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MAO AND THE 1956 SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTION
IN HUNGARY

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Sino-Soviet relations entered a honeymoon period when Khrushchev came to power. Friendship and cooperation were unimpaired despite worries on the part of Mao Zedong about some of Khrushchev's actions at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In fact, Khrushchev's bold criticism of Stalin suited Mao Zedong because it relieved some pressure on him. Generally speaking, the guiding principles of the 20th Congress of the CPSU were identical with those of the 8th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP),¹ to whose views Moscow attached great importance at the time. *Pravda* went so far as to translate into Russian and reprint a CCP article entitled "On the historical experience of proletarian dictatorship", which was also issued as a pamphlet in Russian in 200 000 copies, for study by the whole party.² When another CCP article, "More on the historical experience of proletarian dictatorship", was published, Soviet radio used its star announcer to broadcast the piece repeatedly.³ Moreover, the Soviet Embassy in Beijing suggested in its 1956 annual report that the CPSU Central Committee send people responsible for party affairs to gain experience of the work of the Chinese party and government, for "the CCP has accumulated rich experience in building the party and government and in mass work."⁴ Against this background, Khrushchev recalled that at a critical moment in the Polish/Hungarian developments, his first thought had been "to consult with the fraternal Chinese Communist Party".⁵

1 For a detailed exposition, see Shen 2004.

2 Wang Fu's report on the situation in certain aspects in the Soviet Union, April 25, 1956. Jilin Provincial Archive, 1-12/1-1956, 101st leaf; *Renmin ribao* July 6, 1956.

3 Rong 1991, 19-20.

4 Center for the Storage of Contemporary Documentation, Moscow (Tsentr khraneniya sovremennoy dokumentatsii, hereafter: TsKhSD), f. 5, p. 49, d. 41, l. 16-17.

NO CHINESE ROLE IN THE FIRST SOVIET INTERVENTION

China knew nothing of the Hungarian crisis when it broke out on October 23. The CCP leadership did not react immediately, even after Soviet troops occupied Budapest in the small hours of the following day. Both the reformists and the conservatives in Hungary were very friendly towards China and its principle of doing more listening than talking, and not to expressing any opinion rashly. Despite the negative attitude of Ambassador Hao Deqing towards the mass movement in Hungary, believing it was out to break away from the leadership of the communist party or even overthrow it, the Chinese Embassy remained silent on what were treated as Hungary's internal affairs. As soon as the disturbances began, the Chinese Embassy in Budapest shut its iron gate fast and rejected any direct contact with any side in the confrontation, including former close friends. Hao Deqing, speaking through the guards at the entrance, politely asked officials of the Rákosi government seeking refuge to go to the Soviet Embassy instead. For security reasons, the embassy staff worked together at the dormitory compound. They learnt of the situation only by listening to the radio and gathering leaflets and posters in the streets.

Documents from the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (AMFAC) confirm that Mao knew nothing of what was happening in Budapest. At eight and nine in the evening on October 23, the Chinese Embassy in Budapest sent two telegrams to Beijing, reporting the conditions at the demonstration taking place there and of Ernő Gerő's radio address. No comments were appended. After that, the embassy sent no further word. At four on the afternoon of October 24, the Foreign Ministry sent three consecutive telegrams ordering its embassies in Budapest and other East European countries to report promptly on Hungary's political situation, especially on Nagy. One read, "You must avoid in reporting any subjectivity or bias, or unthinking repetition of the words of others." The ministry also asked the embassy in Budapest to send a well-informed Hungarian-language interpreter to Moscow without delay—to give a detailed report to Liu Shaoqi, of course.⁶ But

5 Khrushchev 1988, 599–600.

6 Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, Beijing (hereafter: AMFAC), 109–01041–01, 3–4. Report on demonstration of university students in Budapest, October 23, 1956; *ibid.*, 5–6. Report on Gerő's radio statement of October 23, 1956; *ibid.*, 8. Role of newly reorganized party and government leadership of Hungary, October 24, 1956; *ibid.*, 9. Please give quick report on current developments in domestic politics of Hungary and on the HCP CC, October 24, 1956; *ibid.*, 14. Send counsellor and a Polish-language [sic] interpreter to Moscow immediately, October 24, 1956.

