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SOVIET BROADCASTS TO THE CHINESE ARMED FORCES: A CONTRAST WITH THE CASE OF MARSHAL ZHUKOV

Summary: This paper reports on and interprets some recent Soviet broadcasts to the Chinese Armed Forces in the Mandarin language. It finds that the commentators of Radio Moscow are encouraging the comrades and men of the People's Liberation Army to resist and oppose the Maoist group in the CCP. It contrasts this advice with Soviet insistence on the subordination of the Army to the Party during the crisis caused by the removal of Marshal Zhukov fourteen years ago.

During the past three months, in which the fate of Marshal Lin Piao and his senior colleagues in the Chinese Armed Forces have become a matter of world-wide speculation, Soviet propaganda concerning the Chinese military establishment has suddenly become much more sophisticated. Early in September, for example, Red Star (the Soviet Armed Forces daily) was

clamoring with polemical exaggeration that:

The Chinese Army has become the main instrument in the hands of the Mao group, with the help of which the group established a military-bureaucratic system in the country. Edgar Snow writes that China as a whole is now a large school for the study of Mao Tse-tung's ideas, with the Army performing the role of the director of the school. (1)

In those early September days, the Chinese Armed Forces still appeared to Soviet eyes as one of the main villains in the plot. They were accused of militarizing the whole of Chinese life, preparing for war with Russia, upholding the example of the Chinese troops who fought on the Soviet borders in 1969, and even preparing to build transport aircraft in cooperation with the USA. (2) The PLA was then seen as Mao's main henchman and supporter.

But as more and more evidence accumulated that not only Lin Piao but also General Huang Yung Sheng, the Chief of the General Staff of the PLA, and other military leaders were in serious trouble (Huang was last seen on September 9), the Soviet tune began to change noticeably. On September 30, a Soviet Rear Admiral broadcast to the Chinese Armed Forces in Mandarin. The Admiral, a former naval advisor in China, reminded his audience of Soviet aid to the PLA in the 1945-1960 period, of the Soviet-Chinese Friendship Treaty of 1957, of the aircraft, tanks, and arms factories provided by the Soviets in those "fraternal" years.

The USSR had demanded no special privileges in return, he claimed, and had been "unselfish" and even "generous" in its support of the PLA. He admitted that tension had "regrettably" built up between the two peoples in recent years, but added that he saw this as only a temporary phenomenon, hinting broadly that once Mao had gone, or been overthrown, all would be sweetness and light once more.

Any listener who interpreted this broadcast as an invitation to the PLA to get rid of the Mao clique in exchange for a fresh influx of modern Soviet weaponry would probably not have been far off the mark.

In mid-November, Radio Moscow began to exploit the abundant evidence that a major purge of the PLA had begun. A broadcast in Mandarin on November 14 accused Mao of resorting to the purge of the Armed Forces in order to increase his own influence. It noted the disappearance of the defense minister, the chief of the General Staff, the commander of the Air Force, (3) and "many other military leaders."

Then the broadcaster shed crocodile tears over the fact that the PLA was being relegated to the backstage, with its role restricted. The attitude of the Mao clique to the Army had soured, the commentator said:

Peking's propaganda machine is now fiercely attacking the military officers who lead production in a military way. The purge always begins with the chiefs of the Armed Forces. But this is only the beginning. As in the past, hundreds of thousands of high and middle-ranking commanders will be replaced or persecuted. This has happened before and it will happen in the future.

It appears from these extracts that by this time a decision had been made in Moscow to encourage the doubters and others in the PLA either to defect to save themselves from the impending purge or to take strong action against the Maoists in the hope of preventing a purge from spreading. But any large-scale military defections under present Chinese conditions would scarcely seem feasible, so that Radio Moscow broadcasts appear calculated to encourage a military putsch against the Party. One wonders whether the Kremlin has thought this policy through. There may well be a small number of Chinese marshals who believe -- or believed -- that Soviet aid in the provision of advanced weapons is desirable, but there may be at least as many who, once in power, would prove to be even more belligerently anti-Soviet in action, as opposed to words, than the Mao faction. This might well be the case if the principal leaders of a pro-Soviet military group were in fact killed in the mysterious Trident crash in Mongolia, as defector interrogations in Hong-Kong are now suggesting.

