

Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion  
Elite Power Struggles and the Fate of Three Revolutions

by

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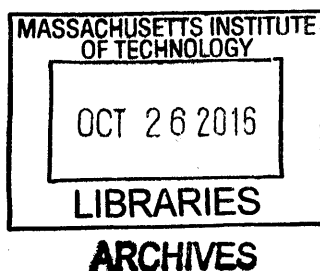
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# Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion

## Elite Power Struggles and the Fate of Three Revolutions

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How do leaders win power struggles in Leninist regimes? Many political scientists emphasize the importance of institutions in such regimes. Such institutionalization allegedly provides a mechanism for distributing patronage and debating policies, stipulates rules that delineate a group that selects the leadership, and prevents the military and secret police from playing a special coercive role. This dissertation instead argues that the defining feature of one-party states is weak institutionalization. Power struggles are therefore determined by prestige and sociological ties, the manipulation of multiple decision-making bodies, and politicized militaries and secret police. Leaders with legacies as successful warfighters are especially capable of dominating such systems. Institutionalization can only explain why elites do not pointlessly and unnecessarily violate ambiguous rules, losers rarely defect from the party or resist decisions after suffering defeat, and the coercive organs never blatantly wield force against united civilian leaders. These arguments are based on a theoretically rigorous examination of the power struggles fought by Nikita Khrushchev, Deng Xiaoping, and Kim Il Sung. The historic failure to institutionalize leadership selection had a tragic legacy: its absence is crucial for understanding the origins of Soviet stagnation, the tragedy at Tiananmen Square in 1989, and the Kim family multi-generational personality cult.

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## Chapter 1: Theory

### Introduction

In the spring of 1989, massive student protests erupted in Beijing. A majority of the Politburo Standing Committee, including the general secretary of the party, supported using peaceful means to defuse the crisis, and the full Politburo supported this tactic at a meeting on May 10. This attitude was shared by the leadership of the National People's Congress, the Chinese state legislature, which even attempted to summon an emergency meeting. Key revolutionary elders explicitly expressed their support to the general secretary or behaved passively. Seven high-ranking generals who had served in the wars against the Japanese and KMT wrote a letter to the leadership expressing support for a non-violent solution, another letter was sent by the two surviving marshals, and the commander of the elite 38 Group Army simply refused to bring his forces to Beijing. For the many political scientists who emphasize the power of institutions in authoritarian regimes, especially in Leninist ones, these facts should have portended a peaceful outcome. As Gandhi and Przeworski argue, "Authoritarian institutions are not just 'window dressing'... institutions do matter under authoritarian regimes."<sup>1</sup>

The ultimate use of force, which was only possible because of Deng Xiaoping's side-lining of the regime's most important decision-making bodies and even the secretary general himself, raises important theoretical questions unanswered by the extant literature. Using a wide variety of newly-available material, this dissertation will show that models conceptualizing authoritarian politics as an institutionalized system of exchange based on patronage or policy interests within a single defined group of decision makers would fail to predict the outcomes of recent events of major historical import in the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea.

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 11 (January 2007): 1280, 1293.

Yet simply criticizing these popular theories would prove unsatisfying or unpersuasive to three groups of people: those who accept the critique but hope for a better answer; those unfamiliar with the current political science literature and might therefore not find low levels of institutionalization surprising; and those who would argue that institutionalization, although weak, is not *entirely* absent. This dissertation not only provides a different answer for why certain leaders and not others are able to win power struggles in Leninist one-party regimes, but also explains the extent to which institutions, although weak, can still matter.

Low levels of institutionalization have three key implications. First, institutions are unable to provide a serious platform for policy deliberation or to convey 'rational-legal' authority to leaders. Therefore sociological forms of authority, such as personal ties and prestige, as well as the use of incriminating personal information, prove to be of greater importance in power struggles than economic interests or policy prescriptions. Second, no clear, defined rulebook exists, and politics instead are marked by a messy mix of ambiguous formal and informal rules. Therefore victory is not the result of politicking within a single defined group of individuals, but the manipulation of multiple layers of potential decision-making bodies. Third, low institutionalization means that the key groups who enforce decisions, most importantly the military or political police, do not simply execute orders as if those orders were presented unambiguously to them on a card spit out of a little box. Because the legitimacy of competing orders is ambiguous, enforcement is politicized in the sense that it is not purely the outcome of a deliberative process. Within these parameters, I demonstrate that leaders with a successful history as military commanders are especially powerful. Successful warfighting is not only especially potent for conferring prestige in general, but also for establishing ties with the armed forces in particular, who can help to both maneuver among potential decision making bodies and ultimately enforce decisions.

Yet institutions are not entirely irrelevant for three reasons. First, a clearly tendentious interpretation of rules can cost a leader some popularity even if they ultimately win victory in a given struggle, and leaders will prefer to win in a way that less obviously constitutes cheating. Second, when

competitors are defeated in Leninist regimes, they never seek to resist the decision in a way that would threaten the party as a whole. For those who are out-maneuvered, the party is always right. Third, the military and political police are incapable of operating completely independently of the political process. The coercive forces always behave in struggles with at least some shade of political cover, and uniformed military men are incapable of using naked force to resist the party.

In this introductory chapter, I first explain why power struggles in one-party regimes are a theoretically important topic. Second, I provide two dueling explanatory models: the economic model, which assumes robust institutionalization, and the authority model, which does not. The empirical chapters will show the greater usefulness of the latter. Third, I use findings from the literature of military sociology to explain how leaders with a history as legendary wartime commanders have political capital especially useful for achieving victory in the authority model. Fourth, I explain why plotters avoid unnecessarily violating rules, losers accept defeat, and violence is never used in the total absence of political legitimacy. I conclude with a brief discussion of my methodology and a preview of my individual cases and how they relate to my theory.

### **The Importance**

Over the last few years, the accessibility of new resources on the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea has improved tremendously. Newly-opened archives overseas, the availability in American libraries of primary sources not yet officially available even in their home countries, memoirs, and high-quality secondary material in languages other than English now allow us to revisit historical events of major theoretical and empirical import. Unfortunately, however, qualitative analytical studies of elite politics have been on a long-term decline.<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, historians have focused on distant time periods or been somewhat reluctant to make the implications of their findings explicit.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes, "The Study of Elite Political Conflict in the PRC: Politics inside the 'Black Box,'" in *Handbook of the Politics of China* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2015), 21–41.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth J. Perry, "The Promise of PRC History," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 10, no. 1 (January 2016): 113–17.



are now paying greater attention to social history, not power politics.<sup>4</sup> In the meantime, political scientists have focused increasingly on quantitative methods in their investigation of authoritarian regimes.<sup>5</sup> While scholars working in these areas have made groundbreaking progress, these trends mean that the gap between new qualitative historical sources and their potential exploitation for theoretical import has become enormous.

The importance of elite politics is such that a constant review of all available material and the use of multiple approaches from our methodological toolbox is essential. First, if leaders are more than faceless representatives of elite interest groups, as this dissertation will argue, then predicting which leaders come to power is extremely important. Once in command, leaders often have broad leeway in deciding policy. Given the complicated nature of social phenomena, they can use their position to creatively pursue a wide variety of different goals.<sup>6</sup>

Second, how leaders win power struggles suggests crucial clues about the nature of their authority. This is true even when the sitting leader is able to reassert their dominance and the challenge is unsuccessful. Political change over long time periods is often invisible, but moments of political contestation provide windows that allow us to see how authority changes over time. These windows also help us theorize how leaders understand the extent to which their positions are secure, how they plan to avoid struggles in the future, or how they might try to win them should they have to confront another challenge.

Third, while scholars have long been interested in state-society relations, the situation within the elite has been under-studied. As Svobik's new work on authoritarian regimes demonstrates, "an

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<sup>4</sup> Malte Griesse, "Soviet Subjectivities: Discourse, Self-Criticism, Imposture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 3 (2008): 609–24.

<sup>5</sup> Victor C. Shih, "Contentious Elites in China: New Evidence and Approaches," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 16, no. Special Issue 01 (March 2016): 1–15.

<sup>6</sup> Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children: Leaders And Their Legacies In Italy And Japan* (Cornell Univ Press, 2005); Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (April 2001): 107–46; Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

overwhelming majority of dictators lose power to those inside the gates of the presidential palace rather than to the masses outside.”<sup>7</sup> This evidence indicates that authoritarian leaders often have more reason to worry about others within the elite than outside of it.

Fourth, authoritarian regimes throughout the world are in resurgence. The colored revolutions,<sup>8</sup> Arab Spring,<sup>9</sup> and continuing concerns about the future of democracy speak to the continued importance of studying non-democracies.<sup>10</sup> Although this dissertation only explicitly examines one-party Leninist states, it provides insights for other non-democracies as well. And although many Leninist regimes have collapsed, those remaining are of crucial importance, including two examined in this dissertation, the PRC and DPRK.

### **The Theory**

To understand who wins power struggles in Leninist regimes, I test two sets of three competing hypotheses. These competing hypotheses answer three separate questions: the primary reason a politician decides to support one of the competitors; the environment in which a competitor canvasses for support; and how a decision outcome is enforced.

The first set of three hypotheses is drawn from the presently dominant approaches to authoritarian regimes, and these hypotheses are usefully grouped together because of their common intellectual affinity with one of Weber’s two conceptions of power: as a ‘constellation of interests.’ According to this model, authority is a form of exchange that operates according to market principles. As Barbalet explains, “Possession of goods... confers influence over others who nevertheless remain formally free and are

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<sup>7</sup> Milan Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Hale, *Interpreting the Color Revolutions and Prospects for Post-Soviet Democratization: Breaking the Cycles* (PONARS Policy Memo No. 373, 2005); Lucan Way, “The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions,” *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 3 (2008): 55–69; Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, “Debating the Color Revolutions: Getting Real about ‘Real Causes,’” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 69–73.

<sup>9</sup> For the Arab Spring, see the October 2013 issue of *Journal of Democracy*.

<sup>10</sup> For the debate on “authoritarian resurgence,” see the April, July, and October 2015 issues of *Journal of Democracy*.

motivated by the pursuit of their own interests.”<sup>11</sup> I call this first set of hypotheses the economic model because the idea of politics being used to “aggregate individual preferences into a collective choice in as fair and efficient a way as possible” meshes well with ideas from the discipline of economics.<sup>12</sup>

The first hypothesis of this set is rooted in the research of the numerous political scientists who posit the over-riding importance of material, economic benefits in authoritarian regimes.<sup>13</sup> De Mesquita and Smith, for example, argue that “Paying supporters... is the essence of ruling.”<sup>14</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson similarly provide an approach to researching dictatorships that is “‘economic-based’ in the sense that we stress individual economic incentives as determining political attitudes.”<sup>15</sup> In order to avoid accusations of “straw-man”-ing this argument, I extend it to include not just economic benefits or patronage but *any* policy platform. Leaders are able to co-opt challengers to their rule by adopting positions that satisfy such material or policy interests. Hypothesis 1a: The leader who provides the best patronage model or popular policy platform wins the power struggle.

The second hypothesis draws on selectorate theory, according to which a formally defined group of individuals have a say in who leads them.<sup>16</sup> For de Mesquita et al, the selectorate is a group that:

has a formal role in expressing a preference over the selection of the leadership that rules them... the set of people whose endowments include the qualities or characteristics institutionally required to choose the government’s leadership and necessary for gaining access to private benefits doled out by the government’s leadership... Politics can be characterized by more-or-less formalized mechanisms... One function of political rules and institutions is to distinguish the subset of residents who possess the characteristics required for membership in the selectorate.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> J.M. Barbalet, “Power and Resistance,” in *Max Weber: Critical Assessments*, ed. Peter Hamilton, vol. 2 (London: Routledge), 388.

<sup>12</sup> David Miller, “Social Choice and Deliberative Democracy,” *Political Studies*, no. 40 (1992): 55; Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy For Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Wintrobe, *The Political Economy of Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Milan W. Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator’s Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xii.

<sup>16</sup> Susan L Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 38, 42.

Within this defined selectorate, the victor will be the one whose platform best meets the demand of a ‘median voter,’ or in other words, achieves the most popular support according to the average of an ideal goal for voters.<sup>18</sup> Hypothesis 2a: A defined group is enfranchised to choose their leader: a ‘median voter’ makes the final decision.

The third hypothesis is based on scholarship that minimizes a special role for the power ministries. Huntington limited this argument to Leninist states: “political systems such as those of the United States and the Soviet Union... have almost impeccable systems of civilian control.”<sup>19</sup> De Mesquita et al, however, minimize differences not just between democracies and communist regimes but democracies and all kinds of non-democracies: “Governments do not differ in kind. They differ along the dimensions of their selectorates and winning coalitions.” By making this argument, they assume that the power ministries do not play different roles across regime types.<sup>20</sup> Hypothesis 3a: The power ministries (military or secret police) do not play an independent or unique role: enforcement of decisions is automatic.

The economic model has led to rather counter-intuitive suggestions for dictators, such as the usefulness for improving political prospects by “subjecting himself to oversight in a court where his mistreatment of any past supporters could cause his own downfall”<sup>21</sup> or casting his population to penury.<sup>22</sup> But are the assumptions behind such a model credible? Each of the three constituent hypotheses of the model are based on an assumption of a high level of institutionalization.<sup>23</sup> In this dissertation, I mean institutionalization to entail the following: first, rules are clear and unambiguous, and second, those

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, Harper, 1957).

<sup>19</sup> Samuel P Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 194.

<sup>20</sup> Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator’s Handbook*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Roger B. Myerson, “The Autocrat’s Credibility Problem and Foundations of the Constitutional State,” *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (February 2008): 125–39.

<sup>22</sup> Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator’s Handbook*.

<sup>23</sup> Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 115–44; Jason Brownlee 1974-, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

rules are maintained by an objective third-party arbiter that enforces decisions. These characteristics are drawn from the definition of institutions provided by Streeck and Thelen:

In sum, the institutions in which we are interested here are formalized rules that may be enforced by calling upon a third party... With an institution we are dealing only if and to the extent that third parties predictably and reliably come to the support of actors whose institutionalized, and therefore *legitimate*, normative expectations have been disappointed. This they do not necessarily because they identify with the interest of such actors, although they may.<sup>24</sup>

In this dissertation, ‘institutionalization’ refers *only* to these two characteristics. Other scholars have used this term to refer to the incorporation of other social forces in the ruling elite or high levels of indoctrination, skill, and bureaucratic strength in an organization.<sup>25</sup> These topics are important but are not the subject of this dissertation. This dissertation is also not about institutionalization outside the elite, although other scholars have noticed the importance of non-institutional characteristics of authoritarian regimes even at the grassroots.<sup>26</sup>

We can clearly see the importance of institutionalization as an assumption necessary for the economic model to have explanatory power. First, the system is effective precisely because institutions are used to distribute spoils and provide a platform for debate over various policy platforms. Second, the presence of unambiguous rules is necessary for the idea of a selectorate to be meaningful, as is clearly evident in the definition provided above.<sup>27</sup> Third, institutionalization presumes that the enforcers are apolitical and only execute the outcome of a political deliberative process.

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<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Ann Thelen, “Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies,” in *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, ed. Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10–11.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce J. Dickson, *Wealth into Power: The Communist Party’s Embrace of China’s Private Sector* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon* (Santa Monica: McGraw-Hill, 1952).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel C. Mattingly, “Elite Capture: How Decentralization and Informal Institutions Weaken Property Rights in China,” *World Politics* 68, no. 3 (2016): 383–412; Qingjie Zeng, “Democratic Procedures in the CCP’s Cadre Selection Process: Implementation and Consequences,” *The China Quarterly* 225 (March 2016): 73–99. For a study of how the Chinese regime manages regular citizens and society, as opposed to other threats within the elite, see Bruce Dickson, *The Dictator’s Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party’s Strategy for Survival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>27</sup> In one article, Acemoglu and Robinson (and Verdier) do accept the possibility of authoritarian regimes with weak institutions. However, they apply their theory only to personalistic regimes (not one-party states), and only examine threats to the regimes (not struggles within the regime). In their model politicians are only interested in

Although scholars who emphasize institutions in authoritarian regimes are often generalists, the Soviet Union and China do appear explicitly in such analyses. De Mesquita and Smith, for example, write that “In today’s China (as in the old Soviet Union), [the real selectorate, or “the group that *actually* chooses the leader”] consists of all voting members of the Communist Party.”<sup>28</sup> Area studies scholars like Shirk used selectorate theory to explain Chinese economic reform in the 1980s, and Miller writes that Deng Xiaoping “introduced reforms to instill a new dynamic in party leadership politics and processes intended to institutionalize an oligarchic collective leadership at the top.”<sup>29</sup>

Having theorized the implications of a regime with strong institutions, we can now turn to the question of what we should expect to see if institutions are weak: the authority model. This next set of three hypotheses is rooted in Weber’s second conceptualization of power, which he contrasted with the ‘constellation of interests’ approach described above. According to the authority model, “The manifested will (command) of the ruler or rulers is meant to influence the conduct of one or more others (the ruled).”<sup>30</sup>

While the economic model conflates politics with economics, in the authority model actors are not “freely-contracting individuals.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, we have moved away from the market to the realm of politics, where winners impose their will on losers.<sup>32</sup> Moe writes that “politics is fundamentally about the exercise of public authority and the struggle to gain control over it. The unique thing about public

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economic dimensions. Moreover, their most important work can still comfortably be placed in the selectorate literature. However, their basic insight in this article that low levels of institutionalizations allow politicians to “create and control interest groups”, as opposed to be controlled by them, has strong affinities with one of the arguments presented in this dissertation: the importance of manipulation of ambiguous rules. Daron Acemoglu, James Robinson, and Thierry Verdier, “Kleptocracy and Divide and-Rule: A Model of Personal Rule, The Alfred Marshall Lecture,” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2, no. 2–3 (2004): 162–92.

<sup>28</sup> Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator’s Handbook*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*; Alice Miller, “The PLA in the Party Leadership Decisionmaking System,” in *PLA Influence on China’s National Security Policymaking*, ed. Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 61.

<sup>30</sup> Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 295.

<sup>31</sup> Peter A Hall and Rosemary C. R Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (December 1, 1996): 941.

<sup>32</sup> Dan Slater and Sofia Fenner, “State Power and Staying Power: Infrastructural Mechanisms and Authoritarian Durability,” *Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 1 (Fall 2011).

authority is that whoever gets to exercise it has the right to tell everyone else what to do, whether they want to do it or not.”<sup>33</sup> Pierson similarly concludes that “[p]olitics involves struggles over the authority to establish, enforce, and change rules governing social action in a particular territory. In short, much of politics is based on authority rather than exchange.”<sup>34</sup>

The fourth hypothesis presented here, the first in the authority model, is a response to the implications of no clearly defined and universally supported mechanisms for the importance of policy differences in deciding an outcome. This ambiguity has two crucial effects. First, ambiguous rules mean that elites have no guarantee that they will have an opportunity to present their opinions or that expressing an opinion will not cause them to be punished later.<sup>35</sup> Leaders have an incentive to quash real debate because lack of robust institutions mean such debate would be exceptionally hard to control.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it is difficult to know what others in the elite are thinking and easy for competitors to mischaracterize the positions of their enemies. As Wan Li, the relatively enlightened former head of the National People’s Congress, put it in a speech that shocked his compatriots in 1986:

After the founding of the PRC, we lacked consciousness of democracy and rule of law, there was no emphasis on developing the rule of law, many things were resolved just with the word of a party or state leader... We have only had the experience of ‘rule by man,’ we lack the concept of ‘rule of law.’... The major reason why the ‘two hundred’s’ [Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend, meaning truly open discussion of policies] policy could never be enacted was because in the past different political opinions were understood as “antiparty” “anti-socialist” and “counter-revolutionary,” this kind of thinking brought a lot of bad side effects. Actually, in many situations, it is very hard to

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<sup>33</sup> Terry M. Moe, “Power and Political Institutions,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 2 (2005): 221.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 34.

<sup>35</sup> The father of the Chinese current leader, the relatively liberal leader Xi Zhongxun, at one point even proposed the creation of a law guaranteeing that party members would not be punished for expressing any opinion. Gao Kai, “Xi Zhongxun Jianyi Zhiding ‘Butong Yijian Baohufa’ [Xi Zhongxun Suggested Establishing a ‘Different Viewpoint Protection Law’],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 12 (2013).

<sup>36</sup> Lowenthal wrote that if policy initiative was not highly concentrated, it “would indeed spell deadly dangerous for a one-party regime: for once a monopolistic party permits the growth of a plurality of organized groups or wings in its own ranks, it becomes, in fact, a democratic multi-party regime under another name, and the advantages of its monopoly are gone.” Richard Lowenthal, “The Nature of Khrushchev’s Power,” *Problems of Communism* 4 (August 1960): 2.

distinguish between academic and political issues... All political issues, policy issues, should be researched, before a decision is made, they should be discussed, they can be debated.<sup>37</sup>

In this excerpt, Wan also pointed to the second major implication for weak institutions on policy deliberations: the special importance of personal status and prestige. This personalistic form of authority is particularly significant because if a leadership selection process is vague or unfair, the degree of legitimacy that procedure can impute is limited. In the words of Weber, 'rational-legal' authority is weak, and the following would be absent:

a system of rules that is applied judicially and administratively in accordance with ascertainable principles for all members of the corporate group. The persons who exercise the power of command are typically *superiors* who are appointed or elected by legally sanctioned procedures and are themselves oriented toward the maintenance of the legal order. The persons subject to the commands are *legal equals* who obey 'the law' rather than the persons implementing it.<sup>38</sup>

Without this type of institutionally conferred authority, other, more personalistic forms of authority become more prominent. Because this form of authority is so decisive in such systems, the use of *kompromat*, or personally incriminating information, to undermine such prestige is extremely important.

When these two elements are considered in conjunction with one another, we can see how little policy differences would matter in such an environment. Not only would elites find it difficult to express their opinions because of the lack of institutional guarantees, the special importance of personalistic forms of authority mean debates are more likely to be shaped by the informal status of the competitors and the skillful use of *kompromat*. Hypothesis 1b: Sociological ties and prestige are more important than the dispensation of patronage or real policy differences.

Area studies experts have long appreciated the importance of personal ties as opposed to material considerations in the politics of the countries investigated in this dissertation. Interpersonal ties were a core feature of politics in the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> Eastman shows that Soviet power was in fact quite weak in

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<sup>37</sup> Xu Qingquan and Du Mingming, "Wan Li de Zhengzhi Dandang [Wan Li's Political Service]," *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 9 (2015): 73.

<sup>38</sup> Bendix, *Max Weber*, 1977, 294.

<sup>39</sup> Graeme Gill, "The Soviet Leader Cult: Reflections on the Structure of Leadership in the Soviet Union," *British Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 2 (1980): 167–86; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living*



terms of organization, and that this problem was “eventually overcome by the intersection of informal social structures and formal political organizations.”<sup>40</sup> Ties created during the Bolsheviks’ underground days became important during the Civil War, which further enhanced the importance of these networks. These informal power resources were then used to stabilize Soviet power in the regions, but ultimately became targets of the purges when they became constraints on Stalin’s power. As Getty argues, “[f]ew people trusted or even believed in institutions: they believed in people. Everything was personal... The line that separated informal from formal practices was imaginary.”<sup>41</sup> These characteristics were present in ancient Muscovy and persist in contemporary Russia.<sup>42</sup>

While some China scholars emphasize the growing importance of policy and an enfranchised selectorate<sup>43</sup>, others have emphasized the importance of personal ties, and this sensitivity is reflected in the ‘factional’ or ‘power-struggle’ approach to Chinese politics. In this model, Chinese politics is shaped more by power interests than policy considerations.<sup>44</sup> Other scholars have recognized the importance of

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*Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Oleg Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Gerald M. Easter, “Personal Networks and Postrevolutionary State Building: Soviet Russia Reexamined,” *World Politics* 48, no. 4 (July 1, 1996): 557.

<sup>41</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), x; Kenneth Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345-1547* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Alena V. Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin’s Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Shirk argued that “leaders promote policies that appeal to groups in the selectorate” and that “when the leadership is divided by succession competition, the Central Committee may become the bargaining arena.” I argue these assessments were inaccurate. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China, 90-91*; Andrew J. Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience,” *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): 6–17.

<sup>44</sup> Jing Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Zhenxia Huang and William W Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (New York: Praeger, 1973); Lucian Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics: A Psychocultural Study of the Authority Crisis in Political Development*, 2 paperback (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1970); Andrew J. Nathan, “A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 53 (January 1, 1973): 34–66; Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Lowell Dittmer, “Bases of Power in Chinese Politics: A Theory and an Analysis of the Fall of the ‘Gang of Four,’” *World Politics* 31, no. 1 (October 1, 1978): 26–60; Victor Shih, *Factions and Finance in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

prestige and status but refrained from using the term factionalism because of the high degree of coherence it implies on competing groups.<sup>45</sup>

This does not mean real policy differences are entirely absent in Leninist regimes. Certainly politics in normal times, when authority relations are stable, we should see the presence of bargaining on many issue areas.<sup>46</sup> But this dissertation will show that during power struggles, a) in many crucial cases, even the most intense enmities existed within a broad consensus on policy issues, b) policy was less important than more sociological factors, c) whether common policy perspectives mattered was dependent upon which leadership body made a particular decision, d) both sides had strengths and weaknesses in terms of policy popularity that made this metric alone indeterminate, or e) the specialists in violence only sometimes behaved according to material or policy interests.

With regards to the next hypothesis, if rules are ambiguous or simply not respected, then a 'selectorate' would not be able to operate in the way described above. As this dissertation shows, within a group of elites that might possibly have a say in the outcome of a power struggle are a number of different party and state bureaucratic organs that have complicated and ambiguous inter-relationships. These inter-relationships are ambiguous because they are shaped by a mix of unclear formal and informal rules, whose co-existence further muddles the legitimacy of both.<sup>47</sup> In other words, this dissertation does not test formal institutions against informal ones, but rather argues that elites interact in a complex environment that allows for multiple interpretations of the rules. The dissertation will still show, however, that in many cases a leader wins a power struggle *even though* his interpretation of the institutional environment is obviously more tendentious and illegitimate than his competitors.

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<sup>45</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes, "The Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition: From Obeying the Leader to 'Normal Politics'," *The China Journal*, no. 34 (1995).

<sup>46</sup> Michel Oksenberg and Kenneth Lieberthal, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>47</sup> For a theoretical investigation of the nature of informal rules, see Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 4 (2004): 725–40.

Because of this lack of institutional clarity, the term ‘selectorate’ is not appropriate for the elite as a whole. The particular body that makes the final decision cannot be assumed. This has a crucial implication: which decision-making body within the party or state apparatus makes a decision is decisive, as leaders are not politicking within a single defined selectorate. Therefore, power struggles are not so much about seeking support within one single, amorphous group as determining which part of the group gets to choose. Hypothesis 2b: Which bureaucratic organ makes a final decision is more important than a search for a ‘median voter’ in the elite as a whole: institutional manipulation explains more than open vote-seeking.

Finally, a crucial element of institutionalization is the presence of a non-partial organization that enforces the rules objectively. If the rules are ambiguous, then the legitimacy of any particular order is suspect. In other words, the difference between democracies and non-democracies is not just the size of the selectorate, but the absence of this crucial mechanism: non-arbitrary enforcement.<sup>48</sup> The ‘pull’ of political dysfunction in cases of low institutionalization can therefore provide an opportunity for the military to become involved in politics.<sup>49</sup> If Huntington was wrong and communist regimes are not highly institutionalized, we should see the greater relevance of a different model of civil-military relations. Perlmutter and LeoGrande allow for the possibility that “the party-in-uniform [the military] retains the ability to use its military command to settle inner-party conflicts by force of arms, and the coercive

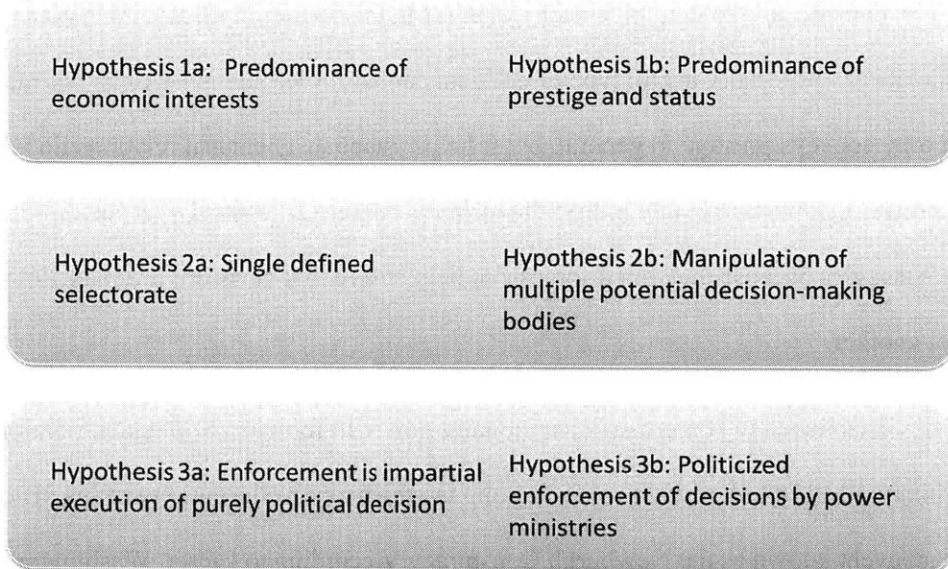
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<sup>48</sup> Milan Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. This dissertation has important similarities and differences with Svoblik’s impressive work. Both Svoblik and the analysis presented here emphasize the lack of an external arbiter as a defining characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Svoblik understands leadership struggles as a contest among the dictator and elites who want to prevent him from seeking ‘power’. Absolute dominance occurs when other members of the elite, suffering from collective action problems and terror of failure, fail to stop the dictator from grasping too much of this power. Svoblik does not explicitly theorize what this ‘power’ is, or why even the most loyal courtiers would not ultimately change their mind and decide to oppose their benefactor after his other competitors are eliminated.

<sup>49</sup> S. E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, 2 edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

potential of the party-in-uniform is often enough to resolve inner-party conflicts.”<sup>50</sup> Hypothesis 3b: Power ministries have leeway when choosing to obey certain decisions about leadership selection and not others.

To sum up, according to the economic model leaders win power struggles by providing the most attractive patronage platform, the struggle takes place within a single, defined group, and the power ministries do not play a special role. In the authority model, prestige and sociological relationships override material interests, the struggle revolves more around where the ultimate decision is made as opposed to politicking within a ‘selectorate,’ and the power ministries are not excluded from the political process.



This dissertation brackets the question of why the regimes under investigation never achieved high levels of institutionalization. The strength of personal ties is likely rooted in more than just politics: sociologists, anthropologists, and historians see seniority and patrimonial ties at the very heart of Russian

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<sup>50</sup> Amos Perlmutter and William M. LeoGrande, “The Party in Uniform: Toward a Theory of Civil-Military Relations in Communist Political Systems,” *The American Political Science Review* 76, no. 4 (December 1, 1982): 778–89.

and Chinese culture.<sup>51</sup> Pye saw strong similarities between Confucianism and Leninism.<sup>52</sup> The reluctance to institutionalize and bureaucratize may also be a result of the history of communist parties as clandestine organizations.<sup>53</sup> Fewsmith sources this historic failure in the veteran party leaders for whom “the traditions of ‘one-man rule’ and ‘party line’ were too deeply embedded to yield to legal-rational decision making.” Or perhaps leaders are simply unwilling to introduce institutions that could hold them accountable, even if they might provide them with rational-legal legitimacy.<sup>54</sup>

### **Martial Prestige**

If the authority model better encapsulates the nature of power struggles in one-party regimes, then what kinds of leaders are able to dominate such systems? In this section I provide an explanation for why warfighting creates an especially useful type of political capital for leaders in Leninist regimes. ‘Martial prestige’ not only conveys prestige in general, but it helps establish a personal relationship with the most important coercive organization in any polity: the military. Moreover, control over the military is useful during power struggles because the armed forces can help ensure that decisions are made in one political organ and not another.

The ties established in war are an exceptionally powerful form of sociological relationship. George Washington in 1783 narrowly avoided a coup in which almost the entirety of his officers participated, an event known as the Newburgh Conspiracy. According to Lipset, Washington “consciously employed his status as military leader and hero of the Revolution to create respect for national authority and to bolster the legitimacy of the new nation.” This authority was created because

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<sup>51</sup> Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchanges* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Xiaotong Fei, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> Lucian W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures*, Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies ; No. 59 (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> Bryan C. Price, “Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism,” *International Security* 36, no. 4 (April 1, 2012): 18.

<sup>54</sup> Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Washington was able to lead “an army whose men were not accustomed to military hierarchy, which had limited resources, and which won few battles... [His] greatest contribution was to keep it viable, to command respect, and to maintain morale. He showed no personal weakness and never gave his soldiers any reason to lose faith in him. He lived with his troops, drew no pay, and rejected opportunities to take even the briefest leave to visit Mount Vernon.” When confronting his officers at Newburgh, Washington put glasses on to read a letter. When he said, “I have grown gray in your service and now find myself growing blind,” many in the audience cried. Jefferson concluded: “The moderation of a single character probably prevented this revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish.”<sup>55</sup>

The application of violence is inherently connected to how individuals identify with a group.<sup>56</sup> Levitsky and Way show that “cohesion is greater in parties that are bound by salient ethnic or ideological ties or a shared history of violent struggle, such as revolutionary or liberation movements.”<sup>57</sup> Slater provides an example of stickiness in his description of ‘protection pacts,’ which are “broad elite coalitions unified by shared support for heightened state power and tightened authoritarian controls as institutional bulwarks against continued or renewed mass unrest.” These coalitions are forged in the fires of contentious politics, which include “a wide range of transgressive, collective mass actions.”<sup>58</sup> With regards to authority within insurgencies, Wood demonstrates the importance of emotional and moral motives for insurgent collective action, and Weinstein shows how social endowments like shared beliefs, expectations and norms contribute to better command and control than economic patronage.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, “George Washington and the Founding of Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 4 (1998): 24–38.

<sup>56</sup> Rebecca Littman and Elizabeth Levy Paluck, “The Cycle of Violence: Understanding Individual Participation in Collective Violence,” *Advances in Political Psychology* 36, no. Suppl. 1 (2015): 79–99.

<sup>57</sup> Lucan Way and Steven Levitsky, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26.

<sup>58</sup> Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>59</sup> Elisabeth Wood, “The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 11 (2008): 539–61; Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in*

The literature on military sociology provides traction for explaining the origins of this authority. First, formal rituals intended to build cohesion inculcate a sense of authority towards officers. The simple acts of giving orders or participating in training are performances that demonstrate power and create habits of obedience. Freeman wrote of a “charisma of rank” that “is powerful and generally renders innocuous any fleeting doubts a subordinate may have of a superior’s authority in a given instance.”<sup>60</sup>

Second, because soldiers put their lives at risk at war, officers who show they can win victories and protect their soldiers will draw deep respect. King concludes that “[t]hose who are militarily proficient and, therefore, good comrades are lauded, while those who have failed to contribute to collective goals are ridiculed, defaced, and ultimately, excluded.”<sup>61</sup> Henderson similarly argues

Men in danger become acutely aware of the qualities of their leaders... Often, the leader approaches the stature of a loved and respected part or of the charismatic leader who demonstrates consistently the Weberian quality of ‘grace,’ or the ability to consistently handle difficult situations well. Such referent power is based on the satisfaction of the soldier’s personal needs for affection, recognition, and security through strong identification with a respected leader who has successfully led his unit through situations of danger and hardship.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, a sense that the leader is competent may create a sense of loyalty. Ernie Pyle argued that “the soldiers’ need for the sustainment which loyalty to leaders bestows had magnified their perception of his competence.”<sup>63</sup>

Third, leaders with martial prestige have better knowledge of how to motivate men in uniform: “Leaders who maximize their referent power know the personal history and circumstances of all their subordinates. They know the aspirations, fears, capabilities, and attitudes of their soldiers in great detail

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*El Salvador*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Felton D.1 Freeman, “The Army as a Social Structure,” *Social Forces* 27, no. 1 (October 1948): 81.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony King, “The Word of Command Communication and Cohesion in the Military,” *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 4 (January 2006): 509.

<sup>62</sup> William Darryl, 1938- Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat: Leadership and Societal Influence in the Armies of the Soviet Union, the United States, North Vietnam, and Israel* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1985), 109, 113.

<sup>63</sup> William Hauser, “The Will to Fight,” in *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military*, ed. Sam Sarkesian (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), 193.

and build relationships on these facts.”<sup>64</sup> Leaders with martial prestige have the eloquence to verbalize in ways that inspire. <sup>65</sup> Good commanders can “convey an impression of himself to his troops through words, to explain what he wants of them, to allay their fears, to arouse their hopes, and to bind their ambitions to his own.”<sup>66</sup> Marines serving in the US military today often speak of General Mattis’ speech before the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as the reason for their deep respect of him. *Feldherrnrede*, the speech given by generals before battle, is a literary form that has existed since antiquity and continues to emphasize similar tropes.<sup>67</sup> Figures with martial prestige inspire loyalty with their eloquence, and they know what kind of eloquence most motivates their subordinates.

Fourth, military leaders who are seen to share in the weal and woe of their soldiers enjoy respect. Keegan writes that legitimacy is “established and sustained by readiness to go to the battlefield and fight with courage once there.” He speaks of “eternal questions”: “Where is our leader? Is he to be seen? What does he say to us? Does he share our risks?”<sup>68</sup> Stewart identifies a commander’s concern for his men, his personal example, the sharing of discomfort, and shared training as key elements for inspiring personal trust. Militaries are defined by their corporateness and expertise, and this sense of a special role creates antipathy towards inexperienced civilians who presume to tell them their business.<sup>69</sup>

The potency of martial prestige is visible on the battlefield. Studies have shown interpersonal relations are a critical glue that bind together fighting men.<sup>70</sup> Kalyvas notes that “numerous studies have

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<sup>64</sup> Henderson, *Cohesion, the Human Element in Combat*, 114.

<sup>65</sup> Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands/Malvinas War* (Washington DC: Brassey’s US, 1991), Chapter 8.

<sup>66</sup> John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 319.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 319–21.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>69</sup> S. E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, 2 enlarged (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957); Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

<sup>70</sup> Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (July 1, 1948): 280–315; Charles Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man: The Rank and File in Today’s Military* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970).



concluded that men in combat are usually motivated by group pressures and processes involving: (1) regard for their comrades, (2) respect for their leaders, (3) concern for their own reputation with both, and (4) an urge to contribute to their success of the group.”<sup>71</sup> Laqueur writes that “[t]hroughout history it has been strong leadership, the personal example of the commander, the ethos and the esprit de corps which have kept guerrilla movements going and not just ideological motivation.”<sup>72</sup> Violent organizations are at their best when leadership is based on charisma, not on conventional forms of authority.<sup>73</sup> In his classic study of communist guerrillas in Malaysia, Pye concluded that cadres “tended to conceive of any form of authority in highly personal terms. In their minds particular people constituted authority and, as individuals, utilized institutions or organizations to support their positions of power.”<sup>74</sup>

Martial prestige, then, is a strong tie: formed because of high levels in “the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.”<sup>75</sup> Martial prestige forms a patron-client relationship, in which “an informal cluster consisting of a power figure who is in a position to give security, inducements, or both, and his personal followers who, in return for such benefits, contribute their loyalty and personal assistance to the patron’s designs.”<sup>76</sup> This is not simply a utilitarian relationship, however: “it is often a durable bond of genuine mutual devotion that can survive severe testing.”<sup>77</sup> Xuezhì Guo writes that “[t]he military elite have a much stronger motivation to establish and develop close personal bonds based on ‘zhong’ and ‘yi,’ which, if combined

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<sup>71</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “‘New’ and ‘Old’ Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?,” *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (June 13, 2011): 108.