Beijing got no response, as communications with the embassy were broken. The embassy had no transceiver and messages up to then had gone through the post office. All international telecommunications and telephone lines were cut off at midnight on October 23, and the Chinese Embassy could neither send reports to Beijing nor receive instructions. Not until the afternoon of October 25 were telecommunications restored, but even then the telephone remained disconnected. The embassy had sent a telegram on the morning of October 24 reporting that the demonstration had “developed into a counter-revolutionary rebellion” the night before, the Hungarian government had declared the martial law, and Soviet military forces had entered Budapest, but the Foreign Ministry failed to receive it until the early morning of October 26.⁷

26 The first news the Chinese had of the Hungarian events came from Moscow. Information in the Russian archives and the recollections of Shi Zhe concur in saying that Liu Shaoqi, after arriving in Moscow on the afternoon of October 23, had talks with Khrushchev, in the guest house where the former was staying, punctuated by successive phone calls from Gerő, the Hungarian leader, and from Marshal Georgy Zhukov, reporting on the disturbances. After briefing Liu on the situation in Hungary, Khrushchev added, “You are not familiar with the developments in Hungary and there is no time to consult with you in advance. We request your presence at the meeting of the Presidium tomorrow.” Then he left. At the meeting of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee that Liu attended the following afternoon, Khrushchev announced that Soviet troops had entered Budapest, public order had been basically restored, and all problems were resolved, except that rebels still held a few positions. People had welcomed the Soviet Red Army and the Soviet tanks. He hoped the Chinese comrades would understand the deployment of Soviet forces, which was quite necessary. He then stressed that whereas the Polish problem had been one within the party, about a conflict between right and wrong, the developments in Hungary had threatened to become a counter-revolution and had to be treated differently.⁸ Liu made no comment on this. According to Liu’s report on his Moscow

7 Ibid., 7. Embassy staff safe and sound after outbreak of counterrevolutionary riot in Budapest, October 24, 1956; *ibid.*, 16. Reasons for inability to send reports in time, October 24, 1956; *ibid.*, 10–11. General situation with reactionary disturbance in capital of Hungary, October 24, 1956. Thanks to subsequent deterioration of situation, communications interrupted again, thus Embassy had to contact Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China via Foreign Ministry of Hungary and Hungarian Embassy in Beijing.; *ibid.*, 23. Further developments in capital of Hungary, October 26, 1956; *ibid.*, 27. Items for attention in current situation, October 27, 1956.

8 TsKhSD, f. 3, op. 12, d. 1005, l. 52; Shi 1997, 13–4.

trip, to the Second Session of the 8th National CCP Congress, Liu phoned Beijing and consulted with Mao after Khrushchev had left.

Apart from some articles in the October 27 *People's Daily* (Renmin ribao), reporting that “reactionaries” had used the peaceful student demonstration to stir up armed disturbances and that the Hungarian authorities had called on Soviet troops stationed in Hungary to help restore public order, the Chinese government and leadership did not make known their position on the crisis before October 30, an omission that has been overlooked in historical sources and scholarly studies.⁹ This silence from Beijing can probably be attributed to developments in Hungary. The Chinese ambassador reported in an October 27 telegram to its superiors in Beijing that “the counter-revolutionary armed forces have been eliminated.” On the following day, another message was cabled to Beijing about the statement Nagy had made that afternoon, announcing the enforcement of a general ceasefire and arrangements for reshuffling the government. The embassy reported, “After Nagy made the statement, the sounds of gunfire gradually faded away.” It seemed hopeful that order would be restored.¹⁰ The situation developed in a highly complex and convoluted way in October 24–8. The Soviet leadership, after hearing on the night of October 28 from Mikhail Suslov, who had just returned from Budapest, was inclined to support the new government of Kádár and Nagy (omitting Gerő and András Hegedüs), accept Nagy’s declaration, and withdraw troops from Budapest and other occupied areas.¹¹

On the same day, the Soviet Military Command in Hungary ordered plans to be made for Soviet withdrawal from Budapest and replacement by the Hungarian army. The plan envisaged the Hungarian army deploying between 8 p.m. on October 29 and 6 a.m. on October 30.¹² What the Chinese leaders thought of this is unknown,

9 According to the biography of Mao, Liu Shaoqi learned of the uprising in Hungary during negotiations with Soviet leaders on October 23, then passed on the message to Mao immediately by phone. During October 24–30, Mao convened a series of high-level meetings to discuss the Polish and Hungarian crises, while liaising directly with Liu by phone, with no details disclosed. See Xiang-Jin 1998, 604.