In any event, Radio Moscow is still operating on the basic premise that the Chinese Army can, and should, be turned against Mao. Perhaps, as The Economist has observed, (4) this is because the PLA is probably the only force which might even now be willing and able to reverse the current Sino-US flirtation with all its potential dangers for the Kremlin.

On November 30 one of Moscow's broadcasts in Mandarin was addressed specifically to the "commanders and fighting men" of the PLA. This argued that even after 40 years, there is still no "genuine" unity between the commanders and their troops, largely as a result of the mistakes made at the time of the Cultural Revolution:

Thinking soldiers have come to realize that Mao's policies are a direct threat to the Chinese people's socialist achievements and to the PRC's international prestige. The cultural revolution, Mao's policy of splitting the socialist community, and the artificial termination of the PLA's cooperation with the fraternal armies of the socialist countries and, primarily, with the Soviet Army, have convinced PLA men that all this has an extremely harmful effect on the Chinese Army.

Lavrov, the author of the Soviet broadcast, goes on to claim that disunity within the PLA between the "healthy forces" and those who blindly follow Mao is now evident "everywhere and at all levels." The exit of a number of high-ranking Chinese officers from the political stage is said to be "forceful proof" of his theory. "As long as the Chinese Army continues to perform tasks alien to its nature, none of the Maoist slogans will help," Lavrov concluded.

Here Lavrov seems to be openly claiming that the missing Marshal Lin Biao, General Huang Yung-shen, Wu Fa-hsien, and Navy Commissar Li Tso-pieng, were in fact all pro-Soviet, objectively at least, if not subjectively. If this were true, it would make them seem to be the contemporary followers of Peng Te-huai, the former Chinese minister of defense who was fired in 1959 (shortly before the Sino-Soviet break became public knowledge) partly for his pro-Soviet leanings and his opposition to Mao Tse-tung's policies.

Lavrov goes on to argue that because the PLA is strict in its control of the factories, schools, communes, and government bodies throughout the country, it is increasingly antagonizing the people.

Although Chinese propaganda, Lavrov says, calls on the PLA to show a paternalistic attitude, the Army is simultaneously told not to relax its efforts for maximum production. Hence the "unity" between the civilians and the Armed Forces will continue to deteriorate.

He probably has a point here, but it scarcely follows that the leaders of the PLA would be willing to reduce their economic activities merely because it is making the Army unpopular. The real aim of the broadcast seems to be to set the PLA against the Party and above the Party. This is understandable enough in terms of tactical opportunism, but it happens to coincide, oddly enough, with the anniversary of Marshal G. K. Zhukov's dismissal as minister of Soviet defense fourteen years ago in October 1957.

At that time the Soviet press was full of angry denunciations of military leaders who attempt to oppose political indoctrination (by the Party) of the Armed Forces. Zhukov was removed from the Presidium and from the Central Committee, and was attacked in the press by rivals such as Marshal Konev for aiming at military dictatorship and for advocating an "adventurous" foreign policy.

A purge of Zhukov's supporters was begun, and many of his colleagues were retired or posted to distant military districts on the periphery of the USSR. Since then, the Soviet Army has never been permitted (or even attempted, as far as is known), to challenge the Party's supremacy.

Zhukov regularly receives additional Orders of Lenin (his latest was on the occasion of his 75th birthday earlier this week), but neither he nor Grechko, the present minister of defense, would be allowed by the Kremlin to oppose the Party's policy on any question of substance. It is partly for this reason that Grechko has conspicuously not been promoted even to candidate member status in the Politburo. So the current Soviet broadcasts to the PLA, inciting and encouraging active resistance to the Mao group and even its removal, are scarcely based on any "Marxist-Leninist principles." Bonapartism is strictly for export only, and opportunism is a constant component of Soviet foreign policy, as well as a permanent factor in the Kremlin's attitude to the other "socialist" countries, particularly those which do not toe the line, such as China.

r.r.g.

- (1) Red Star, 7 September 1971.
- (2) Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 8 September 1971.
- (3) Wu Fa-hsien.
- (4) Economist, 15 October 1971.