<sup>72</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical & Critical Study* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 272.

<sup>73</sup> Price, “Targeting Top Terrorists”; John C. Bahnsen, “Charisma,” in *Leadership: The Warrior’s Art*, ed. Christopher Kolenda (Carlisle: Army War College Foundational Press, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Lucian Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 277–78.

<sup>75</sup> Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (May 1, 1973): 1361.

<sup>76</sup> James C. Scott, “Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia,” *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 1 (March 1, 1972): 92.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

with long-term personal interactions and shared privations in the battlefield, become powerful elements in promoting mutual personal dependence and the cohesion of the military.”<sup>78</sup>

The role of martial prestige has played critical roles in many revolutions. Most famously, Napoleon Bonaparte’s military victories and support in the armed forces were critical in his rise to power.<sup>79</sup> In Mexico, the leading civilian politicians all had military experience from the revolutionary war, which served to enhance civilian control over the military: “[t]he Revolution itself provides the foundation for bridging the two elites, military and political, because both had, or at least it has been assumed that both had, firsthand revolutionary experience. It is convincing that the experience helped create a shared sense of legitimacy essential to the inculcation and acceptance of the doctrine of civilian supremacy.”<sup>80</sup> In Cuba, the fighting at Moncada “symbolized the mythical source of the Cuban Revolution. It was the legitimizing crucible for the entire revolutionary process that followed, and the *moncadistas* ever since have been the most revered of Cuba’s national heroes, comparable only to Marti and the nineteenth-century *mambises*.” The greatest political crisis in Communist Cuba revolved around the purge of General Arnaldo Ochoa, as “For Fidel it has always been axiomatic that a popular and charismatic troop commander would be the greatest threat to his hegemony.”<sup>81</sup> The friendship that Le Duan and Le Duc Tho forged as guerrillas in South Vietnam in the early 1950s helps explain how they “engineered the greatest usurpation of power in the annals of the Vietnamese Communist Party.”<sup>82</sup>

In this dissertation we are most interested in the implications of martial prestige for one-party regimes. Third, because formal decision-making bodies are weak in authoritarian regimes, personal

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<sup>78</sup> Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics,” 79.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Bonapartism’ thus became one of the greatest *bête noirs* in the communist political lexicon: the danger of the revolution’s generals hijacking the revolution.

<sup>80</sup> Roderic Ai Camp, *Generals in the Palacio: The Military in Modern Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>81</sup> Brian Latell, *After Fidel: The Inside Story of Castro’s Regime and Cuba’s Next Leader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 131, 210.

<sup>82</sup> Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 47. Another crucial reason was the failure of land reform in the North by the previous leader.

prestige is especially important. War can create a trust among comrades far beyond simple popularity, so leaders can use former military subordinates whom they absolutely trust to populate other critical positions within the party and state. Second, the military can help certain leaders seize the initiative and execute *faits accomplis*. The military can be used to isolate certain figures and prevent them from rallying support. It can also be used to rally one's own supporters. In other words, the military provides the maneuverability that ensures political decisions are made in certain bodies and not others. Third, given the ambiguity of legitimacy in one-party regimes, the military does have some leeway in determining what orders it decides to obey. Therefore, which leader the military decides to support is of critical importance.<sup>83</sup>

By showing the strong implications of warfighting for one-party regimes, this argument has clear intellectual affinities with other scholars who have drawn attention to the consequences of violence on politics.<sup>84</sup> Levitsky and Way have theorized about the legacies of revolution in particular: “violent liberation struggles and the polarization generated by revolutionary seizures of power produce unusually disciplined ruling parties, marked by militarized structures, strong partisan identities, intense within-group loyalties, and a founding generation of leaders with extraordinary legitimacy.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Taylor refers to this as ‘military arbitration.’ Brian D. Taylor, “Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689-2000” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Jeffrey Ira Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Barry R. Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power,” *International Security* 18, no. 2 (October 1, 1993): 80–124; Slater, *Ordering Power*, 2010; Nicholas Sambanis, Stergios Skaperdas, and William C. Wohlforth, “Nation-Building through War,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 2 (May 2015): 279–296.

<sup>85</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 3 (2013): 9.

Political scientists are still working out the full implications of this insight: Levitsky and Way admit that their work is still “best viewed as a hypothesis-generating exercise.”<sup>86</sup> Although the theory presented here builds on these findings, its contribution is different. First, while Levitsky and Way describe revolutionary violence as a force for engendering “strikingly robust regime institutions,” I demonstrate instead that martial prestige is best seen as a tool for manipulating weak institutions. Second, Levitsky and Way are primarily interested in understanding the long-term durability of one-party regimes, while this dissertation investigates power struggles inside the elite that might not have anything to do with democratizing pressures. Third, as discussed below, my methodological approach is different: instead of relying on low-*n* cross-case variation with brief case studies<sup>87</sup> or the presentation of a wide variety of evidence from a high number of cases<sup>88</sup>, I deeply investigate individual moments of intense political contestation to show what power struggles actually look like.

#### **“Low” Institutionalization, not “Absent” Institutionalization**

The above conceptualization of politics in Leninist states identifies the ambiguity of rules and the lack of an external enforcer as defining characteristics. The similarities with the international system are therefore unmistakable, where laws are equivocal and no world government is present to enforce them.<sup>89</sup> Because of these common structural features, both Leninist regimes and the international system are marked by constant struggles for dominance.<sup>90</sup> The ‘bloodiness’ of politics is omnipresent: competitors seek security because losers are eliminated.

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<sup>86</sup> Steven R. Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “Beyond Patronage: Violent Struggle, Ruling Party Cohesion, and Authoritarian Durability,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (2012): 880.

<sup>87</sup> For an example, see Levitsky and Way, “Beyond Patronage.”

<sup>88</sup> For an example, see Levitsky and Way, “The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes.”

<sup>89</sup> Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3d ed. (New York, Knopf, 1960); Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979).

<sup>90</sup> D. Scott Bennett, *The Behavioral Origins of War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Daniel S. Geller and J. David Singer, *Nations at War: A Scientific Study of International Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*; Avery Goldstein, *From Bandwagon to Balance-of-Power Politics: Structural Constraints and Politics in China, 1949-1978* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991).

However, despite the enduring and unmistakable implications of anarchy upon state behavior, states do have a common interest in maintaining that system and avoiding constant unrestricted warfare. Even if laws are ambiguous and unenforceable, they do exist.<sup>91</sup> States recognize that at least pretending in ways that appear legitimate can make the achievement of their goals easier.<sup>92</sup> Obvious violations damage perceptions of fairness and damage reputation.<sup>93</sup> The more the breaking of a rule or norm is obvious, the more likely that action will inspire a negative reaction. In other words, even in systems with low levels of institutionalization, important boundaries and limitations can exist. In Leninist regimes, we see the following three characteristics.

First, although Leninist regimes are shaped by a complicated interaction of formal and informal rules, they do at least serve as a frame of reference. Those rules are useful to the extent that, to use the words of political philosopher John Dunn, they soften the “intrinsic humiliations” of being ruled and set “some hazy limits to the harms that [rulers] will voluntarily choose to do us collectively.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, even in the context of truly Machiavellian political machinations institutions allow leaders to at least clothe themselves in a fig leaf of respectability and prevent each other from simply shooting one another at Politburo meetings. This has several crucial implications. If the winner is only able to win by clearly violating even ambiguous rules, this will cost him popularity, although perhaps not ultimate victory in the struggle at hand. Although competitors will not adhere to the rules so closely as to risk losing a power struggle, they will not needlessly go beyond what is necessary. That explains why victors will go through so many somersaults to make their victory look legal and why elites in Leninist states are

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<sup>91</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 3 ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>92</sup> Stacie E. Goddard, “When Right Makes Might: How Prussia Overturned the European Balance of Power,” *International Security* 33, no. 3 (January 2009): 110–42.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy Among Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Thomas M. Franck, *Fairness in International Law and Institutions*, Oxford Scholarship Online (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1995); Omar Dajani, “Shadow or Shade? The Roles of International Law in Palestinian-Israeli Peace Talks,” *Yale Journal of International Law* 32, no. 61 (Winter 2007).

<sup>94</sup> John Dunn, “Situating Democratic Political Accountability,” in *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, ed. Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes, and Bernard Manin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 342–43.

not simply assassinated. Both sides will try to cast the opponent as a violator of the rules, and competitors will especially suffer if their behavior is seen as putting the stability of the system as a whole at risk.

Second, such regimes are institutionalized to the extent that even the most antagonistic competitors almost always refuse to exit the party and oppose it from the outside. This attitude is rooted in a deep-seated belief among such groups that the party is a manifestation of historical will.<sup>95</sup> Such a belief, and the common goal to not let the regime as a whole collapse, helps explain why such regimes last longer.<sup>96</sup> One Soviet leader remarked, “There could be no life for him (Pyatakov continued) outside the ranks of the Party, and he would be ready to believe that black was white, and white was black, if the Party required it. In order to become one with this great Party he would fuse himself with it, abandon his own personality, so that there was no particle left inside him which was not at one with the Party, did not belong to it.” As Conquest put it, “this idea of all morality and all truth being comprehended in the Party is extraordinarily illuminating when we come to consider the humiliations Pyatakov and others were to accept in the Party’s name.”<sup>97</sup> Molotov wept when he was reinstated in the party in the 1980s.<sup>98</sup> Even Mao remarked on this remarkable quality of communist parties in 1971: “China is also strange, China’s party has never split, fifty years have already passed and it never split.”<sup>99</sup> When a loser is out-manuevered, he will not challenge a decision if doing so would threaten the stability of the system as a whole.

Third, naked force without even the semblance of political legitimacy is rare. As discussed above, war heroes are specially equipped to win power struggles in Leninist regimes. However, this emphatically does not mean it is likely a general can simply declare himself leader. As discussed above, the party *qua*

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<sup>95</sup> Jowitt, *New World Disorder*; Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon*; Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1950).

<sup>96</sup> Geddes, “What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?”; Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats.”

<sup>97</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 113.

<sup>98</sup> July 12, 1984, Meeting of Politburo of CPSU, Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>99</sup> Jon Chongji and Pang Xianzhi, *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1949-1976 Xia [Biography of Mao Zedong 1949-1976 Part 2]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 1594.

party enjoys supreme legitimacy. Communist states are extremely sensitive to the danger of “Bonapartism”: the use of military force from within to destroy the revolution. This attitude not only contributes to some skepticism towards powerful military figures among civilians, but also includes members of the military elite. As Perlmutter and LeoGrande argued, the military is still the ‘party-in-uniform.’<sup>100</sup> Therefore, while we see war heroes relying on prestige and personal connections, using the military to help maneuver among different decision-making bodies, and ordering the armed forces to enforce decisions that suffer from questionable legitimacy, we do not see purely military figures or the political police overthrowing a unified civilian leadership.

These caveats provide us traction for addressing the question of how generalizable this theory is for other types of authoritarian regimes. Fully answering this question will demand close investigations of power struggles similar to those presented here. But two proposals seem reasonable. First, of all the types of authoritarian states, Leninist regimes are the most institutionalized. In other words, this is a ‘hard’ case for proving that institutions do not matter in authoritarian regimes. If this dissertation effectively demonstrates the greater usefulness of the authority model for even these states, then we can safely predict that it will be even more relevant for other cases. Second, to the extent that the caveats presented in this section are accurate, then, relatively speaking, Leninist regimes should be placed somewhat higher on the ‘institutionalization’ scale. Even within Leninist regimes, the strength of leadership selection norms may change over time, meaning they can also shift on this spectrum.<sup>101</sup> However, until such rules are made explicit and an objective arbiter is established, this will remain a change in degree, not kind. In any case, in comparison with other authoritarian regimes, generally speaking struggles in Leninist regimes will be marked by (somewhat) less brutality, are less likely to split during a crisis, and military strongmen will find it more difficult to seize total control.

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<sup>100</sup> Perlmutter and LeoGrande, “The Party in Uniform.”

<sup>101</sup> Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience”; Milan Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*; Alice Miller, “Projecting the Next Politburo Standing Committee,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 49 (March 2016).

## Methodology

The methodology used in this dissertation is simple and straightforward. I selected for study the most important power struggles in the Soviet Union and China after Stalin and Mao, as well as the most crucial political crises in North Korea during the Kim Il Sung era. I use a wide variety of previously unavailable material to reconstruct those historical events. Evidence is categorized according to whether it validates or weakens the two sets of competing hypotheses introduced above. To connect theory and empirics, each chapter asks a series of clear, answerable questions related to the competing hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1a vs 1b:* Did the winner have a more consensus-oriented personality than his competitors, or did he bully and dominate other members of the elite? Were policy differences real, or were alleged differences manipulated and overblown for the purposes of political struggle? Were debates more about policy differences, or did they revolve more around personal prestige and the skillful use of compromising personal material (*kompromat*)? If policy differences were real, did the winner have an unambiguously more popular platform, or did the loser have more popular policies?

*Hypothesis 2a vs 2b:* Did the winner of the power struggle compete within a single defined group, or was the winner determined by which decision-making body within the elite was allowed to make the final decision? Was there a serious deliberation about the strengths and weaknesses of a leader, or did one leader execute a *fait accompli* that made it impossible for the accused to put up a serious defense? Did the leader more closely hewing to the (albeit ambiguous) rules win, or did the leader who adopted a much more tendentious interpretation win?

*Hypothesis 3a vs 3b:* Did the military and political police execute a decision after the political process was completed, or did they operate in an environment in which they could potentially decide among multiple orders? Were the power ministries considered to be irrelevant to struggles within the party, or did leaders see control over the coercive organs as an integral part of the contest? When members of the power ministries expressed an opinion on the power struggle, was the effect equivalent to



their voting power in the political bodies on which they had a seat, or did their positions threaten the potential use of force and therefore have an outsize effect?

The empirical chapters provide evidence discounting the first halves of these questions and affirming the second halves. They also demonstrate the three caveats identified earlier in this chapter: the limited hazards associated with violating rules too brazenly, the acceptance of a final decision once the struggle is over, and the limited political capacity of the power ministries vis a vis a united party.

This type of approach is not common in political science, and therefore its particular strengths should be briefly mentioned. It is in part a reaction to two trends in other methodologies. First, even as we better understand what types of statistical analysis are persuasive, this progress goes hand in hand with a recognition that it is applicable only in increasingly restrictive situations, like natural experiments.<sup>102</sup> Important reviews of the quantitative literature on key issues reveal a troubling lack of conclusions.<sup>103</sup> Second, a wide variety of new findings now call into question the usefulness of homogenizing assumptions that define game-theoretic accounts.<sup>104</sup> The best modelers in this school are those that accept

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<sup>102</sup> Jason Seawright, "Regression-Based Inference: A Case Study in Failed Causal Assessment," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry Brady and David Collier, 2 ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010); Michael Shalev, "Limits and Alternatives to Multiple Regression in Comparative Research," *Comparative Social Research* 24 (May 2007): 261–308; David Freedman, *Statistical Models and Causal Inference: A Dialogue with the Social Sciences*, ed. David Collier, Jasjeet Singh Sekhon, and Philip Stark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Rocío Titiunik, "Can Big Data Solve the Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference?," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 48, no. 1 (January 2015): 75–79; Thad Dunning, *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>103</sup> Nicholas Sambanis, "A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War," *Defence and Peace Economics* 13, no. 3 (2002): 215–43; Mark S. Bell, "Examining Explanations for Nuclear Proliferation," *International Studies Quarterly*, December, 2015.

<sup>104</sup> Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, "Inequality and Regime Change: Democratic Transitions and the Stability of Democratic Rule," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 495–516; Marcus Kreuzer, "Historical Knowledge and Quantitative Analysis: The Case of the Origins of Proportional Representation," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (2010): 369–92; Bruce Morrison, "Channeling the 'Restless Spirit of Innovation': Elite Concessions and Institutional Change in the British Reform Act of 1832," *World Politics* 63, no. 4 (2011): 678–710; Dan Slater and Benjamin Smith, "Economic Origins of Democratic Breakdown: The Redistributive Model and the Postcolonial State," University of Chicago Department of Political Science Working Paper Series, June 2012; Mary Gallagher and Jonathan K. Hanson, "Authoritarian Survival, Resilience, and the Selectorate Theory," in *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe*, ed. Martin K Dimitrov (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Marc Trachtenberg, "Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis," *Security Studies* 21, no. 1 (January 2012): 3–42.

the impossibility of universalistic explanations.<sup>105</sup> Although these approaches are incredibly powerful and will continue to provide crucial insights, the growing realization that they are imperfect tools and the greater understanding that they are based on different foundational assumptions from certain qualitative approaches both speak to the need for keeping the tent of political science large.

Capoccia and Ziblatt suggest the use of ‘episode analysis’ as a way to avoid the pitfalls of ahistorical approaches. Their basic insight is that it is important to systematically analyze the moments in which institutions are “created or substantially shaped.” This approach adopts “an explicitly historical approach to causality” that “identifies the key political actors fighting over institutional change, highlights the terms of the debate and the full range of options that they perceived, reconstructs the extent of political and social support behind these options, and analyzes, as much as possible with the eyes of the contemporaries, the political interactions that led to the institutional outcome.” This allows an assessment of “how structural factors often seen as driving long-term trajectories of democratic development actually influence the politics of democratic reform in key episodes.” By focusing on political interactions, episode analysis therefore works as a critical filtration device for understanding if and how antecedent conditions actually shape outcomes.<sup>106</sup> Thelen similarly points to the importance of “[doing] the empirical work to make sure that the actors to whom we attribute certain strategic behaviors are in fact ‘players’ in the first place.”<sup>107</sup>

Although Capoccia and Ziblatt do not say so explicitly in their article, ‘episode analysis’ has strong elements of scientific realism: a philosophy of science that prizes concepts and mechanisms over cross-case variation. The ‘real’ in scientific realism is the belief that “causation is a relation between

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<sup>105</sup> Dani Rodrik, *Economics Rules: Why Economics Works, When It Fails, and How to Tell the Difference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>106</sup> Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, “The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond,” *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 8–9 (January 8, 2010): 934, 939, 942, 943.

<sup>107</sup> Kathleen Thelen, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (June 1999): 378.

mechanism and outcome rather than premise and conclusion as in the deductive-nomological model.”<sup>108</sup>

Cases are not “manifestations of one or another theoretically derived instance[s] in a typology” but a combination of different structural elements.<sup>109</sup>

It therefore differs from both a statistical analysis that measures an average causal effect and a logic-based analysis that identifies necessary and sufficient conditions through the use of Mill’s methods of fuzzy sets.<sup>110</sup> The focus on individual cases presumes the importance of ‘process tracing,’ and as Mahoney argues, “[s]cholars who use process tracing... reject the view that an event is explained when it can be subsumed under and predicted by a covering law model.”<sup>111</sup> Scientific realists instead use the historical record to deeply investigate individual moments, construct a narrative of what happened, and then conceptualize the factors that had a gravitational pull on that event: a technique known as *retroduction*.<sup>112</sup> This approach has the added benefit of identifying elements that are of crucial importance in shaping an event but do not have a determinative effect. For example, the ‘old comrades’ were defeated despite their legitimacy as major revolutionary figures in the Soviet Union in June 1957, but to say that this legitimacy did not matter would be a gross exaggeration.

To better understand this process, it helps to think about social reality on three different levels. On the one hand, we have the actual evidence we use for analysis: documents, memoirs, high-quality secondary material, and so on. At the other end of the spectrum, we have the underlying dynamics that

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<sup>108</sup> Ian Shapiro and Alexander Wendt, “The Difference That Realism Makes: Social Science and the Politics of Consent,” in *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences*, ed. Ian Shapiro (Princeton.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 40.

<sup>109</sup> Ira Katznelson, “Structure and Configuration in Comparative Politics,” in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 99.

<sup>110</sup> Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil, “When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (December 2012): 935–953; Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>111</sup> James Mahoney, “The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences,” *Sociological Methods & Research* 41, no. 4 (November 1, 2012): 586.

<sup>112</sup> Berth Danermark et al., *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002).

have a gravitational pull on events as they transpire. The trick is how to move from the basic evidence to the social scientific concepts that interest us. The bridge between the two is the formulation of clear, answerable questions that a) the evidence can address and b) for which the answers shed light on questions of theoretical import. When formulated in this way, the differences with an approach that prizes cross-case variation are obvious.

Scholars working in the democratic transitions literature might find this focus on political crises surprising, as they understand such events to be highly contingent.<sup>113</sup> Yet at the same time these are moments “where the conditions are challenged and the mechanisms are disturbed” or “where mechanisms appear in an almost pure form.”<sup>114</sup> As scientific realist Bhaskar argues, “[i]t might be conjectured that in periods of transition or crisis generative structures, previously opaque, become more visible to agents. And that this, though it never yields quite the epistemic possibilities of a closure... does provide a partial analogue to the role played by experimentation in natural science.”<sup>115</sup> Whether or not the outcome of an event was likely or not should be problematized as opposed to assumed.<sup>116</sup> In some cases, a high degree of contingency is itself interesting from a social scientific point of view. Even if an event was highly contingent, we can still theorize the forces shaping it and made it possible.<sup>117</sup> This approach may not be able to identify factors that are big, slow moving, and invisible, as they are happening, but such factors

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<sup>113</sup> Guillermo A. O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Jon Elster, “Authors and Actors: Executive-Legislative Relations in Four French Constitution-Making Moments,” April 2003.

<sup>114</sup> Berth Danermark et al., *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 104.

<sup>115</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 66.

<sup>116</sup> Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism,” *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (April 2007): 341–69; Dietrich Rueschemeyer, “Can One or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains?,” in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>117</sup> Philip Pettit, “Resilience as the Explanandum of Social Theory,” in *Political Contingency: Studying the Unexpected, the Accidental, and the Unforeseen*, ed. Ian Shapiro and Sonu Bedi (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

are hard to identify anyways precisely because they are big, slow moving, and invisible.<sup>118</sup> By looking at individual moments, we can at least gain traction on them when they become most visible.

Although this type of analysis is different from the covering law approach, it still fits within accepted scientific trends. As Lieberson and Flynn point out, evolution is a more advanced field than sociology, but biologists are satisfied with using the concept to explain only past events.<sup>119</sup> An emphasis on concepts “does not imply renunciation of explanation and generalization. Rather, it leads to a different type of explanation and different degrees of generalization.”<sup>120</sup> McKweon points out that such concepts may not have the rigor of statistical inference, but they:

are often more important for their value in clarifying previously obscure theoretical relationships than for providing an additional observation to be added to a sample... a good case is not necessarily a ‘typical’ case but a ‘telling case’... Max Weber seems to have had a similar conception of ideal types- he saw them as deliberately ‘one-sided’ constructs intended to capture essential elements of causation and meaning in a particular setting, without regard to whether they adequately represented all relevant situations.<sup>121</sup>

But how does this approach meet the charge of ‘cherry-picking’ evidence?<sup>122</sup> Retroduction is an exceptionally rigorous form of qualitative analysis because by focusing on individual events as opposed to long periods of history we can situate and evaluate evidence in a much more serious way. It is highly falsifiable because the concentrated, highly specific target of the research makes it possible to completely reinterpret an event because of one previously unavailable document. Scholars using retroduction should in fact be very humble about what they are doing. A strong possibility remains that in the future more evidence will be revealed, forcing a rejection or revision their earlier conclusions.<sup>123</sup> With regards to elite

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<sup>118</sup> Paul Pierson, “Big, Slow-Moving, And... Invisible,” in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>119</sup> Stanley Lieberson and Freda B. Lynn, “Barking Up the Wrong Branch: Scientific Alternatives to the Current Model of Sociological Science,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no. 1 (2002): 1–19.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Ragin and David Zaret, “Theory and Method in Comparative Research: Two Strategies,” *Social Forces* 61, no. 3 (March 1983): 741.

<sup>121</sup> Timothy J. McKeown, “Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview: Review of King, Keohane, and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*,” *International Organization* 53, no. 1 (1999): 174. In this section I conflate ideal types with structure.

<sup>122</sup> Ian S. Lustick, “History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias,” *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 (September 1996): 605–18.

<sup>123</sup> Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 13.

politics in authoritarian regimes, this danger is particularly serious. Academics should consistently challenge each other by seeking out new sources of evidence and attacking each other's interpretations. This process will help determine the most accurate account of an event.<sup>124</sup> Different narratives will have fundamentally different implications in terms of the theoretical lessons we can derive from it. If the details are wrong, the entire argument is wrong.

## **The Cases**

In the cases, I test the two competing sets of hypotheses in the economic and authority models. I categorize evidence by whether it strengthens or weakens these dueling hypotheses. Two of the Soviet four chapters, all of the China chapters, and the North Korea chapter all show the potency of martial prestige in the authority model. In the third Soviet chapter I delineate the limitations of martial prestige, and the dissertation concludes with a final Soviet chapter on the implications of a Leninist system without such political capital. At the end of each chapter, I draw out the long-term political implications of the struggle on the political trajectories of these regimes as a whole.

In the first Soviet chapter I investigate the defeat of Lavrenti Beria in 1953, a few short months after the death of Stalin. First, I show that Beria had no real policy differences with his opponents, and that in fact most of his policy initiatives were intended to increase his popularity. Second, I show that isolating Beria in such a way was necessary for a smooth victory. The arrest prevented him from making his case to the Central Committee as a whole, as was his right as a member of the Presidium. Marshal Georgi Zhukov, a man who possessed the most martial prestige in the Soviet Union, played an absolutely integral role in the defeat of Beria. Third, I show that the military's behavior was not apolitical: it played a clearly illegal, coercive role by arresting Beria during a meeting of the Presidium. This was a crucial

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<sup>124</sup> The textbook example is Trachtenberg's analysis of whether Roosevelt provoked the Japanese into attacking the United States to bring Washington into the war. Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*. For a more recent example, see Si Meiqing, 'Final Response to Professors Chen Jian and Xia Feng Regarding H-Diplo Roundtable Review of Simei Qing, From Allies to Enemies: Visions of Modernity, Identity, and U.S. China-Diplomacy, 1945-1960', *H-Diplo Roundtable Review*, 6 August 2014.

moment in the post-Stalin history of the Soviet Union, as it signified the defeat of the political police as an all-powerful political force.

The second Soviet chapter analyzes Nikita Khrushchev's struggle with the so-called "anti-party group": an incident during which a majority of the Presidium (Politburo) attempted to remove Khrushchev from power. The evidence clearly supports the authority model over the economic model. First, policy differences between Khrushchev and his opponents were minimal, and to the extent such differences could be determined Khrushchev was not necessarily the more popular. And in any case, the power of the "anti-party group" was clearly more rooted in their prestige as revolutionary leaders. That prestige was challenged by Zhukov, who emphasized their culpability in the destruction of other revolutionary figures during the Great Terror. Second, Zhukov stalled for time and used military planes to summon the Central Committee (CC), a political body in which Khrushchev held more support. Third, Zhukov, who controlled the military, refused to submit to the majority on the Presidium who opposed Khrushchev. This victory came at a cost, however: by allowing the CC unprecedented participation in a decision over the top leadership, Khrushchev brought the USSR a major step forward in the direction of stagnation.

The third Soviet chapter differs from the rest of the dissertation in that it presents a case in which a figure with the most martial prestige does not win a power struggle and is therefore an illustration of how rules triumph over the potential use of force. Khrushchev was able to defeat Zhukov for three reasons. First, Khrushchev made it a question of the party itself against Zhukov's individual 'Napoleonic' ambitions: considerations of legitimacy, as opposed to pure interests, played a significant role. Second, had Zhukov chosen to resist his purge with force, it would have been impossible for him to provide even a fig leaf for what would have been an act of naked coercion. Such an action would have found little support and be seen as fundamentally destabilizing. In that sense, in this case institutions came as close as possible to being able to define a single interpretation of what type of coercion was legitimate. Third, party institutions were manipulated in an illegal fashion: while Zhukov was overseas, Khrushchev

prepared a full case against him and lined up support in the CC. By preparing the CC in Zhukov's absence, Khrushchev created a *fait accompli*, a reversal of which would have been hugely difficult. At the same time, such an obvious act of cheating clearly hurt Khrushchev's standing among many in the party and military. Zhukov's removal had major political implications: by evicting Zhukov from the leadership, Khrushchev rid himself of a powerful, independent-thinking figure, but at the same time lost a potentially powerful ally.

The final Soviet chapter examines the case of a power struggle in a Leninist regime in which no leader enjoyed strong personal prestige: the purge of Khrushchev in October 1964. At first one might suspect that without martial prestige the economic model would have more explanatory power. However, in even this 'hard' case, the authority model still provides greater leverage. First, I show that although Khrushchev made decisions hugely unpopular in the power ministries and the party, the conspirators were terrified that they would not be able to pull off the coup: the outcome was clearly up in the air *despite* major policy differences. Second, the KGB and 'administrative department' of the CC (which controlled the military, secret police, and courts) both played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for a successful CC plenum by using extra-democratic means. Significantly, Brezhnev did not replace Khrushchev in a way that scrupulously obeyed party rules. The evidence shows that he chose not to pursue 'rational-legal' authority to the full extent possible because he feared such a process would give potential competitors an opportunity to challenge him. Third, several key figures refused to support the coup until they were guaranteed neither the military nor the KGB would support Khrushchev: the attitude of the power ministries therefore played an important role, although the military's contribution in this case was passive. Knowing that a small group of dissatisfied individuals could remove him using extra-institutional means, Brezhnev took special care to satisfy all the needs of the elite. Without rational-legal authority or personal prestige, the Soviet leadership was incapable of preventing the USSR from slipping into the stagnation of escalating military expenditures and no further serious attempts to at least try to make the economy work more effectively.



The first two China chapters, which describe Deng Xiaoping's defeat of Mao's initial successor Hua Guofeng over 1977-1981, show further evidence of the authority model. First, the economic model would have predicted that the figure with more democratic sensibilities would have won because of his ability to co-opt threats, but Deng was clearly the less consensus-oriented figure. Deng had limited policy differences with Hua, who deserves greater credit for the beginning of the reform process than previously appreciated. Historical legacies proved more important than policy differences. Deng's strength was rooted in his role as a revolutionary-era figure, while Hua suffered from 'historical' problems from his career during the Cultural Revolution. Second, Hua's most important defeat took place at a full Central Committee meeting: an event with no precedence in the People's Republic of China, which to that point had been dominated by the leadership at the very top. Hua's later removal from any meaningful formal position years afterward was conducted in a decidedly undemocratic process. Third, Deng clearly believed political power revolved around the question of military control. His move against Hua was started over a struggle regarding who had the greater say over the armed forces, and Deng used his unique relationship with the People's Liberation Army to weaken Hua's political position. Deng's decision to purge Hua entirely from the leadership, instead of to let him remain as a sign of stability, was because of a fear that young leftist forces within the military would rally to Hua's banner.

The third and fourth China chapters show how the Tiananmen Square incident was not just a massacre but a power struggle. First, a majority of the most important decision making bodies in the PRC opposed using violence. In other words, to the extent a 'median voter' existed in spring 1989 it would have voted for a peaceful conclusion. Second, only by preventing a session of party bodies or the Chinese state legislature was Deng able to guarantee the outcome he wanted. Third, the military decided to support Deng despite opposition among the top military leadership to violence and clear evidence institutions were not working as they should: a outcome only possible because of Deng's special relationship with them. The bloody conclusion signified the end of the slow steps in the 1980s towards a freer, more open political system.

The North Korea chapter examines three crucial moments on the path towards the installation of multi-generational personality cult: an attempt to arrest the movement towards a cult in 1956 by a group of Koreans connected to China and the Soviet Union; the purge of all but the most loyal to Kim in the late 1960s; and the introduction of Kim Il Sung's son as successor. Each of these episodes are best explained by the authority model. First, the chapter shows that Kim Il Sung's radical policies were not especially popular within the elite. Instead, his authority was rooted in his prestige as a partisan leader in Manchuria. That experience allowed him to install intensely loyal associates in crucial positions. The other competing groupings, which enjoyed historical ties with the Soviet Union and China, respectively, did not enjoy the close relations that defined the partisan group - a crucial weakness in 1956 when they challenged Kim's increasingly dictatorial style. As the political atmosphere grew increasingly tense in the second half of the 1960s, Kim increasingly relied upon an even narrower set of partisan comrades. Second, Kim was able to guarantee a successful CC plenum during the 1956 power struggle only by delaying the meeting and subjecting the individual members to blackmail and bribes. The competitors were not competing openly in a defined selectorate; instead, Kim was manipulating party rules to his own benefit. Third, Kim's close control over the military and secret police allowed him to subject party bodies to undemocratic pressure. These victories were critical steps towards the dynastic personality cult that came to characterize the DPRK.

## Chapter 2: The Defeat of Beria

### Introduction: Stalin's Belated Victory

In October 1952, the most powerful men and women in the Soviet Union sat dumbfounded as Iosif Stalin gave a major speech to the first Central Committee (CC) Plenum after the 19th Party Congress. He viciously attacked his old comrades who had served with him for decades and proposed the creation of a new leadership body full of young men who had played no role in the October Revolution. Viacheslav Molotov, seen by the party as Stalin's deputy, was portrayed as never having a principled nature and suffering from a number of serious problems. Another old leader, Anastas Mikoian, had allegedly committed major mistakes during the war: "his lack of responsibility dearly cost our state and people."<sup>1</sup>

A new 25-person 'Presidium' would now replace what had been a much smaller Politburo. How Stalin had compiled the list of young individuals who made up the new group was a mystery to other members of the leadership. He also named an elite 'Bureau' of nine members made up mostly of men younger than the old revolutionaries but older than those newly named to the Presidium: Georgii Malenkov, Lavrentii Beria, Nikita Khrushchev, Maksim Saburov, Mikhail Pervukhin, and Nikolai Bulganin. Molotov and Mikoian were conspicuously absent, and Kliment Voroshilov, another old revolutionary, was apparently only included by mistake.<sup>2</sup> Historians agree that Stalin intended to liquidate the older leaders in favor of the younger individuals now promoted to the new, expanded Presidium.<sup>3</sup>

If that was in fact his plan, Stalin did not have time to complete it. As he lay on his death bed on March 5, 1953, a joint session of the CC, Council of Ministers (the Soviet government), and Presidium of

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<sup>1</sup> Nuriddin Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle [Years Spent in the Kremlin]*, vol. 1 (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo narodnogo nasledii imeni Abdully Kadyri, 1994), 82–83.

<sup>2</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, ed. Sergei Khrushchev (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 109–11, 116. Stalin was of course a member. Lazar Kaganovich, an old comrade of Stalin, also made the cut.

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Danilov and A.V. Pyzhikov, *Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy: SSSR v Pervye Poslevoennye Gody [Birth of a Superpower: The USSR in the First Postwar Years]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001), 260–61.

the Supreme Soviet (the Soviet legislature) was held. After introductory remarks about Stalin's condition by the head of Soviet public health, Malenkov spoke: "it is clear to all that the country cannot stand not even one hour of interruption in the leadership." He emphasized that the situation demanded "the greatest cohesion." Then Beria told the audience that the Bureau nominated Malenkov as head of the Council of Ministers (the premiership). After Beria finished, Malenkov named Beria, Molotov, Bulganin, and Kaganovich as his first vice chairmen. Molotov was made foreign minister, Voroshilov chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and Mikoian head of the newly combined ministry managing external and internal trade. Despite lacking the necessary approval of a full Party Congress, Malenkov had reversed Stalin's decision to create a Bureau and Presidium: "in the interests of greater operational efficiency in the leadership, establish a Presidium with 11 members and 4 candidates."<sup>4</sup> Even before Stalin had taken his last breath, the old men of the party had returned to participate in the top leadership, the middle generation had seized dominance, and the younger cohort had been cast into political oblivion.<sup>5</sup>

Khrushchev was removed from his position as head of the Moscow party committee and ordered to "concentrate" on CC work. In this new line-up, Khrushchev's authority was rather unremarkable. According to one Russian expert of this time period, "by 1953 from the perspective of formal leadership Khrushchev had the most unfavorable odds."<sup>6</sup> Another historian concurs: "the authority of Khrushchev in the party at the time was not comparable with the high authority of Malenkov, Beria, Molotov."<sup>7</sup> Khrushchev was not even made first secretary until September.<sup>8</sup> Taubman, the author of Khrushchev's

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<sup>4</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 23 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>5</sup> Zh.A. Medvedev, "Zagadka Smerti Stalina [The Myth of Stalin's Death]," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 1 (January 2000): 83–91.

<sup>6</sup> E. Iu. Zubkova, "Malenkov i Khrushchev: Lichnyi Faktor v Politike Poslestalinskogo Rukovodstva [Malenkov and Khrushchev: The Personal Factor in the Politics of the Post-Stalin Leadership]," *Otechestvennaia Istoriiia*, no. 4 (1995): 106.

<sup>7</sup> V.P. Naumov, "Bor'ba N.S. Khrushcheva Za Edinolichnuiu Vlast' [N.S. Khrushchev's Struggle for Sole Power]," *Novaia i Noveishaya Istoriiia*, no. 2 (April 1996): 12.

<sup>8</sup> According to Kaganovich, Malenkov made the proposal without discussing it with other members of the leadership during a break between plenum sessions. When Kaganovich later asked him why he did this, Malenkov explained that Bulganin told him to do so: "Otherwise, I will do it on my own." Malenkov did not think Bulganin

definitive biography, affirms that “Virtually no one in the USSR or abroad imagined that Khrushchev had a chance of besting them all.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet Khrushchev became the first dominant leader after Stalin’s death, and in 1964 he was removed by the young generation that had been so unceremoniously cast aside in March 1953. Stalin’s will would ultimately manifest itself, but in ways he did not expect and eleven years later than he had planned. This curious progression of Soviet elite politics in the wake of Stalin is all the more strange given that in China ‘old person’ politics persisted and dominated the political environment for many years after Mao. The Soviet section of this dissertation explains this historical puzzle by deeply investigating the most important moments of political contestation between 1953 and 1964.

In this, the first chapter of four on the Soviet Union, I explain the purge of Lavrentii Beria. Although perhaps an obscure historical case in the west, in contemporary Russia Beria remains the symbol of a certain type of politics: the power of the political police. In 2013 former Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovskii published a book that described Putin and much of his team, known for their connections to the KGB, as Beria’s “heirs.”<sup>10</sup> Russian oppositionist journalist Oleg Kashin wrote on his blog that “I would now compare the Chechen leader [Ramzan Kadyrov] with Beria. When he [Beria] ran the NKVD, everyone was fine with this, but as soon as he tried to become something more, the most ardent enemies united and annihilated Beria.”<sup>11</sup> In January 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated: “If a person has a certain position, or certain claims, let him express [them], say who he is, otherwise

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would act alone, so he nominated Khrushchev for the position. Kaganovich recounts that the others reservedly accepted this decision because they were afraid of opposing it and because if a first secretary was to be chosen, there was no other option. Lazar Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego... [Memos by a Worker...]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1996), 503.

<sup>9</sup> William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 1 ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), 240.