10 AMFAC, 109-01041-01, 24. The counterrevolutionary armed forces in Hungary basically eliminated, October 27, 1956; *ibid.*, 36. Please give instructions on what stand to take on Hungarian events, October 28, 1956.

11 TsKhSD, f. 3, op. 12, d. 1005, l. 54–61; Volkov 1998, 439–441; according to András Hegedüs, Nagy returned from the Soviet Embassy at 11 a.m. on October 28 and told him and Ernő Gerő that the Soviets had assented to the proposal for transforming the government of Hungary. See Hegedüs 1992, 310; according to a Chinese Embassy report, the Soviet troops began to withdraw from Budapest on the evening of the 28th. AMFAC, 109-01041-01, 54. Demands of the Revolutionary Council of University Youth, published in *Szabad Nép*, October 29, 1956.

but reports in the *People's Daily* on October 28 and 29 gave the impression the storm would soon be over. The Hungarian government had given the rebels a deadline for laying down their arms, which many had already done. The mobs had requested talks and a temporary ceasefire was in effect in Budapest. The government and people were trying to restore peace. Negotiations were under way, etc. Perhaps these developments led Mao Zedong to the idea that there was no more need for the Warsaw Pact and he could support Polish and Hungarian demands for Soviet troops to leave.

MAO AND THE SOVIET DECISION TO SEND IN TROOPS FOR THE SECOND TIME

28 Yet the Hungarian authorities, when facing the frenzied masses, stalled in restructuring the government and the concessions made gave chances for militant trouble-makers, rather than calming matters. As the situation in Budapest became ever more complex, Moscow had reports from Ivan Serov on October 29, and that night from Anastas Mikoyan and Suslov, indicating the situation in Hungary was out of control. As word of this reached the Kremlin, Khrushchev was in talks with Liu Shaoqi on how problems in Soviet relations with the East European countries could be resolved. Liu explained Mao's view that the Soviets should give Eastern Europe more political, economic and military freedom. The talks continued into the night. The Soviets finally agreed to draft a declaration on equal relations, to be adopted next day.¹³ Here Khrushchev's memoirs square with the Chinese sources, only adding the issue of Hungary. According to Khrushchev, the meeting lasted until early next morning, discussing developments in the Hungarian crisis and various solutions. Khrushchev briefed the Chinese on the messages from Budapest. On a basis of full trust, the Soviet and Chinese delegates weighed repeatedly what measures to take. At one point, they supported the idea of sending in troops, but after further deliberation, they decided to refrain from a military approach. Then came Mao's suggestion of "letting it go further". So the Soviets decided that military means would not be used. The situation in Hungary would be allowed to develop in its own way and the new government there would hopefully settle the crisis.¹⁴

As the situation in Budapest further deteriorated on October 30, Moscow received morning reports from Mikoyan and Suslov: "The party organizations are in the process of collapse. Hooligan elements have become more insolent, seizing district

12 Györkei-Horváth 1999, 70-1.

13 Shi 1997, 15-6; Xiang-Jin 1998, 604.

14 Khrushchev 1988, 359-60.

party committees, killing communists. The organization of party volunteer squads is going slowly. The factories are stalled. The people are sitting at home. The railroads are not working. Hooligan students and other resistance elements have changed their tactics and are displaying greater activity.” The radio had been occupied. “The insurgents declare that they will not give them up until Soviet troops leave Budapest.” The Hungarian army takes a wait-and-see attitude and is likely to ally itself with the rebels.¹⁵ At 2 p.m. on the same day, the Council of Ministers decided to abolish the one-party system in Hungary, and this was announced in a broadcast speech by Nagy at 2.28. He also called for the withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Budapest. Hungary would immediately start negotiations with the Soviet government on the withdrawal of Soviet troops and local democratic self-governing bodies set up during the revolutionary process would be recognized.¹⁶ Acting on the October 28 plan, the Soviet army stopped fighting at 4 p.m. and began to pull out of Budapest.¹⁷ Meanwhile the exacerbation of the situation was felt by the Chinese Embassy as well. Fearing for the safety of embassy staff and Chinese students in Budapest, the embassy began to dispose of its documents and to make preparations to leave.¹⁸

