Key Issues in the Development of the Sino-Soviet Dispute

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The Soviet Union and Communist China are engaged in a bitter struggle for power. The impact of this struggle is having a dramatic effect on the unity of the Communist world and is presenting a new challenge to the West.

With the development of their differences, the Chinese have adopted the more aggressive stand while the Soviets have assumed a moderate role, trying to control the situation. Over the years, particularly since 1960, their differences have intensified and their charges and counter-charges have become more volatile. In order to understand their current differences, it is useful to give some historical perspective to the development of Sino-Soviet relations, which may be conveniently divided into three periods: the pre-1949 relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union; the first ten years of Sino-Soviet "cooperation" following their treaty of 1950; and the period from 1960 to the present.

The Pre-1949 Period

Since the Chinese Communists did not come to power until 1949, the relationship before them was largely one between parties rather than governments. During the twenties the creditability of Soviet leadership in China was short lived. With the bungling efforts of Stalin and the Comintern, Stalin's instruction to the Chinese Communists to join with the Nationalist Party of Chiang Kai-shek and to promote a proletarian revolution in the cities of China led to almost disastrous results for the Communist movement and did much to produce factional disputes within the party leadership. It was not until the early thirties that Mao Tse-tung, who had deviated from the Stalinist approach, was able to overcome the factionalism

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largely connected with the question of whether greater reliance should be placed on the urban workers or the peasant. Mao's struggle against the Li Li-san line within the party was in part a struggle against Stalin, who began referring to Mao as a revisionist.

Stalin had little confidence in Mao's agrarian approach, giving no assistance to his protracted rise to power until the eve of the Communist victory in 1949. As late as 1946 the Soviets continued to recognize and deal with Chiang's Nationalist government, which had permitted them to regain control of Port Arthur, Dairen, and interests in the Manchurian railways. By 1948 Stalin admitted that he had underestimated the chances of the Chinese Communists of seizing power.

The present Sino-Soviet dispute is also an outgrowth of certain pre-1949 factors not mentioned above. For instance, one such factor was the increase of xenophobic nationalism in Communist China. The "Middle Kingdom" view that the rest of the world is peripheral lends a kind of arrogance to the belligerency of the Communist Chinese. This feeling was strengthened by the humiliation China suffered at the hands of western imperialism and an awareness that Russia had played an important role in those humiliations. The fact that the Soviets took over in Russia only partly modified this resentment.

Some of the most resented and costly humiliations were the loss of territory. In the nineteenth century, Russia seized the land between the Amur, the Ussuri and the Pacific and did its best to seize Manchuria and Korea until she was stopped by the Japanese. Nevertheless, the Russians secured a foothold in Manchuria and were not forced out until long after the Soviets came to power in 1917. Eliminated from Manchuria by the thirties, the Soviets returned after World War II and did not surrender their special privileges in Manchuria until 1954, five years after the Chinese Communists came to power.

Perhaps a more important bone of contention has been the assumed protectorship of Outer Mongolia by the Tsar and later the Soviets. Although the Soviets repudiated this relationship in 1919, they invaded Outer Mongolia two years later and established a People's Republic under Soviet suzerainty rather than Chinese. Another territorial claim which has become part of the Sino-Soviet debate in recent years has to do with disputed territory in the western part of the Sinkiang Province.

A Decade of "Lasting Friendship"

The Communist victory in China and the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in early 1950 seemed to usher in a lasting friendship. The treaty, however, permitted the Soviets to remain in Manchuria until the mid-fifties and its loan provisions were meager compared with China's needs. In terms of China's vast requirements, the Soviet loan was little more than a token of good will and intentions. It was less, for example, than the Russian loan granted to Poland. New credits were periodically given but the overall amount of assistance to China was not impressive. Also, the Soviets were slow to replace the industrial equipment built in Manchuria by the Japanese which they stripped in 1945. And, while the relations between the Soviets and Chinese Communists during the Korean War are still obscure, there are reasons to believe the Chinese were peeved by the lack of air support and modern weapons from the Soviets.

After the Chinese Communists seized power in China, they assumed effective control of western Sinkiang and suppressed a Kazakh revolt in the area by 1953. Soviet influence, however, continued in the area with the existence of joint Sino-Soviet stock companies from 1950 to 1954. Sino-Soviet relations improved when these companies were liquidated as a result of the Khrushchev-Bulganin visit to Peking in 1954. Direct Soviet influence in Sinkiang seemed to cease.

While Sino-Soviet relations were generally on the up-swing, the Soviets continued to insist on the independence of Outer Mongolia, which Peking and Taipei both regard as part of China. In recent years, further assurance of the continued separation of Outer Mongolia from China has been achieved through its membership in the United Nations.

The earliest sign of Sino-Soviet competition for the non-aligned countries seemed to emerge during the mid-fifties with Chinese participation in the 1955 Bandung conference and the Khrushchev-Bulganin visit to India later in the year. Both Moscow and Peking made a bid for leadership in the developing societies, which extended to most Afro-Asian countries in later years.