<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Bukovskii, *Nasledniki Lavrentiia Beriia: Putin i Ego Komanda [The Heirs of Lavrentii Beria: Putin and His Team]* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> <http://gordonua.com/news/society/Kashin-YA-dopuskayu-chto-siloviki-pozvolili-ubit-Nemcova-chtoby-sozdat-povod-dlya-nakazaniya-lyudey-Kadyrova-70601.html>

these are not claims or complaints, they are anonymous letters [anonimka]. There is only one who did his job well checking [who the authors of the letters were]: Lavrentii Pavlovich Beria.”<sup>12</sup>

Beria remains a controversial and disputed figure in Soviet historiography. Some popular historians portray now Beria as nothing short of a superman.<sup>13</sup> Others stick to the more conventional narrative of him as a murderous, sex-crazed maniac. This intense interest has had some unfortunate consequences: in 2010, a forged document claiming to be Beria’s private diaries was published.<sup>14</sup> Extreme claims and dubious sources make the study of the man exceptionally challenging. But what exactly was the nature of Beria’s power and why was he arrested and executed soon after Stalin’s death? What does the case of Beria teach us about the strengths and weakness of political authority when it is tied to the special capabilities of the political police?

Political scientists have yet to provide a theoretically useful answer to this question.<sup>15</sup> Like elsewhere in this dissertation, I test three competing sets of hypotheses as described in the theory chapter. The economic model fails on all counts. First, focusing on the material benefits of one policy over another, or even policy platforms in general, would not only explain nothing but be entirely misleading. Beria sought out close friendly relationships with other members of the elite, deliberately selected reformist policies that he believed would gain him support, and rarely had meaningful differences with his colleagues over any important policies. What proves to be of much more importance were legitimacy issues tied to party seniority, historical antagonisms, and the threatening role of ‘*kompromat*’: compromising material that would allow Beria to make incendiary charges against his colleagues.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/299754/?utm\\_source=readable&utm\\_medium=banner&utm\\_campaign=bogazeta](http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/299754/?utm_source=readable&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=bogazeta)

<sup>13</sup> S.T. Brezkun, *Beriia: Luchshii Menedzher XX Veka [Beria: The Best Manager of the 20 Century]* (Moscow: Iauza, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> L.P. Beria, *Lichnyi Dnevnik 1937-1941: "Stalin Slezam Ne verit" [Personal Diary 1937-1941: "Stalin Does Not Believe in Tears]* (Moscow: Iazua, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> For superb historical accounts, see Mark Kramer, “Leadership Selection and Political Violence in the USSR Following Stalin’s Death,” in *Political Violence: Belief, Behavior, and Legitimation*, ed. Paul Hollander (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 244–57; Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin’s First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Second, Beria's arrest entailed a blatant series of violations of party rules. The move against him was preceded by a conspiracy within the top leadership in a process so secretive that even today we are not entirely sure who first proposed Beria's arrest. We have tentative evidence that even on the Presidium a significant number of individuals were either unsure about the propriety of arresting Beria or were presented with false evidence of his alleged crimes. The military intervention in any case ensured doubters would fall in line. Beria was not allowed to present his case to the CC: a trick so outrageous that it was not even employed in the 1930s. Instead, the party was presented with a *fait accompli*.

Third, the power ministries played an absolutely crucial role. One of the most important reasons for the move against Beria was fear over his control over the political police. These forces included not only the bodyguards of the top leadership, but also entire divisions armed similarly to their counterparts in the Soviet Army. The arrest of Beria was only made possible because high-ranking military officers agreed to illegally arrest him during a meeting in the Kremlin. As the case against him was prepared, he was placed in a military bunker to prevent him from linking up with his forces in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD).

### **Brief Chronology**

Immediately after Stalin's death in March 1953, Lavrentii Beria sought to strengthen his friendship with others in the leadership and initiated a series of reforms intended to boost his popularity. However, his colleagues were concerned over his superior access to information, including *kompromat*, and had strong feelings about his historical role during the Stalinist era. Moreover, he controlled the political police and made signs he was interested in expanding his influence over the military. In June, a small coterie of leaders, with the help of the armed forces, arrested Beria at a meeting in the Kremlin. The CC was presented with a *fait accompli* while Beria was held incommunicado. The criminal charges against him were based on character assassination and the proceedings were controlled by the Kremlin. Beria was executed in December.

## Section 1: Policy Differences vs. Sociological Forms of Authority

According to the first hypothesis of the economic model, we should see Beria losing out to opponents that promised greater material benefits, or, if we extend the model, simply policies which a ‘median voter’ in the elite favored. Yet in the case of Beria, this hypothesis is not only wrong but misleading: Beria sought out positive relations with others in the elite and hoped to gain support by using popular policies. As historian Amir Weiner notes, all of Beria’s initiatives “outlasted him and endured” except for his attempts to give more power to government bodies at the expense of the party.<sup>16</sup> Paradoxically, the popularity of his policies in fact *hurt* him, as they made his comrades at the apex of the party feel threatened. On the other hand, we see much greater support for the authority model, which emphasizes the sociological origins of authority and the importance of personal prestige. Beria was opposed by more senior members of the Politburo who saw him as an upstart and was hated (mostly unjustly) for actions committed during the Stalin era. Most importantly, the entire elite was afraid of the discrediting effects of compromising material in Beria’s hands.

### *Beria as Friend*

According to hypothesis 1a, we should expect to see consensus-driven leaders achieve victory. This personality type would be more conducive to aggregating support. However, decisive evidence shows that Beria, the loser, used friendliness to other major figures to improve his position. Beria hoped to inspire loyalty by suggesting that the government build dachas for the elite.<sup>17</sup> Molotov claims that Beria hinted to him that he had assassinated Stalin: “Apparently [Beria] wanted to evoke my sympathy. He said, ‘I did him in!’- as if this had benefited me. Of course he wanted to ingratiate himself with me.”<sup>18</sup> The day after Stalin’s funeral, Beria released Molotov’s wife who had been sent to prison by Stalin.<sup>19</sup> Before

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<sup>16</sup> Amir Weiner, “Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution: The Life Cycle of the Soviet Revolution, 1945-1968,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (2008): 221.

<sup>17</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Feliks Chuev and Vyacheslav Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 237.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.



Stalin's death, Beria even told others in the leadership that Molotov should be protected, as "he is necessary for the party."<sup>20</sup> On May 6, Beria wrote a memorandum to the Presidium rehabilitating Kaganovich's brother Mikhail, who had committed suicide after being accused of participation in a "rightist-Trotskyite" organization.<sup>21</sup>

Malenkov, Beria and Khrushchev seemed especially close. Together they were put in charge of managing Stalin's documents as the leader lay on his death bed.<sup>22</sup> Mikoian in his memoirs described how Beria would often meet with Malenkov, Molotov, and Khrushchev before Presidium meetings and decide how to present issues to the rest of the leadership. Beria would walk with Khrushchev and Malenkov in the Kremlin "conversing excitedly... they were together after work as well..."<sup>23</sup> Molotov saw Beria, Khrushchev, and Malenkov as a "trinity" who together were trying to dominate the political arena and enjoyed close relations, if not friendship.<sup>24</sup> Khrushchev admitted in his memoirs that after Stalin died "Beria was very attentive to me, making a great display of his respect."<sup>25</sup> When Khrushchev had a dispute with Beria over policy towards East Germany, Molotov was surprised: "I must confess I didn't expect it, because I always see the three of you together and I thought you would take the same position as Malenkov and Beria."<sup>26</sup> Khrushchev also acknowledged that Voroshilov thought Khrushchev and Beria were close.<sup>27</sup> Khrushchev admitted at the CC plenum after Beria's arrest that he enjoyed the best relations with the fallen leader in the time period after Stalin's death: "If I did not call him for a day, then he would call and ask, why don't you call. You say there was no time, there was work. [Beria]: 'But still call.' I,

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<sup>20</sup> Anastas Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvhsem [How It Was: Reflections on the Past]* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2014), 630.

<sup>21</sup> V. Naumov and I.U. Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953: Stenogramma iul'skogo plenuma TSK KPSS i drugie dokumenty [Lavrenti Beria, 1953: Transcript of the July Plenum of the CC KPSU and Other Documents]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1999), 42.

<sup>22</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 23, list 7 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>23</sup> Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvhsem [How It Was: Reflections on the Past]*, 628.

<sup>24</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 334–35.

<sup>25</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 183.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

comrades, started to think, what is this, why is there such love shown to me, what's the matter?"<sup>28</sup> As will be described in greater detail below, Beria was also not on bad terms with Mikoian.

In a letter to Malenkov after his arrest, Beria described his relationship with others on the Presidium as being on an exceptionally friendly basis. The letter gives of a sense that he was shocked by his arrest. Regarding Molotov: "we always highly rated you as a true discipline of Lenin and a true colleague of Stalin, the second most important figure after Comrade Stalin." Khrushchev: "we were always great friends and I was always proud of the fact that you are a terrific Bolshevik and a terrific comrade and I repeatedly told you this..." Malenkov: "Dear Georgii I ask you to understand me, you know me better than others."<sup>29</sup>

### *Beria's Policy Popularity*

Beria not only tried to establish friendly relations with other figures at the apex of Soviet power - he also tried to cultivate popularity through a wide variety of ambitious reforms. Instead of this policy agenda leading to a strengthened political position, as hypothesis 1a would expect, it actually led his competitors in the elite to feel threatened by him and therefore seek his removal.

When Mikoian asked Beria why he wanted to take control of the political police, Beria responded: "it is necessary to restore legality, it is impossible to tolerate this situation in the country."<sup>30</sup> This was not the first time in Beria's career that he served as a reformer. When Beria became head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1938 he conducted a partial rehabilitation of those who suffered from mass repressions.<sup>31</sup> One hundred to one hundred fifty thousand were freed during this time period.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 96.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–80.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>31</sup> O.V. Khlevniuk, "L.P. Beria: Predely Istoricheskoi 'Reabilitatsii' [L.P. Beria: The Limits of Historical 'Rehabilitation']," in *Istoricheskie Issledovaniia v Rossii: Tendentsii Poslednikh Let*, ed. G.A. Bordiugova (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1996), 145.

<sup>32</sup> Nikita Petrov, *Palachi: Oni Vypolniali Zakazy Stalina [Butchers: They Executed the Orders of Stalin]* (Moscow: Novaia Gazeta, 2011), 29.

On March 13, eight days after the death of Stalin, Beria ordered the creation of special investigative groups to reevaluate the infamous Doctors' Plot, as well as the arrests of former members of the Ministry of State Security, officers in the General Artillery Department, and Georgian party officials.<sup>33</sup> On April 4, he distributed a document that criticized the use of torture in the past and explicitly forbid its use in the future.<sup>34</sup> On May 13, he proposed the end to restrictions on where Soviet citizens could live within their own country.<sup>35</sup> He even proposed greater restrictions on the extra-judicial Special Council [*osoboe soveschanie*], which had been responsible for many of the worst abuses of the Stalin era.<sup>36</sup> According to the Soviet poet K. Simonov, Beria even chose to show the CC documents delineating Stalin's role in the Doctors' Plot in a way that showed his paranoia and brutality - a first step towards "de-Stalinization."<sup>37</sup> Kramer writes that "Reports transmitted by local and regional officials to the central authorities in Moscow indicated that Soviet citizens heartily welcomed the political reforms."<sup>38</sup>

Beria's generosity extended to the military. On March 18, he ordered a reevaluation of the accusations against the leadership of the Air Force and Ministry of Aviation Industry.<sup>39</sup> On April 10, he rehabilitated Marshal of the Artillery Yakovlev, commander of the General Artillery Department Volkotrubenko, and vice chairman of the Ministry of Weapons Mirzakhanov.<sup>40</sup> On May 26, he rehabilitated the former commander of the Soviet Air Force and head of the Ministry of Aviation Industry.<sup>41</sup> Admiral Kuznetsov personally thanked Beria for rehabilitating his former assistant Vice Admiral Goncharov, who had died while being investigated in 1948.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 1953, 17–18.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–64.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 188–89.

<sup>38</sup> Kramer, "Leadership Selection and Political Violence in the USSR Following Stalin's Death," 74.

<sup>39</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 1953, 18–19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–42.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–55.

<sup>42</sup> Pavel Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness- a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 360.

These reforming steps, however, had negative side effects for Beria: they led other members of the leadership to believe that Beria was improving his own prestige at the expense of the party. Kaganovich told the CC that “You understand that it was impossible [for Beria] to speak before the people in the name of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He is not a stupid man. He needed to speak in the name of the party, and for this he needed to break away some individuals, turn some individuals into his agents and act.”<sup>43</sup> Beria’s attempts at reform were a mark against him in Kaganovich’s eyes: “this person is a careerist, an adventurer, who hopes, by discrediting Stalin, to explode that base upon which we sit and clear a path so that, in his words, after Stalin I [Beria] am the authority, I’m a liberal, after Stalin I will amnesty, I will reveal, I will do everything.”<sup>44</sup> Shepilov in his memoirs wrote that “Beria, the man who for years on end was one of those mainly responsible for the reign of arbitrary will and lawlessness in the country, decided to don the mantle of a champion of legality, individual freedom, and democracy.”<sup>45</sup> According to one of the chekists (political police officers) tried along with Beria as one of his supporters, Beria said about his decree on amnesty: “I freed millions.”<sup>46</sup> Later in court, Moskalenko asked Beria whether he would admit that all of his activities after the death of Stalin were directed towards seizing power. Beria responded: “I categorically deny this. I will say that I did not stand out by any special humility - this is a fact. I certainly did stick my nose [vlezal] into other areas of work that had no relation to me, this is also true. That I tried to popularize myself - that happened. With regards to my Bonapartist contortions [vyvikhov], that is not true.”<sup>47</sup>

Khrushchev claimed to have called on the Presidium to rehabilitate military officers convicted on fabricated charges but that Beria did not support him. The evidence contradicts Khrushchev’s assertion: as discussed above, Beria had already rehabilitated the commander of the Soviet Air Force, and General-

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<sup>43</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 1953, 136.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>45</sup> D. T. Shepilov, *The Kremlin’s Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, ed. Stephen V. Bittner, trans. Anthony Austin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 261.

<sup>46</sup> V. N. Khaustov, *Delo Beria: Prigovor obzhalovaniu ne podlezhit [The Beria Affair: The Verdict Cannot be Appealed]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratia,” 2012), 25.

<sup>47</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beria*, 410.

Lieutenant Kriukov, whom Khrushchev says Beria refused to rehabilitate, had actually already been released on June 13. How did Khrushchev explain Beria's supposed refusal to reevaluate the cases of military officers? "I think that Beria did this for the following reasons - he wanted to work with these generals, and then liberate them.... once these people came out, he would instill in them the idea that Beria returned their lives to them, not the party, not the government, but Beria."<sup>48</sup> Bulganin claimed that Beria had no positive role in these rehabilitations, as they were done only to increase his own popularity.<sup>49</sup>

Some of Beria's reforms were understood not as reforms so much as hidden steps to increase his own power. In the rough notes of Malenkov's speech to the Presidium, the words "Special Council" appear under a heading "incorrect as well were other [matters]," suggesting that Malenkov did not feel the reforms went far enough. Khrushchev in his speech to the CC said that even by limiting the amount of time the Special Council could condemn someone to ten years, there was nothing stopping the council from repeatedly imposing that sentence multiple times.<sup>50</sup>

However, the evidence clearly indicates that Beria sought the support of his comrades. Service understood as early as 1981 that the need to overcome the disastrous Stalinist legacy led to a common position among the elite that serious changes were needed.<sup>51</sup> Strikingly, Beria was in fact not the sole initiator of the reforms for which he was blamed for seeking 'popularity.' In a letter to Malenkov after his arrest Beria wrote that

the MVD introduced to the CC and government *by your suggestion and with regards to certain questions by the suggestion of N.S. Khrushchev* [italics added by author] a series of deserved political and practical suggestions, such as: rehabilitation of the doctors, rehabilitation of those arrested according to the so-called Mingrelian nationalistic center in Georgia and the return of those incorrectly exiled from Georgia, the amnesty, the liquidation of the passport regime, the correction of distortions in the party line in the nationality policies and the punitive measures in the Lithuanian SSR, western Ukraine and western Belarus, your criticism, the criticism of Comrade N.S. Khrushchev, and the criticism of other comrades

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<sup>48</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 1953, 90, 409.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> R. J. Service, "The Road to the Twentieth Party Congress: An Analysis of the Events Surrounding the Central Committee Plenum of July 1953," *Soviet Studies* 33, no. 2 (1981): 232-45.

on the CC Presidium was entirely correct; with my participation, my incorrect desire to send reports of the MVD with the decisions of the CC.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, blaming Beria alone for these policies might suggest a greater difference in positions than is appropriate.

### *Party Seniority, Historical Problems, and Kompromat*

Having shown that Beria sought friendly relations with others in the elite, was associated with generally popular policies, and did not strongly differ from others in the leadership on those policies, we have discounted the value of hypothesis 1a. We can now turn to hypothesis 1b: the importance of sociological factors. In this section I show that the more important drivers of the struggle were questions of party seniority, historical antagonisms, the danger of *kompromat*, Beria's prestige as the miracle worker behind the atomic program, and the dangers of information being used as a weapon.

Some among the old guard believed that Beria was not respecting proper norms of party seniority. This is evident in Kaganovich's speech at a January 1955 CC plenum in which he stated that Malenkov and Beria did not associate with the others as Stalin was dying, instead keeping to themselves on the second floor of Stalin's dacha:

We, old members of the Presidium, are older than them by many years in terms not of age but by work in the party, [by work] in the Politburo with Stalin, after all we walked with Lenin - they [meaning Malenkov and Beria] could have come up [to us] and say what they were doing there, what they were discussing, what decisions they were making, what they were preparing. Nothing of the sort happened, they would stop by to take a look and go upstairs. There was Voroshilov, me, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Molotov, Mikoian, others - nothing of the sort happened, we did not exist for them.<sup>53</sup>

Also at the plenum, another CC member (Malyshev) spoke of Beria's disdainful attitude towards old revolutionaries like Shvernik, Andreevich, and Voroshilov: "We were not accustomed [to see] such an attitude to old leading comrades." He spoke of the curiosity of the old revolutionaries not holding prominent positions: "We see how in recent times experienced comrades that the entire country, entire people know - Comrades Molotov, Voroshilov, Mikoian - were removed from the leadership of our party

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<sup>52</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 75.

<sup>53</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 127, list 121 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

and country. This is a fact. This was very offensive to us. We have known Comrade Molotov since we were Komsomol age... It is clear that Comrade Stalin did not speak with his own words, Beria provided him with this material.”<sup>54</sup>

Another crucial reason were historical animosities that were likely unjustified. Kramer points out that Molotov, Bulganin, Saburov, and Pervukhin all believed Beria had used *kompromat* against them in the past.<sup>55</sup> Personal antagonism against Beria was especially prominent in the military. Zhukov wrote: “They knew that I had an old animosity toward Beria, bordering on enmity. Even while Stalin was alive we had clashes on more than one occasion. It is enough to say that Abakumov [see below for more information on this individual] and Beria wanted to arrest me at some point in the past... By the way, Stalin one day told me directly that they wanted to arrest me. Beria whispered to Stalin, but the latter said: ‘I do not believe it. A brave colonel, patriot- and traitor. I don’t believe it. End this dirty stunt.’ Believe me that after this, I gladly undertook his arrest.” Zhukov later recalled the situation after Stalin’s death: “I knew Beria well, I saw his cunning obsequiousness towards Stalin and his readiness at any minute to remove for Stalin all those who were objectionable to Stalin, and now he posed as a true Bolshevik-Leninist. It was disagreeable to look at this masquerade.”<sup>56</sup>

But did Beria deserve this animosity? Beria had no reason to believe he was more tainted by the Stalinist era than his comrades in the leadership. One major Soviet historian has concluded that Beria “hardly acknowledged responsibility for the mass repressions of the 1930s,” especially given the roles played by Malenkov or even Khrushchev, who in his eyes were more personally responsible.<sup>57</sup> After the war, Beria had a complicated and ambiguous relationship with the political police. He was removed from

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<sup>54</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 1953, 147.

<sup>55</sup> Kramer, “Leadership Selection and Political Violence in the USSR Following Stalin’s Death,” 77–78.

<sup>56</sup> V. Naumov et al, eds., *Georgii Zhukov: stenogramma oktiabr’skogo (1957 g.) plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* [Georgy Zhukov: transcript of the October (1957) Plenum and Other Documents (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratia,” 2001), 621.

<sup>57</sup> R. G. Pikhoia, *Sovetskii Soiuz: istoriia vlasti, 1945-1991* [The Soviet Union: A History of Power, 1945-1991] (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia gossluzhby pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1998), 109.

the NKVD in 1945. Moreover, the NKVD (Internal Affairs) and NKGB (Public Security) had already been separate institutions since 1943 (these bodies were renamed MVD and MGB in 1946). The nature of Beria's relationship with the head of the MGB, Abamukov, is unclear. One chekist stated that Beria "then did not lead over the MGB (according to an official division of the functions of leadership)... Beria, although he did not directly lead our ministry, was an old chekist and therefore I.V. Stalin consulted with him on a daily basis."<sup>58</sup> In a draft speech never given at the July CC plenum at which Beria was discussed, one of Stalin's closest assistants, Poskrebyshev, claimed that although Beria had played a role in Abakumov's nomination as head of the MGB, "The attempts of Beria, working in the Council of Ministers, to take under his political supervision the work of the MGB did not end in victory."<sup>59</sup> According to Abakumov's predecessor Merkulov, "Abakumov stopped taking into consideration the members of the PB, and Beria, to the extent I noticed, started to fear Abakumov like a fire. As they say, an irresistible force met an immovable object [*nashla kosa na kamen*']."<sup>60</sup> Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, the best historians of this era, conclude that "When any member of the ruling circle, in particular Beria, appeared to come too close to the security police, Stalin took decisive measures... Members of the ruling circle were never in doubt that the authority to punish or expel any of them rested with Stalin alone."<sup>61</sup>

Beria certainly did not believe he should take the blame for scheming against others in the elite.

In a letter to Malenkov after his arrest, Beria played up his alleged support for his colleagues during Stalin's life.<sup>62</sup> For example, Beria wrote regarding Zhukov:

The idea that I tricked Stalin through intrigue, if you consider it carefully it's just a misunderstanding, this is not true, Georgii, you know this well, Comrades Mikoian and Molotov should know well that when Zhukov was removed from the general staff at the intrigue of Mekhlis, his position was very dangerous.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Yoram Gorlizki and O. V. Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>62</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 78–80.



Together we persuaded that he be named commander of a reserve front and thereby saved the future hero of our Fatherland War, or when Zhukov was removed from the CC - this was painful for all of us.<sup>63</sup>

In any case, as Kramer writes, “Whether any of these suspicions were well-founded is unclear, but there is little doubt that by 1953 several of Beria’s colleagues believed he had tried to undercut them in the past and would likely do it again.”<sup>64</sup>

Another interesting possibility related to questions of personal prestige that deserves mentioning is Beria’s role in the atomic bomb program.<sup>65</sup> According to Pavel Sudoplatov, a top operative in the MVD in charge of secret operations outside the country, the most important reason Beria was removed was because of his increasing prestige as a result of the miracles he had achieved with the atomic program. This work “raised him in the eyes of all members of the Politburo and members of the Central Committee who knew about this work.” That prestige was the primary threat to the “true” conspirators of Khrushchev, Malenkov, and Molotov.<sup>66</sup> If true, this would again point to the importance of authority derived from clear contributions in the sphere of military affairs, a theme of this dissertation, but also show that Beria was removed *because* of his popularity, not his lack of it: a clear rejection of the idea that a proper mechanism existed for leadership selection to proceed in an ordered manner.

With regards to non-economic forms of authority, however, the most clearly important was Beria’s control over information. This took two forms. First, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) could serve as an independent information channel for Beria that he could use to monitor and control party structures. Second, Beria had access to historical documents that could be used as weapons against his opponents. Its role as a coercive body, as opposed to information-gathering one, will be discussed in the third section of this chapter.

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<sup>63</sup> This fragment of the letter includes several orthographic mistakes and abbreviations. Therefore this translation is an interpretation of what is available. *Ibid.*, 407, fn 33.

<sup>64</sup> Kramer, “Leadership Selection and Political Violence in the USSR Following Stalin’s Death,” 77–78.

<sup>65</sup> A.M. Rodin, “L.P. Beria v Atomnom Proekte [L.P. Beria in the Atomic Project],” *Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, no. 9 (September 2012).

<sup>66</sup> Transcript of Pavel Sudoplatov interviews, Pavel Sudoplatov, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

Before explaining how the MVD shaped Beria's power, it is necessary to describe the nature of his authority in that organization. At the meeting described at the beginning of this chapter that occurred while Stalin lay dying, Malenkov suggested combining the Ministry of State Security (MGB) and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) into a single Ministry of Internal Affairs with Beria in command.<sup>67</sup> Khrushchev claims in his memoirs that even while Stalin lay on his death bed he told Bulganin that Beria wanted to take control of the political police: "If Beria takes control of State Security that will be the beginning of the end for us. He wants to take that post so that he can destroy all of us. And he'll do it!"<sup>68</sup> Khrushchev claimed he did not oppose this decision because a disrupting act so soon after Stalin's death would be seen as destabilizing.<sup>69</sup> At the CC plenum at which the leadership explained Beria's arrest, Bulganin affirmed that shortly before Stalin's death Khrushchev predicted that Beria would pursue leadership over the political police.<sup>70</sup>

One former chekist wrote in his memoirs that "it is necessary to note that a certain part of the leadership of the organs of state security reacted to the nomination of L.P. Beria with happiness and hopes with regards to their careers."<sup>71</sup> Kaganovich told the CC that on the mausoleum during Stalin's funeral Beria told his comrades that "Stalin did not know that if he tried to arrest me the chekists would have started a revolution."<sup>72</sup> Former KGB agent Iu. Krotkov wrote that "it is necessary to say that many workers in the organs of state security worshiped Beria and were prepared to go through fire and water for him. For many years he had guaranteed for them special conditions, practically turning them into

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<sup>67</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 23, listy 1-13 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>68</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 149.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>70</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 110.

<sup>71</sup> V.I. Alidin, *Gosudarstvennaia Bezopasnost' i Vremia (1951-1986) [State Security and Time (1951-1986)]* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Veteran MP," 1997), 109.

<sup>72</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 136.

‘supermen.’”<sup>73</sup> Beria was the only head of the political police (after Menzhinski) that earned the respect of Pavel Sudoplatov. For him, Beria was “a true leader” of the public security organs.<sup>74</sup>

As soon as Beria took over the new MVD, he started removing those officials with primarily party backgrounds who had been sent to work in the political police between 1951 and 1952. The official in charge of the MVD nomenklatura reported that when in April 1953 he brought Beria a list of individuals who came to the Ministry of State Security when it was controlled by Beria’s predecessor Ignat’ev (who had replaced Abakumov in 1952), Beria “ordered to exile all to the periphery as Ignat’evites, and said that it was necessary to bring to the apparat old workers fired from the organs who, as he put it, ‘I know.’” When the official brought a draft resolution for the CC to Beria, Beria told him that he needed an order, not a draft. When he pointed out that the MVD candidates had not been approved by secretaries at the *obkom* level, Beria threw him out of his office.<sup>75</sup> One former chekist wrote that more than twenty such high-ranking political police officers were removed, including MGB vice ministers in charge of cadres and technical issues.<sup>76</sup>

A document submitted by the new leaders of the MVD after Beria’s arrest reveals the extent of his penetration of the ministry.<sup>77</sup> Those removed from leadership positions included: vice minister of the MVD Kobulov; head of military counter-intelligence Goglidze; the head of the Secret-Political Department, who had worked as Beria’s assistant in the MVD and Council of Ministers and was put in the post in March 1953, as well as the deputy head, who had been under investigation until Beria assumed leadership of the MVD; the head and deputy of the Department of Cadres; the head of Inspection Control, who also had been under investigation until Beria’s leadership, as well as the deputy head, a brother of Kobulov; the head of the Investigation of Especially Important Matters [*sledstvennoi chasti po osobo*

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<sup>73</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 256.

<sup>74</sup> Transcript of Pavel Sudoplatov interviews, Pavel Sudoplatov, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>75</sup> Nikita Petrov, *Pervyi Predsedatel’ KGB Ivan Serov [First Head of the KGB Ivan Serov]* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 137.

<sup>76</sup> Alidin, *Gosudarstvennaia Bezopasnost’ I Vremia (1951-1986) [State Security and Time (1951-1986)]*, 110.

<sup>77</sup> Fond 89, opis 18, delo 28 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

*vazhnyim delam*], who had been removed from the political police until returned there by Beria, as well as the deputy head, an associate of Goglidze; the head of the department managing the security of the top leadership; eight members of the MVD department in charge of “special tasks”; the deputy head of the Third Department (military counter-intelligence), who had worked with Goglidze in the Far East; political police head of the Moscow Military District, who had worked with Beria in the Council of Ministers; the head of the political police in the Transcaucasus Military District; the head of the political police of the 7 Army in that district; and the majority of the leadership of the political police in Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia. Many of them were replaced by men from the CC apparat or had been removed from the political police by Beria.

In an interrogation after his arrest, Beria denied promoting individuals in the MVD according to how close they were to him, although he did admit that he made promotions without approval by the CC. He admitted this was inappropriate, but attempted to justify himself by claiming that he needed to work quickly to reorganize the department.<sup>78</sup> Even one of the chekists assigned after Beria’s removal to put together a list of men who needed to be purged from the political police, Sergei Kruglov, was disappointed by the coup.<sup>79</sup>

Heading the MVD allowed Beria access to information about party affairs and therefore played a role as a parallel information structure. According to the rough notes for a draft of Malenkov’s speech at the Presidium meeting where Beria was arrested, Malenkov began by saying “enemies want to place the organs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs over the party and the government.” His conclusion: “Beria’s position as Minister of Internal Affairs - he from this position controls the party and the government.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 86–89.

<sup>79</sup> Ivan Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2016), 413. However, Kruglov did have a long-term relationship with Malenkov beginning in the 1930s, which helps explain why Kruglov was so heavily used in the transition. Transcript of Pavel Sudoplatov interviews, Pavel Sudoplatov, Box 1, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>80</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 89.

The leadership's concern over Beria's use of the MVD in this way is most apparent in the debate over cadres policies in the republics on the periphery. Beria supported policies that increased the representation of non-Russians, and he was criticized for this after his purge. However, the evidence tells a different story: no real policy differences existed among the leadership on the question of cadre policy per se, and the real concern was over Beria's use of the MVD as a source of private information.

On May 8, Beria wrote in a note to the Presidium that the MVD during an investigation had learned that the struggle in Lithuania against the nationalist underground was not proceeding in a satisfactory way: 270,000 Lithuanians, ten percent of the population had been arrested, killed, or exiled between 1944 and 1952. Beria blamed the failure to defeat the insurrection on the lack of Lithuanians in the Lithuanian MVD and then drew attention to the absence of ethnic Lithuanians in the party leadership of the republic.<sup>81</sup> On May 16, he submitted a similar memorandum on Ukraine, in which he criticized tax policy, noted that up to 500,000 Ukrainians had been arrested, killed, or exiled, and pointed to the lack of ethnic Ukrainians in leadership positions in western Ukraine. He even raised the possibility of major failures in the construction of kolkhozes and suggested a working group be sent to investigate.<sup>82</sup> The head of party affairs in the CC [zav. Otdelom partiinykh, profsoiunykh i komsomol'skykh organov] Gromov submitted supportive notes on the low level of local cadres in Lithuania and western Ukraine on May 18 and 19, respectively.<sup>83</sup> The Presidium supported Beria's memos on Ukraine and Lithuania by telling those republics to study Beria's memorandum on their nationality policies.<sup>84</sup> On May 29, the Ukrainian party held a session to discuss Beria's note, "completely" recognized its political mistakes, and elected a new

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<sup>81</sup> RGASPI, fond 82, opis 2, delo 896, listy 135-142

<sup>82</sup> RGASPI, fond 82, opis 2, delo 896, listy 143-150

<sup>83</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 15, delo 441 listy 8-12 and fond 5, opis 15, delo 445, listy 108-112 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>84</sup> Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 49, 52.

first secretary.<sup>85</sup> On June 8, Beria submitted a proposal to the Presidium in which he suggested the removal of the Belarussian party chief Patolichev in favor of an ethnic Belarussian.<sup>86</sup>

Malenkov's draft speech to the Presidium referenced Beria's involvement in Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia as evidence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs correcting the work of the party and government. At the CC plenum following Beria's arrest, Khrushchev claimed that Beria's memorandums on Ukraine, Latvia, and Belarus were based on information collected by members of the MVD.<sup>87</sup> The chairman of the Council of Ministers of Uzbekistan, Mukhitdinov, recalled a phone call from Beria, who allegedly asked "Why did you oppose my memo?" and threatened to remove him from power and "grind him into dust." In May, Beria asked the Uzbek party committee to remove Mukhitdinov from power. Beria was supported by Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Mikoian. Ultimately, Khrushchev called to say that the question of his removal had become a major debate, but that he would have to leave to avoid further aggravating the situation. Mukhitdinov believed that Beria's plan was to use nationality cadre policy to remove those opposed to his rule and install those more favorable to him.<sup>88</sup>

Beria's moves were problematic not so much because of opposition to promoting national cadres as the implication that this would allow him to install his allies in important positions in the republics. Even Khrushchev admitted that "not everything in these suggestions was wrong. Even the CC itself took the course of promoting national cadres."<sup>89</sup> Most strikingly, in June 1953, Khrushchev himself wrote a memorandum about Latvia that touched on the same themes as Beria's memos on Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, and may even have used some of Beria's material.<sup>90</sup> Following the purge of Beria, the Soviet

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<sup>85</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 30, delo 3, listy 9-10 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>86</sup> RGASPI, fond 82, opis 2, delo 898, list 132

<sup>87</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 91.

<sup>88</sup> Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*, 1:110-13, 116.

<sup>89</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Berija*, 268.

<sup>90</sup> Zubkova, "Malenkov I Khrushchev: Lichnyi Faktor v Politike Poslestalinskogo Rukovodstva [Malenkov and Khrushchev: The Personal Factor in the Politics of the Post-Stalin Leadership]," 107. RGANI fond 5, opis 30, delo 6, listy 20-29. I thank Simon Miles for finding this document for me.

Union still continued its historic move towards allowing greater representation of local cadres in the leading political positions of their constituent republics.

Beria himself admitted that his behavior was politically problematic. In a letter to Malenkov written on July 1, Beria wrote that his reform proposals made as head of the MVD were “in accordance with the existing directives of the CC and government” and “corresponds to your advice and for certain questions to the advice of Comrade N.S. Khrushchev.” He did, however, admit that it was inappropriate to distribute decisions of the CC alongside MVD memorandums, as this made it seem like the MVD was running the CC’s in Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus.<sup>91</sup> Beria did not deny that he asked the MVD to collect information on the situation within several western republics with regards to the number of non-Russian cadres. He claimed to have done so with “the best intentions - to present the material to the Presidium of the CC CPSU.”<sup>92</sup>

Interestingly, it seems like the leadership only hazily understood the possibility Beria was using the MVD in this way when he was arrested, although it was certainly seen as a useful cudgel at the CC plenum where the highly unorthodox method of arresting Beria was defended. The key piece of evidence was a letter from the head of the MVD in Lvov, Ukraine. The head of the MVD in Lvov, T.A. Strokach, wrote to Khrushchev telling him that the head of the Ukrainian MVD, P. Ia. Meshik, told him to collect information on the nationalities of party leaders in his area and problems with their work. Strokach called Meshik because he felt like such an order was inappropriate. When Meshik told him the order was from Beria, Strokach did not believe him because Beria, as a high-ranking party and state official, could get such information whenever he wanted from the CC. Strokach complained to the head of the local obkom. Then, Beria allegedly called Strokach in Lvov and said “What are you doing there, you understand nothing, why did you go to the obkom and tell Serdiuk [the head of the obkom] of the mission you

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<sup>91</sup> Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 13.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

received... We will remove you from the organs [the MVD], arrest you and send you to the camps where you will be ground up into powder, we will turn you into prison dust.”

But this letter was not sent to Khrushchev until June 28 - after Beria's arrest.<sup>93</sup> Malenkov used this piece of evidence at the beginning of his speech to the plenum, suggesting that the most damning evidence was found, or fabricated, after the fact.<sup>94</sup> In the very rough notes of Malenkov's speech to the Presidium meeting where Beria was arrested, under section “1. Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia” there is the phrase “the MVD corrected the party and government,” but it is likely that Malenkov just meant that Beria was overstepping his role as head of the MVD. Stuningly, Khrushchev admitted: “This we did not know until Beria was arrested, then we did not know anything, but it was felt that there was an attack on the party, a subjugation of the party to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.”<sup>95</sup> Sudoplatov provided information suggesting that the letter was written by an individual with a personal grudge, thus casting some doubt on its authenticity.<sup>96</sup>

Yet Beria himself admitted in court that he acted inappropriately towards Strokach by cursing him and removing him from his position. During his closing remarks, in which he accepted some of the accusations against him while denying others, he acknowledged that “my biggest anti-party mistake is that I gave orders to collect information on the activities of party organizations and to draft report memos on Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltics. However I did not pursue counter-revolutionary goals.”<sup>97</sup>

Even more important than allowing Beria to shape policy in the satellite republics were the MVD's archives and eavesdropping capabilities. Fear of Beria's use of *kompromat* was one of the most

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<sup>93</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 419, fn 136; Khaustov, *Delo Beria*, 10–12.

<sup>94</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 220.

<sup>95</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Berija*, 268.

<sup>96</sup> Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks*, 357. According to Sudoplatov, Meshik wanted to remove Strokach because he had failed to save the NKVD archive when Kiev was taken by the Nazis. Serdiuk had also clashed with Meshik, as he wanted to use the MVD children's kindergarten as his home, which Meshik had opposed by putting his own armed men in the building.

<sup>97</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Berija*, 410–11.



decisive reasons for others in the leadership to unite against him. By the summer of 1953, Beria had proposed the arrest of the former secretary of the CC and Minister of State Security S.D. Ignatev, a protégé of Malenkov, and had arrested M.D. Riumin, former head of the investigative unit for particularly important cases and a man that could make accusations against Malenkov and Khrushchev.<sup>98</sup> According to the rough notes of Malenkov's speech to the Presidium meeting where Beria was arrested, he emphasized better control over the system of eavesdropping ("comrades are unsure of who is listening to whom").<sup>99</sup> In his speech to the CC after Beria's removal, Khrushchev claimed that Beria wanted to control the political police "so that through his intelligence gathering [he] could spy on the members of the Politburo, eavesdrop, investigate, create cases, intrigue, and this was leading to bad consequences, and perhaps more, for the party."<sup>100</sup> Bulganin told the CC that the Presidium had confiscated from Beria recordings of Khrushchev, Malenkov, Molotov, Bulganin, and Voroshilov.<sup>101</sup> At the June 1957 plenum, Malenkov and Khrushchev, then enemies, agreed that they did not speak at Malenkov's home because they were afraid of eavesdropping, but then both agreed that it later turned out that Malenkov was *not* being eavesdropped on.<sup>102</sup>

At the June 1957 CC plenum, Malenkov was also accused of serving Beria until ultimately joining the conspiracy because the latter had *kompromat* on him. The head of the MVD, a man named Dudorov, read to the plenum a letter written to the Presidium by Malenkov's secretary, Sukhanov (who will be discussed in greater detail below). According to this letter, Malenkov failed to "tell the plenum of the CC CPSU about the reasons and character of his long (from 1937 to 1953), close, and business-like relationship with Beria." Sukhanov's explanation was the possession in Beria's hands of *kompromat* on Malenkov. After Malenkov played a role in the purge of Beria's predecessor in the NKVD, the infamous

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<sup>98</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 1953, 8.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>102</sup> N. Kovaleva, ed., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957: Stenogramma liun'skogo Plenuma TsK KPSS I Drugie Dokumenty*, Rossiia. XX Vek (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1998), 47.