At that point, the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee held a meeting in Moscow on October 30, to focus on the declaration of equal relations among socialist countries, drafted at the suggestion of the Chinese party. Influenced by this draft declaration, the meeting was inclined to adopt a compromise stand on the Hungarian question too. According to the minutes, discussion of the situation in Hungary had just begun when Khrushchev entered and reported on his conversation with Liu Shaoqi the previous night. He said that in view of the opinions of the countries where the Soviet troops were stationed, it would be better to adopt on that very day the draft declaration that the CCP was proposing. As for withdrawal from the people’s democratic countries, that would be discussed at the meeting of Warsaw Pact states. All the Presidium members present agreed. At the subsequent discussions, the Bulgarian delegate, while agreeing to the appeal and declaration being sent to Hungary, complained, “The Chinese comrades lack a correct understanding of relations between the USSR and the people’s democratic countries.” Molotov proposed immediate talks on withdrawing the troops from Hungary and later discussions on the Warsaw Pact with all other member-countries. With the Chinese proposal to

15 Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, Moscow (Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoy Federatsii, hereafter: APRF), f. 3, p. 64, d. 484, l. 122–4.

16 Volkov 1998, 470–1. Originally published in the CWIHPB no. 5: 32 (Spring 1995).

17 *Renmin ribao* November 1, 1956.

18 AMFAC, 109–01041–01, 56. Sequential report on situation in Hungary, October 30, 1956.

base relations among socialist countries on “five principles of peaceful coexistence”, Molotov argued that inter-state relations and inter-party relations had to be built on different foundations. Kliment Voroshilov and Lazar Kaganovich held identical views with Molotov’s. Dmitri Shepilov said, “This incident revealed a crisis in relations between us and the people’s democratic countries. Anti-Soviet sentiment is spreading. We should expose its causes in depth.” He also proposed “adhering to the principle of non-interference and preparing to withdraw the troops with Hungarian government agreement.” Zhukov agreed to the withdrawal and saw lessons, military and political, in the handling the Hungarian crisis. Things were worse with the troops stationed in Democratic Germany and Poland—no one could know what would happen if troops stayed there. Finally, Khrushchev said all had agreed to make a declaration first, after which the Presidium discussed the draft declaration.¹⁹ Towards evening, the Soviet side sent Liu Shaoqi a copy of the draft, the contents of which were basically what Liu had said, with some phrases and sentences copied directly from his statements. The declaration was to be finalized at 8 p.m., and the Chinese delegation returned once more to the meeting.²⁰ So the Chinese proposal for a declaration on equal relations, put forward with the Polish problem in mind, led to a peaceful approach to the crisis in Hungary. It can be inferred that after two days’ hesitation on October 29–30, the Soviets decided to rule out armed intervention in Hungary, and the CCP had played a decisive role in that decision.

So far, neither the Chinese nor the Soviets had any further thought of sending troops into Hungary, but things changed dramatically in the next few hours. According to Khrushchev’s report to the CPSU Central Committee plenary in June 1957 and to his memoirs, published later, he had left Liu Shaoqi’s suite for his home in the early morning of October 30 having decided not to resort to armed intervention in Hungary. But on his return home, he saw new intelligence about the worsening situation in Hungary. The Presidium discussed the matter again and decided to send troops in after all. As he had already agreed with the Chinese not to use force, Khrushchev led all the Presidium members to the airport on the evening of October 31 to inform Liu Shaoqi of the sudden change at talks before he boarded. Quite unexpectedly, the Chinese gave their full support and said they thought the same way.²¹ According to Khrushchev, the Soviets had decided quite on their own to dispatch troops after all.