Today the Chinese Communists claim their differences with the Soviet Union first became serious in the spring of 1956, immediately after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist

Party of the Soviet Union. De-Stalinization by Khrushchev led to new policies which were offensive to the Chinese. Khrushchev's emphasis on peaceful transition to socialism and on peaceful co-existence as the new line of the International Communist movement and his policy of détente with the United States and the effort to expand political and economic influence in India and Indonesia were developments which produced a sharp clash with Peking's interests. Khrushchev, after the death of Stalin, considered himself the senior living Marxist-Leninist. De-Stalinization led to Soviet difficulties in Eastern Europe which encouraged the Chinese to exert pressure on Moscow against intervention in Poland and in favor of it in Hungary. With regard to the Polish question during the summer of 1956, the Soviets were not appreciative of Chinese meddling.

The Soviets' sputnik launchings in the early fall of 1957 and the promise to aid the Chinese in obtaining an atomic capability in mid-October did much to improve Sino-Soviet relations and to prepare a better atmosphere for the November Moscow meetings of world Communism. At this conference, the Chinese, who felt the Soviets should take greater risks in the struggle with the West because of their strategic breakthrough, were lectured on peaceful co-existence. The result of the conference was a serious confrontation of two opposite points of view.

In 1958 when the Chinese adopted a more "leftist" course, increased tensions became almost inevitable. Realizing that massive economic aid from Moscow was not forthcoming, the Chinese launched their "great leap" and the communes in a desperate attempt to achieve rapid self-directed industrialization and increased agricultural production. The claims of the newly introduced "People's Communes" as a shortcut to Communism was greeted in Russia with silence and later with contempt.

With the "great leap" and the communes came enforced sinicization of the Turkic peoples in western Sinkiang. This, in turn, led to border clashes along the Sinkiang-Soviet border. Border clashes were also reported in the Amur river areas as well.

An affront by Khrushchev during the summer of 1958 and just prior to his visit to Peking did little to improve his already tarnished image among the Chinese ruling elite. Weeks prior

to his visit Khrushchev proposed a summit conference concerning the crisis in the Middle East and had recommended that India, not China, be represented.

Following Khrushchev's visit to Peking the Chinese made an effort to "liberate" Taiwan. The only Soviet support forthcoming was a promise that Moscow would retaliate if the United States attacked the mainland. The shelling of the offshore islands for almost two months ended in a Chinese retreat. Since Taiwan was being supplied with missiles by the United States, the Chinese Communists had reasons to be disappointed with Moscow for not giving them similar weapons.

During 1958 and by mid-1959 the Chinese were clearly aware of Soviet efforts at a détente with the United States. During the first half of 1959 Khrushchev decided to force the Chinese to retreat from their belligerent course. In June he formally abrogated the 1957 Soviet commitment to give China aid in atomic weapons.

While Khrushchev was visiting the United States, the Chinese had their most serious border dispute with India, whereupon the Soviets declared their neutrality on the issue. This was followed by Khrushchev's last visit to Peking after which the Chinese accused him of trying to convince them to accept a "two China solution" as part of their peaceful co-existence policy.

Since 1960

In the Spring of 1960 the Sino-Soviet dispute was brought into the open with the Chinese promoting "the inevitability of war" and the Soviets continuing to promote peaceful co-existence. In June, 1960 the Chinese made an overt attempt to detach other Communist parties from Soviet control. This was followed by a verbal counterattack by Khrushchev, withdrawal of Soviet specialists from China, sharply reduced trade, and an effort to overthrow the pro-Peking leadership in Albania.

In the late fall of 1960 a major effort was made to overcome the dispute through a conference of 81 parties meeting in Moscow. But the conference solved nothing. Most of the parties, except for Albania and the Indonesian and Vietnamese parties, gave overwhelming support to the Soviets.

In 1961 during the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the conflict received more

publicity when Khrushchev publicly denounced and subsequently broke off diplomatic relations with Albania. The Congress formally approved the Soviet version of the transition to Communism for underdeveloped societies as opposed to the Chinese approach. This was followed by anti-Chinese attacks toward Albania with a vigorous reaction by the Albanians who were supported by the Chinese. Anti-Soviet polemics by the Chinese were directed at Belgrade.

During the polemic of 1962, both the Chinese and Soviets worked hard in their organizational and ideological moves to gain support, which efforts worsened Sino-Soviet relations. The Chinese continued to attack Yugoslavia, declaring that capitalism had been restored, and the Soviets continued to attack Albania. The Chinese invasion of India's frontier and the Cuban crisis in October moved the dispute toward an open public break where the polemics became explicit and direct, no longer restricted to attacks on one another's "allies," Yugoslavia and Albania. The Soviets deplored the Chinese aggression against India and promised the sale of fighter planes to India. The Chinese accused the Soviets of cowardice when they withdrew their missiles from Cuba.