Nikolai Yezhov, Beria allegedly extracted compromising material on Malenkov from Yezhov. The resultant document was kept by Beria until his arrest.<sup>103</sup>

The head procurator, Rudenko, stated that “Malenkov’s main interest in the Beria affair was that he feared that Beria would expose him in vile matters.” Rudenko claimed that Malenkov served Beria because the latter had investigated him after being accused of plotting a “terroristic act” against Kaganovich. Beria used the material to blackmail Malenkov. Rudenko stated that “The explanation given to Stalin was kept not in Stalin’s safe, but in Beria’s personal archive.” Malenkov responded: “He did this against all the members of the Politburo.”<sup>104</sup> As soon as Beria was defeated, Malenkov sent his three secretaries (Shatalin, Sukhanov, and Dedov) to the Kremlin to investigate Beria’s documents, clearly because he feared they contained damaging information.<sup>105</sup>

Curiously, on June 25, the eve of his arrest, Beria submitted a memorandum on the investigation of M.D. Riumin that announced the discovery that material related to the “Leningrad affair” was fabricated.<sup>106</sup> Malenkov was closely linked to that purge, so Beria’s concluding words in the memo, “The investigation into the Riumin affair continues,” might have been understood by Malenkov as a direct threat. Later Malenkov’s role in that incident would be a weapon against him. Even more damning is a document described by Russian historian Pikhov, which apparently shows Beria ordering V.D. Styrov, head of the Soviet archives (which were part of the MVD) to find information compromising Malenkov in the archives of the Red Army and Chkalov oblast’ archives.<sup>107</sup>

It was not only Malenkov’s behavior that was likely shaped by the issue of *kompromat*. As the former leader of Ukraine, Khrushchev likely saw Beria’s criticisms of policies in the republic as a challenge to his legacy. Former MVD official Sudoplatov told the historian Volkogonov in personal

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 43–44.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>106</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 64–66.

<sup>107</sup> Pikhov, *Sovetskii Soiuz*, 111.

correspondence that Khrushchev wanted to remove Beria because Beria knew that Khrushchev had organized mass repressions in Ukraine from 1938-1949 and “it was extremely necessary to get rid of unnecessary witnesses.”<sup>108</sup> One of the men tried along with Beria said after his arrest that “So, for example, with regards to the issue of mistakes in western Ukraine, Beria in a draft memorandum and draft resolution to the CC Presidium CPSU showed that mass repressions and other operations created such a situation, and verbally commented in an ironic tone that in that time N.S. Khrushchev worked in Ukraine.”<sup>109</sup> In any case, Beria’s elimination freed them from the fear he would use *kompromat* against them. In August 1954, the leadership would make a collective decision to destroy documents that compromised them.<sup>110</sup> Material on top marshals was destroyed “so as not to compromise honest people that had been placed under surveillance.”<sup>111</sup>

Did Beria intend to use the MVD against other members of the elites? Beria’s son claims that for days after Stalin’s death Khrushchev tried to convince his father to take control of the MVD in order to bring order to its ranks: a poisoned chalice. According to this narrative, Beria planned to leave the organization as soon as he reformed it.<sup>112</sup> Although this account is hard to believe, as Beria assumed the position even before Stalin died, Mikoian’s speech to the CC plenum after Beria’s arrest does hint that originally there was a hope Beria’s intentions were less dangerous:

In the beginning I said to him: why do you need the NKVD? And he said: it is necessary to restore legality, the situation in the country is intolerable. We have many arrested, they must be freed. The NKVD needs to be cut... When he spoke at Red Square on the grave of Comrade Stalin, after his speech I said: in your speech there is a place where you guarantee each citizen rights and freedoms stipulated in the constitution. In a speech of a common orator this is an empty phrase, but in the speech of the minister of internal affairs - this is a program of action, you must execute it. He answered me: I will execute it.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> P.A. Sudoplatov, “Letter to Volkogonov from Sudoplatov” (Library of Congress. Volkogonov Papers. Reel 8., November 18, 1990), 2.

<sup>109</sup> Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 25.

<sup>110</sup> O.V. Khlevniuk et al, eds., *Politbiuro TsK VKP(B) I Sovet Ministrov SSSR 1945-1953 [Politburo TsK VKP(B) and the Council of Ministers of the USSR 1945-1953]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), 203.

<sup>111</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 330, list 44 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>112</sup> Sergo Beriia, *Moi Otets Narkom Beriia [My Father Commissar Beriia]* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2013), 18.

<sup>113</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 169–70.

Interestingly, during his interrogations Beria denied that he ordered the MVD to eavesdrop on party and state leaders.<sup>114</sup> Sudoplatov's memoirs provide an example of someone providing Beria with compromising information on Malenkov, but that Beria indignantly had it ignored. A Georgian playwright named Gregori Mdivani had given the chief of Beria's secretariat a memo claiming Malenkov's speech to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress plagiarized a czarist minister. Although Beria disregarded the document, the memo "found its way from Beria's secretariat to Malenkov's office, and the damage was done." Sudoplatov also claims that "all the members of [Beria's] secretariat who knew about the memo accusing Malenkov of plagiarism in his report to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress were promptly arrested and imprisoned." Therefore we have reason to believe that Beria's accomplices might have truly thought that Beria had compromising material, but whether he was actively seeking it out or planned to use it may never be known.<sup>115</sup> In any case, given the power of *kompromat*, the possibility that Beria *might* use such documents was enough of a reason to move against him.

## **Section 2: Selectorate Theory vs. Rule Manipulation**

According to hypothesis 2a, the removal of Beria should have been the result of a careful deliberation of his policies. Yet the process of preparing to move against Beria and the path to his ultimate execution speak against the defining assumptions of the selectorate theory: of a defined, enfranchised group deciding on a final outcome after careful consideration of the situation. Instead, we see the following decisive characteristics. First, Beria's arrest was preceded by conspiratorial secret meetings, as opposed to open, democratic discussion in which he was allowed to defend himself or agree to correct his behavior. In other words, the question of Beria was illegally discussed outside party channels. Second, the evidence hints at the strong possibility that members of the Presidium had ambiguous attitudes about the propriety of how Beria should be confronted and how he should be punished. In other words, a consensus about the propriety of his arrest and execution might not have been

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>115</sup> Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks*, 359.

universal before he was isolated. Third, the CC, the party's most powerful organ, was presented with a fait accompli and therefore stripped of any possibility to interfere in the decision. Beria was not even allowed to present his case. Fourth, the victors in the contest won by relying on an extremely tendentious interpretation of even ambiguous rules. As former Soviet foreign minister Shepilov concluded in his memoirs: "it really was undemocratic and unconstitutional."<sup>116</sup>

### *Conspiracy*

The extent to which the preparation to move against Beria was a conspiratorial intrigue reminiscent of old-style palace coups is striking. The evidence clearly demonstrates that leadership preferences were not being aggregated in any structured fashion. The preparations were so secret that even today the evidence does not allow us to name with certainty the initiator of the coup. Certainly, the consensus view that Khrushchev was the main plotter has support in the historical record. Khrushchev plays up his decisive role in his own memoirs. Molotov told an interviewer that "the initiative was in [Khrushchev's] hands as he was the party secretary."<sup>117</sup> Mikoian agreed in his own memoirs.<sup>118</sup>

However, other evidence hints at a greater role for Malenkov than Khrushchev. Most importantly, Malenkov's personal secretary, Sukhanov, provides a completely different account. Sukhanov believed that Beria and Malenkov were political enemies and that as early as 1945 Beria had tried to weaken Malenkov's position by fabricating a case against him. According to Sukhanov, Beria tried to purge Malenkov in the immediate aftermath of Stalin's death, yet Malenkov, "with the assistance of Marshal G.K. Zhukov, and relying on the support of his proteges in the secretariat of the CC KPSU and government" was able to frustrate this plan and remove Khrushchev, an alleged Beria ally, from his position in charge of Moscow. With the help of Khrushchev, Beria in April 1953 allegedly tried to blame the so-called "Mingrelian Affair" on Malenkov. Beria then planned to seize power, along with

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<sup>116</sup> Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar*, 265.

<sup>117</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 343.

<sup>118</sup> Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvshem [How It Was: Reflections on the Past]*, 633.

Khrushchev and Bulganin, after watching a show at the Bolshoi Theater on June 26. Sukhanov believed that Malenkov essentially forced Khrushchev and Bulganin to go along with his plan to purge Beria.<sup>119</sup>

According to Malenkov's son, immediately after Stalin's death, Beria raced to Moscow to arrest Malenkov and seize power. However, Malenkov was too fast for him: he summoned Zhukov and gave him control over the troops in the Moscow Military Region to block Beria's divisions in their barracks. Malenkov allegedly told his son that a week before the arrest of Beria, Khrushchev and Bulganin went to Malenkov and said: "he is trying to enlist [*verbuet*] us. What should we do?" Molotov and Kaganovich were allegedly opposed to Beria's arrest.<sup>120</sup> It is unclear whether Malenkov told his son these stories, or whether Malenkov's son was relating information told him by Sukhanov.

Of all the evidence presented in this dissertation, Sukhanov's testimonies are perhaps the most unique. For most memoir accounts, the key differences are about differing interpretations or emphases on certain pieces of evidence as opposed to others. Sukhanov's accounts stand out both because of the extent to which he fundamentally rejects all other memoirs and because his position as Malenkov's assistant for twenty years means we have reason to believe he had access to such information. Moskalenko's account of Beria's arrest twice mentions Malenkov's assistant, Sukhanov, playing a role.<sup>121</sup> One Russian historian supports Sukhanov's arguments, adding some credibility to his position by arguing that Khrushchev signaled a decision to ally with Beria in April by liquidating a CC department in charge of cadres and through other personnel changes.<sup>122</sup> As discussed above, Khrushchev submitted a document to the Presidium that supported Beria's position on ethnic issues in Latvia in June. This means that Khrushchev

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<sup>119</sup> D.N. Sukhanov, "Iz Vospominanii Sukhanova D.N. Byvshego Pomoshchnika Malenkova G.M. [From the Recollections of D.N. Sukhanov, Former Assistant to G.M. Malenkov]" (Library of Congress. Volkogonov Papers. Reel 8., n.d.), 19–22.

<sup>120</sup> Andrei Malenkov, *O Moem Ottse Georgii Malenkove [About My Father Georgi Malenkov]* (Moscow, 2007), 58–61.

<sup>121</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 285–86.

<sup>122</sup> Iu. N. Zhukov, *Tainy Kremliia: Stalin, Molotov, Beriia, Malenkov [Mysteries of the Kremlin: Stalin, Molotov, Beria, Malenkov]* (Moscow: TERRA, 2000), 635–36.

was not openly opposing Beria at that late date, although it remains difficult to determine whether Khrushchev was honestly supporting him or faking.<sup>123</sup>

Discussions about the purge of Beria in the years afterwards are also revealing. At the January 1955 CC plenum at which Malenkov was criticized and his removal from the position of premier was discussed, he was accused by Khrushchev of “literally being Beria’s shadow” for a long period of time, especially while Stalin was alive, when there was “complete oppression, complete submission.” Khrushchev complained that after Stalin’s death Malenkov refused to discuss personnel issues with him, instead making all his decisions with Beria. Molotov claimed that “it was necessary to grab Beria by the throat, but you had no such desire.” Like Khrushchev, Molotov complained that Malenkov and Beria together tried to take control of the situation after Stalin’s death.<sup>124</sup>

Malenkov’s reaction to these accusations remains hard to decipher. He stated: “I completely confirm that there was intimacy; at the time I did not deny this and do not deny this now.” However, he justified his behavior as an attempt to guarantee unity and solidarity in the leadership, and he mentioned his involvement in Abakumov’s arrest: something Beria allegedly tried to prevent.<sup>125</sup> The sense that Malenkov, while accepting the charges formally, did not fully acknowledge their legitimacy is further substantiated by the reaction it caused. Kaganovich claimed that others in the leadership did not plan to speak at the plenum, but were disturbed that Malenkov “did not find in himself the bravery to say that he was more closely connected to Beria than others.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 30, delo 6, listy 20-29. Khrushchev sent the document to other members of the Presidium on June 8: 18 days before Beria’s arrest.

<sup>124</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 127, listy 17, 19, 36, 63, 106 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>125</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 127, list 62-64, 71 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection). If true, Malenkov’s fears were far from unfounded. Reports to the leadership about reactions to Beria’s removal included information that some believed it was no longer possible to trust anyone in the leadership and that it was a sign of a power struggle. Moreover, after Beria’s purge some communists used the opportunity to strongly criticize *gorkom* and *raikom* leaders for their cadre selections and violations of collective leadership. RGANI fond 5, opis 15, delo 407, listy 115, 154, 163, 201 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>126</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 127, list 139 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

These proceedings are interesting for another reason. Malenkov's relationship with Beria was one of the major charges against him that led to his removal from the premiership. Of all the types of evidence used in the study of authoritarian regimes, charges leveled against a fallen leader, even when made at a private party meeting, are among the least trustworthy. Malenkov's role in the defeat of Beria contributed to his prestige within the party. The suggestion that Malenkov was in fact close to Beria plays a powerful political purpose, and that instrumentalism casts doubt both on the accusations at the January 1955th plenum and later memoir accounts.

Most interestingly, at the June 1957 CC plenum Khrushchev stated: "Comrades! When we in the last few days in the meetings of the Presidium [during which Khrushchev's opponents tried to remove him from the leadership] touched on the question of the arrest of Beria, they, Kaganovich in particular, said: they speak incorrectly that Khrushchev showed initiative in the arrest of Beria. Malenkov did this." When Khrushchev claimed that Malenkov only went along "because he saw: if you decide to choose this option in this situation, then you'll face this and this, if you choose a different option - you'll stay alive, and will earn something for yourself," Malenkov retorted: "we began this together, you know this!" Khrushchev: "I know this well." Malenkov: "Then what's the matter?!"<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, the suggestion that Beria and Malenkov were long-term antagonists struggles with several powerful pieces of evidence other than the memoir accounts described above. First, Sukhanov's own behavior hints that he might be a less than honest individual: while Beria was being investigated, Sukhanov found among Beria's materials a state bond that originally belonged to Bulganin. When it won a very large sum and he cashed it in 1956, he was caught and spent ten years in jail.<sup>128</sup> Second, Sukhanov almost certainly would have felt strong antagonism towards Khrushchev not only for his jail sentence but for how he treated his mentor Malenkov. This would have given him reason to lie. Third, Soviet historians Gorlizki and Khlevniuk believe that Khrushchev and Bulganin were added to the leadership in

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<sup>127</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 490.

<sup>128</sup> See the documentary film that interviews Sukhanov: <http://my.mail.ru/mail/ded-ka/video/3267/33993.html>



Stalin's late years as a balance against Beria and Malenkov, which would suggest they had a friendly working relationship.<sup>129</sup> Ivan Serov, the first head of the KGB, wrote in his memoirs that in 1947 he overheard Molotov and Bulganin complaining that "Malenkov and Beria act together and support one another, while Anastas [Mikhoian] takes an ambiguous position [*ni to ni se*] and does what's most advantageous for him."<sup>130</sup>

Although we cannot entirely reject Sukhanov's story, to the extent he is correct, the theoretical implications for this dissertation are the same. Although his account is hard to square with the others, it might be the case that the situation was extremely fluid and therefore difficult for Sukhanov to perceive correctly. In other words, the highly differing accounts in and of themselves might be revealing because they hint at what was an intensely complicated political environment in which many individuals were only hazily aware of the true situation.

### *The Presidium*

What was the attitude of others in the Presidium? The evidence is mixed, but a very strong possibility remains that a consensus had not been reached on the day of Beria's arrest and that, at the very least, many in the leadership had ambiguous feelings. This yet again would indicate the weakness of hypothesis 2a: not even the party's top decision-making organ had a clear consensus on what to do with Beria. According to Khrushchev's memoirs, when he sought out Voroshilov's support he ended up not revealing his plans because the conversation began with Voroshilov loudly praising Beria. When Khrushchev approached Kaganovich, the latter first asked who else opposed Beria. When Khrushchev said that Malenkov, Bulganin, Molotov, and Saburov were already in agreement, thus forming a majority, Kaganovich agreed to support Khrushchev. The implication here is not only that Kaganovich was going along with the majority, but also that Khrushchev would have had the ability to shape Kaganovich's

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<sup>129</sup> Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, 92–95.

<sup>130</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti* [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death], 358.

response by mischaracterizing the positions of others. Khrushchev claims not to have spoken with Mikoian until the day of the move against Beria, as he believed Beria and Mikoian were exceptionally close since they were both from the Caucasus (Georgian and Armenian, respectively). When Mikoian was told of the plan on that morning, he said “[Beria] is not hopeless; he might be able to work as a member of the collective.”<sup>131</sup> Serov described in his memoirs a drunken confrontation in a bathroom during a visit to China in 1954 during which Bulganin grabbed Mikoian by the collar and screamed: “You did want to arrest Beria immediately too, you wanted an investigation.”<sup>132</sup> Saburov agreed to move against Beria beforehand, but Pervukhin told Malenkov that he needed to think. However, Khrushchev was able to convince Pervukhin to change his mind.<sup>133</sup>

Molotov’s recollections differ somewhat from Khrushchev’s. Molotov claimed that Voroshilov immediately agreed to remove Beria from power. Although Molotov timed Khrushchev’s initial approach to Mikoian at an earlier date, he agreed with Khrushchev’s claim that Mikoian did not agree to remove Beria.<sup>134</sup> According to the transcript of the CC plenum at which Beria’s arrest was discussed, Mikoian himself admitted that even though he knew about Beria’s negative qualities, “it was still difficult for me to agree to an arrest of a member of the Presidium of the CC.”<sup>135</sup>

In his own memoirs, Kaganovich denied that he asked whether there was a majority in favor of ousting Beria. He told an interviewer that he had been traveling until a telegram told him to come to Moscow. When Khrushchev summoned him after his return to the capital, he was told that Beria was engaged in intrigue and wanted to overthrow the leadership and take power. Yet even though Kaganovich denies asking about the position of others on the Presidium, Kaganovich suggested that Beria only be

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<sup>131</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 191–94.

<sup>132</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 430.

<sup>133</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 272–74.

<sup>134</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 343–44.

<sup>135</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 167.

weakened but not removed [*ego prizhat' i ostavit vse-taki, ne snimat'*]. Khrushchev said matters had already gone too far and that more would be explained at the meeting that would arrest Beria. Khrushchev told him that Mikoian did not know because he would have told Beria.<sup>136</sup>

No official transcript has been found of the Presidium meeting at which Beria was arrested, and we are therefore unable to state for certain what specific accusations Beria faced or the exact positions of the other members. Molotov claims that Mikoian spoke against removing Beria, allegedly because he was afraid Beria would turn matters around and emerge victorious.<sup>137</sup> Khrushchev also wrote that Mikoian argued that Beria could be useful to the collective leadership.<sup>138</sup> According to Kaganovich, Mikoian was surprised by what happened and later asked what was going on.<sup>139</sup> Mikoian claims to have only agreed to make Beria head of the oil industry, as Beria “might still be useful.”<sup>140</sup> Curiously, according to the rough draft of his speech to the Presidium, Malenkov did not propose arresting Beria, but only removing him from his position as deputy premier and putting him in charge of the oil industry.<sup>141</sup> As will be discussed below, the military officers involved in the arrest of Beria believed that the Presidium members were shocked by their presence.

Most interesting is the evidence that this meeting did not even bother to go through the motions of appropriate party procedure: Khrushchev claimed that there was not even a formal vote. According to his memoirs, Khrushchev had proposed that the Presidium suggest to the next plenum of the Central Committee that Beria be removed from all his posts. But Malenkov, apparently extremely nervous, instead pressed a secret button that summoned the military officers in the next room to come and arrest Beria. Malenkov only said that “I propose as chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR that you

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<sup>136</sup> Feliks Chuev and Lazar Kaganovich, *Tak Govoril Kaganovich [Thus Spoke Kaganovich]* (Moscow: Otechestvo, 1992), 66.

<sup>137</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 345.

<sup>138</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 277.

<sup>139</sup> Chuev and Kaganovich, *Tak Govoril Kaganovich [Thus Spoke Kaganovich]*, 65.

<sup>140</sup> Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvshem [How It Was: Reflections on the Past]*, 634.

<sup>141</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 69–70.

detain Beria.”<sup>142</sup> In other words, the Soviet premier was using his personal authority to ask high-ranking military officers to arrest a fellow member of the Presidium and first deputy minister of the government.<sup>143</sup>

The Sukhanov thesis goes so far as to claim that Malenkov was essentially the only member of the Presidium that opposed Beria. On the eve of the meeting at which Beria was to execute his coup, Malenkov invited Khrushchev and Bulganin to his office, where without even saying hello he told them he knew about Beria’s conspiracy and their participation in it. They were warned that their lives would be saved if Bulganin smuggled military officers into the Kremlin in his car. At the actual meeting on June 26, Pervukhin and Saburov supported arresting Beria; Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich were opposed; and Khrushchev, Bulganin, and Mikoian were noncommittal. While Molotov was speaking, Malenkov used a button to summon Zhukov and the other officers. When Malenkov again suggested arresting Beria, suddenly everyone was in favor. Before removing Beria, Zhukov suggested to Malenkov that he arrest the other members of the Presidium who had cooperated with Beria. Sukhanov even claimed that Khrushchev and Bulganin had tried to warn Beria by writing the word “alarm” on a piece of paper and placing it in Beria’s office: if he had gone into his office before the meeting, in Sukhanov’s mind, he would have saved himself.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 197–98. According to Moskalenko, Malenkov said to make the arrest “in the name of Soviet law.” Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beria*, 286.

<sup>143</sup> Khrushchev gave an advisor a different version: Malenkov was too nervous to even make an opening statement, so Khrushchev took the initiative to propose that Beria be removed from the Presidium, CC and the party and be turned over to a military court. Then he was the first to raise his hand to vote in favor of his own proposal, followed by everyone else. Khrushchev, not Malenkov, ordered Moskalenko to make the arrest: “Take this snake, traitor to his motherland, and take him where he belongs.” Fedor Burlatskii, *Nikita Khrushchev i ego sovetniki-krasnye, chernye, belye [Nikita Khrushchev and His Advisors: Red, Black, and White]* (Moscow: EKSMO-Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>144</sup> Sukhanov, “Iz Vospominanii Sukhanova D.N. Byvshego Pomoshchnika Malenkova G.M. [From the Recollections of D.N. Sukhanov, Former Assistant to G.M. Malenkov],” 19–22.

The evidence supporting this role for Zhukov is mixed. Malenkov had served as Zhukov's commissar at one point during the war.<sup>145</sup> However, while Molotov admitted that Malenkov supported Zhukov "to some extent," he also believed that "to say he was Malenkov's protégé is going too far."<sup>146</sup> Zhukov told a military historian that Khrushchev was the initiator of the move against Beria and that preparations for his removal lasted an entire month.<sup>147</sup> Zhukov in his speech to the 1957 June plenum said Malenkov was even guiltier of the repressions than Kaganovich or Molotov.<sup>148</sup> However, his attitude towards Malenkov might have changed. In a speech to the Moscow garrison and ministry of defense, Zhukov argues that Bulganin once showed him documents taken from Malenkov's personal safe that had compromising information on a whole number of marshals, including Budennyi, Timoshenko, Konev, and Voroshilov. Coincidentally, this information was found when Sukhanov was arrested for stealing.<sup>149</sup> This hints that Zhukov might have changed his mind about Malenkov after initially supporting him.

#### *The Central Committee*

According to the party's own rules, if the Presidium was split, then the CC should have been able to referee a decision. However, once again, we do not see a serious discussion of Beria's strengths and weakness. Instead, we see more evidence for hypothesis 2b: the importance of a fait accompli. The CC's membership was stunned. At the CC plenum, one speaker said "we, workers in the regions, before the Plenum of the Central Committee knew very little, and it was difficult to guess at any level about the treachery of this man."<sup>150</sup> Another remarked that what had happened was "simply unbelievable [*prosto ne*

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<sup>145</sup> David M. Glantz, *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942*; v. 2. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 53.

<sup>146</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 239.

<sup>147</sup> V.A. Anfilov, "Razgovor Okonchilsia Ugrozoi Stalina [The Conversation Ended With Stalin's Threat]," *Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, no. 3 (1995): 45.

<sup>148</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 40.

<sup>149</sup> National Security Archive, Box 16, Russian and Eastern European Archive Documents Database, 07.02.1957, R11697, Speeches at the meeting, 18.

<sup>150</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 191.

*veritsia*]" and admitted that he had only learned of the arrest the day before the plenum.<sup>151</sup> Both went on to criticize Beria, but it was clear they were shocked.

Khrushchev struggled to explain why Beria had been removed in the way he was. He admitted that people were confused that he and Malenkov had turned on Beria, given that they were often seen walking hand in hand with each other. Yet he argued that "with a treacherous man it was necessary to behave in this way. If we had said that he was a bastard after it was already seen [that he was a bastard], then I am sure that he would have finished us. You do not think that he could. I already told several comrades, and they told me that I am exaggerating.... We are not dealing with a member of the party that can be struggled against by party means, we are instead dealing with a conspirator, with a provocateur, and therefore it was impossible to expose ourselves."<sup>152</sup> Mikoian admitted that "it was hard for me to agree to the arrest of a member of the CC Presidium. But in the process of discussion the totally adventurous nature of Beria became apparent and there was clearly a conspiratorial threat. This led to the total isolation of Beria and the unanimous decision on his arrest."<sup>153</sup>

In other words, Khrushchev was using the nature of the threat Beria represented to justify "special" measures. Yet those measures also prevented Beria from defending himself. Moreover, they beg another question: if Beria needed to be isolated from the political police out of a fear he would use force to protect himself, why was he not allowed to address the CC after he was stripped of his position as leader of the MVD? The obvious answer is that Beria could have pointed to the weaknesses in the charges against him, as well as make powerful accusations against his opponents. As Soviet historian Naumov wrote: "[the conspirators] sought to liquidate as quickly as possible Beria, who knew too much about his former comrades. They wanted to avoid a detailed and thorough investigation of his crimes in order to

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

hide their own participation in them. Therefore, the leaders of the Presidium of the CC did not even think of observing the law.”<sup>154</sup>

### *Beria's Fall and Party Rules*

Although many questions remain about the purge of Beria, together the evidence shows beyond a reasonable doubt that the plotters were relying on extremely tendentious interpretations of party rules. This is significant because it shows that, contrary to the predictions of hypothesis 2a, those who most clearly violated the rules were able to emerge victorious. First, Beria easily could have accused the plotters of factionalism. As discussed above, at the January 1955 plenum Malenkov spoke of the importance of party solidarity [*splochnost*] as the primary reason for why he did not move against Beria immediately after Stalin's death. Khrushchev started his speech to the CC plenum after his arrest by claiming that “the striving for unity, comrades, was very cleverly used by this adventurist Beria.”<sup>155</sup> These comments reveal that the leadership understood their actions could be understood as violations of the party's codes against factionalism.

In Lenin's famous anti-faction resolution passed at the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, point 4 stipulates that matters should only be discussed at party meetings, not at ‘groups’ forming around a ‘platform’.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, the party constitution's section 3-A described maintaining the unity of the party as the first obligation of each party member. Beria's arrest also arguably violated the resolution passed by the joint session on March 5 that spoke of the situation demanding “the greatest solidarity [*splochnosti*] of the leadership.”<sup>157</sup> The move against Beria therefore violated these strictures on factionalism in two ways. The discussions about the need to remove Beria, a major political issue, were made outside of party meetings, and the arrest of a Presidium member clearly violated a norm of party unity and solidarity.

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<sup>154</sup> V.P. Naumov, “Byl Li Zagovor Berii? Novye Dokumenty O Sobytiakh 1953 G [Was There a Beria Conspiracy? New Documents on the Events of 1953],” *Novaia i Noveishaya Istorii*, no. 5 (October 1998): 32.

<sup>155</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 90.

<sup>156</sup> RGASPI, fond 45, opis 1, delo 23, listy 29-31

<sup>157</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 23, list 8 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

Second, the Presidium did not have the right to make personnel decisions. That decision-making power lay in the hands of the CC. According to point 34 of the party constitution, “The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union organizes: for the leadership of the work of the CC between plenums - a Presidium.” Certainly, a majority of the Presidium could have suggested to the CC that Beria be removed from the leadership. Yet technically this should not have been a rubber-stamp process. Instead, the differing positions should have been explained to the CC, which would then serve as an adjudicator. Moreover, the minority on the Presidium did not necessarily have to lose. Indeed, this is precisely what happened in June 1957, when Khrushchev, then in the minority position against his foes, brought the dispute to the CC to overturn a Presidium majority.

Third, Beria should not have been refused access to the CC plenum that passed a resolution supporting the Presidium after his arrest. Point 12 of the party constitution stipulated that an individual can only be removed from the CC when two thirds of the body support such a decision, while point 3-G allowed every party member the right “to demand personal participation in all situations when a decision is made about his activities or behavior.” Therefore, according to the party’s own rules, Beria could not have been removed from the CC unless he was present at the deliberations.

Moreover, the investigation proceedings after Beria’s arrest were politicized. No external judicial arbiter made an unbiased decision. The top procurator that would have tried the case, Safonov, was replaced by the more pliable Rudenko immediately after Beria’s arrest. On June 29, Rudenko was ordered by the Presidium to “proceed immediately, based on the directions of the session of the Presidium of the CC, to identify and investigate the facts of hostile anti-state, anti-Party activities of Beria through his entourage.”<sup>158</sup> Once the political decision was made, the procuracy’s only task was to provide a conviction. This was despite Beria’s desperate pleas in a letter to the Presidium on July 2: “dear comrades I strongly implore you to name the most responsibly and strict commission for the strict investigation of

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<sup>158</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 74.



my affair, led by Comrade Molotov or Comrade Voroshilov. Surely a member of the Presidium of the CC deserves that his affair is carefully sorted out, accusations be presented, explanations be demanded, witnesses be questioned. From all points of view this is good for the matter and the CC.”<sup>159</sup>

Yet Beria’s wishes were denied. Instead, a special eight-man court was created. Only two of the members had any relationship with the justice system, and two others had a purely military background, including the head of the court, Marshal Konev. According to his widow, Konev was opposed to his nomination to lead the court that condemned Beria: “He so did not want this! He said I am a military man, leave me in peace, I am not a judge and do not know legal subtleties.” He received numerous threatening letters at home (which, according to Konev’s widow, cost him ten years of his life).<sup>160</sup> The other military member was Moskalenko himself. Even the author of a biography generally positive about Rudenko acknowledged this was outrageous: “Apparently, this was a whim of Khrushchev or some other of the top party bosses... That the same person [Moskalenko] would arrest, investigate, judge, and execute the sentence - this did not occur even during the ‘rapid-fire justice’ of the Stalin era!”<sup>161</sup>

### **Section 3: Coercive Institutions**

In this final section, I test the third part of the economic and authority models: has a high level of institutionalization eclipsed a role for coercion, or can violence, or the threat of violence, still be used for individual political interests? In this section, I show evidence for the authority model using the following pieces of evidence. Contrary to the expectations of hypothesis 3b, the political leadership and the military was terrified that Beria would use his forces to simply arrest them. A major reason for the move against Beria was the fear that he was beginning to seek more control over the military. In other words, the fight against Beria was more a contest over control of the forces of coercion than a measured policy

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>160</sup> Elizaveta Maetnaia, “Marshal Konev Revnoval Budushchuiu Zhenu K Marshalu Zhukovu [Marshal Konev Was Jealous of His Wife with Regards to Marshal Zhukov],” *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, December 5, 1997, 7.

<sup>161</sup> Aleksandr Zviagintsev, *Rudenko: general’nyi prokuror SSSR [Rudenko: General Prosecutor of the USSR]* (Moscow: OLMedia Media Grupp, 2012), 156.

deliberation within the party. Moreover, the defeat of Beria was entirely dependent on the military supporting the conspirators because Beria had his own support among the political police.

### *Beria's Control over the Political Police*

Because of the absence of robust political institutionalization, strong evidence points to a fear in the leadership that Beria could simply arrest them. According to Molotov, Khrushchev “[a]pparently had been informed that Beria was up to something. And Beria had troops under his command. Aside from his personnel, he also had a Ministry of Internal Affairs division at his command.” When asked by an interviewer whether Beria was preparing a coup, Molotov said yes.<sup>162</sup> Khrushchev later told an advisor that when he went to speak to Malenkov about removing Beria, he said, “Special divisions are being brought to Moscow for some reason,” implying that the troops might be used by Beria for a coup.<sup>163</sup> Historian Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko, without any evidence, claimed that two top chekists, Ivan Serov and Sergei Kruglov, described to Khrushchev the “plan of an armed putsch, the disposition of units, and provided the names of the conspirators.”<sup>164</sup>

We have absolutely no real, reliable evidence that Beria was planning a coup.<sup>165</sup> But even if this was not the case, the fact that some conspirators played up this fear means they believed such a charge was politically powerful or a dangerous threat even if it was not immediate. At the Presidium meeting where Beria was arrested, Malenkov proposed giving the position of Minister of Internal Affairs to Kruglov, thus placing the system of bodyguards under the control of the CC.<sup>166</sup>

### *Beria and the Military*

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<sup>162</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 344.

<sup>163</sup> Burlatskii, *Nikita Khrushchev i ego sovetniki-krasnye, chernye, belye [Nikita Khrushchev and His Advisors: Red, Black, and White]*, 17.

<sup>164</sup> Antonov-Ovseyenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 132.

<sup>165</sup> Naumov, “Byl Li Zagovor Berii? Novye Dokumenty O Sobytiakh 1953 G [Was There a Beria Conspiracy? New Documents on the Events of 1953].”

<sup>166</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 89.

Control over the military clearly had special importance for the contest between Beria and his competitors. Although the elite as a whole had reason to fear arrest and execution by Beria, the military had special reason. The bloody history of the armed forces in the Soviet Union dated back to the founding of the regime.<sup>167</sup> Yet the Great Terror of 1937-1938 was not the only period when high-ranking military officers were butchered. Between 1941 and 1952, one hundred and one generals were arrested, of whom twelve died during the investigation and another eighty-one were convicted.<sup>168</sup> Former intelligence operative Pavel Sudoplatov understood this as “the opening of a campaign to demote the heroes of the Great Patriotic War and rid himself [Stalin] of potential rivals.”<sup>169</sup>

A primary target of these purges was Marshal Georgi Zhukov.<sup>170</sup> Zhukov’s attitude towards Beria was shaped not only by personal antagonism, as discussed in the previous section, but also by a long-term distaste for the political police as a whole. When years earlier Abakumov started arresting generals in Germany under Zhukov’s command without even telling Zhukov of his arrival, Zhukov ordered him to release all those he arrested and to return to Moscow within 24 hours. If this was not done, he would have him arrested and sent back to Moscow “under convoy.” Zhukov admitted to an interviewer that such behavior was dangerous: “I understood wonderfully that by this act I would summon the fierce rage of not only Beria, but also Stalin. But I had no other choice. I must execute my responsibility: to defend the

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<sup>167</sup> Vladimir Pavlovich Naumov and A. A. Kosakovskii, *Kronshtadt, 1921* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1997); Nonna Tarkhova, *Krasnaia Armii i Stalinskaia Kollektivizatsiia 1928-1933 Gg. [The Red Army and Stalinist Collectivization 1928-1933]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010); Vladimir Khaustov and Lennart Samuelson, *Stalin, NKVD, i Repressii 1936-1938 [Stalin, the NKVD, and Repressions]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010); O.F. Suvenirov, *Tragediia RKKA 1937-1938 [Tragedy of the RKKA 1937-1938]* (Moscow: Terra, 1998); N. Cherushev, *Udar Po Svoim. Krasnaia Armii 1938-1941 [Attack on One’s Own. The Red Army 1938-1941]* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); N. Cherushev, *1937 God: Elita Krasnoi Armii Na Golgofo [The Year 1937: The Elite of the Red Army on Golgotha]* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); N. Cherushev, *Iz GULAGa -v Boi [From the Gulag to War]* (Moscow: Veche, 2006); S. Minakov, *Stalin i Zagovor Generalov [Stalin and the Conspiracy of the Generals]* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005); Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>168</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria, 1953*, 409, fn 47.

<sup>169</sup> Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks*, 312.

<sup>170</sup> The legendary admiral Kuznetsov was also targeted. See P.N. Bobylev et al, eds., *Priказы Narodnogo Komissara Oborony SSSR i Ministra Voorozhennykh Sil SSSR. 12 Oktiabria 1945 G. - 1949 G. [Orders of the USSR People’s Commissar for Defense and USSR Minister of Defense. October 12 1945-1949]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 249–51.

troops from arbitrariness.”<sup>171</sup> When Ivan Serov in 1947 warned Zhukov about the political police spying on them, Zhukov sneered and said “they can go to hell [*chert s nimi*].”<sup>172</sup> Zhukov told a military historian that by arresting Beria “in this way, an extremely dangerous development of events was avoided, which could have led to the establishment of a regime even more brutal than the Stalinist one.”<sup>173</sup> Therefore, Zhukov behaved in the way he did not only because of a personal antagonism against Beria, but to eliminate the power of the political police as a whole. According to Sudoplatov, “Zhukov, understandably, was ill-disposed to all security operations and the entire staff of the Ministry of Security [sic]. For him it made no difference who was in charge of his surveillance, Beria, Abakumov, or Kobulov; they were all voyeurs into his private life.”<sup>174</sup> When Zhukov was asked which event in his life was the most important, he answered without doubt: “the arrest of Beria!”<sup>175</sup>

Second, one of the reasons the conspirators moved against Beria were signs he intended to expand his influence over the military. This was a sensitive matter even during the war. Beria and his vice ministers focused on different areas, but Beria included military counter-intelligence as one of his direct bailiwicks.<sup>176</sup> The top leadership was clearly concerned over signs that Beria was trying to gain better control over the military. Bulganin told the CC plenum that on the eve of his arrest it became clear that Beria was collecting “material of a military nature.” This material was collected allegedly for “special

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<sup>171</sup> Nikolai Andreevich Svetlishin, *Krutye stupeni sud'by: zhizn' i ratnye podvigi marshala G.K. Zhukova [Steep Steps of Fate: The Life and Military Exploits of Marshal G.K. Zhukov]* (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1992), 225–26.

<sup>172</sup> Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 373.

<sup>173</sup> Anfilov, “Razgovor Okonchilsia Ugrozoi Stalina [The Conversation Ended With Stalin’s Threat],” 45.

<sup>174</sup> Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks*, 314.

<sup>175</sup> Burlatskii, *Nikita Khrushchev i ego sovetniki-krasnye, chernye, belye [Nikita Khrushchev and His Advisors: Red, Black, and White]*, 20.

<sup>176</sup> Aleksandr Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Lubianka: organy VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917-1991: spravochnik [Lubyanka: Organs of the VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917-1991. Directory]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2003), 112.

reasons related to jet engines,” but Bulganin asked rhetorically why it was collected without the knowledge of either the CC or the Minister of Defense (him).<sup>177</sup>

The leadership was apparently concerned about Beria’s control over the nuclear program. Beria was in charge of this program during the Stalin era, and on March 16, 1953, he was named chairman of the Special Committee on the atomic industry, Berkut and Kometa systems, and long-range rockets.<sup>178</sup> One former nuclear specialist, Makhnev, claimed that Beria had in fact taken a whole series of other decisions as well without the knowledge of the CC or government (including the KB-11, production of heavy water, and tests of the R-5 rocket).<sup>179</sup> At the July plenum, Malenkov accused Beria at the plenum of single-handedly ordering preparation for the first test explosion of a hydrogen bomb.<sup>180</sup> Whether Beria had the right to make such decisions is unclear. According to the document that made Beria head of the Special Committee, the committee had the right to “make operational decisions,” although it also noted that “in cases requiring the approval of the government” the committee would submit proposals to the Council of Ministers. Bulganin was a member of this committee, indicating that he at least should have been aware of the Committee’s activities.<sup>181</sup>

After Beria’s arrest, Makhnev argued that “it is necessary to more closely include military men (leaders of the Ministry of Defense, commanders of the services) in atomic affairs... Beria in every way tried to prevent proximity to this weapon, and we were powerless to do anything (AB was in the hands of the former First Department and under the protection of the MVD, not in the hands of the military

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<sup>177</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 111–12.