19 TsKhSD, f. 3, p. 12, d. 1006, l. 6–14.

20 Shi 1997, 16.

21 Khrushchev 1997, 359–60.

But the Chinese side gives a rather different story. Shi Zhe described the process in detail in his recollections. The Soviets sent Mikoyan's report on the deteriorating situation in Hungary to Liu Shaoqi on the morning of October 30. The under-informed Chinese delegation was taken by surprise, discussed the matter all day and put forward two solutions.²² One was to pull the Soviet troops out of Budapest, and the other was suppression. Liu Shaoqi made a phone call in the evening to Mao Zedong for instructions. Mao said both approaches could be raised and discussed with the Soviets. He inclined towards armed suppression, but it should be delayed until the reactionary elements had exposed themselves further and people could see their nature more clearly.

In the evening, the Chinese and Soviet leaders held an emergency meeting at the request of the Chinese, where Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping clearly indicated that political power in Hungary could not be surrendered to the enemy and the Soviet troops should turn round to protect people's power strongly. The problem in Hungary was different from that in Poland, because it had degenerated into a counter-revolutionary action and the utmost had to be done to save the situation. But Khrushchev felt he was put in a very awkward situation and thought bringing the Soviet troops back would entail a complete occupation of Hungary. So the Soviet side preferred not to do so and the Chinese delegation did not urge them any further.²³

Based on Minute 49 of the CPSU Presidium meeting on October 30, Pavel Yudin, at some time in the night (after the body had decided not to intervene militarily in Hungary and passed the declaration on equal relations), reported on the conversations with the Chinese delegate. The Chinese had expressed fears about the situation in Hungary and put some questions. Would Hungary break off from our camp? Who was Nagy? Could he be trusted? Later still, Khrushchev arrived at the meeting with Liu Shaoqi. According to his working notes, Liu gave it as the opinion of the CCP leaders that "troops should remain in Hungary and Budapest." The records of Khrushchev's subsequent words read: "There are two paths: a military path—one of occupation; a peaceful path—withdrawal of troops, and negotiations." Molotov seemed inclined towards the Chinese proposal: "The political situation has taken

22 Not until November 1 did the Chinese Foreign Ministry receive the telegrams dated October 29 and 30 from its Embassy in Budapest, reporting on the deteriorating situation there. See AMFAC, 109-01041-01, 51. Report on the incident in the street in front of the dormitory compound of the Chinese Embassy, October 29, 1956; *ibid.*, 57-8. Sequential report on situation in Hungary, October 29, 1956.; *ibid.*, 56. Nagy's announcement in an address, October 30, 1956.

23 Wu 1999, 51-2; Shi 1997, 16-7; Xiang-Jin 1998, 604-5; Jin 1998, 805-6.

clearer shape. A counter-revolutionary government, a transitional government has been formed.”²⁴ This suggests the CCP leaders had clarified their new position on the night of October 30, while the Soviet leaders were still hesitant and indecisive.

The minutes of the October 31 session show that the Soviet leaders had made up their minds by this time. Khrushchev took the view that they had to re-examine their evaluation of the events in Hungary. Soviet troops should not withdraw from Hungary or Budapest and firm steps had to be taken to restore order. “If we depart from Hungary, it will give a great boost to the American, British, and French imperialists,” Khrushchev said, adding that the Soviets could not afford to hand Hungary over to the West after what had happened in Egypt, and that there was “no other alternative”. He also presented the specific measures needed for a new military intervention, including a provisional revolutionary government headed by János Kádár (with Ferenc Münnich as prime minister and defence and interior minister, and Imre Nagy as deputy prime minister, if he would agree), negotiations with Tito, and briefings of China, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. Khrushchev’s proposals were unanimously approved by the Presidium, where the former Hungarian leaders Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő and András Hegedűs were presented and also supported the decision.²⁵