The Chinese publicly raised the issue of Russian territorial annexations in Asia and charged the Russians with the 1960 withdrawal of specialists from China and cutting down economic aid and trade. They sought to pull Castro closer to Peking, using his disappointment over withdrawal of missiles and fear of Soviet-U.S. détente. They sought and gained considerable influence and support from Asian Communist parties and consolidated their influence in North Korea and stepped up their efforts in Africa and Latin America.

By early 1963, there was another effort at mending their differences by other Communist parties. The Chinese hoped for a large meeting to include all the parties, particularly those from underdeveloped societies. The Soviets had their way when a bilateral meeting was convened in July. Simultaneous negotiation of the test ban treaty in Moscow was a direct slap at Peking. The result of the meeting brought Sino-Soviet relations "to the verge of an open split" according to the Chinese. Peking followed with the accusation that the Soviets attempted to overthrow Chinese leadership, had reneged on their promises to give atomic weapons, had enticed the Chinese citizens to

revolt in Sinkiang, and had formed an open alliance with the U.S. to prevent China from obtaining nuclear weapons.

In November, 1963, the Soviets called a sudden halt to their polemics, presumably hoping the Chinese leaders would exercise similar restraint. Peking's rejection of the offer encouraged the Soviets to organize a world conference to condemn the Chinese. By the beginning of 1964, however, the Soviets backed off from such a conference, fearing a complete split. Both continued to press their public attacks on one another, Moscow releasing a bitterly worded anti-Chinese book and a series of *Pravda Observer* articles castigating the Chinese and the Peking leaders calling for the overthrow of Khrushchev and pro-Soviet leaders in other parties.

In the spring and summer, 1964, the Chinese accused the Soviets of subversive operations in Sinkiang and claimed Khrushchev was restoring capitalism to Russia. In the meantime the Soviets resumed their efforts for a conference, contending that the vast majority of the world's Communist parties desired such a conference in order to resolve the issues in the dispute. In September, Khrushchev, to a group of Japanese journalists, compared Mao to Hitler.

A significant lull in the polemics occurs with the removal of Khrushchev in October. Within a few weeks, however, it became obvious the Soviets were not about to reverse Khrushchev's position. While the December conference was postponed, the new leadership reaffirmed the policies of the Twentieth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second Congresses. In November, Brezhnev reiterated the standard themes anathema to Peking but also called for unity. Initially, Peking's polemics were directed at Khrushchev but eventually the new Soviet leaders were accused of carrying on the "sinister spirit of Khrushchev."

By the Spring of 1965, the polemics became heated over the escalation of the war in Vietnam. The Soviets were criticized by the Chinese for their lack of enthusiasm for the "war of national liberation" in Vietnam. The Chinese condemned Moscow's "ruthless suppression" of students engaged in a "legitimate" demonstration in Moscow against U.S. bombing of North Vietnam and sent a formal note demanding that Moscow admit error in putting down the student demonstrations and apologizing to the American ambassador.

The war in Vietnam, while many assumed it would bring Peking and Moscow closer together, has only exacerbated the Sino-Soviet relations. China's relations with other Communist countries, as well as the Soviets, is at an all time low.

The Twenty-Third Party Congress, scheduled in March, 1966, almost led to a total break between Peking and Moscow. While the purpose of the Communist Party Congress was to demonstrate support for North Vietnam, the Congress became the object of further polemics. In the preparatory memorandum which the Soviets were circulating, they accused the Chinese of "subversive activity" against the Soviet Union and of flooding the Communist countries with "anti-Soviet tracts." It listed a series of "provocative incidents" along the Sino-Soviet border and accused Peking of exploiting the Vietnamese war to serve her own ends. Of course, Peking had its own answers to these allegations and its objections to Moscow's effort to isolate China.

The Sino-Soviet dispute is fundamental and ranges over a wide front. Its issues are multiple and complex. Those issues which seem to stand out are: (1) the territorial claims of the Chinese; (2) the border conflicts and subversive activities against each other; (3) failure of the Soviets to grant assistance to China on a scale remotely approaching China's need; (4) the resentment of Soviet assistance to India, Indonesia and the "bourgeois nationalist regimes"; (5) personal conflict between Mao and the Soviet leaders, particularly Khrushchev; (6) ideological claims of China; (7) indications of Soviet collusion with the West; (8) open rivalry for support by the Communist parties of the world, particularly in the developing areas; and (9) disagreement over the strategy of revolution, particularly in Vietnam.

What is the nature of the issues involved? Are they primarily ideological or are they a conflict of interests? To what extent is the conflict cultural, economic, or political? Is it a conflict over strategy and objectives in the international Communist movement? These are some of the questions discussed in this issue of *Brigham Young University Studies.*