<sup>178</sup> V. I. Ivkin and G. A. Sukhina, eds., *Zadacha osoboi gosudarstvennoi vazhnosti: iz istorii sozdaniia raketno-iadernogo oruzhii i raketnykh voisk strategicheskogo naznacheniiia (1945-1959 gg.)*. *Sbornik dokumentov. [Task of Special State Importance: From the History of the Creation of the Rocket-Nuclear Weapon and Strategic Rocket Forces (1945-1959). Collection of Documents.]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), 321.

<sup>179</sup> Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 53.

<sup>180</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 224, 420 fn148.

<sup>181</sup> Ivkin and Sukhina, *Zadacha osoboi gosudarstvennoi vazhnosti*, 321.

ministry).<sup>182</sup> According to Holloway, “There had been some anxiety that Beria might use the atomic bomb- or threaten its use- in a *coup d’etat*.”<sup>183</sup>

Most threatening were signs that Beria was not satisfied with Bulganin as Minister of Defense. Bulganin told the CC that after disagreeing with Beria over the question of Germany,<sup>184</sup> Beria threatened that if such disagreements continued it would be necessary to remove certain individuals who were both ministers and members of the Presidium (conditions that applied only to Molotov, Bulganin, and Beria).<sup>185</sup> Mikoian in his memoirs wrote that when Khrushchev told him that Beria had threatened to remove Bulganin from his position as minister of defense, “this, of course, left an extremely negative impression on me.” When Khrushchev visited Mikoian on the morning of the move against Beria in an attempt to enlist him, “as evidence [Khrushchev] raised the fact of the intolerable conversation with Bulganin after the dispute over Germany. Here Beria threatened a member of the Presidium of the CC, apparently counting on his influence. This truly was an extremely serious fact.”<sup>186</sup> In other words, for Mikoian, a key swing voter, Beria’s attitude towards the minister of defense was hugely important. In a letter from jail, Beria admitted to “unacceptable rudeness and insolence” towards Khrushchev and Bulganin during the discussion of Germany.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 59.

<sup>183</sup> David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy 1939-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 321. Holloway was told by someone in a position to know that key scientists speculated after the arrest “about the possibility that [Beria] might have thought about doing something like exploiting his position as head of the atomic project to seize overall power.” Personal communication with author, October 2012.

<sup>184</sup> This seems to have been one of the few real policy disputes, but the extent of disagreement remains unclear. Beria in one of his post-arrest letters hints that there was a consensus on all other major foreign policy issues. Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 75. In one of his post-arrest interrogations, Beria claimed that “my position on the German issue was the same as the CC Presidium... My suggestions were not to abandon the course of constructing socialism in the GDR, but in the extremely careful approach to this construction.” Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 85–86.

<sup>185</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 111–12.

<sup>186</sup> Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvshem [How It Was: Reflections on the Past]*, 631.

<sup>187</sup> Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beriia, 1953*, 13.

Beria's relationship with the head of the general staff, S.M. Shtemenko, was particularly suspect. Shtemenko and Beria had worked together on two separate occasions in the Caucasus during World War II. When Shtemenko was head of the general staff for the first time between 1948 and 1952, Beria would call and ask about the situation in the military. Bulganin believed that Shtemenko was feeding Beria compromising information on military officers, who then gave that information to Stalin. After Shtemenko returned to the general staff in 1953 after a brief assignment in Germany, Bulganin still believed Shtemenko was feeding Beria information. After Beria was arrested, Shtemenko was also removed from power. Judging from a letter written by Shtemenko to Khrushchev complaining about his removal, the main charge against him was providing information to Beria about the military.<sup>188</sup>

#### *The Military's Role in the Arrest of Beria*

Hypothesis 3a would suggest that the military would not have played a politicized role in the enforcement of a political decision on Beria's removal. However, the evidence clearly shows that the military's assistance in the arrest of Beria was, from a legal point of view, entirely inappropriate, and, moreover, that the armed forces were entirely necessary for Beria's defeat. The plotters explicitly decided that it would be impossible to use purely "party methods" to defeat Beria. According to his memoirs, when Khrushchev proposed to Molotov that Beria simply be relieved of his positions, Molotov disagreed: "Beria is very dangerous, and I think we need to take more extreme measures." Khrushchev then suggested that Beria be detained for investigation.<sup>189</sup> Because of his control over the political police, simply voting to remove him was not an option. Khrushchev writes that "[a]s soon as we brought up this question, Beria could order his guards to arrest us."<sup>190</sup> Khrushchev and the other plotters therefore

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<sup>188</sup> Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 116–21.

<sup>189</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 191–94.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

requested that military officers hide in the waiting room of Malenkov's office and wait for a signal to come and arrest Beria.<sup>191</sup>

Zhukov told one of Khrushchev's advisors that when he arrested Beria, "It seemed to me that not all members of the Presidium knew about the arrest and that they suspected that I was executing a military coup."<sup>192</sup> Moskalkenko wrote that "other than members of the Presidium Bulganin, Malenkov, Molotov, and Khrushchev, apparently, no one knew or expected the arrest of Beria."<sup>193</sup> According to another military officer involved in the operation, "when we entered, several members of the Presidium jumped from their seats, apparently they did not know the details of the arrest. Zhukov immediately calmed them down: 'Relax, comrades! Sit down.'" Then, Malenkov proposed the question of Beria be discussed once again [*eshche raz rassmotret' vopros o Beriia*].<sup>194</sup>

After his arrest, Beria was hidden in the lounge of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers with Moskalkenko and four other high-ranking military officers. Beria clearly tried to give a signal to the guards. Around midnight, thirty armed military officers came to the Kremlin to replace the Kremlin guards surrounding the building where Beria was held. Beria was then put in the middle seat of a military vehicle and brought to a Moscow garrison. Later he was brought to a bunker deep underground in the staff office of the Moscow Military Region.<sup>195</sup> Military historian Sukhimlinov argues this was because it would have been easy for general Maslennikov, commander of the internal troops loyal to Beria, to seize the installation, and the military commandant of Moscow, who had served in the NKVD and was a

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<sup>191</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 281–89. Sergo claimed that his father was actually killed on June 26 at his home and that his letters and records of interrogation were forged. This argument is impossible to accept, as it would require a complete rejection of all other primary sources and memoirs. According to Sergo, shots were fired at his father's house, and a bodyguard told him that a body was carried out covered in tarp. Therefore not even Sergo provided persuasive information that his father was killed. *Beriia, Moi Otets Narkom Beriia [My Father Commissar Beria]*, 260, 444.

<sup>192</sup> Burlatskii, *Nikita Khrushchev i ego sovetniki-krasnye, chernye, belye [Nikita Khrushchev and His Advisors: Red, Black, and White]*, 20.

<sup>193</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 286.

<sup>194</sup> S. Bystrov, "Zadanie Osobogo Svoistva [Mission of a Special Nature]," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, March 19, 1988.

<sup>195</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 287–88.



protégé of Beria, was unreliable.<sup>196</sup> A lieutenant-colonel later recalled visiting the base in October and seeing it defended like a fortress.<sup>197</sup>

The military took many other steps to insure a guaranteed outcome. The commander of the Moscow Military District, P.A. Artem'ev, a former NKVD commander, was a supporter of Beria. Khrushchev suggested that a reason be found to remove him without raising suspicion. Khrushchev organized a major military exercise in Kalinin that required Artem'ev's presence and nominated Moskalenko as temporary commander of the District.<sup>198</sup> According to Soviet historian Roy Medvedev, Moskalenko stationed the Kantemir and Taman tank divisions in the capital, naval frontier guards took control of the Kremlin, bodyguards of the top leadership were replaced, and MVD buildings were surrounded.<sup>199</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Skorokhodov, commander of an anti-aircraft artillery regiment, was ordered to mobilize two vehicles with 60 submachine gunners and put his gun batteries on military alert. On the way to his assigned position, Skorokhodov saw a T-34 tank and a column of vehicles and wondered whether a war was starting. Their journey was interrupted by a MVD officer who told them to return to their barracks. When Skorokhodov refused, he was warned that he would be held responsible. When they reached their position they prepared their anti-aircraft weapons and waited to see a fleet of warplanes, ultimately waiting on full alert on the gates of Moscow for three days.<sup>200</sup> Lubyanka, the political police headquarters, was surrounded by tanks with their engines running and cannons uncovered, leading one observer to wonder whether the army was in open revolt against the party.<sup>201</sup>

The first vice head of the Third General Department in the MVD, a protégé of Beria, called the man in charge of military counter-intelligence in the general staff and ministry of defense apparatus, Leonid

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<sup>196</sup> Andrei Sukhomlinov, *Kto Vy, Lavrentii Beria? [Who Are You, Lavrentii Beria?]* (Moscow: Detektiv-press, 2004), 31.

<sup>197</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Berii*, 292.

<sup>198</sup> Svetlishin, *Krutye stupeni sud'by*, 235–36.

<sup>199</sup> Roy Medvedev, *Khrushchev: A Biography* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1984), 62–63.

<sup>200</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Berii*, 289–92.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

Ivanov, to ask why troops had appeared on the streets. When Ivanov called the first vice commander of the general staff to ask what was going on, he was told “I suggest that you do not ask anyone else about this issue. Understood?” Ivanov realized that this was a warning to stay inactive so as to avoid any “unpleasantries” in the future.<sup>202</sup>

According to Sukhomlinov, the Kantemir division sent one tank regiment to occupy Lenin Hills, another covered the Gorkovskoe highway, and a third separated into battalions to occupy stations, post offices, and telegraphs, as well as Gorki Street and the Kremlin. All orders came from Zhukov and Moskalenko. Troops from the Tamansk division surrounded the Kremlin. Former commander of the 56 aviation bombardment division, Hero of the Soviet Union S.F. Dolgushin (only a colonel at the time), recalled that he was told by the commander of the Moscow Military District Air Force, general-colonel S. Krasovskii: “Beria is arrested. You must be prepared to bomb the Kremlin!” The 5<sup>th</sup> guard assault division (Il-10s) and the 9<sup>th</sup> fighter division (MiG-15s) were also mobilized. Veterans claim that fighters were on alert around the clock and armed to strike ground targets.<sup>203</sup>

At the June 1957 CC plenum, Malenkov described the military’s role:

It was not that simple or easy to unmask Beria. At the time we relied on military comrades in this matter at the most necessary moment. Comrade Moskalenko provided us a decisive service in this matter. We approached him at the difficult moment with Comrade Khrushchev, we were without power or means in this regard.<sup>204</sup>

In a written request to the Central Committee in 1985 by three of the officers who participated in the operation to be awarded Hero of the Soviet Union, they described it as a “highly conspiratorial operation associated with desperate and violent risk” that “in all of its complicated stages - the arrest of Beria and his accomplices, the neutralization of the guards, the blockade of the special forces under Beria’s command - was conducted without spilling blood or any losses.”<sup>205</sup> The conspirators had apparently forgotten what

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<sup>202</sup> Leonid Ivanov, *Pravda O “Smersh” [The Truth about Smersh]* (Moscow: Iauza, Eksmo, 2009), 219.

<sup>203</sup> Sukhomlinov, *Kto Vy, Lavrentii Beria? [Who Are You, Lavrentii Beria?]*, 22–23.

<sup>204</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 49.

<sup>205</sup> “Net Neobkhodimosti Govorit’ O Nashikh Boevykh Zaslugakh [There Is No Need to Speak of Our Military Achievements],” *Rodina*, no. 10 (1992): 64.

Bulganin allegedly told them: “All that you know, all that you saw, forget. Do not speak of this conspiracy anywhere at any time.”<sup>206</sup>

Beyond the purely operational sense, relying on revered military figures was useful for the legitimacy they conveyed. Although Khrushchev did not at first include Zhukov as one of the military officers who would arrest Beria, Moskalenko wrote that he and Bulganin decided to include Zhukov.<sup>207</sup> By including a man like Zhukov, the action would automatically seem more legitimate: after all, Zhukov was seen by many as the man who had saved the Soviet Union. One of the officers who participated in the operation said they felt much more comfortable when Zhukov appeared.<sup>208</sup>

The military did not just play a decisive role: it was also illegal. We have strong evidence that the military high command was reluctant to execute this mission. Malenkov would later tell Moskalenko that they had earlier asked a marshal to execute the mission, but he refused. When Bulganin told Moskalenko that they would need more officers to arrest Beria, the latter suggested Vasilevskii, but his candidacy was rejected.<sup>209</sup>

In his memoirs, Moskalenko was clearly concerned about justifying the legitimacy of his behavior, suggesting that he was aware of how problematic it was for a military officer to arrest a sitting member of the Presidium in the middle of a session. Moskalenko emphasized a lack of personal antagonism by claiming to not know Beria personally and justifying his decision to accept the order to arrest Beria as “an assignment of our party, our CC, its Presidium.”<sup>210</sup> Both Moskalenko and Zhukov wrote that they had met with members of the Presidium before Beria’s actual arrest and had been told that Beria wanted to seize power and had spied on other members of the Presidium.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> S. Bystrov, “Zadanie Osobogo Svoistva [Mission of a Special Nature],” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, March 18, 1988.

<sup>207</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 284.

<sup>208</sup> Bystrov, “Zadanie Osobogo Svoistva [Mission of a Special Nature],” March 18, 1988.

<sup>209</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 284.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 284–85.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 281, 285. Zhukov listed “Malenkov, Molotov, Mikoian, and other members of the Presidium,” while Moskalenko only identified Khrushchev, Bulganin, Malenkov, and Molotov.

The military plotters clearly had ambivalent feelings about what they did. Moskalkenko claimed that he refused to be awarded Hero of the Soviet Union for his role in Beria's arrest.<sup>212</sup> According to the late Soviet historian Volkogonov, the participating officers refused the award so as "not to shame them with an award for such work."<sup>213</sup>

Most interesting is Moskalkenko's refusal to allow Serov and Kruglov, two chekists, to meet Beria alone after his arrest. Moskalkenko went to the Bolshoi Theater and said to the Presidium: "I am a soldier and a communist. You told me that Beria is an enemy of the party and the people. Therefore, we, including myself, treat him like an enemy. But we will not allow anything bad to happen to him... I had a clean conscience before the party, before the people and its Armed Forces during Stalin's life and after."<sup>214</sup> The phraseology hints that Moskalkenko doth protest too much, and his reaction to Serov and Kruglov speaks to the strong possibility Moskalkenko was concerned about the propriety of the proceedings against Beria, especially when they seemed to be taking an even more sinister turn.

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

Beria's fall was hardly a case of robust institutionalization in force. But institutions were not entirely absent. First, the plotters went to great pains to persuade the CC that they had behaved appropriately. As mentioned above, Khrushchev argued that Beria had to be arrested because any other way of acting would have been too dangerous. Second, the political police did not rally to save their leader, although the reluctance to fight a civil war with the armed forces, which had already seized Beria, was probably more important. Third, the initiative was not in Zhukov's hands: the military was invited to

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>213</sup> However, in 1985 three participants of the operation wrote to the Central Committee asking that they receive the award Hero of the Soviet Union for their actions. They were refused, the reason given being that they had already been awarded in January 1954 with the order of the Red Flag. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy of an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 194; "Net Neobkhodimosti Govorit' O Nashikh Boevykh Zaslugakh [There Is No Need to Speak of Our Military Achievements]," 64.

<sup>214</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko and Nekrasov, *Beriia*, 287–88.

participate in politics. Although Beria's arrest was clearly illegal, the positions of figures like Khrushchev, Malenkov, and Molotov provided crucial political cover.

### **The Implications of the Fall of Beria**

The fall of Beria was followed by a series of powerful steps intended to emasculate the political police as an independent political force. Eavesdropping on marshals Budennyi, Zhukov, and Timoshenko immediately ended.<sup>215</sup> On June 2, the MVD was ordered to cut 8,704 personnel. A military officer, General-Lieutenant S.N. Perevertkin, was made one of the MVD's vice ministers, and a commissar was appointed as head of military counter-intelligence.<sup>216</sup> The political police had been under such intense criticism that at a meeting of the Presidium on February 8, 1954, Kaganovich remarked that after the July plenum (when Beria was purged) the MVD was "behaving passively" and suggested writing a "motivating document." At that same meeting, the leadership established a Committee of State Security [KGB], as opposed to a Ministry of State Security. As Kaganovich put it, a "Committee" was a department of the party and thus entailed even greater control. He emphasized that the chekists must report to party organs. Malenkov agreed: "the matter must be dealt with in this way so there is no longer any more abuse... [matters] must be brought into the hand of the party." No longer would "eyes be watching friends and not enemies."<sup>217</sup> Soon after, the party committees at the republic level were given the right to confirm the nominations to the KGB in their region.<sup>218</sup> By February 1956, approximately 16,000 officers had been purged for lacking "political trust."<sup>219</sup> Almost immediately after Beria's arrest,

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<sup>215</sup> Fond 89, opis 18, delo 27, (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>216</sup> Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, 115.

<sup>217</sup> A. A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 19-24.

<sup>218</sup> O.V. Khlevniuk et al, eds., *Regional'naia politika N.S. Khrushcheva: TsK KPSS i mestnye partiinye komitety, 1953-1964 gg. [The Regional Policy of N.K. Khrushchev: The CC CPSU and Regional Party Committees, 1953-1964]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 5.

<sup>219</sup> Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, 152.

on July 13, 54 condemned generals were released.<sup>220</sup> The man who would take control of the newly formed KGB in 1954, Ivan Serov, had a long personal relationship with Khrushchev, with whom he had served in Ukraine.<sup>221</sup> After the war, Serov even helped the future head of the party steal animals for the Kiev zoo.

Beria's role in the Katyn massacres and his sexual exploits with underage women alone make him a difficult individual to like.<sup>222</sup> Yet the question of the historical implications of his removal remain. As Pikhovia concluded, "[h]e was, without a doubt, the most informed person in the leadership of the time, and his information was diverse, precise, and independent from other offices."<sup>223</sup> As one major Russian historian of the political police noted: "Desire for power...was mentioned by many memoirists. But [Beria's] 'lack of ideological content [*bezydeinost*']' was pretty much what perhaps everyone who dealt with him agreed upon."<sup>224</sup>

Thinking about the possible extent of Beria's reformist inclinations is even more tantalizing given how differently he would have ruled than Khrushchev had he emerged triumphant. As will be shown in the next chapter, Khrushchev often pushed through poorly planned reforms. Yet Beria was a superb organizer, as shown in his work on the nuclear bomb.<sup>225</sup> He sought support through popular reforms. But most importantly, he could have potentially used the political police as a power structure parallel to the party.

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<sup>220</sup> A. Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia: Kak Eto Bylo. Mart 1953-Fevral' 1956 Gg. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS I Drugie Materialy [Rehabilitation: How It Was. March 1953 to February 1956. Documents of the Presidium of the CC CPSU and Other Materials]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2000), 58–59.

<sup>221</sup> After the war Serov even helped Khrushchev steal animals from the Berlin zoo to be sent back to Kiev. Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 329.

<sup>222</sup> Question: Do you admit your criminal-moral dissolution? Answer: There is a little. I am guilty of this. Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 36.

<sup>223</sup> Pikhovia, *Sovetskii Soiuz*, 108.

<sup>224</sup> Petrov, *Palachi: Oni Vypolniali Zakazy Stalina [Butchers: They Executed the Orders of Stalin]*, 14.

<sup>225</sup> Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy 1939-1956*.

This chapter provides clues about why such a method of rule proved to be unsustainable. Most importantly, the evidence shows that Beria's greatest strength was also his greatest weakness: it was precisely his leadership of the political police that terrified his comrades and led them to oppose his rule. Without the ability to rely on party rules to defend themselves, Beria's control over *kompromat* and his own armed forces proved too dangerous for his colleagues to tolerate in a game in which the loser could lose their life. Yet to overcome Beria's authority, the plotters resorted to the illegal use of force and the manipulation and violation of the party's own rules. Although the political police had been weakened as a political force, at the apex of Soviet power the problem of institutionalization had yet to be solved. Having failed to use the opportunity to achieve this institutionalization, the KGB was given the opportunity once more to play a decisive role in elite politics in 1964 when Khrushchev himself was removed from the leadership.

Whether the Soviet Union could have more successfully managed the Stalinist legacy with an effective leader allied with a new cohort of non-Russian leaders in the regions, reformers, and the chekists will remain a mystery. What remains clear, however, is why that historical path was closed: having suffered the Stalinist repressions, the party elite had reason to oppose a politically powerful political police. The support of the armed forces, who had seen their ranks decimated by the political police over the decades, gave them the opportunity to achieve their objective. The next chapter will explore why another potential source of authority, the old revolutionaries, also failed to assert their dominance over the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

## Chapter 3: The Anti-Party Group

### Introduction: The Passing of a Generation

In December 2012, Chinese leader Xi Jinping gave a speech in which he asked his audience a question: “Why did the Soviet Union disintegrate? Why did the Soviet Communist Party collapse?” One of several answers he gave was the following: “To dismiss the history of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party, to dismiss Lenin and Stalin, and to dismiss everything else is to engage in historic nihilism, and it confuses our thoughts and undermines the Party’s organizations on all levels.”<sup>1</sup> Judging from these comments, we can assume that Xi believes Nikita Khrushchev’s famous Secret Speech to the 20th Party Congress in 1956 denouncing Stalin was a major milestone on the path to the fall of the Union.

Certainly, Khrushchev’s Secret Speech was a shock to the system. But is Xi drawing the most important conclusions from this time period? When considered in the broad context of the party elite’s position on Stalin since 1953, Khrushchev’s speech was a hiccup. In 1969, *Pravda* “balanced” Stalin’s contributions and mistakes, and in 1970 a marble bust of Stalin was placed behind the Lenin Mausoleum.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps an even more important lesson from this historical moment is what it teaches us about another aspect of elite politics of key interest to Xi. In August 2015, the party mouthpiece *People’s Daily* complained that some old leaders would like to “keep the tea hot”: in other words, continue to interfere in politics.<sup>3</sup> As historian of Chinese elite politics Warren Sun pointed out, this could be “the beginning of a virtually impossible effort to achieve a ‘new norm’ that formally ends ‘old-man politics.’”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Leaked Speech Shows Xi Jinping’s Opposition to Reform,” *China Digital Times (CDT)*, January 27, 2013, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2013/01/leaked-speech-shows-xi-jinpings-opposition-to-reform/>. Other reasons given include losing control over the military and “nobody was man enough to stand up and resist.”

<sup>2</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin* (Exeter, NH: PublishingWorks, 2010), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Bo Zhiyue, “Is Xi Sending an Ultimatum to Former President Jiang Zemin?,” *The Diplomat*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/is-xi-sending-an-ultimatum-to-former-president-jiang-zemin/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Stop Meddling in Politics: Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Coded Message to Jiang Zemin,” *South China Morning Post*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1848790/hard-lines-chinese-president-xi-jinpings-coded-message>.



This chapter reveals that the time period of 1955 to 1957 is most interesting not because of a struggle over “de-Stalinization” but for its lessons about how Khrushchev overcame the power of the old men of the party.<sup>5</sup> That victory is especially stunning given the persistence of the old revolutionaries in China after Mao’s death, as will be discussed in the next chapter. But the answer to how that outcome was achieved might be troubling for Xi. Khrushchev’s victory was Pyrrhic: he failed to establish a new model of authority relations that would secure his position and drastically increased the power of the party apparatus, thus taking the USSR a major step forward towards stagnation. Khrushchev’s own removal and the birth of stagnation will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

The empirical topic of this chapter is the so-called “anti-party group” incident. In June 1957, a majority of the Presidium (Politburo) tried to remove Nikita Khrushchev from his position as first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). His opponents were formidable, including two of Stalin’s most famous former right hand men (Viacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich), the former premier and initial successor to Stalin (Georgi Malenkov), the reigning premier (Nikolai Bulganin), and the head of state (Kliment Voroshilov). As Mikoian put it in his memoirs, Khrushchev “hung by a thread.”<sup>6</sup>

How was Khrushchev able to emerge triumphant? This chapter is further evidence for the arguments delineated at the beginning of this dissertation. If the economic model is more useful, Khrushchev would have won because he promised more popular policies or provided more material benefits, did all of his politicking in a single defined group of elites, and did not rely on the power ministries to play a special role. If the authority model explains more, we would see the greater importance of prestige and sociological ties, the manipulation of ambiguous party rules, and the military and political police enjoying some leeway to decide which orders to obey.

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<sup>5</sup> For a superb historical treatment of this event, see William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 1 ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), 303–24.

<sup>6</sup> Anastas Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvshem [How It Was: Reflections on the Past]* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2014), 644.

I provide the following evidence with regards to the first set of two hypotheses. First, Khrushchev did not co-opt threats, as the economic model would predict, but instead actively antagonized his colleagues on the Presidium and violated the principles of collective leadership. This was primarily a fight about whether other members of the Presidium would have any right to express their own opinions as opposed to any real fundamental fights about policy. Second, the real strength of the “anti-party group” was clearly related to the status of some of those members as old revolutionaries. Third, policy differences explain very little. On the issues of foreign policy, industrial reform, and Stalin, the Presidium was in fact shaped more by consensus than difference, and to the extent that the leaders had different inclinations Khrushchev was not necessarily the more popular individual. Finally, a key reason for their defeat was the deployment of *kompromat* and the use of Marshal Georgii Zhukov’s authority as a legendary military leader.

With regards to the second set of two hypotheses, Khrushchev won not by politicking within a single defined group but by manipulating multiple decision-making bodies. He and Zhukov stalled for time while the CC rallied and ultimately overturned the will of the majority of the Presidium, an event with absolutely no historical precedence. Although both Khrushchev and his opponents operated within an ambiguous system of formal and informal rules, and they all violated the spirit of those strictures to a greater or lesser extent, Khrushchev more obviously went beyond previous established practice to achieve his victory.

Finally, I demonstrate that Zhukov’s role was not only important because of his popularity as a military leader but in an operational sense as well. Zhukov’s refusal to support the “anti-party group” frightened Khrushchev’s opponents, who were clearly afraid that the military would arrest them. He also used military planes to fly in Central Committee (CC) members to support Khrushchev. Moreover, Khrushchev’s disconcertingly close control over the KGB was a major reason for the move against him.

### **Brief Chronology**

After the defeat of Beria, Khrushchev moved to weaken the political power of those colleagues of his in the Presidium who enjoyed greater prestige than he did despite their attempts to achieve a more collective form of leadership. Khrushchev's deteriorating relations with other members of the Presidium had more to do with his increasingly dictatorial style than policy differences. Those differences were minimal, and to the extent they were present Khrushchev was not necessarily the more popular figure. A majority of the members of the Presidium confronted Khrushchev in June 1957. With the help of defense secretary Georgii Zhukov, Khrushchev held out for four days of discussions in that body until a full CC plenum was called. The plenum was presented with devastating *kompromat* that demonstrated the role of the old men of the party in the worst abuses of the Stalinist era. Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov were expelled from the Presidium immediately and later from the party entirely, while other members of the "anti-party group" were expelled more gradually to hide the full extent of opposition to Khrushchev.

### **Section 1: Policy Differences vs. Sociological Forms of Authority**

In this first of three sections, I show the greater explanatory power of the authority model by providing evidence that vitiates the importance of real policy differences and reveals the significance of more sociological factors. First, Khrushchev did not defeat threats by co-opting them but instead provoked his colleagues. Second, the greatest strength of Khrushchev's opponents lay in their history as revolutionary leaders and old men of the party. Third, policy differences on foreign policy, industrial reform, and Stalin were muted, and to the extent some leaders did lean in certain directions, Khrushchev was usually the less popular. His opponents included individuals who had been in complete agreement on essentially every single issue. Fourth, their defeat was secured in large part by the use of *kompromat* and relying on Marshal Georgii Zhukov's status as a legendary hero.

#### *Khrushchev's Dictatorial Tendencies*

Hypothesis 1a would predict that a leader would remain in power by co-opting challengers and adopting their policy preferences. Political contests would be primarily about policy. However, in this

first section, I show that the prime reason for the crisis was Khrushchev's increasingly dictatorial tendencies, not real policy differences.

For a brief time after the defeat of Beria, Stalin's successors did attempt to achieve a truly consensual model of leadership. In 1954, a Soviet delegation to China was asked to identify their top leader. Their answer was "collective leadership." The Soviet ambassador told the Chinese he simply did not know who the leader was. The leadership was so "collective" at the time that the Chinese at first thought, bizarrely, that Bulganin might be the top man because of his physical stature, mannerisms, and the fact he often spoke first at public meetings.<sup>7</sup>

Khrushchev sparked the leadership crisis by attacking other members of the leadership and violating the principles of collective leadership. Significantly, Khrushchev's first target on the road to paramount status was an individual who in fact took the opposite approach, Georgii Malenkov, a man with a clearly more consensual leadership style. After the defeat of Lavrenti Beria (as described in the last chapter), Malenkov was still the most powerful figure in the country. As premier, he was formidable: the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers was seen as the most important position in the country, as Lenin and Stalin had both held this title.<sup>8</sup> At the plenum following the defeat of Beria, a statement describing Malenkov as Stalin's successor was met by applause. Malenkov clearly figured higher in the hierarchy than Khrushchev after Stalin's death.

Most strikingly, Malenkov was defeated even though he tried to achieve victory by doing what the economic model would have predicted: by acting as a conciliatory figure. Former CC secretary and foreign minister Dmitri Shepilov wrote that "As chairman of the CC Presidium and the Council of Ministers, Malenkov did his best to run things in a fully democratic fashion... In his own demeanor there was not a trace of pretentiousness. He did not try to stand out; his whole manner seemed to say, 'I have no

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<sup>7</sup> Yan Mingfu, *Yan Mingfu Huiyilu. Shang. [Memoirs of Yan Mingfu. Volume 1]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2015), 366.

<sup>8</sup> Feliks Chuev and Lazar Kaganovich, *Tak Govoril Kaganovich [Thus Spoke Kaganovich]* (Moscow: Otechestvo, 1992), 85.

edge over the rest of you. Let us reason together.”<sup>9</sup> Mikoian recalled Malenkov telling him: “Act freely in the development of trade, I will always support you.”<sup>10</sup> V.M. Sukhodrev, a low-ranking translator at the time, was stunned when during a reception at the British embassy Malenkov made a toast to his health.<sup>11</sup> Khrushchev’s son wrote that his father disliked how easily Malenkov agreed with people and obeyed their wishes.<sup>12</sup> After Stalin’s funeral, Malenkov complained to two CC secretaries in charge of ideological issues that *Pravda* had published his speech more prominently than those by Beria and Molotov. He also complained about a forged picture that placed him sitting between Stalin and Mao, which he described as a “provocation.” Malenkov explained: “we believe it is necessary to end the politics of the cult of personality!”<sup>13</sup> When Malenkov was described as the successor at the plenum after Beria’s defeat, he stated that they were all successors to Stalin, not him alone.<sup>14</sup> Despite these qualities, in January 1955, Malenkov was stripped of his position as premier.

Khrushchev’s next target was Molotov, a somewhat surprising choice because of the evidence Molotov originally sought a working relationship with Khrushchev. Molotov was one of two Presidium members (along with Voroshilov) who had wanted Khrushchev, not Bulganin, to replace Malenkov as chairman of the Council of Ministers.<sup>15</sup> In other words, he wanted Khrushchev to assume the positions of

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<sup>9</sup> D. T Shepilov, *The Kremlin’s Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, ed. Stephen V Bittner, trans. Anthony Austin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 254.

<sup>10</sup> Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvshem* [How It Was: Reflections on the Past], 633.

<sup>11</sup> V.M. Sukhodrev, *Iazyk Moi- Drug Moi. Ot Khrushcheva Do Gorbacheva* [My Language- My Friend. From Khrushchev to Gorbachev] (Moscow: Izdatel’skii dom TONCHU, 2008), 38.

<sup>12</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy* [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower] (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Iu. V. Aksiutin and A.V. Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe Obshchestvo: Problema Liderstva I Transformatsiia Vlasti* [Post-Stalinist Society: The Problem of Leadership and the Transformation of Power] (Moscow: Nauchnaia Kniga, 1999), 24–25.

<sup>14</sup> Many aspects of Malenkov’s removal remain mysterious. Sukhanov, Malenkov’s assistant, wrote that the decision to remove Malenkov was made in secret in September 1954 by Khrushchev and other high ranking leaders while vacationing in Crimea: a process that Sukhanov characterized as a coup, as party rules on factionalism were not being obeyed. D.N. Sukhanov, “Iz Vospominanii Sukhanova D.N. Byvshego Pomoshchnika Malenkova G.M. [From the Recollections of D.N. Sukhanov, Former Assistant to G.M. Malenkov]” (Library of Congress. Volkogonov Papers. Reel 8., n.d.), 27.

<sup>15</sup> A. A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy.* [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 35–36.

both first secretary and prime minister - a clear sign that he felt that a cooperative relationship was possible.<sup>16</sup>

However, Khrushchev felt threatened by Molotov's obvious authority: Kaganovich claims that as early as 1954 Khrushchev told him that "Molotov does not recognize me, therefore I have difficult relations with him."<sup>17</sup> Kaganovich later wrote that Khrushchev behaved within the norms of collective leadership until mid-1955, after which he began to emphasize his own role.<sup>18</sup> Khrushchev engineered a plenum in the middle of 1955 that criticized Molotov to weaken him politically. By the end of the year, Khrushchev had also humiliated Kaganovich by secretly developing a railways plan that he knew Kaganovich would oppose, even though transportation was Kaganovich's bailiwick.<sup>19</sup> Even a key Khrushchev ally, Ivan Serov, wrote in his memoirs about 1955: "However, at the meetings of the Presidium sometimes there were hot words particularly between Khrushchev and Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich about a series of issues of an even non-principled nature. Khrushchev wants to solve one question or another faster and in his own way, and the others say: 'Don't hurry, let's discuss, weigh [the issue] and then make a decision.' Some leading comrades, members of the Politburo [Presidium], more often appeared at factories to speak publicly. This is good. But for some reason this displeased some people, especially Khrushchev."<sup>20</sup> A decision was made that leaders had to get permission from the Presidium before giving speeches. Serov continued:

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Voroshilov only supported Khrushchev because he thought Bulganin was an inappropriate choice because of his military background.

<sup>16</sup> Historian Oleg Khlevniuk interprets Molotov's proposal differently. Khlevniuk believes that Molotov assumed that if Khrushchev took the position of premier, he would no longer be first secretary of the party. This would have weakened Khrushchev (Personal communication with author, March 27, 2016). Given Khrushchev's familiarity and personal connections in the party apparatus, a move to the premiership could have weakened him. Although we cannot disregard Khlevniuk's hypothesis, we do not have decisive evidence that Molotov did indeed believe this, and moreover, up to that point the premiership was considered a more prominent position than party secretary.

<sup>17</sup> Lazar Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego... [Memos by a Worker...]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1996), 507.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 508.

<sup>19</sup> N.K. Baibakov, *Sorok Let v Pravitel'stve [Forty Years in the Government]* (Moscow: Respublika, 1993), 68–70.

<sup>20</sup> Ivan Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniki Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2016), 435.

I don't know about other people, but I do not like the relationships among the members of the Politburo [Presidium], especially Khrushchev's quarrelsome tone. With regards to all major issues discussed in the Politburo [Presidium], he expressed his own opinion and wants it to be solved in that way. And with regards to a series of issues V.M. Molotov opposes this, and I think, with good reason. Khrushchev gets angry and sometimes makes offensive remarks like, "Viacheslav, you truly do not understand agriculture."... I understand that Khrushchev wants to do everything faster, so that the people live better, like he says everywhere, but unfortunately this is not always successful in life, it is necessary to wait and test things in practice.<sup>21</sup>

Molotov later admitted that by the 20th Party Congress in February 1956 he was already sidelined.<sup>22</sup> But Khrushchev continued to behave aggressively towards other members of the Presidium after the Congress. At a Presidium meeting on May 26, 1956, he accused Molotov of being "an aristocrat who is used to bossing people around and not working" and suggested he be removed from his position as minister of foreign affairs.<sup>23</sup> Two days later at another Presidium meeting, Molotov denied any wrongdoing: "I sincerely and honestly execute the decisions of the CC." Mikoian, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Shepilov, and Voroshilov argued that he should keep his post at least for a little longer. Supported by other members of the Presidium (Malenkov, Pervukhin, Zhukov, Furtseva, Aristov, Brezhnev, and Beliaev), Khrushchev carried the day.<sup>24</sup>

At the June plenum, Brezhnev admitted to the plenum that for a time after the 20th Party Congress, members of the anti-party group would shout "that's correct, terrific!" even before Khrushchev finished expressing himself. Kaganovich approached Khrushchev and said: "I want to be friends with you, Nikita Sergeevich. And Molotov always wants to be friends. We will support you, support you in everything."<sup>25</sup>

Yet Khrushchev's continued striving for dominance changed their minds. After Mukhitdinov was summoned to the Kremlin to participate in the Presidium meetings intended to defeat Khrushchev, his old

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 442–43.

<sup>22</sup> Feliks Chuev and Vyacheslav Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 350.

<sup>23</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 137.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 137–38. Strikingly, Bulganin admitted at this meeting that "recently there have been fewer disputes," suggesting that at this time Molotov had been even less outspoken at meetings than he allegedly was before.

<sup>25</sup> N. Kovaleva, ed., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957: Stenogramma liun'skogo Plenuma TsK KPSS I Drugie Dokumenty, Rossiia XX Vek* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1998), 240.

friend Pervukhin told him that it had simply become impossible to work: the government was paralyzed, as Khrushchev decided all problems independently and made inappropriate remarks while on the road.<sup>26</sup> At the CC plenum, Malenkov argued that the danger was not what person held the position of first secretary, but that it was important not to place too much power in their hands: “we have a tragic experience [of this] in the history of our party.”<sup>27</sup> One of their goals was for Presidium members to take turns chairing meetings, instead of having the first secretary do so.<sup>28</sup>

The move against Khrushchev in June 1957 was defensive. On May 17, 1957, Khrushchev told a meeting of intellectuals, which included many individuals who were not even members of the CPSU, that “to my great regret, Molotov’s points of view did not always coincide with mine, and I regret this very much. Later they may condemn me for drinking a lot, but I do not want to invoke that I drank and therefore am saying this. I am fully conscious and take full responsibility for every word said by me.” Khrushchev stated that who was correct and who was wrong would be decided by the party.<sup>29</sup> Kaganovich remarked in his memoirs that “the attack of Khrushchev on Molotov, a member of the CC Presidium, among non-party intelligentsia was quite an exceptional case and [implied] far-reaching goals.... If before this he could count on a majority in the Presidium of the CC, then after his attack on a member of the Presidium it can be said directly that a majority of members of the Presidium adopted more critical positions toward Khrushchev and his method of leadership.”<sup>30</sup> Even Khrushchev’s ally Mikoian identified the meeting with authors as a moment when unhappiness with Khrushchev developed further [*rasshirilos*’], and criticized Khrushchev publicly for this at the June 1957 plenum.<sup>31</sup> The exact date of the move against Khrushchev was timed to

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<sup>26</sup> Nuriddin Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle [Years Spent in the Kremlin]*, vol. 1 (Tashkent: Izdatel’stvo narodnogo naslediiia imeni Abdully Kadyri, 1994), 266.