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On the evening of October 31, Liu Shaoqi received a phone call from the Kremlin requesting the Chinese delegation to arrive at the airport an hour earlier, so that another talk could be held. When they met, Khrushchev told Liu that after a whole day’s discussion, the Presidium had reached a new decision to adopt an offensive policy in Hungary. Liu Shaoqi gave his agreement and then proposed two preconditions for Soviet armed intervention: a request to it from the Hungarian government, and support from the Hungarian masses.²⁶

WHY MAO SUPPORTED SUPPRESSION IN HUNGARY

Mao’s change of attitude to the Hungarian crisis on the night of October 30, or rather his attitude to the Nagy government, clearly had a profound effect on the Soviet decision to intervene in Hungary a second time. One factor encouraging Mao to shift his ground may have been Mikoyan’s telegram of October 30, forwarded by Liu Shaoqi. There are data to show the situation reports from the Chinese Embassy in Budapest were also influential. According to recollections by János Radványi,

24 TsKhSD, f. 3, p. 12, d. 1006, l. 6–14; Volkov 1998, 457–63.

25 Ibid., 479–84.

26 Shi 1997, 16–7; Xiang-Jin 1998, 604–5; Jin 1998, 805–6.

a Hungarian diplomat, and by Luo Yisu, Ambassador Hao Deqing was on very good personal terms with Kádár. He told Kádár later he had seen long before the incident how Nagy's policies would lead to capitalism being restored in Hungary. He thought Mikoyan's association with the Nagy government and the pull-out of Soviet troops from Budapest were wrong, and firmly believed that only military intervention could save the day. A few years later, Mao Zedong personally confirmed it was Hao Deqing's advice that shifted his stand. During talks on May 5, 1959, Mao Zedong stressed that the Chinese leaders had watched the Hungarian events of 1956 closely. He pointed at Hao Deqing, sitting behind Chen Yi, saying that the ambassador's reports and proposals were most useful for evaluating and handling the rapidly evolving situation in the Hungary of 1956. At the end of October that year, Mao recalled, the Chinese Embassy reported that the reactionary forces were gaining support and warned that if the Soviet Union could not oust the government controlled by Nagy, capitalism would inevitably be restored. Thanks to the reporting and information received from East European communist parties, Mao Zedong said, he decided to call on Khrushchev at once to take military action against the Hungarian revisionists.²⁷

Ironically, Nagy pinned his hopes on China at the crucial moment, just as Mao made the decisive move that would push the Hungarian leader and his government into the abyss. At 10 p.m. on November 1, Nagy made an urgent appointment with Hao Deqing. The conversation lasted for two hours. Nagy first pointed out, "This is a tragedy rooted in serious mistakes committed by the [Hungarian] party in the past," and "The peaceful protest movement indicates that the people are discontented." But the movement had been dubbed a counter-revolutionary revolt, which had intensified the conflict. Subsequent Soviet military intervention had pushed the situation "towards extreme deterioration". "Certainly, in such grave circumstances, some counter-revolutionary and Nazi-type activities have emerged, but these have only been perpetrated by a small minority." His government had brought things to the attention of the Soviet authorities several times and negotiated with Mikoyan and Suslov continually. "Their evaluation and judgement of the situation matched ours." At the focus of the problem, Nagy noted that the Soviet government had declared willingness to negotiate and conceded that the continued presence of Soviet forces could only make the situation much worse. But eventually, things turned out to be the opposite. According to Hungarian intelligence report, "Since yesterday afternoon, the Soviet forces have not been leaving at all, but reinforced with two new tank divisions." This violated "the agreement made through negotiations between the Hungarian government and Mikoyan" and "went against the Soviet government

27 Radványi 1970, 123 and 126.

declaration". Nagy stated very emotionally that we should use every means of preventing an inconceivable tragedy: "We are communists. Half our cabinet members are communists. The chairman of the Council of Ministers is a communist. We all want to build socialism. But now, the situation has become very grave. Why on earth are we being drawn into such situation? [...] We have no option but to submit the problem to the UN for debate, withdraw from the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and declare our neutrality." The Soviet tanks, Nagy said, were only 60 km from Budapest, and all airports in the country had been occupied by them. This was clearly planned military aggression. At the end of the conversation, Nagy undertook with deep feeling to withdraw the UN complaint immediately if the Soviet troops retreated: "Things are very serious. Please convey to Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou that we request the Chinese government to intervene and help resolve the problem of Soviet military withdrawal."²⁸ It was beyond all Nagy's imaginings and expectations that Mao could have made a quite opposite decision by that time.