<sup>27</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> N.G. Tomilina et al, eds., *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, Documents from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev]*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2009), 490.

<sup>30</sup> Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego... [Memos by a Worker...]*, 515–16.

<sup>31</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 144.



prevent a joint trip to Leningrad, where the “anti-party group” was afraid Khrushchev would once again behave as he did in front of the writers.<sup>32</sup>

The evidence therefore hints that the “anti-party group” was a desperate, last-ditch attempt to save their political careers. At the June plenum, Khrushchev essentially admitted that this was the case by revealing that he had wanted to promote younger figures, who naturally would have supported him, to the Presidium:

Earlier we exchanged opinions and thought of calling a plenum in November. When we returned from Finland [which occurred immediately before the move against Khrushchev], I said to Bulganin: it is necessary to summon a plenum, summon it earlier than November, we have a very unstable CC Presidium. Look - Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov behave incorrectly with regards to many of the most important issues, at the first stage [Voroshilov] often supported Molotov, but later he thought better of it and distanced himself. There’s four for you. Can we, comrades, hold different opinions on this or that question with two more people [on the Presidium]? That’s always natural. That means there is no stability, it is necessary to bring in new power [*novye sily*]. I said all of this to Bulganin, and he sneaked off to them. Bulganin said: we will not allow the Presidium to be diluted. What does this mean? They did not want to ‘allow’ the introduction of new power so that this group could dominate.<sup>33</sup>

The evidence presented in this section shows the importance of Khrushchev’s striving for dominance as a cause of the move against him. As Serov put it after the incident, “Generally speaking, for those of us close to the backstage affairs of the CC and Council of Ministers, all of this looked like a fight over first roles, a game of pride for some of them...”<sup>34</sup> In other words, the debates in the Presidium were not so much about real policy differences, but whether every decision would be made entirely according to Khrushchev’s wishes.

#### *The Prestige of the “Anti-Party Group”*

A crucial reason for why the “anti-party group” had the “pride” to oppose such a state of affairs was their personal prestige. The importance of this prestige clearly shows support for hypothesis 1b. The

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 481.

<sup>34</sup> Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti* [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death], 515–16.

evidence demonstrates that Khrushchev was primarily threatened by his enemies' status as legendary revolutionary leaders and understanding of Marxist dogma, not their political policies. Given the lack of rational-legal legitimacy that a fully institutionalized leadership process might have brought, revolutionary seniority and status was of special importance. Molotov himself understood authority in essentially Weberian terms:

It goes without saying that leaders are not born, that authority and the influence of leaders on the masses is not acquired and does not appear immediately - they are produced in the course of a prolonged period of time, they are produced as the result of the gradual internal persuasion of people that a certain individual figure understands events deeper and sees them deeper than others, that he conducts policies that answer their general interests.<sup>35</sup>

As Fitzpatrick writes, it is clear through letters to *Pravda* and the Central Committee that people were “uneasy at this summary dismissal of Old Bolsheviks with many services to their country... I was particularly interested to see what a strong following Molotov had in 1953-1954, particularly but not solely, among party members, making his acceptance of collective leadership and failure to bid for the top job all the more striking. Equally striking is Khrushchev's *lack* of popularity...”<sup>36</sup>

Molotov clearly had the highest prestige of any high-ranking Soviet leader. Before Stalin turned on Molotov after World War II, Khrushchev writes that “we, the people of the prewar era, had previously regarded Molotov as the future leader of the country.”<sup>37</sup> Shepilov told an interviewer: “Among the people it was like this: if not Stalin, then who? Of course, Molotov.”<sup>38</sup> In 1952, Mikoian told Stalin that he thought Molotov should be the successor.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> V.M. Molotov, “Pis'mo V.M. Molotova v TsK KPSS (1964 G.) [Letter from V.M. Molotov to the CC CPSU],” *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 5 (May 2011): 66.

<sup>36</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 253, 276.

<sup>37</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, ed. Sergei Khrushchev (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 106.

<sup>38</sup> Feliks Chuev, *Kaganovich; Shepilov [Kaganovich; Shepilov]* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001), 315.

<sup>39</sup> D.V. Pavlov, “Iz Zapisok Narkoma [From the Notes of the Commissar],” *Novaia i Noveishaia Istorii*, no. 6 (1988): 125.

Even while opposing Molotov's attempt to remove Khrushchev from power in 1957, Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, then a candidate member of the Presidium, stated: "Viacheslav Mikhailovich, we all respect you, you have great achievements and high authority... you are the oldest member of the party [*stareishii deiatel' partii*], you were a member of the Politburo while Lenin was alive, you worked with him, from that time [you have been] at the highest level of the party and government... Even as a schoolchild, with happiness I carried your portrait at demonstrations, I was proud to do so in front of the other children."<sup>40</sup>

The party chief of Sverdlovsk wrote a letter to Khrushchev on July 13 that described speeches by a number of communists that did not support the outcome of the June plenum. At a party meeting at the Gorkii automobile factory, three spoke out in opposition of the plenum decision. One question asked: "Isn't it true that an incorrect action does not lower the great contributions of Molotov as an underground [communist], fighter for the revolution, colleague of the Great Lenin?"<sup>41</sup> The editor-in-chief of *Izvestiia* told Kennedy in 1962 that "Mr. Khrushchev was of the opinion that if a plebiscite had been taken in 1957, Molotov would have obtained 95% of the votes and he only 5%."<sup>42</sup>

Two other long-time veterans were also included in the group: Kliment Voroshilov and Lazar Kaganovich. Voroshilov had fought with Stalin in the Civil War, had attained the rank of marshal, and at the time of the June 1957 incident lead the Supreme Soviet, making him, in ceremonial terms, the Soviet president. The political impact of a legend like Voroshilov opposing Khrushchev was in fact hidden from the populace: only Malenkov, Kaganovich, Molotov, and Shepilov (the CC secretary and foreign minister) were named. Kaganovich was one of Stalin's closest confidantes, and both he and Voroshilov played major roles in the growth of the Stalinist personality cult.

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<sup>40</sup> Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*, 1:268.

<sup>41</sup> V.V. Smirnov, ed., "Ia Ne Veriu Etomu: Otkliki Trudiashchikhsia Na Resheniia liuns'skogo (1957 G.) Plenuma TsK KPSS [I Do Not Believe This: Responses of Workers to the Decisions of the June (1957) Plenum of the CC CPSU]," *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* 1 (2000): 11, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Charles S. Sampson and John Michael Joyce, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Soviet Union. Volume V* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1998), 359.

These men all had major prestige as old revolutionary figures. As one party member asked at a meeting discussing the decision against the group at a lower level, “who can believe that Old Bolsheviks who have been in the government for forty years have become enemies of the people? Who believes that Malenkov, Kaganovich, Molotov, Voroshilov, Shepilov, Pervukhin, Saburov, and Voroshilov were wrong, but Khrushchev was right, along with Furtseva?”<sup>43</sup> Leaflets found in the city of Kuibyshev declared “Comrades, it is unbelievable that such experienced, forged Bolsheviks like Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Shepilov, who even worked with Lenin, could really organize an anti-party group.” “Anti-Soviet” leaflets were also found in Saransk, Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Noril’sk, Kyzyl, and Kaspiisk. At the Voroshilov factory in Kuibyshev, one man said at a party meeting that he “knew” Molotov and Malenkov but not Khrushchev: he was then actively applauded by a significant number of people. About fifteen to twenty went to the front of the room and demanded to speak “for the workers.” The secretary of the party *raikom* was shouted down when he said that no one “knew” Molotov.<sup>44</sup> Even those who voted in favor of the resolution were unhappy that they were not allowed to see the stenogram of the plenum.<sup>45</sup> The *delo* in the Russian archives containing information on the subsequent local party meetings after the plenum are full of questions about why Khrushchev was trustworthy but not Molotov: “How could Molotov oppose Leninism if he created the party with Lenin?”<sup>46</sup> Some even accused Khrushchev of creating his own cult of personality.<sup>47</sup>

On July 2, when members of the Chinese leadership were informed in Beijing about the “anti-party group,” Marshal Peng Dehuai quickly interrupted: “Aren’t they all the founders of the Soviet Communist Party, how could they be anti-party?” The Chinese subtly suggested that they found it hard to understand “old comrades” could be treated this way and asked if they should be dealt with more

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<sup>43</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 70, list 57.

<sup>44</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 72, listy 10-15.

<sup>45</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 72, list 9.

<sup>46</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 72, list 70.

<sup>47</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 72, listy 25-26.

leniently. Liu Shaoqi, the highest ranking leader present, did not immediately express support for Khrushchev.<sup>48</sup>

The presence of figures like Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich in the group that opposed Khrushchev demonstrated the clear importance of generational factors. In his defense at the June plenum, Molotov emphasized his relationship with Lenin and criticized Khrushchev for not giving awards to those party members who had participated in the October Revolution.<sup>49</sup> Voroshilov poked a member of the CC delegation sent to interrupt the Presidium proceedings and said: “Is it you, little boy, whom we should give explanations to? First learn how to wear long pants [*Eto tebe, mal’chishke, my dolzhny davat’ ob’iasneniia? Nauchis’ vnachale nosit’ dlinnye shtany*].”<sup>50</sup> When Voroshilov tried to defend his reaction at the plenum he said: “the situation was unprecedented, and you are young people!” When the hall erupted, he said, “Wait, wait, you are young people. You still do not need to worry about such things. Life is very long, you will have to fight every type of struggle.”<sup>51</sup> One CC member complained that Voroshilov treated them like Pioneers (essentially, Soviet Boy Scouts).<sup>52</sup> When Molotov at the plenum described the CC as the “leading political center,” a CC member countered: “And we have been doing party work for 20 years, and you still see us wearing short pants, why do you treat us contemptuously?”<sup>53</sup> One CC member joked that the old guard still saw the CC members as “youth” even though they already had grandchildren: “We are not afraid. We are not who we were before.”<sup>54</sup> Gromyko said that it was not the fault of his generation that they were fifteen years younger than members of the “anti-party group”: “it is more the fault of our mothers and

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<sup>48</sup> Yan Mingfu, *Yan Mingfu Huiyilu. Shang. [Memoirs of Yan Mingfu. Volume 1]*, 373. Mao ultimately decided to support the decision, reasoning that “how could we oppose?... this is their internal party matter.” 374.

<sup>49</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 101, 106–7.

<sup>50</sup> Aleksei Adzhubei, *Te desiat’ let [Those Ten Years]* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 275.

<sup>51</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 266.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

fathers.” Gromyko then pointed to Churchill’s forced retirement and suggested Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov also be “sent to paint paintings.”<sup>55</sup>

Khrushchev clearly played up these generational antagonisms. One CC member reported Khrushchev saying “our old revolutionary cadres have much revolutionary pathos, but they understand concrete life poorly, they do not know those cadres, the backbone of the party, who now organize the execution of the party’s directive and carry all the difficulties of the previous period on their own shoulders, and some think that these people walk around as before, in undershorts.”<sup>56</sup> Khrushchev refused to allow Molotov the moral high ground with regards to respect to seniority: “Now Molotov depicts the matter as if he was the only one defending the interests of the Old Bolsheviks. Molotov is one of the culprits in the annihilation of many thousands of old revolutionaries.”<sup>57</sup> As described below, the most important attacks on the “anti-party group” by Zhukov were related to their character and prestige, not their positions on political issues. Although their prestige as revolutionary leaders did not allow Khrushchev’s opponents to carry the day, this type of language shows that the senior revolutionaries clearly relied on this type of status and believed in its potency. Interestingly, after the “anti-party group” was defeated, the Chinese tried to undermine Khrushchev by spreading the idea that the “old guard” did not support his opposition to Beijing.<sup>58</sup> Even in 1964, party members were still using the opportunity to ask anonymous questions at meetings to ask what the “anti-party group” were doing.<sup>59</sup> During the meetings on Khrushchev’s resignation that followed his removal in October 1964, party members asked whether the plenum had also discussed the “anti-party group.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 543.

<sup>58</sup> After briefly considering asking the former leaders to speak out in favor of Khrushchev, Khrushchev decided: “We will not go to the old junk. Our own authority is enough.” Aleksandr Iakovlev, *Omut Pamiati [Whirlpool of Memory]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), 138.

<sup>59</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 234, list 271 (and throughout).

<sup>60</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 239, list 84. See also RGANI fond 3, opis 22, delo 16, list 18

Yet it was not only the older generation that opposed Khrushchev. Other members of the elite enjoyed other, albeit weaker sources of authority. As discussed above, Malenkov had been a major figure as Stalin's initial successor, at one point outranking Khrushchev in the immediate post-Stalin interregnum. Malenkov's son claims that his father told him: "I, Beria, Molotov, Voroshilov, Mikoian, Kaganovich came to Stalin's dacha. He was paralyzed, did not speak, he could only move the wrist of one hand... Molotov approaches Stalin. Stalin makes a sign: 'go away.' Beria approaches. The same sign. For Mikoian - the same. Then I approach. Stalin takes my hand, not letting it go. A few minutes later he is dying..."<sup>61</sup>

Another member of the group, Premier Nikolai Bulganin, had also allegedly been considered by Stalin as his most appropriate successor. Khrushchev recounts Stalin reflecting:

Who will we assign after me to be chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR? Beria? No, he's not a Russian; he's a Georgian. Khrushchev? No, he's a worker; we need to appoint someone more from the intelligentsia. Malenkov? No, the only thing he knows is how to be led on a leash by someone else. Kaganovich? No, he's not a Russian, he's a Jew. Molotov? No, he's already too old: he wouldn't be up to it. Voroshilov? No, he's old, and in general he's weak and not very capable. Saburov? Pervukhin? They're suitable for secondary roles. The only left is Bulganin.<sup>62</sup>

#### *The Irrelevance of Policy Differences*

Khrushchev's violations of collective leadership and the personal prestige of his opponents were, therefore, major factors shaping the contest. But what about real policy differences? As early as 1988, Service recognized correctly, despite limited sources, that "Although the regime's collapse was not an immediate likelihood in 1953, the urgent need for reconstruction was recognized by most of the most influential members of the Soviet Presidium." Although Service suggested that "the precise position of Molotov and Kaganovich over the entire range of proposals for reform has not yet been investigated," he reasoned that "Molotov and Kaganovich in any event evidently resisted innovation in general more than did other Presidium members. They were undoubtedly the greatest obstacles to de-Stalinisation on most

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<sup>61</sup> Andrei Malenkov, "A Tovarishch Malenkov Nadaval Emu Pinkov..." [And Comrade Malenkov Kicked Him...]," *Trud*, January 15, 2013, 3 edition.

<sup>62</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 113.

issues.”<sup>63</sup> Khrushchev himself described Molotov as the “ideological mastermind” of the “anti-party group.”<sup>64</sup>

Did Molotov really have such significant differences of opinion with Khrushchev? The evidence in fact indicates that even though Molotov’s differences with others in the leadership were limited in practical terms, the way he presented his (limited) reservations was problematic. Molotov constantly emphasized his authority as an interpreter of Leninist thought. Such a tactic proved problematic. By framing his points with ideologically-charged language, his positions raised questions about the relative authority of individual Presidium members, as the implication was that he should enjoy special prerogatives when discussing policy. Moreover, if policies turned out to be unsuccessful, those failures could subsequently be interpreted as a line error, not as a more prosaic mistake. Molotov himself may have been surprised by the extent to which even his small suggestions and independent role on the Presidium would be greeted by his colleagues, especially given his historical role in the party. He almost certainly expected that, given his history, in the party he would enjoy at least some benefits in terms of authority. Most importantly, his belief that he had the right to express his opinions conflicted with Khrushchev’s drive to dominance, as discussed above.

This might initially seem like an awkward argument, but it is supported by the following evidence. First, Molotov did not seem to have real, major policy differences with regards to foreign policy. Molotov agreed with others in the Presidium over the importance of improving ties with the West. Crucially, according to the Malin notes, Molotov in February 1956 supported the introduction of “peaceful coexistence” into the party platform at the 20th Party Congress: an issue of fundamental importance.<sup>65</sup> Although Molotov was criticized for opposing a treaty with Austria, the documents show

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<sup>63</sup> Robert Service, “De-Stalinization in the USSR Before Khrushchev’s Secret Speech,” in *Il XX Congresso del Pcus*, ed. E. A. Ambartsumov, Francesca Gori, and Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1988), 299.

<sup>64</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 511.

<sup>65</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 89-93. Molotov had three reservations. First, he criticized an abbreviated version of a statement originally made by Stalin. The draft report said: “Peace will be maintained and strengthened if people take the maintenance of peace into their own hands”.



that as early as the summer of 1953 he was taking steps towards easing tensions between Moscow and Vienna.<sup>66</sup> At a Presidium meeting on May 19, 1955, Molotov denied any real differences on foreign policy: “if we discuss the issue according to its substance, it’s one thing, and if we discuss the question according to its form, it is another.”<sup>67</sup>

Most famously, in the summer of 1955, Molotov was criticized over foreign policy toward Yugoslavia at an important plenum meeting. However, one historian of Soviet-Yugoslav relations points out that “it would be inappropriate to exclude the possibility that the goal of Khrushchev’s activities was not normalizing relations with the Yugoslav leadership, but raising his own authority in the Soviet leadership.”<sup>68</sup> In his memoirs, Kaganovich wrote that the Presidium did not support Molotov on the question of Yugoslavia, but that “Khrushchev essentially went somewhat further and made it about the party line, thus violating the directives of the CC [*fakticheski poshel neskol’ko dal’she I po partiinoi linii, narushaia direktivy TsK*].”<sup>69</sup> At the Presidium sessions in June 1957 at which Molotov and others tried to remove Khrushchev from his position as first secretary, Molotov did not criticize Khrushchev’s foreign

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The report did not say this was Stalin’s phrase, and moreover, did not include the rest of Stalin’s sentence: “and defend it to the end.” Second, he emphasized that when speaking of the possible path to socialism by “parliamentary means” it was necessary to also criticize laborists and “socialists” in England, Norway, and Sweden that had been voted into power: those parties were not bringing their societies to real socialism. Finally, he said it was necessary not only to criticize dead revisionists like Bernstein and Kautovskii but living ones as well. Shvernik clearly stated that “what Molotov said does not contradict the draft of the report.” Although at this meeting Kaganovich was more critical of western leftist parties, for which he was criticized, Kaganovich was polite: “I will try to soften my suggestions. We do not have fundamental differences. I support that the [draft] be approved in principle. I completely understand the desire of the person giving the report.”

<sup>66</sup> That decision included no longer forcing the Austrians to pay for Soviet troops. According to the editor of a new collection of documents on the Austrian issue, “the successors to Stalin despite all the inconsistency and contradiction of their activities tried to find new approaches to the solution of multiple international problems that were a legacy of the previous time period.” Those documents indeed show a desire by Soviet diplomats to solve the Austrian situation and lessen international tensions, although their tactics evolved over time. V.I. Iakunin, *SSSR I Avstriia Na Puti K Gosudarstvennomu Dogoru. Stranitsy Dokumental’noi Istorii 1945-1955. Obrazy I Teksty [The USSR and Austria on the Path to State Treaty. Pages of a Document History 1945-1955. Images and Texts]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015), 20.

<sup>67</sup> Molotov was not the only one to criticize along these lines: in June of the next year, Khrushchev himself would criticize Bulganin for calling Tito a Leninist. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 145.

<sup>68</sup> A.B. Edemskii, *Ot Konflikta K Normalizatsii. Sovetsko-Iugoslavskie Otnosheniia v 1953-1956 Godakh [From Conflict to Normalization. Soviet-Yugoslav Relations in 1953-1956]* (Moscow: Nauka, 2008), 237.

<sup>69</sup> Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego... [Memos by a Worker...]*, 511.

policy, but instead attacked Khrushchev's habit of imputing policies to him in order to attack him.<sup>70</sup> Even Khrushchev himself made the stunning admission to the American ambassador in 1960 that "even with Molotov there had not been basic disagreement over his policies, particularly coexistence, but said Molotov carried the burden of his age and background in his thinking."<sup>71</sup> Therefore, although Molotov certainly had different inclinations, the more important dynamic was Khrushchev's deliberate transformation of those differences from normal discussions among a collective leadership into a major debate.

Second, Molotov was careless in his use of ideology as a weapon. At the January 1955 CC plenum, one of Molotov's two primary criticisms of Malenkov was his "carelessness with regards to theory."<sup>72</sup> At one Presidium meeting, Mikoian complained that it was inexcusable for Molotov to use terms like "anti-Leninist [*antileninets*]." Kaganovich asked "what is not Leninist in our position on Yugoslavia?" Molotov was forced to apologize: "saying they were not Leninists - this was a fit of temper [*ne leninskie- eto sgoriacha*]."<sup>73</sup> At another Presidium meeting on June 8, 1955, after a Soviet delegation visited Yugoslavia, Molotov argued that claiming the negotiations were based on the positions of Marxism-Leninism was a mistake. This time the hint that he knew more about Leninism was not

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 520. Molotov also denied opposing the virgin lands project, arguing that the only difference was that he thought less capital should be invested so much so quickly. Molotov's position on this issue was often raised as an example of his outdated thinking and stubbornness. Even given this possibly small difference, again it was not clear Molotov had the less popular position. The party returned to the importance of investment in traditional regions in March 1965. Some party members raised the question after the plenum: What attitude should we have to the debate in the Presidium CC in 1957 when some of the leadership (Khrushchev) made a bet on new eastern virgin regions, and another part supported the investment into traditional regions, which the March CC plenum brought attention to? A.I. Shevel'kov, "'Pochemu Ia Dolzhen Verit' Martovskomu Plenumu TsK KPSS?' 'Neudobnye' voprosy Partiinomou Rukovodstvu. Vesna 1965 G. ['Why Do I Have to Believe the March CC CPSU Plenum?' 'Inconvenient' Questions to the Party Leadership. Spring 1965]," *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>71</sup> Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State. September 8, 1960. Document 163. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960. Volume X, Part 1, Eastern European Region, Soviet Union. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d163>

<sup>72</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 127, list 103 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection). Other members of the leadership could have only felt concerned when Molotov said "carelessness with regards to the questions of theory, for us, communists, is a dangerous thing, if we want to participate in the leadership of the party, in the leadership of our state." (list 113)

<sup>73</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 41-42.

forgiven. Mikoian declared that it was necessary to tell a full CC plenum that there was a dispute within the party. For Kaganovich, Molotov had an ulterior motive: “he wants white hands, he acts stubbornly, he [is setting up an insurance policy to maintain the moral high ground] [as in maintaining the moral high ground- *strakhuet*].”<sup>74</sup>

The transcript of the July 1955 CC plenum shows Molotov explaining that “we all want to improve relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia” but disagreeing with the position of others in the leadership that previous poor relations should be blamed on Beria, or that the foundation of the relationship should be described as based on the principles of Leninism-Marxism. Molotov believed improvement in relations could still happen based on other principles.<sup>75</sup>

The dissatisfaction of the Presidium members in the way Molotov phrased his positions is on display in the following interaction:

Bulganin: Molotov constantly attacked us and spoke against us, as against people that were anti-Leninists, that we were non-Leninists, that we were opportunists, especially with regard to Comrade Khrushchev.

Khrushchev: The Presidium condemned this line of behavior and wrote it into the record, and he apologized, acknowledged the impermissibility of his behavior.

Bulganin: That we are non-Leninists...

Molotov: [They] were attacking me from all sides.

Bulganin: He was punished fiercely for his misdeeds.

Khrushchev: We also have strong fists, we punished you severely.<sup>76</sup>

Kaganovich also suggested at the plenum that it was Molotov’s attitude that so distressed his colleagues:

“But the whole issue is what tone [is given] to one question or another. This is what I consider incorrect.”<sup>77</sup> At one point, Molotov defended himself by saying, “I believe that the Presidium of the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 51–54.

<sup>75</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 158, listy 1, 21, 34, 43-45, 50-51 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection) When Molotov said he even supported a meeting with the Yugoslav leaders, Khrushchev interrupted: “Which we achieved despite a struggle with you.” Molotov: “That is incorrect, of course.” 57.

<sup>76</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 158, list 106.

<sup>77</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 160, list 57 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

Central Committee is a Marxist-Leninist center. But that it is possible to debate over individual questions.” Mikoian responded: “It is necessary to persuade when there is a debate... one must not hurl labels, such that if you are not in agreement with something, then you are an anti-Leninist.”<sup>78</sup> Mikoian challenged the idea that Molotov’s status in the party made him uniquely qualify to interpret dogma: “First, who gave him the right to declare us anti-Leninists, could it truly be only that he was a few years older than us in the party? If one is in the party 35 years, and another 40 years, is that really a big difference? Nonsense.”<sup>79</sup> Later during the proceedings Pervukhin made a similar comment: “In the Presidium com. Molotov is an older member of the party, an old member of the Politburo, a comrade and leader respected by our party. But in the Presidium, like in the CC, all are equal, and therefore he can argue, but he cannot use the right [sic] that he has such an authority, created by our party, that he can hurl labels at those who argue with him.”<sup>80</sup> Khrushchev argued that Molotov had lost touch with regular people and the true state of affairs in the country: a theme to which the party would return in June 1957.<sup>81</sup>

During his last speech at the plenum, Molotov admitted that “in certain situations in the heat of debate incorrect and intolerable arguments were made by me [*dopuskalis*] as if a certain suggestion did not accord with the Leninist line. Of course, this was a mistake, incorrect, and I spoke of this at the Presidium of the Central Committee, I think it is my duty to speak of this before the CC plenum.” He denied having fundamentally different positions on any issue, including the Virgin Lands project,<sup>82</sup> Gosplan, or the removal of Soviet troops from Austria. He stated emphatically that “here there was an attempt from certain comrades to present the matter in such a way that Molotov opposes this question, and others as well. It is true, comrades, that in practical work, with regards to individual issues we would

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<sup>78</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 159, list 42. (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>79</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 159, list 45-46 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>80</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 160, list 105 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>81</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 161, list 241 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>82</sup> Molotov again referred to a lack of principled disagreement regarding the virgin lands in a letter to the CC in the 1960s. V.M. Molotov, “Pis’mo V.M. Molotova v TsK KPSS (1964 G.) [Letter from V.M. Molotov to the CC CPSU],” *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 1 (January 2012): 81.

oppose and make suggestions and some of them were incorrect, but I declared and declare: I have no special opinions on the decisions taken.”<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, it is not even clear whether the positions imputed to Molotov unfairly were unpopular. Historians Zubok and Edemskii separately conclude that, broadly speaking, Molotov’s positions on foreign policy, to the extent they truly existed (or were portrayed to exist), were more popular than Khrushchev’s, including on the issue of Yugoslavia.<sup>84</sup> Concerns about Molotov’s ideological pedigree again appeared at the June 1957 CC plenum, where Mikoian stated that “one cannot be a fetishist or a dogmatist... This is the infantile disease of leftism, we cannot resemble the baron who tries to squirm his way into society but does not know how to behave himself there.”<sup>85</sup> Together, the above evidence clearly corroborates hypothesis 1b: Molotov’s personal prestige was of primary importance, and alleged policy differences were deliberately over played for political purposes.

If hypothesis 1a is correct and policy popularity is a useful tool in power struggles, then Malenkov’s role in the “anti-party group” should have dramatically increased the likelihood of Khrushchev’s failure. Malenkov had in fact been removed from the premiership in 1955 in part because his greater popularity was seen as a threat to his competitors in the Presidium. Among Malenkov’s alleged crimes was his attempt to achieve “cheap popularity” in a speech to the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the Supreme Soviet in August 1953.<sup>86</sup> During this speech, Malenkov declared that the party would guarantee food and consumer goods for the population, that it was necessary to force the development of light industry, and that agricultural taxes would be cut. This speech made Malenkov extremely popular within the country:

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<sup>83</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 2, delo 161, listy 180, 185 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>84</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 120; Edemskii, *Ot Konflikta K Normalizatsii. Sovetsko-lugoslavskie Otnosheniia v 1953-1956 Godakh [From Conflict to Normalization. Soviet-Yugoslav Relations in 1953-1956]*, 409.

<sup>85</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 160.

<sup>86</sup> For the resolution written by the Presidium to be approved by CC plenum, see V. N. Khaustov, *Delo Beriia: Prigovor obzhalovaniuu ne podlezhit [The Beria Affair: The Verdict Cannot be Appealed]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2012), 614–16.

peasants started to call full glasses of moonshine ‘*malenkovskii*.’<sup>87</sup> At a private Presidium session on January 22, Saburov accused Malenkov of “succumbing to parliamentary popularity.”<sup>88</sup> In a report to Belgrade, the Yugoslav ambassador described Malenkov’s “main weapon” as his popularity among the peasant masses.<sup>89</sup> After Malenkov was removed, the party secretary of a raion in Novgorod oblast’ noted at a local meeting that Malenkov had support from people who thought he deserved credit for recent improvements.<sup>90</sup> In other words, the adoption of a popular position was seen as a threat to others within the leadership and helped lead them to a decision to remove him.

We do see some evidence for hypothesis 1a with regards to policy support for Khrushchev in the CC. Between March 1953 and February 1956, Khrushchev removed 45 of 84 first secretaries of republic-level and oblast’-level party committees directly under the purview of the CC, accusing them of poor leadership, especially with regards to agriculture.<sup>91</sup> The head of the Georgian party committee, for example, was replaced by Mzhavanadze, who had served as a commissar with Khrushchev during the war.<sup>92</sup> He also took important steps to gain the confidence of these leaders by expanding the authority of regional party

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<sup>87</sup> Iurii Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaia “ottepel” i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953-1964 gg. [Khrushchev’s “Thaw” and Societal Attitudes in the USSR 1953-1964]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 67–68. It also made him popular within some segments of the military. According to one report written by Zhukov and Zheltov (head of the GPD), after Malenkov’s removal “there were cases of the expression of dissatisfaction and backward attitude from certain military men.” Malenkov’s speech to the Supreme Soviet “had influence on some military men with a connection to the kholkhos countryside”. Fond 2, opis 1, delo 118, listy 40-44 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>88</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 35.

<sup>89</sup> Edemskii, *Ot Konflikta K Normalizatsii. Sovetsko-Yugoslavskie Otnosheniia v 1953-1956 Godakh [From Conflict to Normalization. Soviet-Yugoslav Relations in 1953-1956]*, 364.

<sup>90</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 16, listy 9-10. A description of the situation in the Briansk party organization is typical of other regions: party members were asking questions like why Malenkov had to take the blame if the leadership was collective and how it was possible for him to stay in the Presidium so long after his ties with Beria were clear. Signs were found saying “glory to Malenkov.” RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 16, listy 14-17.

<sup>91</sup> T. H. Rigby, *Political Elites in the USSR: Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev* (Hants: Aldershot, 1990); O.V. Khlevniuk et al, eds., *Regional’naia politika N.S. Khrushcheva: TsK KPSS i mestnye partiinye komitety, 1953-1964 gg. [The Regional Policy of N.K. Khrushchev: The CC CPSU and Regional Party Committees, 1953-1964]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 52–91.

<sup>92</sup> Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaia “ottepel” i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953-1964 gg. [Khrushchev’s “Thaw” and Societal Attitudes in the USSR 1953-1964]*, 96.

committees with regards to budgetary and personnel.<sup>93</sup> In July 1956, a new nomenklatura system was introduced that dramatically cut the number of nominations controlled by the Central Committee and increased the number of positions in which the regions had more control.<sup>94</sup> He created a Russian Bureau of the CC so that Russia, like the other constituent republics, would have its own apparat. This move could increase support for Khrushchev from local leaders inside Russia, but it was an idea that got its supporters executed during the Stalin era.<sup>95</sup> Scholars have often pointed to the industrial organization reforms in February 1957 as a key reason for regional leaders on the CC to support Khrushchev at the June plenum. According to the editors of a collection of documents on Khrushchev's policies towards the regions, "[i]t was precisely because of the support of regional secretaries who made up a significant part of the CC CPSU that Khrushchev was able to defeat the so called 'anti-party group.'"<sup>96</sup>

All of these steps were important reasons for why the CC supported Khrushchev, and at first glance they support the economic model. Certainly they helped Khrushchev. But we have powerful evidence that they were far from decisive. We have reason to believe that industrial reform, which has been described as the key factor explaining support for Khrushchev, was not as much of a winning policy as later portrayed. The original plans for reforms when delineated at a CC plenum at the end of 1956 were not especially ambitious. Khrushchev wrote a memorandum to the Presidium in January 1957 in which he complained that the changes did not go far enough. He suggested much more radical policies that would weaken the central ministries and introduce a territorial administration system: the "*sovnarkhoz*." This would clearly benefit the party secretaries in the regions who made up a significant portion of the CC. Khrushchev played up their role as beneficiaries in the memorandum: "having reformed management, we will immeasurably raise the role of local party and soviet organs."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Khlevniuk et al, *Regional'naiia politika N.S. Khrushcheva*, 103–4, 123–25.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>97</sup> A.A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 2. Postanovleniia 1954-1958 [Presidium of the CC KPSU 1954-1964. Volume 2. Resolutions 1954-1958]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 522–39.

At a Presidium meeting on January 28, 1957, Pervukhin noted that this was a “cardinal issue.” Although he agreed to cut the number of ministries and organizing territorial economic commissions in order to ensure horizontal cooperation, he emphasized the continuing importance of the ministries and of maintaining control over local production. Molotov noted that he agreed with the decision from the previous plenum: the roles and number of the ministries should be decreased and the local party organizations should play a greater role. But he also felt that Khrushchev was going too far, and that the ministries should not be entirely liquidated. Molotov’s reference to the plenum is revealing: he was clearly indicating he believed that Khrushchev was going beyond the party line. Voroshilov and Saburov also expressed concerns. Khrushchev retorted that some in Moscow were over-estimating the role of the ministries and called for “democratic centralism in the leadership of industry.”<sup>98</sup>

Another CC plenum was then held in February that came closer to Khrushchev’s prescriptions. Khrushchev had written another memorandum about the specifics of the reforms. At a Presidium meeting on March 22, the leadership expressed general support for that document.<sup>99</sup> However, on March 24, Molotov wrote a memorandum to the CC as a whole in which he described Khrushchev’s proposals in stark terms: “the presented draft is clearly not finished, it suffers from one-sidedness and without significant changes can bring serious difficulties to the system of managing Soviet industry. The draft one-sidedly reflects the decision of the February CC plenum with regards to decentralization of the management of industry, bringing this decentralization to an intolerable extreme.” Molotov affirmed the basic idea of that plenum by accepting that the ministries were too large and unwieldy, but argued that no management whatsoever was going so far. He instead proposed the creation of committees on major industrial fields. He also made several complaints that other major ideas had not been thought through:

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<sup>98</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernoye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 221–23.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 236–39.



“My suggestion: before publishing this draft, it is necessary to seriously work on it and finish it for real.”<sup>100</sup>

Khrushchev realized the nature of the threat posed by Molotov’s letter and submitted a memorandum to the Presidium on March 26 in response. Khrushchev complained that Molotov did not express his concerns at a Presidium meeting, instead revealing his concerns to the entire CC in his letter: “But Comrade Molotov decided to write a special memorandum to the CC CPSU, in which he wanted to express in his own way the comments and suggestions of the comrades who spoke in the process of discussion of the draft theses on the Presidium of the CC CPSU. Therefore, Comrade Molotov’s memorandum was caused not by business-like considerations, but by some other kind... I cannot agree with this form of presenting comments that Comrade Molotov selected.”<sup>101</sup> At a Presidium meeting the next day, Bulganin complained that Molotov’s memo was “a great danger for unity.” Pervukhin noted that “for such a major issue there must be unity.” Malenkov: “There will be damage if an impression is created that there is a disagreement within the party.”<sup>102</sup>

Molotov’s document and Khrushchev’s response are rather remarkable. Molotov had revealed a difference of opinion inside the Presidium to the CC as a whole and criticized the paramount leader. In other words, even after *another* plenum that came closer to what Khrushchev wanted, Molotov was still arguing that Khrushchev was not proceeding according to the directives of the CC. Since Molotov was revealing a split to that body, it seems hard to believe that he thought his position would be overwhelmingly unpopular. Moreover, Molotov seemed to believe his position was not fundamentally different from Khrushchev’s - simply better thought out.

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<sup>100</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 2. Postanovleniia 1954-1958 [Presidium of the CC KPSU 1954-1964. Volume 2. Resolutions 1954-1958]*, 613–15.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 615–19.

<sup>102</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 240–46.

This characterization of Molotov's attitude is supported by the following evidence. First, a significant number of CC members were leaders in Moscow (as opposed to the regions). Kirichenko in his speech at the June plenum acknowledged that Molotov had reason to believe a significant portion of the CC would have supported him over industrial reform: "They thought that in the membership of the CC there were many ministers, vice ministers and CC candidate members that are being sent to the sovnarkhozy. They thought that these comrades were in agreement with the reorganization, but not with their exit from Moscow."<sup>103</sup>

Second, the rushed nature of the reforms probably led to concerns no matter whom they were intended to benefit. Leningrad party activists, for example, bombarded Presidium candidate member Frol Kozlov with demands for details, and enterprise directors and economists raised concerns. Even Khrushchev supporters like Furtseva thought the reform plans were rushed.<sup>104</sup> Mikoian admitted at the June 1957 plenum that "several believe that even if it was a correct measure, it was poorly executed."<sup>105</sup>

As historian Kibita writes, "From the start, the USSR CM [Council of Ministers] addressed numerous problems either slowly or not at all. There were no supply plans and nobody was assigned to study the problems that the *sovnerkhozy* would certainly have to deal with."<sup>106</sup> Kaganovich later wrote that "Khrushchev and here [implying in other cases as well] with regards to the Sovnarkhozes, spoiled an idea that wasn't bad. If it was organized correctly it could have brought benefit, if not for Khrushchev's desire for his own 'eureka' moment..."<sup>107</sup> Even Mikoian at the June plenum admitted that "several [*nekotorye*]" were unhappy with how the idea was executed.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 214.

<sup>104</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 304.

<sup>105</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 144.

<sup>106</sup> Nataliya Kibita, *Soviet Economic Management Under Khrushchev: The Sovnarkhoz Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 39.

<sup>107</sup> Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego... [Memos by a Worker...]*, 512.

<sup>108</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 144.

Third, Molotov at the Presidium meeting on March 27 denied that he was not operating within a broad consensus on the issue. He claimed that Khrushchev misrepresented him, did not in fact disagree with the decisions of the February plenum, and that it was Khrushchev's positions that were one-sided. At the June CC plenum, when Molotov was accused of opposing the sovnarkhozy, he denied it: "I had corrections [*imel popravki*]." <sup>109</sup> Kibita notes that "Ironically enough, the branch committees that Molotov talked about started appearing immediately after the regional economic councils took over production and construction." <sup>110</sup> Another historian argued, "the decentralizing effects were not as substantial as it might have seemed. The sovnarkhozy were still strictly subordinate to the Council of Ministers, and Gosplan's profile was raised sharply as it took over many of the planning duties formerly held by the ministries. This meant that planning was still largely centralized..." <sup>111</sup>

The historical verdict on the sovnarkhozy also betrays a skepticism about their appropriateness. By 1959, the process of decentralization started to reverse, a centralized branch administration was established in 1962, and after Khrushchev was removed they were abolished entirely. <sup>112</sup> At a Politburo meeting three decades later, one Politburo member commented: "And what [Khrushchev] did to our economy! I myself have had to work in a Sovkharkhoz." Another member: "We were always against sovnarkhozy." <sup>113</sup> Therefore industrial reform should not be understood as a decisive reason for Khrushchev's ultimate victory.

Other than the issue of industrial reform, scholars have sometimes identified the contest as a defeat of the "Stalinists." In other words, the defeat of the old guard was the result of a policy aggregation process in which the reformist Khrushchev emerged victorious. This has clear similarities to the arguments in hypothesis 1a. However, the available evidence shows decisively that this characterization is

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>110</sup> Kibita, *Soviet Economic Management Under Khrushchev*, 40.

<sup>111</sup> Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, "Soviet Industry in the World Spotlight: The Domestic Dilemmas of Soviet Foreign Economic Relations, 1955–1965," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 9 (November 2010): 1559.

<sup>112</sup> Kibita, *Soviet Economic Management Under Khrushchev*.

<sup>113</sup> July 12, 1984, Meeting of Politburo of CPSU (Wilson Center Digital Archive)

mistaken. As Dobson argues in her book on the Gulag and legal reforms, the Khrushchev era was not marked by a clear differentiation on the issue of Stalin: “few-including political leaders- maintained an unambivalent attitude toward Stalinism, itself a complex and ill-defined entity: people might be enthusiastic about some changes but resentful of others.”<sup>114</sup> The issue of Stalin should be divided into several separate issues: rehabilitations, the evaluation of Stalin as a historical figure, and responsibility. On each of these questions, in contradistinction to hypothesis 1a, we see either limited policy differences between Khrushchev and his opponents, or, in some cases, his opponents actually being associated with a *more* popular policy.

With regards to rehabilitating figures who suffered during the Stalinist era, the situation was hardly a showdown between “Stalinists” and “reformers.” Molotov was not opposed to rehabilitations in general. Even before Khrushchev’s Secret Speech to the 20th Party Congress, the Presidium made a decision to create special committees with authority from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet to make decisions on individual cases for rehabilitation. Molotov said that the decisions needed to be worked out [*vyrabotat’ mery*] but also that the idea was correct [*pravil’no vneseno predlozhenie*].<sup>115</sup> In one case he forwarded a letter to Khrushchev from a former editor of *Izvestiia* on a particular rehabilitation, implying that the matter should be discussed by the CC.<sup>116</sup> Molotov was in fact in charge of the committee in charge of rehabilitations. Ol’ga Shatunovskaia, a strong supporter of rehabilitations, admitted that Molotov’s wife asked her to their home to discuss the issue with her husband.<sup>117</sup> Malenkov met with the wife of executed Soviet Army General Yakov Smushkevich personally, and even gave the family money

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<sup>114</sup> Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 15.

<sup>115</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 94.

<sup>116</sup> Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer*, 80.

<sup>117</sup> Ol’ga Shatunovskaia, *Ob ushedshem veke [About the Last Century]* (La Jolla: DAA Books, 2001, 2001), 290.

and offered to give them back their former home.<sup>118</sup> On at least one occasion Kaganovich assisted a Jewish prisoner who wrote him asking for help.<sup>119</sup>

If “Stalinists” were opposed to rehabilitations, it is difficult to explain the nearly one hundred special committees created for such a purpose and the 170,000 individuals whose cases were reviewed.<sup>120</sup> They were unified on crucial issues. The leadership did not fight over the rehabilitation of such major figures as Chubar’, Rudzutak, Kosior, Postyshev, Kaminskii, Gamarnik, or Eikhe, nor did they fight over giving the relatives of those who had died in the camps false information about the conditions and date of death so as to hide the true extent of the repressions. They also agreed on not rehabilitating Trotskyites, Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, or members of other parties.<sup>121</sup>

At the June plenum, Molotov noted that with regards to the work of the commission on rehabilitations, “it is necessary to keep in mind that the results of this work were signed by all members of this commission unanimously.”<sup>122</sup> Serov noted that “The Molotov Commission established facts of lawlessness” and that even Molotov and Bulganin wanted to investigate the “Leningrad Affair.”<sup>123</sup> Khrushchev only accused Molotov of blocking the research of material related to Bukharin, Rykov, Zinovev, and Tomskii.<sup>124</sup> However, Khrushchev himself told Ol’ga Shatunovskaia that Bukharin and the others could not be rehabilitated for at least another fifteen years; otherwise it would discredit the party.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 154–55.

<sup>119</sup> Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics*, 242.

<sup>120</sup> A. Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia: Kak Eto Bylo. Fevral’ 1956- Nachalo 80-Kh godov [Rehabilitation: How It Was. February 1956- Beginning of 1980s]*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2003), 6.

<sup>121</sup> A. Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia: Kak Eto Bylo. Mart 1953-Fevral’ 1956 Gg. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS I Drugie Materialy [Rehabilitation: How It Was. March 1953 to February 1956. Documents of the Presidium of the CC CPSU and Other Materials]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2000), 10–11.

<sup>122</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 189.

<sup>123</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 465.

<sup>124</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 537.

<sup>125</sup> Shatunovskaia, *Ob ushedshem veke*, 291.

Khrushchev was off by a significant amount of time, as none of these men were rehabilitated until perestroika.<sup>126</sup>

Even if Molotov was more skeptical about rehabilitations than Khrushchev, it was not necessarily obvious that this position was broadly unpopular, as not everyone was certain the rehabilitation process should proceed too far. Head of the KGB and Khrushchev ally Serov was certainly skeptical.<sup>127</sup> Rehabilitation concerned individuals who feared that the Old Bolsheviks would steal their jobs.<sup>128</sup> As Cohen concludes, “Some officials were supportive, but many were not. They viewed former zeks ‘with suspicion,’ rehabilitation as ‘something rotten,’ and did not trust people with an ‘unclean past.’”<sup>129</sup> Most striking, after the defeat of the “anti-party group,” the process of rehabilitation slowed down rather than sped up. After Molotov was removed from the committee on the show-trials of the 1930s, that committee did not work for a long period of time and made no decisions.<sup>130</sup>

The question of how to analyze Stalin as a historical figure is also not nearly as clear-cut as traditionally portrayed. The move away from Stalin’s cult began immediately after his death. No Stalin prizes ever again awarded. By November 1955, the Presidium was already discussing the creation of a Lenin prize, and an edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia completed in July 1955 had nixed the entry for “Stalin prizes.”<sup>131</sup> As early as April 1953, Malenkov wanted to hold a special plenum to condemn “the propagation of the cult of personality” as foreign to Marxism and the principle of collective leadership.<sup>132</sup> Immediately after the purge of Beria, it was Molotov in a meeting with Italian communists that

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<sup>126</sup> Michael Parks, “Soviets Complete Rehabilitation of Bukharin, Key Stalin Foe,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1988, [http://articles.latimes.com/1988-07-10/news/mn-9457\\_1\\_josef-stalin](http://articles.latimes.com/1988-07-10/news/mn-9457_1_josef-stalin).

<sup>127</sup> Nikita Petrov, *Pervyi Predsedatel' KGB Ivan Serov [First Head of the KGB Ivan Serov]* (Moscow: Materik, 2005).

<sup>128</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 54, listy 27-28 contains a letter complaining that rehabilitated old Bolsheviks were being treated poorly by the apparat.

<sup>129</sup> Cohen, *The Victims Return*, 79.

<sup>130</sup> Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia: Kak Eto Bylo. Fevral' 1956- Nachalo 80-Kh godov [Rehabilitation: How It Was. February 1956- Beginning of 1980s]*, 2:11.

<sup>131</sup> V.I. Ivkin, “Kak Otmeniali Stalinskie Premii [How the Stalin Prizes Were Ended],” *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 6 (2013).

<sup>132</sup> Vitalii Afiani, “Segodnia, 60 Let Nazad, Zavershilsia XX S'ezd KPSS, a Nakanune... [Today, 60 Years Ago, the 20 CPSU Party Congress Was Held, but Before...],” *Novaia Gazeta*, February 26, 2016.

made it plain that the Presidium did not in fact regard Stalin in a totally favourable light... Molotov also adduced evidence about Stalin's megalomania... Molotov's picture gives us Stalin in his alleged dotage after the Second World War... If only Stalin had hearkened to and worked alongside his other leading advisers, Molotov implies, then so much of the political and economic travail of the post-war epoch could have been avoided."<sup>133</sup>

Everyone agreed on the need for an admission of Stalin's mistakes. This step was needed for two reasons: to provide at least some justification for the ongoing rehabilitations, and to prevent the issue from being forced on the leadership at a later date in a way they could not control. Khrushchev in his memoirs said his reasoning with the others in the leadership was the following:

People will come out of prison, return to their native places, tell their relatives and friends and acquaintances what actually happened, and it will become known to the entire country and to the entire party that those who remained alive had been innocent victims of repression... Here is something else I would ask you to think about. We are holding the first congress since Stalin's death. I think that it's precisely at such a congress that we must honestly and openly tell the full truth... When the party learns the truth from former prisoners, the membership will say to us: 'Please, how is this possible? The Twentieth Congress was held and nothing was said to us here.' And we won't have any reply.<sup>134</sup>

According to a later interview of Kaganovich, a deluge of requests for clemency from arrested people lead to the creation of an investigatory commission led by Piotr Pospelov. The original idea was to hold a special plenum of the CC to listen to Pospelov's report. In other words, the Presidium *as a whole* recognized that the question of the repressions had to be addressed.<sup>135</sup> At a Presidium meeting on November 5 that discussed how to commemorate the anniversary of Stalin's birth on December 21, Kaganovich and Voroshilov advocated holding assemblies at factories. However, when Bulganin and Mikoian resisted that proposal, Kaganovich emphasized that he supported the decision of the CC against the cult of personality: "there is no difference between you and me, Comrade Khrushchev... I do not intend to battle against you."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> R. J. Service, "The Road to the Twentieth Party Congress: An Analysis of the Events Surrounding the Central Committee Plenum of July 1953," *Soviet Studies* 33, no. 2 (1981): 240–41. Molotov did not mention the terror, but his behavior so soon after Beria's arrest does point to flexibility on this issue.

<sup>134</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 209–10.

<sup>135</sup> Chuev and Kaganovich, *Tak Govoril Kaganovich [Thus Spoke Kaganovich]*, 44, 64.

<sup>136</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 56–57.

A crucial Presidium meeting on February 1 began by listening to a former chekist named B.V. Rodos explain how during the Stalin era he had been ordered to extract confessions out of prominent party members that they were enemies of the people. Molotov did not deny any mistakes, but insisted that Stalin still be recognized as a great leader: “it is impossible not to say in the report that Stalin was a great heir to Lenin. I insist on this.” He admitted that the truth must be told, but also that, under the leadership of Stalin, socialism was triumphant. Voroshilov also accepted that the “party must know the truth” but that the situation at the time must be emphasized so as to not “throw the baby out with the bathwater.” Khrushchev agreed that the Terror would not be discussed at the upcoming Congress.<sup>137</sup>

At a meeting on February 9, everyone supported telling the Party Congress the “truth” about Stalin. The only difference was that some believed these truths included Stalin’s triumphs as well. Kaganovich stated that it was correct for Khrushchev to give a report on Stalin, but agreed with Molotov that it was necessary to proceed carefully. Voroshilov also agreed that something had to be said at the Congress, but advised care. Bulganin explained what many must have been thinking: “If we do not speak at this congress, they will say that we were cowards.” Shepilov concurred: “we must tell the party, otherwise they will not forgive us.” Khrushchev ended the meeting by stating explicitly: “there are no disputes over whether the Congress should be told. The debate is only over shades of meeting, this will be considered.”

Therefore, although Molotov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov did not want Stalin to be entirely exposed; they still recognized the need for some explanation of the Terror to be given to the party.<sup>138</sup> As historians Aksiutin and Pyzhikov point out, even Kaganovich and Molotov spoke out against the cult of personality at the 20th Party Congress. Molotov stated that the CC “strongly spoke out against the cult of personality that is foreign to Marxism-Leninism, which played in a certain period such a negative role.” As the plenum applauded, Molotov expressed certainty that “this congress will completely approve this

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 95–97, 920 fn 2.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 98–103.



principled position [*ustanovka*].”<sup>139</sup> Molotov stated explicitly and repeatedly in a letter to the CC in the mid-1960s that he recognized that there had been mistakes and that innocent people had been killed, but that this did not mean the purges should be described as the deliberate annihilation of the best in the party.<sup>140</sup>

At the June CC plenum, Kaganovich stated that “I believe it was correct that we revealed and exposed this matter [regarding Khrushchev’s Secret Speech].”<sup>141</sup> Even Molotov remarked that “along with successes certain deficiencies in Stalin grew more powerful, they were very dangerous and damaging, of which we speak now all in unity.”<sup>142</sup> Later in the plenum he stated: “We, comrades, remember that at the 20th Party Congress we completely legally, correctly, strongly, and bravely revealed those mistakes and perversions of revolutionary legality that were committed in the period of Stalin’s leadership.”<sup>143</sup>

The real puzzle is why Khrushchev felt that this demanded such a negative evaluation of Stalin. In July 1956, he told a delegation of Italian communists that if the criticism of Stalin had been done in small doses then some people “not having enough facts, would remain persuaded of the infallibility of Stalin.”<sup>144</sup> Perhaps it was a matter of personal conscience. Another possibility is that he was using the criticism of Stalin as a weapon against others in the elite. We cannot rule out this possibility, but other evidence hints that at this early date it might not yet have been the case. First, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Khrushchev had already weakened potential competitors like Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich. Second, Khrushchev in his Secret Speech identified Molotov as a victim of Stalin’s crimes,

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<sup>139</sup> Iu. V. Aksiutin and A. V. Pyzhikov, “O Podgotovke Zakrytogo Doklada N.S. Khrushcheva XX S’ezdu KPSS v Svete Novykh Dokumentov [On the Preparation of the Secret Speech of N.S. Khrushchev at the 20 Congress of the CPSU in Light of New Documents],” *Novaia i Noveishaia Istorii*, no. 2 (March 2002): 113–14.

<sup>140</sup> V.M. Molotov, “Pis’mo V.M. Molotova v TsK KPSS (1964 G.) [Letter from V.M. Molotov to the CC CPSU],” *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 3 (March 2011): 75–90.

<sup>141</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 68.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>144</sup> “N.S. Khrushchev: U Stalina Byli Momenty Prosvetleniia (1956) [N.S. Khrushchev: Stalin Had Moments of Enlightenment],” *Istochnik*, no. 2 (1994): 85.

arguing that if Stalin had lived another few months “then at this Party Congress Comrades Molotov and Mikoian, possibly, would not have given speeches. Stalin, apparently, had his own plans to crack down on old members of the Politburo.”<sup>145</sup>

If the intent really was to damage the political position of Stalin’s former henchmen like Molotov and Kaganovich, then his plan clearly failed: de-Stalinization was not a clear winning formula, either with regards to rehabilitations or the evaluation of Stalin. Khrushchev became even less popular as the full implications of the speech for social stability became apparent, and over time he moved closer to the positions of those who wanted a more balanced appraisal of Stalin.

One participant describes the reaction to the Secret Speech thusly: “It was possible to hear a fly in the air... They went home in silence. In the cloakroom, as people were getting their coats, not one voice could be heard. People were depressed. They could not understand what this was and how to interpret it.”<sup>146</sup> Mukhitdinov wrote that although in Uzbekistan everyone was fully in support of rehabilitating those innocent individuals who suffered during the repressions, “with regard to Stalin himself [*lichnosti Stalina*], his personal responsibility for the committed lawlessness and serious mistakes at the beginning of the war, and in several other areas, our position somewhat differed.”<sup>147</sup> The majority of workers at the journal *Kommunist* reacted negatively, as Stalin was associated with too many achievements and the entirety of ideological life was tied to his name.<sup>148</sup>

The Yugoslav ambassador Micunovic wrote in his memoirs that “in various circles Soviet citizens prefer the Chinese statement [which had a more positive evaluation of Stalin] to Khrushchev’s speech. They say that the Chinese are objective, tactful, balanced, and truthful, and wise- which cannot be

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<sup>145</sup> Karl Eimermacher, ed., *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na XX s'ezde KPSS. Dokumenty. [Khrushchev's Report on Stalin's Cult of Personality at the 22th CPSU Congress. Documents]* (Moscow: ROSSPÈN, 2002), 115.

<sup>146</sup> Anatolii Cherniaev, “XX S'ezd. Vid S Galerki [The 20 Congress. View from the Peanut Gallery],” *Novaia Gazeta*, February 26, 2016.

<sup>147</sup> Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*, 1:171.

<sup>148</sup> Fedor Burlatskii, *Nikita Khrushchev i ego sovetniki-krasnye, chernye, belye [Nikita Khrushchev and His Advisors: Red, Black, and White]* (Moscow: EKSMO-Press, 2002), 53.

said about Khrushchev.” Aleksandr Iakovlev wrote in his memoirs that “the overwhelming majority of the bureaucracy of the CC apparat reacted to Khrushchev’s report negatively.”<sup>149</sup> Even Brezhnev, a Khrushchev ally, thought the report failed to adequately praise Stalin for his achievements. He wrote (ungrammatically) in his notes:

The report is unbalanced. It’s a wrong definition and incorrect approach showing the consequences of the cult of personality- and therefore the material has been selected to show how the cult of personality came about and its harm- yet everything about Stalin that used to be preached and talked about was positive.<sup>150</sup>

According to a Ministry of Defense report on discussions of Khrushchev’s speech in the Moscow Military District, officers made comments like: “Why did they publish this?” “After this report you don’t know whom to trust” and “I will not be surprised, if tomorrow a different document is published by the CC CPSU that takes a completely different position than the report “On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences.”<sup>151</sup> One military officer named V.M. Malkin wrote in his private diary about a Chinese delegation’s respect at Lenin and Stalin’s mausoleum in January 1957 and Khrushchev’s newly pro-Stalin language: “What is this: the Chinese have corrected us? Doesn’t it really seem like this? I am in complete agreement with the Chinese.”<sup>152</sup> Within the military were many skeptics about the wisdom of revealing Stalin’s crimes, and some expressed bafflement about why Stalin was the only man to blame in the leadership, as it seemed no one, including Khrushchev, challenged him.<sup>153</sup>

When the contents of the Secret Speech became more widely known, it led to agitation at party meetings and a violent solution to protests in Tbilisi. Members of the top leadership acknowledged to

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<sup>149</sup> Iakovlev, *Omut Pamiati [Whirlpool of Memory]*, 117.

<sup>150</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy of an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 263.

<sup>151</sup> Eimermacher, *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na XX s'ezde KPSS. Dokumenty. [Khrushchev's Report on Stalin's Cult of Personality at the 22th CPSU Congress. Documents]*, 540–41.

<sup>152</sup> RGVA fond 40894, opis 2, delo 31, list 238.

<sup>153</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 46, listy 202-211. One officer asked “Why was it necessary to publicize all this?” Another officer noted “It is still unclear what kind of policy comrades Khrushchev and Bulganin are pursuing, how regular members of the party will view it.” He predicted some would give up their party membership in protest. Another officer: “The members of the Politburo knew of the facts presented in the report by comrade Khrushchev. Why didn’t they take any measures while Stalin was alive, why was Beria again made head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs? Comrade Khrushchev’s explanations are not persuasive.”

foreigners that Khrushchev was losing popularity at the expense of his competitors. Bulganin told Micunovic that protesters in Moscow and Georgia wanted Molotov to become head of the government, which the ambassador interpreted as a subtle hint to a dispute within the leadership. According to Micunovic, “[t]o judge by a ‘poll’ we have taken, the people here still prefer people like Molotov and Malenkov...”<sup>154</sup> Khrushchev also told the delegation of Italian communists that the Georgians shouted “down with Khrushchev, Mikoian, and Bulganin” and “form a government by Molotov.”<sup>155</sup>

Khrushchev moved more closely to a “Stalinist” position throughout 1956. As early as April 1956, the CC distributed a letter to the party that restricted the discussion of the Secret Speech. A crucial June 30 CC document took an official position on Stalin much more positive than in that speech, primarily by pointing to the “objective concrete historical conditions” in which his actions took place, and crucially explained why other members of the Politburo were not able to stop the repressions, thus absolving them of any responsibility: “why did these people openly oppose Stalin and remove him from the leadership? In those conditions this was impossible. Without a doubt [*bezuslovno*].” If they had spoken out against Stalin, they “would not have received support among the people.” Moreover, his worst crimes were allegedly not discovered until after the defeat of Beria.<sup>156</sup> Crucially, this document was the official position of the party on Stalin, as the final version of Khrushchev’s Secret Speech said it was not “from the CC,” although Khrushchev had wanted this characterization.<sup>157</sup>

In July, Khrushchev told a delegation of Italian communists that Churchill had warned him that if he moved too fast with de-Stalinization he would be removed from the leadership and replaced by leaders

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<sup>154</sup> Veljko Micunovic, *Moscow Diary* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 34, 38.

<sup>155</sup> “N.S. Khrushchev: U Stalina Byli Momenty Prosvetleniia (1956) [N.S. Khrushchev: Stalin Had Moments of Enlightenment],” 86.

<sup>156</sup> Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia: Kak Eto Bylo. Fevral’ 1956- Nachalo 80-X Godov [Rehabilitation: How It Was. February 1956- Beginning of 1980s]*, 2:63–65, 132–46.

<sup>157</sup> Afiani, “Segodnia, 60 Let Nazad, Zavershilsia XX S’ezd KPSS, a Nakanune... [Today, 60 Years Ago, the 20 CPSU Party Congress Was Held, but Before...].”

who would use Stalinist methods and that he agreed with the former British prime minister.<sup>158</sup> On December 6, the Presidium approved the draft of a letter to be sent in the name of the CC to all party organizations on ending attacks by anti-Soviet and enemy elements. The letter took an extremely hard line and signified the end to hopes that the Secret Speech signified the start of a new era.<sup>159</sup> At the Presidium meeting that decided to release the document, Khrushchev even stated that “of those freed from jails and exile - some of them are not deserving.”<sup>160</sup> At one point Khrushchev explicitly told Ol’ga Shatunovskaia, a supporter of rehabilitations, that not everyone accused of a crime during the Stalin era could be brought to justice because “there are thousands and thousands of them, and then we would have another 1937.”<sup>161</sup>

In January 1957, Khrushchev gave a speech at the Chinese embassy in which he described Stalin as a man who devoted his whole life to the victory of the working class and socialism. Micunovic noted that the crowd was surprised to hear this and that his comments “evoked a storm of applause.” The Yugoslav ambassador believed that Khrushchev did this to save his own skin: “[t]he extent to which he then felt he was going to lose his position in the Presidium can be judged from the way he made himself out in public to be a greater Stalinist than Molotov and Malenkov.”<sup>162</sup> Khrushchev referenced this January speech explicitly at the February CC plenum, the last before the “anti-party group” incident, to emphasize the absence of any policy splits in the leadership: “[The Yugoslavs] also divided us into Stalinists and non-Stalinists. We answered. They write that Khrushchev in his speech at the reception at the Chinese embassy made a step backward from the decisions of the 20th Party Congress. I spoke of Stalin there. I believe that it was necessary precisely in that understanding it was necessary to speak and this was said... But we do not deny that with Stalin and as a result of that which was contributed by our party, our people,

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<sup>158</sup> “N.S. Khrushchev: U Stalina Byli Momenty Prosvetleniia (1956) [N.S. Khrushchev: Stalin Had Moments of Enlightenment],” 82–83.

<sup>159</sup> Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia: Kak Eto Bylo. Fevral’ 1956- Nachalo 80-X Godov [Rehabilitation: How It Was. February 1956- Beginning of 1980s]*, 2:208–14.

<sup>160</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 212–13.

<sup>161</sup> Shatunovskaia, *Ob ushedshem veke*, 286.

<sup>162</sup> Micunovic, *Moscow Diary*, 188, 277.

the result of which we have such a great country as the Soviet Union.”<sup>163</sup> That same month, the KGB warned that the courts should “carefully [sic] examine all the circumstances of a case [to insure that] enemies of the Soviet government will not receive acquittal or lighter punishments [when they should in fact be receiving] more severe punishments.”<sup>164</sup>

Khrushchev went so far in this direction that at a meeting of the party *aktiv* in the ministry of defense and Moscow garrison following the June plenum, Marshal Moskalenko stated “Kaganovich, Malenkov, and Molotov accused Khrushchev of spitting on Stalin, that he spoke only of his deficiencies. We all loved Stalin, and Khrushchev did not only speak poorly of him, but on multiple times emphasized his contributions to the people and the party.”<sup>165</sup> To say that Khrushchev defeated “Stalinists” therefore fails to acknowledge the extent to which Khrushchev had backtracked from his speech to the 20th Party Congress. Tellingly, Molotov and Kaganovich were allowed to rejoin the party in the 1980s. At the Politburo meeting where this decision was discussed, Ustinov stated “No one enemy brought us so much harm as Khrushchev did in his policy towards the past of our party and our state, and towards Stalin.”<sup>166</sup> Thirty years later, the historical verdict on the question of Stalin was in favor of the anti-party group.

To sum up, Khrushchev sparked the crisis with his dictatorial tendencies, had few real policy differences with others in the Presidium, and was often even associated with policies that did not enjoy broad popularity. In other words, in terms of policy preferences the outcome of the power struggle in the CC was unclear. Khrushchev told the June plenum that twenty of its members had demanded a session, yet the body consisted of 130 members. Serov wrote in his memoirs that “some members of the CC were waiting to see which way the wind was blowing and did not sign [the letter demanding a plenum session].” After the incident, Zhukov and Serov would remark many times on the “confusion

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<sup>163</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 215, listy 117-118 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>164</sup> Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 176.

<sup>165</sup> National Security Archive, Box 16, Russian and Eastern European Archive Documents Database, 07.02.1957, R11697, Speeches at the meeting, 54.

<sup>166</sup> July 12, 1984, Meeting of Politburo of CPSU. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

[*rassteriannost*] of certain members of the Presidium in those days and the two-faced nature of many members of the CC who would say neither yes or no.”<sup>167</sup> Khrushchev was not unambiguously popular in the CC.

*The Moral Authority of Marshal Zhukov and the Importance of Kompromat*

The previous sections demonstrated the weakness of hypothesis 1a by pointing to evidence that Khrushchev refused to cooperate with his competitors and that real policy differences were muted. In support of hypothesis 1b, we provided evidence that the primary threat posed by Khrushchev’s supporters was their status as old revolutionaries. In this final portion, I share evidence indicating that Khrushchev’s victory was dependent on two dynamics identified in hypothesis 1b: the importance of personal prestige and the skillful use of *kompromat*. Khrushchev clearly relied on Marshal Georgi Zhukov’s prestige as a military legend and historical documents indicating the role of his competitors in the purge. When Zhukov presented evidence of crimes committed by Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov to the CC plenum, the effect was devastating. The hero of the war against Nazi Germany was showing that party legends were butchers. These sociological factors separate from policy questions are absolutely crucial for understanding the outcome of the plenum.

Even before June 1957, we see evidence of Khrushchev improving his ties with Zhukov and a greater political role for the military. Although the military’s role in the setbacks that Malenkov and Molotov faced in 1955 was not decisive, in both cases we see clear evidence of the extent to which Khrushchev saw political power revolving around the military and the usefulness of using Zhukov’s prestige as a military leader against his opponents. The American intelligence community believed that the military sided with Khrushchev against Malenkov in 1955 because of the latter’s support for more consumer

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<sup>167</sup> Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 511, 515. Serov puts the number of people who demanded a session at 40, still many less than even half the CC membership.

goods.<sup>168</sup> Khrushchev gave a speech to the Supreme Soviet in April 1954 emphasizing heavy industry that has been interpreted as an attempt to enlist the military-industrial complex and military officers in his attempt to unseat Malenkov.<sup>169</sup> Zhukov complained to Khrushchev about Malenkov's statement that a nuclear war would lead to the end of human civilization, and Khrushchev communicated Zhukov's concerns.<sup>170</sup> The fact that Malenkov was accused of playing a role in the case of Marshal of the Artillery Iakovlev also suggests military support was being cultivated.

The role of the military was much more obvious in the attack on Molotov in 1955: here the evidence shows that Khrushchev used the prestige of the military leadership against Molotov's prestige as Stalin's right hand man. On May 8, Konev gave a speech that emphasized the role of Marshal Tito's forces in the defeat of fascism.<sup>171</sup> On the same day, *Pravda* published an article by Zhukov on the tenth anniversary of the defeat of Germany that also recognized Tito's role. At a Presidium meeting on May 19, Molotov criticized Zhukov's article: "Trotsky created the Red Army, but we do not praise him." Although the notes of the meeting are incomplete, Molotov apparently criticized the position towards Yugoslavia as not being sufficiently Leninist.<sup>172</sup>

At the CC plenum in 1955 that saw Molotov criticized for his foreign policy positions, Khrushchev admitted that he added the lines offensive to the article about the Yugoslav army without Zhukov's permission, as the latter was in Berlin, although his name was on the byline.<sup>173</sup> Bulganin claimed that one Presidium meeting Zhukov noted that the Yugoslavs had 40 divisions and that it was necessary to make

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<sup>168</sup> Sampson and Joyce, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Soviet Union. Volume V*, 536.

<sup>169</sup> Edemskii, *Ot Konflikta K Normalizatsii. Sovetsko-Iugoslavskie Otnosheniia v 1953-1956 Godakh [From Conflict to Normalization. Soviet-Yugoslav Relations in 1953-1956]*, 244.

<sup>170</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformator [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]* (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), 166–67.

<sup>171</sup> Edemskii, *Ot Konflikta K Normalizatsii. Sovetsko-Iugoslavskie Otnosheniia v 1953-1956 Godakh [From Conflict to Normalization. Soviet-Yugoslav Relations in 1953-1956]*, 389.

<sup>172</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 41–42.

<sup>173</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 158, list 111 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection). Khrushchev says "Polish" army in the transcript, but he clearly meant Yugoslav based on the context.



peace with such a country. Molotov allegedly answered: “the Americans have more. You can go serve them.”<sup>174</sup> In April, Zhukov even openly told the Yugoslav ambassador that he disagreed with Bulganin, Molotov, and Malenkov with regards to the USSR’s policy on Yugoslavia. In June, Micunovic noted how significant it was that “the Russians have used Marshal Zhukov - that is to say, the Soviet armed forces- for improving relations with Yugoslavia...”<sup>175</sup> At the May 28, 1956 Presidium meeting that decided to remove Molotov from the foreign ministry, Zhukov, since the 20th Party Congress a candidate Presidium member, said: “It is necessary to remove Comrade Molotov now. [He committed] mistakes on Yugoslavia and the German question. *Comrade Molotov has no authority among the military* [italics added by author].”<sup>176</sup>

When Molotov submitted his memorandum to the CC complaining about Khrushchev’s supposedly one-sided interpretation of the February plenum, Zhukov stated that “Molotov portrays the goal of his memorandum as the desire to introduce amendments, but the goal is different- to emphasize his disagreement with [Khrushchev’s] theses. He does not understand the issue, he does not want to place himself in one ranking with all members of the Presidium. It is necessary to make a certain decision. There was a decision to discuss the issue of collective leadership. There are comrades that must reconsider their behavior.”<sup>177</sup>

Why would Zhukov choose to assist Khrushchev? One obvious point is the lack of ties between the “anti-party group” and the military. The last Presidium meeting before Malenkov’s fall was entirely about civil-military relations and the creation of new institutions to manage security affairs.<sup>178</sup> When the new Defense Council was finally approved in February, soon after Malenkov was removed from the premiership, Khrushchev was named chairman and Malenkov was not even a member (other than Khrushchev, membership included Bulganin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, and Molotov, as well as marshals

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<sup>174</sup> RGANO fond 2, opis 1, delo 158, list 107 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>175</sup> Micunovic, *Moscow Diary*, 227, 246.

<sup>176</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 137–38.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–31.

Zhukov and Vasilevsky).<sup>179</sup> Although we have no proof that the timing was anything more than coincidental, it is revealing that major changes that would have enhanced the authority of the leader over the military were delayed until Malenkov was fully defeated: this piece of evidence therefore hints at the extent to which political power revolved around control of the military.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, as will be described in more detail in the next chapter, the new arrangements imparted to Khrushchev more direct authority over military affairs than was customary for a civilian Soviet leader. One month after Malenkov's removal, Khrushchev would promote six officers who served with him in the southwestern theater to marshal.<sup>181</sup>

Khrushchev therefore had an opportunity to improve his knowledge of defense affairs and interact with the high command. This gave him a serious advantage. Stalin at one point told Molotov: "You take no interest in military affairs. No one takes such an interest or knows military affairs. What will become of you? The imperialists will strangle you." Molotov freely admitted that "military affairs were of little interest to me."<sup>182</sup> Two major civilian leaders did have some military experience, but they were widely seen within the upper ranks as hopeless dilettantes. Former intelligence operative Sudoplatov said of Bulganin that "[h]is incompetence was striking. Bulganin was confused about such elementary concepts as the rapid deployment of forces, state of alert, and strategic military installations." When Stalin made him minister of defense, the idea was to make him the "arbiter between real commanders" who had

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 40, 884 fn 2.

<sup>180</sup> Soviet mole Oleg Penkovsky mockingly told his de-briefers that Khrushchev was called commander-in-chief "even though his rank is still lieutenant-general. (Jokingly to G)" Meeting #4, at Leeds, England, 23 April 1961, National Security Archive Online Database, 10.

<sup>181</sup> John Erickson, "Moskalenko," in *Stalin's Generals*, ed. Harold Shukman (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 152. This was apparently an effective technique. Penkovsky told his de-briefers: "Take VARENSOV- once he became a chief Marshal, he begins to like KHRUSHCHEV, you can't get anywhere near him. That's the way people act. He is well off financially, he has power, he wears badges of rank, he has a car, he has followers, he has a suite, he has a guard, a dacha so 'long live KHRUSHCHEV'!... VARENSOV used to say that KHRUSHCHEV is a fool and an adventurer, and now he drinks his health." YOGA Meetings Second Phase -July - August in London. Meeting. No. 18. National Security Archive Online Database, 29.

<sup>182</sup> Chuev and Molotov, *Molotov Remembers*, 189.

no respect for him.<sup>183</sup> For Zhukov, “Bulganin, as minister of defense, was not an authority and he knew this.”<sup>184</sup> Voroshilov had served for years as head of the armed forces, but his incompetence as a military leader was fully demonstrated both during the Civil War and war against Finland.<sup>185</sup> Although Voroshilov had previously served as head of the armed forces, he was universally seen as a dilettante.

A second crucial issue was the historic role played by members of the “anti-party group” in the massacre of leading officers, especially during the Great Terror, and the treatment of Zhukov personally after the war’s end. This antipathy on Zhukov’s part exacerbated his desire, the strongest among the entire leadership, to debunk Stalin. According to a former commander of the Turkestan Military Region, after Khrushchev gave his Secret Speech criticizing Stalin, Zhukov, “happy, his eyes shining, joyfully” said to his military comrades in the hallway: “Finally they debunked that pockmarked [expletive]!”<sup>186</sup> On April 5, Zhukov forwarded to Khrushchev a letter from a professor that diagnosed Stalin with paranoia.<sup>187</sup>

The most crucial piece of evidence for Zhukov’s intentions, however, is his draft speech for a planned plenum on “the decisions of the 20th Party Congress and the tasks of improving ideological work” submitted to Khrushchev on May 19, 1956.<sup>188</sup> The decision to hold a plenum was repeatedly delayed, and when one was finally held in December, the discussion was limited to economic issues.<sup>189</sup> Although he never gave the speech, its contents are remarkable for their ability to provide insights into Zhukov’s thinking, especially his attitude towards certain leaders.

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<sup>183</sup> Pavel Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness- a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 312–13.

<sup>184</sup> V. Naumov et al, eds., *Georgii Zhukov: stenogramma oktiabr’skogo (1957 g.) plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty [Georgy Zhukov: transcript of the October (1957) Plenum and Other Documents* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2001), 621.

<sup>185</sup> David M Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of World War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 41–42, 54.

<sup>186</sup> Vladimir Karpov, *Marshal Zhukov. Opala [Marshal Zhukov. Disgrace]* (Moscow: Veche, 1994), 219.

<sup>187</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 30, delo 140, listy 24-25b (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>188</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 137–48.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 653, NaN-12.

In his speech, Zhukov was emphatic: the greatest problem for ideological work in the military was Stalin's cult of personality. Zhukov noted that although "certain comrades" believed that it was wrong to further "stir up [voroshil']" this issue, he believed that "such attitudes flow from disagreement with the decision of the 20th Party Congress." For Zhukov, "we cannot forget the cult of personality and all that was connected with it, that it brought us so much damage in the affairs of the defense of our country as well."

Zhukov complained that too many of the victories of the war against the Nazis were attributed to Stalin at the expense of the people, party, government, and armed forces. He referred directly to how the purges of army officers in 1937-1938 damaged the military's ability to fight against the Nazis. Stalin's lack of trust towards military officers, expressed in his decision to twice dissolve one-man-command and install commissars, had devastating implications for discipline.

But Stalin was not Zhukov's only target. Zhukov complained that Stalin and Molotov had ignored warnings about the Nazis' intentions: "Did Stalin and Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars V.M. Molotov know about the concentration of Hitler's troops on our borders? - Yes, they knew." Zhukov even included in his speech a document he had submitted to Molotov on April 11, 1941 about German border violations, which Zhukov said was ignored. He condemned Stalin's refusal to allow the military to go on alert and discounted the idea that "active defense" was a real strategy as opposed to weak performance. Zhukov complained that Stalin understood operational and tactical issues very poorly, and that his lack of knowledge led to poor decision-making. He was especially incensed that Stalin tried to shift the blame for early defeats to military officers and even executed several generals.

Zhukov's attempts to overcome the consequences of the cult of personality were often blocked. He chaired a commission on rehabilitating prisoners of war.<sup>190</sup> Although amnesty was granted, the verdicts were only converted from betrayal and treachery into regular military crimes, meaning that in terms of status they were still the same as former members of German units and police squads.<sup>191</sup> In November 1956,

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 126–30.

<sup>191</sup> Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 179.

he demanded the resignation of the chairman of the military collegium of the Supreme Soviet and the deputy general prosecutor [*prokuror*] because of their roles in the post-war arrests of Soviet officers. Zhukov accused the latter of persecuting his adjutants and forcing them to write fabricated material about him, but he was given a soft landing by the party.<sup>192</sup> On March 16, 1956, Chairman of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Soviet V. Borisoglebskii wrote a personal memorandum to Zhukov on speeding up rehabilitations, a remarkable decision given that Zhukov was minister of defense and only a candidate member to the Presidium. In the memorandum, Borisoglebskii complained that reviewing cases in the Supreme Collegium and military tribunals required a long period of time and proposed the creation of commissions to investigate verdicts of counter-revolutionary crimes by extra-judicial organs. Even though when Zhukov forwarded the letter to the CC he explicitly expressed support for its contents, on June 8, immediately before the move against Khrushchev, the proposal was declined.<sup>193</sup>

Khrushchev clearly manipulated Zhukov's dissatisfaction towards Stalin and his former comrades.<sup>194</sup> In his Secret Speech to the 20th Party Congress, in the section in which he criticized Stalin as a military leader (which Khrushchev personally added to the draft written by Shepilov) he stated "as a result of Stalin's suspiciousness, by slanderous accusations, a high number of army commanders and political workers were annihilated," which "naturally" had an effect on the beginning of the war."<sup>195</sup> At the very first Presidium meeting that discussed a more serious line against Stalin's cult of personality, Khrushchev emphasized the death of officers: "Cadres were killed. Military ones [*Kadry perebili*.

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<sup>192</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 150.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 151–53.