34 Of course there were further external factors affecting Moscow's decision to send troops into Budapest again. One was the Americans' repeated assertion that they did not regard the Soviets' satellite countries as potential military partners, and another was the Suez Crisis. In the latter case, Moscow felt it was unthinkable to lose ground in Eastern Europe just after the Middle East had slipped from its influence. The crisis hardened Soviet determination to resort to military intervention in Hungary, because it saw that the West was preoccupied with Egypt. Some scholars have also seen a destructive impact from the Hungarian crisis on other East European states, notably East Germany and Czechoslovakia, which worried the KGB deeply. Unless the disturbances were put down fast, there could be chain reactions across the socialist camp.²⁹ Yet all these factors behind Moscow's decision seem secondary compared with the change in the attitude of Mao.

Khrushchev faced a dilemma in managing affairs in Eastern Europe. If the Soviets pursued a line of political and economical reforms in those countries, they would have reappoint previously ousted non-Stalinists if they wanted to preserve the unity of the socialist camp. But such reformers in Eastern Europe made up a force against Soviet control, backed by the masses in their societies. Such developments would shake the Soviet Bloc to pieces and threaten the security of the Soviet Union itself.

The CCP leaders stuck to two principles as they coped with the Polish and Hungarian crises. One was to seize the opportunity to criticize Stalinism, by joining

28 AMFAC, 109-01041-01, 90-91. Items Ambassador Hao Deqing reported by telephone, November 2, 1956; *ibid.*, 97-101. Several issues Nagy talked about in his interview with Ambassador Hao, November 2, 1956.

hands with the East European states in opposing Soviet great-power chauvinism and the primacy of the Soviet party, stressing the principles of independence and equality in relations among the socialist states. That epitomized especially the Chinese handling of the Polish issue. It was not so much that the Chinese helped the Soviets fix the problem of Poland as that they used the crisis to make Soviet leaders confess their previous mistakes and issue a general statement on the framework for relations within the communist world. The other principle was to try to coordinate the relationships between the Soviet Union and its satellites, emphasize the unity and stability of the socialist camp, and oppose all measures and tendencies that deviated from socialism. The second was more evident in Beijing's stance on the Hungarian crisis.

Scholars have wondered why China, having opposed Soviet armed intervention in Poland, condoned Khrushchev's revised decision to send troops back into Hungary.³⁰ In Poland's case, Mao Zedong and the CCP leadership believed the target of attack was Moscow's "great-power chauvinist" policy, while in Hungary's it was socialism. Mao was all for targeting the former but dead against targeting the latter. And just as Moscow misjudged the situation in Poland, so did Beijing in Hungary. Nagy and his regime were short-sighted and made unwise moves, but they did not betray socialism. Hungary's decision to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact was largely a result of the Soviet armed intervention, not a cause of it.

As for China's role in the Polish and Hungarian affairs, it can safely be assumed that the decisions to give up armed intervention in Poland and to dispatch troops to Hungary after all were made by the Soviet leaders alone. Yet China played a dominant role, first in pulling the Soviet troops out of Budapest and then in bringing them back. But this paper is concerned more about something else. To this author's mind, it is more apposite to say that Mao Zedong attained his goal of criticizing the great-power chauvinism of Moscow and that of maintaining the unity of the socialist camp, than that China helped the Soviet Union tide over its crises. In that sense, the author agrees with scholars who say that one of Khrushchev's decisive acts in handling the crises of 1956 was to bring China into Europe.³¹ In starting to become involved in East European affairs, the CCP symbolically ascended a new flight of steps in its position and role in the international communist movement. Thereafter Moscow's leadership of the communist world began to be challenged from Beijing.

(Translated by Guo Jie, East China Normal University, Shanghai.)

29 Kramer 1996-7, 370-1; see also Hu 2004, 118-20.

30 Crankshaw 1963, 54.

31 Ibid., 53; Chen 2001, 161-2.

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