<sup>194</sup> Khrushchev may have been seeking out military support in other ways as well: "Khrushchev told us frankly during the talks on November 2-3 that the Soviet Army has been the main factor in reaching a decision about the intervention in Hungary." Micunovic, *Moscow Diary*, 154.

<sup>195</sup> Eimermacher, *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na XX s'ezde KPSS. Dokumenty. [Khrushchev's Report on Stalin's Cult of Personality at the 22th CPSU Congress. Documents]*, 87–88.

*Voennye*].”<sup>196</sup> At the crucial Presidium meeting on March 27, 1957 when Khrushchev clashed with Molotov on industry reform, he made the following remarks:

Molotov is completely disconnected from real life. With regards to the virgin lands, he disagreed, with regards to foreign policy, he disagreed, this memo [on industrial reform] - is disagreement. He did not speak at the plenum - he probably was opposed. Now he suggests a commission - also, to delay. It wasn't always that Molotov acted unhurriedly [*byl netoropliv*]. He was in a hurry during the period of collectivization, *he was in a hurry when the group of generals were repressed* [italics added by author].<sup>197</sup>

At the Presidium meeting on April 25, the political situation continued to heat up. The Presidium decided to posthumously reinstate Soviet officers Yakir, Tukhachevsky, and Uborevich, who had been killed during the height of the Great Terror, into the party. Khrushchev did not let this opportunity to take a swing at his competitors go to waste: “Let the old members of the Politburo say how they solved the problem of bring Yakir to justice, how this first step was prepared.” Kaganovich tried to defend himself: “The matter was like this: the report was made, and we made a decision.” This was not enough for Zhukov: “We must get clarity with regards to this question [*iasnost' nado poluchit' v etom voprose*].”<sup>198</sup> At the same meeting, Khrushchev called for the rehabilitation of a factory manager involved in the production of tanks: “in this matter my friend Georgi Malenkov played an unseemly role. Rubinchik is a sacrifice of palace intrigue.”<sup>199</sup>

Brezhnev likely referred to this meeting when he stated the following at the plenum:

One of the reasons was the fact that recently the CC Presidium more and more often started receiving material, primarily from Comrade Shvernik, about the rehabilitation of communists, leading workers, repressions at the time at the will of Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich. At one of the last meetings Comrade Khrushchev expressed this idea: “Look, comrades, we are reviewing material, we are rehabilitating posthumously innocents who were shot. How should we treat the culprits of these shootings, will we return to this issue or will we continue to be quiet about this before the party?”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 57.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 245–46.

Khrushchev and Zhukov's joint raising of the responsibility of other members of the leadership was a clear violation of the joint decision made in the summer of 1956 to not hold culprits accountable. Molotov quoted from this June 30 letter at the CC plenum to explain his behavior during the Terror, thus showing the extent to which he saw the document as a reprieve: "this was a unanimous decision of the CC Presidium... No one in the party, not a single obkom, not a single CC from a republic spoke against this decision."<sup>201</sup> Along with the factors discussed above, they provided another reason for the "anti-party group" to move against Khrushchev before they were confronted with these charges.

Yet the use of *kompromat*, especially in the hands of Zhukov, ultimately played a crucial role in the struggle against the "anti-party group." In the words of Shepilov: "Zhukov supported Khrushchev. And this decided the fate of Molotov's group."<sup>202</sup> When a majority of the Presidium confronted Khrushchev, Zhukov was the first to speak against Khrushchev's opponents and brought up their responsibility for the worst crimes of the Stalinist era. He was the first to label them a group engaged in a conspiracy.<sup>203</sup> Zhukov later described his behavior thus: when the Presidium refused to accept Khrushchev's proposal for a plenum, deciding instead that Khrushchev should first be removed from his position as first secretary, "I saw an exit from the situation only in decisive actions. I stated: 'I categorically insist on immediately summoning a CC plenum. The issue is much broader than the group suggests. I want to put before the plenum the issue of Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, and Malenkov. I have in my hands material on their bloody atrocities with Stalin in 1937-1938 and they have no place in the CC Presidium and even in the CPSU CC...'"<sup>204</sup> Aristov at the CC plenum confirmed that "after this massive artillery attack [meaning the criticisms of Khrushchev] Zhukov, our glorious marshal, was the first to [attack using the *kompromat*]."<sup>205</sup> At the July 2 meeting of the ministry of defense apparat and Moscow garrison, Zhukov frankly admitted that he saved Khrushchev: "In order to win time, to more deeply figure

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>202</sup> Chuev, *Kaganovich; Shepilov [Kaganovich; Shepilov]*, 365.

<sup>203</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 183.

<sup>204</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 629.

<sup>205</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 183.

out their thoughts and intentions, to attempt to split the group, which was joined by Saburov (7-4) a supplementary question was raised by me with regards to the responsibility of Malenkov, Kaganovich and Molotov for the abuse of power.”<sup>206</sup>

The subsequent CC plenum began with Suslov giving a brief account of the Presidium sessions. The second speaker was Zhukov, who began by also describing the Presidium meetings and accusing Khrushchev’s opponents of using deficiencies in the work of the leadership to destroy the unity of the party. But then he changed the tone of debate entirely. Marshal Meretskov told the defense ministry and Moscow garrison that “the direction of the debate in actuality was determined by Comrade Zhukov. He directly raised the question that people in the past committed crimes, and now they want to cause a split and seize power.”<sup>207</sup>

Zhukov noted that at the 20th Party Congress Khrushchev had spoken of the mass repressions and shootings, but did not name Malenkov, Kaganovich, or Molotov as “the main culprits of the arrests and shootings of party and Soviet cadres.” He questioned why these “comrades” did not find it necessary to speak of their guilt when the new CC was selected. Zhukov postulated that this was because if they had done so, they would not have been elected to the next Presidium. He claimed that they had not acted under pressure from Stalin, but “of their own initiative.”

Zhukov then quoted specific documents and accused Molotov and Kaganovich of giving permission to execute 38,679 individuals. According to one former chekist, these documents were provided to Khrushchev by KGB head Serov, who also destroyed those documents that would have compromised Khrushchev.<sup>208</sup> Zhukov quoted at length Marshal Yakir’s last letter to Stalin in which he begged for his life, as well as Stalin’s response on the document: “A scoundrel and a prostitute.” Molotov

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<sup>206</sup> National Security Archive, Box 16, Russian and Eastern European Archive Documents Database, 07.02.1957, R11697, Speeches at the meeting, 12.

<sup>207</sup> National Security Archive, Box 16, Russian and Eastern European Archive Documents Database, 07.02.1957, R11697, Speeches at the meeting, 86.

<sup>208</sup> V.I. Alidin, *Gosudarstvennaia Bezopasnost’ i Vremia (1951-1986) [State Security and Time (1951-1986)]* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Veteran MP,” 1997), 131.



agreed: “A completely accurate definition.” Kaganovich added: “The scum, bastard, and whore deserves one punishment - death.” The hall exploded into shouts of “Butchers!” and “Give an answer!” For Zhukov, Malenkov was even guiltier than Kaganovich or Molotov, as his party task had been to manage the NKVD. Zhukov told the plenum that Bulganin showed him documents from Malenkov’s private safe. These documents were 58 volumes of conversations of individuals like “Budenny, Timoshenko, Zhukov, Konev, and Voroshilov”: all marshals of the Soviet Army. Zhukov concluded: “and this material was preserved in his personal safe and was taken out incidentally, when the MVD needed to arrest his personal secretary.”

For Zhukov, if the people had only known about how “their fingers dripped with the blood of innocents,” then they would not be met with applause, but stones. He proposed that the plenum demand explanations from Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov. Before ending his speech by proposing the question of whether the three should remain leaders of the country, he made an interesting remark about the remaining individuals on the Presidium: “It is necessary to say that other comrades are guilty as well, former members of the Politburo. I think, comrades, that you know who I am talking about, but you know that these comrades by their honest work and straightforwardness deserved the trust of the CC of the party...” Therefore, Khrushchev’s history was not so much forgotten as forgiven because of his subsequent behavior. Zhukov repeated his accusation that Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov held personal responsibility for the mass repressions in his speech justifying their purge to the ministry of defense and Moscow garrison on July 2.

Zhukov was followed by the head of the MVD, a man named Dudorov, who continued the attack with even more *kompromat*. Malenkov spoke next, wryly beginning his speech by remarking: “Comrades Dudorov and Zhukov, having done quite a bit of preparation, apparently, and spent a long period of time collecting documents, have informed the CC plenum of facts with regards to different periods of my career.” While Malenkov tried to defend himself, Zhukov interrupted him repeatedly. Twice Zhukov asked him why he did not report to the Presidium about the documents that included compromising

material on the marshals. When Malenkov said “I absolutely at no time had any connection to the organization of surveillance over marshals, I did not eavesdrop on anyone, as I myself was eavesdropped upon,” Zhukov stated flatly: “That is untrue.” Khrushchev jumped into the fray and criticized Malenkov for portraying himself as suffering from surveillance just like Marshals Zhukov and Timoshenko.<sup>209</sup>

When Kaganovich in his speech began listing examples of Khrushchev violating the principles of collective leadership, Zhukov tried to change the subject: “let’s talk about responsibility for the crimes, the shootings.”<sup>210</sup> After Zhukov told Kaganovich that he should be held for criminal charges, Kaganovich started to remind the audience that he was not the only one with blood on his hands, asking Khrushchev: “And did you really not sign papers on shooting in Ukraine?” Then he confronted Zhukov:

Kaganovich: What, Comrade Zhukov, as commander of a division you did not sign?

Zhukov: I did not order anyone shot, Comrade Kaganovich.

Kaganovich: This is difficult to believe.

Zhukov: Please believe it.

Kaganovich: What, you didn’t approve the policy of the CC, the policy of struggle against enemies?

Zhukov: Struggle against enemies, but not shootings.

Kaganovich: We did not know all the details.

Then Khrushchev cut into the conversation to argue that as a member of the Politburo, Kaganovich should have known, pointing out he (Khrushchev) was not at the time.<sup>211</sup> Zhukov was so aggressive during Molotov’s speech that the latter labeled his words a threat that violated party rules.<sup>212</sup> Still, Zhukov interrupted Molotov’s speech to accuse him, at Bulganin’s suggestion, of sending 126,000 officers who had been captured by the Nazis into concentration camps for six years.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 47.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–69.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Marshal Konev also spoke at the plenum, where he criticized the group for damaging the unity of the party and the danger such behavior portended for national security. He also attacked Molotov personally: “during the most difficult days of the Great Fatherland War Comrade Molotov treated us military officers commanding troops on the fronts like a lord, contemptuously, speaking to us with curse words during the most difficult days of the operations.” Konev then criticized Molotov for supporting Stalin after the war when he attacked Zhukov with “libelous accusations.” He flatly stated to Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov: “Among us, army communists, you lack trust, and I in the name of the army members of the party, army Bolsheviks speak in favor of you being removed from the CC of our party.”<sup>214</sup> Marshal Eremenko did not speak at the plenum (although he shouted interjections), instead submitting a written speech in which he accused Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov of being more guilty in the murder of cadres than Stalin, demanded Kaganovich be tried in a criminal court, described Malenkov as a coward in battle, and told Molotov he was “up to his neck in blood.”<sup>215</sup>

Khrushchev and his supporters took their cue from Zhukov and played up fears that the “anti-party group” would return the Terror. They could now portray the move against Khrushchev as an attempt to avoid responsibility for the killings. As Khrushchev stated: “You wanted to form a group, there was a plot. You wanted to remove [me] in order to get the material you need and destroy evidence of crimes.”<sup>216</sup> Mikoian stated that during the Presidium meetings Molotov accused Khrushchev of falling into a “rightist deviation”: “this was simply a dogmatic, scholastic comparison and an attempt to find an offensive label to compromise members of the Presidium.” Mikoian raised the possibility that Molotov “wanted to return to a number of Stalin’s bad methods.”<sup>217</sup> Aristov argued that the group moved against Khrushchev because they were afraid de-Stalinization would mean they would eventually be held to account for the Terror, as the process of investigation had shown their complicity.<sup>218</sup> Brezhnev stated that the “seizure of power by

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<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 177–81.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 666–68.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 191–92.

these conspirators would inevitably lead to those fanatical methods towards cadres of the party and state that they used in that prior time... We did not forget and we will not forget that massive repressions and shootings took place at your dirty hands.”<sup>219</sup>

Despite the clear complicity of members of the “anti-party group” in some of the greatest political crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the use of *kompromat* against them was part of a dirty political game. Ivan Serov claims to have been told by the head of the General Department, Vladimir Malin, that documents proving Khrushchev’s role in the Terror had been destroyed. Serov pointed out that everyone wanted to use *kompromat* against each other, but only Khrushchev personally controlled the KGV, MVD, and procuracy.<sup>220</sup> Everyone was complicit, but at the same time, everyone had been dominated by Stalin. Kaganovich remarked: “... Com. Zhukov dragged out the names of only two or three that signed the documents, and he did not mention others - this is a factionalist maneuver. Here is where the factionalism is.”<sup>221</sup> As Malenkov put it at the plenum: “What, I ruled Stalin? If you put it like that, people will laugh.”<sup>222</sup> The evidence was hardly portrayed in a way befitting a true settling of accounts. *Kompromat* was used to imply a plot to return to the Terror, a charge for which there is absolutely no corroborating evidence<sup>223</sup>, and to strip senior leaders of their legitimacy as legendary revolutionary figures. Yet it was used to devastating effect. In a letter to the CC written in the mid-1960s, Molotov acknowledged the power of such charges when they were again made at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress: “In my opinion, this was nothing other than an attempt to scare the delegates of the Congress. And I affirm that this attempt was successful to a certain

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>220</sup> Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 465–66.

<sup>221</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 68.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 491.

<sup>223</sup> Khrushchev: You want to turn everything back in time, so that then you yourself could grab the axe.

Molotov: I hope that you did not want this, I all the more so do not want it.

Ibid., 131.

degree, as, indeed, during the time of the so-called cult of personality of Stalin there were relatively widespread facts of arbitrariness and lawlessness...”<sup>224</sup>

Khrushchev’s own role in the crimes was ignored. After Beria’s purge, Serov was assigned to the Special Archive of the Central Committee to find material related to the former political police boss. He found documents proving Khrushchev’s role in the purges in Ukraine, and that Khrushchev had written “all kinds of filth” about such leaders as Kosior and Postyshev.<sup>225</sup> Khrushchev had even written “I vote for this proposal” on resolutions expelling Tukhevskii, Iakir, and Uborevich from the party: all Soviet marshals. In July 1937, as mayor of Moscow, he proposed the creation of a committee to try anti-Soviet elements, and he was even a member of one of the infamous extra-judicial *troikas*.<sup>226</sup> Deciding that Khrushchev was less culpable was a fine line to draw. Therefore, Kaganovich had the right to ask Khrushchev directly at the June plenum: “isn’t it the case that you signed papers on execution in Ukraine?”<sup>227</sup> This idea was understood at lower levels: one man at a local party meeting who had been a member of the party since 1927 (and had recently been demobilized from the political police) complained that the case against Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov was unfair because Khrushchev also played a role in 1937.<sup>228</sup>

To sum up, if hypothesis 1a was accurate we should have seen Khrushchev achieving victory by co-opting his opponents and adopting popular policy platforms. Yet Khrushchev antagonized other members of the elite. Policy differences were either muted, did not favor Khrushchev, or were over-emphasized for political purposes. Instead, the evidence provides more evidence for hypothesis 1b: his

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<sup>224</sup> V.M. Molotov, “Pis’mo V.M. Molotova v TsK KPSS (1964 G.) [Letter from V.M. Molotov to the CC CPSU],” *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 6 (June 2011): 72.

<sup>225</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti* [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death], 418.

<sup>226</sup> Federal’noe arkhivnoe agentstvo, *Khrushchev: K 120-Letiiu so Dnia Rozhdeniia. Katalog Istoriko-Dokumental’noi Vystavki* [Khrushchev: On the Anniversary of His 120 Birthday. Catalogue of Historical-Documentary Exhibition] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015), 42–43.

<sup>227</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 68.

<sup>228</sup> “Tovarishch Kaganovich Pretenduet Na Osoboe K Sebe Otnoshenie,” August 2005, 13.

competitors were primarily threatening because of their status as old men of the party, and Khrushchev's victory relied upon the special status of a military leader and the tendentious use of *kompromat*.

## **Section 2: Selectorate Theory vs. Rule Manipulation**

According to hypothesis 2a, we should expect to see deliberation over leadership positions in a single enfranchised group. Yet here again we see more evidence for hypothesis 2b: victory in the power struggle was more about manipulation of ambiguous rules about which decision-making body would have the right to decide. Second, hypothesis 2b predicts power struggles can be won by the individual more obviously violating even ambiguous groups. In this case, although we see both sides violated formal and informal rules, Khrushchev's behavior was arguably a greater departure from previously-established practice. Members of the "anti-party group" met individually outside of the Presidium to discuss Khrushchev's behavior before moving against him, which could be considered a violation of Lenin's famous resolution on factions. On the other hand, arguing that members of the Presidium could not discuss amongst themselves an "unhealthy atmosphere" in that body, especially when a majority of them felt the same way, is hard to take seriously. With regards to Khrushchev, his summoning of the CC to judge a Presidium decision was clearly legitimate according to the letter of the CPSU's constitution. Yet his reliance on the military and the revelation of a split in the Presidium to the broader party membership was clearly seen as an outrageous violation of established procedure by his competitors. In other words, the man who most violated the spirit of party rules won. In any case, it was precisely his ability to maneuver and bring the matter to the CC that ensured his victory. To put it in Mikoian's words, "arithmetics" did not mean victory: "They were in a big hurry, they got carried away with arithmetics [meaning the Presidium majority]. We made a warning: do not get carried away with arithmetics. However voices rang out that arithmetics is no small matter in politics."<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 154.

The case could certainly be made that the “anti-party group” was not entirely operating according to party rules. As Kirilenko put it, “Do you really think it is normal to first group together and then tell a comrade suddenly of a decision? This is factionalism, you know the history of our party!”<sup>230</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress resolution on factionalism was mentioned repeatedly at the June 1957 plenum. As discussed in the previous chapter, point four of this document stipulates that matters should only be discussed at party meetings, not at “groups” forming around a “platform.”<sup>231</sup> The move against the leader of the party could also be seen as factionalist to the extent it was destabilizing, as the target was the leader of the country. As Konev put it:

We, military people, are especially concerned that this bunt against the party not in the slightest way reflect on the interests of the security of our fatherland. In the conditions of the current international situation, when our Soviet state undergoes constant attacks of the reactionary powers of the capitalist world, when the enemy seeks any opening to split the socialist camp - the unity of our party and cohesion of our strength has enormous significance.<sup>232</sup>

Yet on the other hand, the behavior of the “anti-party group” becomes much less problematic when the following factors are considered. First, Khrushchev’s opponents on the Presidium were a *majority*. How could a majority of the Presidium be considered a faction? As Malenkov put it, “The group consisted of seven members of the Presidium - it is necessary to consider this.”<sup>233</sup> Kaganovich was more direct: “seven members of an eleven member Presidium expressed a certain opinion. Is this a group? No. Invite any jurist (noise in the hall), any legalist, any intelligent person, and he will say that seven of eleven - this is a majority, not a group [faction].” He went on to argue that the plenum had the right to elect a new Presidium, but as long as it existed, “it is a Presidium, not a group.”<sup>234</sup> The majority opposed to Khrushchev on the Presidium might have been even larger if they had carried the day. For example, Mikoian could have been a fence-sitter. Khrushchev once told Castro: “I trust [Mikoian] least of all. He’s a shrewd fox from the east; you can’t count on him. In both 1953 when we arrested Beria, and in 1957

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>231</sup> RGASPI, fond 45, opis 1, delo 23, listy 29-31

<sup>232</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 178.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 62.

with the ‘anti-party group,’ I was more nervous about Mikoian’s position than anyone else’s.”<sup>235</sup> As mentioned above, Zhukov and Serov later remarked on the “confusion [*rassteriannost*] of certain members of the Presidium in those days and the two-faced nature of many members of the CC who would say neither yes or no.”<sup>236</sup>

Second, the “anti-party group” was reacting against Khrushchev’s striving for dominance over the collective. Their position was often portrayed by Khrushchev’s opponents in the CC deliberations as a *rejection* of Stalin’s cult of personality. Malenkov stated: “We are required to learn lessons from this tragic experience and not allow it under any circumstances.”<sup>237</sup> Charges of factionalism implied that the Presidium members had no right to challenge a leader who was slipping out of control.

Third, it is hard to imagine how Khrushchev could have been challenged if his opponents had not had *any* conversations beforehand. As Malenkov put it, “I reject any factionalist work. Members of the Presidium have the right to speak with one another one on one... There is no prohibition on having a conversation.”<sup>238</sup> Kaganovich argued “We met according to the constitution, without any violations of established rules, discussed an issue. You yourself understand that the issue was with regards to abnormalities in the Presidium.”<sup>239</sup> Clearly this was a major inherent problem to the system: individual conversations could be considered factionalism, but without such conversations, could there be any real deliberations, especially on such important questions as the behavior of the paramount leader? And unlike the situation with Beria, the anti-party group never suggested simply arresting Khrushchev. Rules were therefore highly ambiguous.

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<sup>235</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 581.

<sup>236</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti* [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death], 511, 515. Serov puts the number of people who demanded a session at 40, still many less than even half the CC membership.

<sup>237</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 54.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.



Fourth, the idea of a faction assumed that there was some common policy orientation. As discussed above, this was decidedly not the case, and the “anti-party group” emphasized this at the CC plenum. Bulganin pointed out that he had always suffered troubled relations with Molotov, Kaganovich, and Malenkov.<sup>240</sup> Pervukhin remarked that he had no principle differences with either foreign policy or domestic policy issues.<sup>241</sup> Voroshilov emphasized that “neither I nor the majority of the so-called faction had any differences with the line of the party with regards to foreign or domestic issues, we were always united. Why attribute that which is not true?”<sup>242</sup> Even Molotov affirmed that “Suslov spoke incorrectly, that I had a different understanding of the policies of our party.”<sup>243</sup> Molotov tried to explain to the party that “there was no political platform, and without a political platform, comrades, there is no faction.”<sup>244</sup> Molotov was clearly frustrated: “It is not true that I was opposed to the virgin lands. Khrushchev framed me for so many incorrect things...”<sup>245</sup> Molotov repeatedly emphasized this: “I affirm that in this case [Yugoslavia], and in a series of other occasions things were attributed to me that I did not say.”<sup>246</sup> Mikoian tried to square this circle by arguing that removing Khrushchev from the leadership had to affect policy. However, even he could go only so far, lamely arguing that, “On the face of things the group, working behind the back of the CC, did have *elements* [italics added by author] of a platform, there was still no platform, but all the elements of a platform were there.”<sup>247</sup>

The idea that their behavior was illegitimate infuriated members of the “anti-party group”. They clearly found the charge outrageous. In the plenum record there is a remarkable interlude with the following description:

Voroshilov very explosively reacts to the expression “anti-party group”, in the midst of a continuous role in the hall he says something, only the following words were intelligible: this is an abomination, fiction,

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 165–66.

there was no anti-party group. He addresses Khrushchev: why are you silent, you are the chair, say that there was no group!

Khrushchev: Kliment Efremovich, it turns out that you are a temperamental person, you accused me of my temper, and now you are no better than me in this regard.<sup>248</sup>

Although formally the CC was technically a more authoritative institution than the Presidium, the idea that the CC could actually over-ride the Presidium was revolutionary. Kaganovich wrote that “several members of the Presidium furiously reacted to this act of summoning members of the CC to Moscow without the permission of the CC Presidium as an act of usurpation from the CC secretariat, and of course, Khrushchev himself.” Saburov allegedly screamed: “I thought, Comrade Khrushchev, that you were an honest person. Now I see that I was mistaken - you are a dishonest person, allowing yourself to act divisively [*po fraktsionnomu*], behind the back of the CC Presidium organizing this meeting in Sverdlov Hall.”<sup>249</sup> Kozlov described the arrival of the CC delegation (led by Serov and marshals, as discussed above) as “like an atom bomb exploded on the head of this faction.”<sup>250</sup>

The question of who was acting more appropriately revolved around whether it was more legitimate for the Presidium to make a decision that was then reviewed by CC, or whether disputes in the Presidium should be decided in the CC. Kaganovich certainly believed it was the former. As he put it at the plenum: “Indeed before the plenum there is a Presidium, and the norm of party life demands that an issue is first discussed on the Presidium, and then at the plenum. Indeed, this is why the Presidium exists.”<sup>251</sup> It was precisely the interpretation of this particular rule that was decisive. Mikoian admits in his memoirs that “the whole matter was about which way the CC plenum was informed: as a decision already made by the Presidium or as a dispute in the Presidium. In the former case [Khrushchev]’s song would have been sung. The plenum would have, without a doubt, approved the decision: the Stalinist traditions were strong even long after his death.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>249</sup> Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego... [Memos by a Worker...]*, 520.

<sup>250</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 207.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>252</sup> Mikoian, *Tak Bylo: Razmyshleniia O Minuvshem [How It Was: Reflections on the Past]*, 646.

### Section 3: Coercive Institutions

According to hypothesis 3a, the position of the military or political police should not have a special role in resolving the conflict. However, each side understood that Zhukov and Serov would play an integral role and sought their support. Moreover, when a CC delegation interrupted the Presidium deliberations, the presence of marshals and the head of the KGB clearly had an especially sobering effect on Khrushchev's opponents. Hypothesis 3a would also not allow for the possibility that the power ministries would have some leeway in deciding which orders were more legitimate. But by refusing to obey the will of the Presidium majority, defense minister Zhukov and KGB head Serov essentially foreclosed the possibility of Khrushchev's defeat.

#### *The Key Roles Played by the Power Ministries*

Hypothesis 3a would neither predict that the positions of the military and KGB would have a decisive impact on the power struggle or that the fight for dominance would revolve to any serious extent around the power ministries. However, we see more support for hypothesis 3b: the positions held by Zhukov and Serov were sought by both sides, and the expression of their position had a decisive influence. Shortly before the showdown at the Presidium, Zhukov had attended the wedding of Khrushchev's son, at which Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Bulganin had demonstratively left together to go to Malenkov's dacha. Kirichenko then approached Zhukov and said: "We are counting on you. You have tremendous authority in the Army, with one word the army will do everything that is needed." Zhukov felt that "Kirichenko did not say these words incidentally, that it was not his idea."<sup>253</sup> When the meeting began, Zhukov was attending a military exercise. When he finally arrived at the Kremlin, Brezhnev said to him: "Whose side are you on, are you on their side or not? The decision will be based on this."<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 627.

<sup>254</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 243.

The anti-party group also clearly sought Zhukov's support, and these attempts were at times criticized as one of its crimes. At one point Kaganovich slapped Zhukov on the back on a trip to the dacha and said that it was time for him to become a member of the Presidium.<sup>255</sup> This hope of enlisting Zhukov may not have been completely baseless. Curiously, we have some evidence that even as Zhukov hated the men who had butchered his comrades in the army, he too was concerned about Khrushchev's increasingly dictatorial tendencies. Shepilov wrote in his memoirs that during the Presidium deliberations on whether to remove Khrushchev, Zhukov wrote a note to Bulganin that said: "I propose that we bring the discussion to an end. Issue a stern reprimand to Khrushchev for violating the principle of collective leadership, and leave everything as is for the time being, and look again at the situation later."<sup>256</sup> Zhukov admitted at the June CC plenum that during the Presidium meetings he had proposed that instead of a first secretary there be a secretary of general issues [*sekretar' po obshchim voprosam*]: a compromise that would have saved Khrushchev but limited his power.<sup>257</sup>

However, other evidence hints that Zhukov was playing a double game. Khrushchev told the plenum:

We always knew that Zhukov visited Molotov, that he visited Malenkov more than once, and that he even visited Voroshilov. We were always in touch with Zhukov and told him that he should go, that he should speak, first, to clarify [what was going on] and second, to find out what was motivating them (*chem oni dyshat*).<sup>258</sup>

At the October plenum in 1957 at which Zhukov was purged, Ignatov stated: "Before the June plenum, at one stage you [Zhukov] were in favor of a different leadership in the party. You even suggested powerful measures such that the first secretary would not only be removed but that Comrade Khrushchev would be punished with a severe reprimand and a warning."<sup>259</sup> Whether Zhukov was truly that loyal to Khrushchev, or this was a story made up to assuage doubts among plenum members that Zhukov was also skeptical

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>256</sup> Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar*, 396.

<sup>257</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 52.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 99–100.

<sup>259</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 333.

about Khrushchev's increasingly despotic leadership style, may always remain a mystery.<sup>260</sup> In any case, both sides recognized the importance of which position he decided to take.

The "anti-party group" also sought out the support of the KGB head, Ivan Serov.<sup>261</sup> However, Serov turned out to be loyal to Khrushchev, probably because he was compromised by his crimes during the Stalin era and knew that his position was highly dependent on Khrushchev, with whom he had worked in Ukraine.<sup>262</sup> Still, the anti-party group might have had some hopes: Serov admitted in his memoirs that even he was unhappy with Khrushchev's dictatorial tendencies.<sup>263</sup>

Still, the relationship between Serov and Khrushchev was troubling for others on the Presidium. Shortly before the showdown, Bulganin asked Serov to his office and demanded to know why he was not informed about some small issue. When Serov responded that he addressed all of his memoranda to the CC, which then distributed them to members of the Presidium, Bulganin exploded: "What, I'm not the CC? Am I a dog's cock [*khren sobachii*], is that it?" Bulganin accused Serov of sending information only to Khrushchev. Serov argued that this was a formal decision of the Presidium, and that it made sense for information sent "to the CC" to go first to Khrushchev as first secretary.<sup>264</sup> At the Presidium meetings, the "anti-party group" demanded the KGB submit to the Presidium as a whole (as opposed to just Khrushchev) and that a special committee be established to observe its work. They apparently hoped to replace Serov with Bulganin.<sup>265</sup> Kaganovich explained that "the KGB, which should be subject to the

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<sup>260</sup> The approaches made by the "anti-party group" towards Zhukov and their goal of removing Serov from the KGB were interpreted by some as an attempt to use force to coerce the party. The commander of the Pacific Fleet made this argument at a *partaktiv* in July 1957: clearly a double standard given Khrushchev's use of those two individuals. RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 71, list 17. Interestingly, Zhukov's role was not obvious to the party as a whole. Some party members asked questions about how Zhukov behaved, indicated a lack of knowledge about his role. See, for example, RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 71, list 31.

<sup>261</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti* [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death], 507.

<sup>262</sup> Petrov, *Pervyi Predsedatel' KGB Ivan Serov* [First Head of the KGB Ivan Serov].

<sup>263</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti* [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death], 507–11.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>265</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 54, 56.

entire Presidium, was essentially subject only to him [Khrushchev].”<sup>266</sup> Mostly the “organs” favored Khrushchev, but Zhukov was also concerned that the number of body guards around Khrushchev’s opponents had increased and that Bulganin and Malenkov had friends in the KGB and MVD who might assist them.<sup>267</sup>

The import of the military and KGB is especially clear by how members of the CC confronted the Presidium as its proceedings were still continuing. The Presidium deliberations were interrupted by a group of 15-20 CC members who demanded to join the meeting. Mukhitdinov later wrote they were mostly military officers and members of the KGB and MVD, with Serov in front. Marshal Konev was a leader of the group, which, as Taylor points out, would have contributed to the sense that Khrushchev was supported by the military.<sup>268</sup>

Serov in his own memoirs provides new details: the group was repeatedly denied entry into the room where the Presidium meetings were taking place. Then Serov suggested to Konev: “Let’s the two of us go in without invitation.” In other words, the head of the KGB and the commander of the Soviet ground forces barged into a Presidium meeting even though the official standing at the door repeatedly told them they had not been granted an audience.<sup>269</sup>

According to Mukhitdinov, once inside Serov complained that for the last three days the CC was not being informed about what was going on: “Not one issue falling into the competency of the plenum [CC] should be decided here. We will not leave without a clear answer!” Bulganin struck his fist on the table: “How dare you? It is clear to everyone who and by whose initiative this group was summoned...” Marshal Konev supported Serov: “We are all members of the CC. The people must know the truth!”

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>267</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 631.

<sup>268</sup> Brian D Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 183.

<sup>269</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 512.

Voroshilov and Khrushchev left the room to “explain” what was transpiring to the CC delegation.<sup>270</sup> At the plenum Saburov admitted to saying: “today military officers, and tomorrow tanks.” Khrushchev corrected him: “You said it like this: I now see what kind of person you are, they come today, and there tanks stand.” Zhukov responded that this was incorrect, since as minister of defense tanks could only be moved at his order.<sup>271</sup> In the edited version of Aristov’s speech in the CC plenum transcript, the line “after the surnames of the military men were named” was inserted in front of the line: “there was a quick transformation of several comrades from lions into rabbits.”<sup>272</sup>

Zhukov used the arrival of the CC delegation to further emphasize the threat he posed to the “anti-party group” as head of the military. Kozlov provided the following account to the CC plenum about what happened after Saburov’s exclamation regarding tanks: “Com. Zhukov [said] is this distrust of the army, who has the right to deploy tanks without my order, what is this! This cooled them down a bit, sobered them up! When Molotov threatened him with a finger, Zhukov said to him - distrust of me, I have been wearing a uniform for forty years. This cooled them down a bit!” Interestingly, this story was cut from the official version of the plenum transcript.

#### *The Military and KGB Refuse to Enact the Will of the Presidium*

Hypothesis 3a’s emphasis on institutionalization means that it would predict the power ministries would serve as objective, third-party enforcers. According to established party practice, the more obviously legitimate choice was for the military and KGB to submit to the will of the Presidium. As hypothesis 3b would predict, however, Zhukov and Serov had the ability to decide that in this case it would be more appropriate for the CC to make the decision. On the afternoon of June 18, Zhukov flatly stated: “The army will not support removals from the leadership of the CC.” Everyone exchanged

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<sup>270</sup> Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*, 1:272–73; Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego... [Memos by a Worker...]*, 521. Serov, however, claimed that it was Mikoian who went out to address them.

<sup>271</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 86.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

glances, as this sounded like a threat.<sup>273</sup> According to a memoir by Mukhitdinov, who was a Presidium candidate member at the time, Khrushchev asked, during a meeting with Suslov, Mukhitdinov, Zhukov, and Furtseva, whether he should fight back. Zhukov answered: “you do not need to leave the post of first secretary. I will arrest them, everything is prepared.” Suslov was skeptical: “Arrest them for what? Moreover, what crimes could we accuse them of?” Mukhitdinov also supported using the party to defeat the challenge and reminded Khrushchev that the CC supported him. Khrushchev agreed: “indeed, the more realistic path is to quickly call a plenum and seize the initiative from them.”<sup>274</sup>

According to Ivan Serov, even Khrushchev was unsure about the legality of the plenum option.

Serov wrote:

[In response to Khrushchev telling him that the plotters wanted to remove him as well] I answered: ‘No matter what they want, but given such quarrels in the CC Presidium, I will not surrender the KGB to anyone without the permission of a CC plenum.’ Zhukov says: ‘That’s right, Ivan, I also will not give up the Ministry of Defense.’ Khrushchev said to this: ‘*The Presidium has the right to make such a decision* [italics added].’ I answered: ‘Well, it’s better to let the CC plenum decide.’

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

Institutions, although weak, were not entirely irrelevant. Both sides did somersaults to try and convince the CC they were adhering more closely to the rules. When the “anti-party group” realized the game was up, they did not refuse to follow the decision for the sake of party unity. As the last section indicated, Khrushchev have might even had the option of using the military and KGB to simply arrest his competitors. However, he apparently decided that such a step would have been either too blatant or simply unnecessary. The answer is hard to determine. Although Mukhitdinov claimed Zhukov was fully prepared to arrest the “anti-party group”, Serov recounted the following exchange between Khrushchev and Zhukov on the second day of the Presidium proceedings:

Then Khrushchev says that ‘recently Molotov called him and says why are tanks being mobilized at night.’ Zhukov answered this cursing: ‘This was done by the commander of the MVO [Moscow Military

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<sup>273</sup> Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*, 1:267.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:271–72.



District], general-colonel Moskalenko, idiot, I already scolded him.’ Khrushchev also scolded Moskalenko, that he should not have done that.<sup>275</sup>

In any case, both the Mukhitdinov and Serov accounts indicate that Khrushchev recognized that he was playing with fire in terms of the rules and was reluctant to too obviously violate them. But the explanatory power of the authority model still takes precedence, as Khrushchev very clearly broke all prior tradition to achieve victory.

## **Implications**

Khrushchev had indeed achieved a miraculous triumph. A majority of the Presidium, including several legendary figures, had been overruled. For the first and only time in Soviet history, the greatest criminals of the Stalin era had come as close as they ever would to a trial. Khrushchev could now pursue his own agenda without having to contend with the opinions of powerful men like Molotov.

Yet the June 1957 plenum was historic for other reasons. Khrushchev had indeed achieved victory, but at what cost? In 1953, Beria’s defeat meant the political police would no longer be used to control the party. June 1957 saw the passing of the old men of the party. To defeat those men, Khrushchev needed Zhukov. But unfortunately for the marshal, this demonstration of power meant his days were numbered. Having helped to establish a unified Presidium and again demonstrated his own political power, he would soon be removed, thus eliminating a political force that had shown itself to be so potent in both 1953 and 1957.

After that, no Soviet leader could truly control the apparat. Historian Vladimir Naumov therefore concluded that “the victory at the June plenum was not so much Khrushchev’s victory as the victory of the secretaries of the obkoms.” The young in the CC had defeated the old guard. For them, the battle against “Stalinism” meant a guarantee for their own security and power.<sup>276</sup> Pikhovia writes: “Was

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<sup>275</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 510.

<sup>276</sup> Kovaleva, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957*, 17–18.

Khrushchev the victor at the plenum? Yes, since he rid himself of his most tiresome opponents and personal enemies. No, since the price of this victory was the establishment of Khrushchev's dependence, the first secretary of the CC CPSU, on that party apparat, which would support him only as long as his activities met the interests of that party apparat."<sup>277</sup> As described in the final Soviet chapter, Khrushchev's removal in 1964 was a case of a leader failing to reform a party apparatus without any of the tools identified in the authority model. June 1957 was a crucial step towards that devastating outcome.

The destruction of the "anti-party group" reveals one other pathology inherent to Leninist regimes. Khrushchev simply could not tolerate measured discussion of any policies. It was too hard not to interpret caveats or suggestions as anything more than an incipient challenge. What could have been measured discussions were transformed into warring platforms for the purposes of political struggle. If Khrushchev had been more secure in his position, would he have been so intolerant of debate within a larger consensus? Would that have thus led to a more measured, well-considered policy process? Malenkov shared similar policy inclinations as Khrushchev, especially with regard to placing more emphasis on consumers. Could he have contributed to more intelligent policies?<sup>278</sup> Molotov may have been somewhat more conservative than Khrushchev, but his experience was truly great, and he might have contributed to the prestige and the authority of the leadership because of his historical role in the party. Unfortunately for Khrushchev and the USSR as a whole, however, low levels of institutionalization meant that he could not tolerate any possibility of a move against him.

Politics became personal, not policy. After the "anti-party group" incident, the two men who did the most to save Khrushchev, Serov and Zhukov, agreed that "Khrushchev had a habit of commanding, and his main tragedy: he loves to say: 'I.'" Serov told Zhukov: "You are now a member of the Presidium,

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<sup>277</sup> R. G. Pikhov, *Sovetskii Soiuz: istoriia vlasti, 1945-1991 [The Soviet Union: A History of Power, 1945-1991]* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia gossluzhby pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1998), 182.

<sup>278</sup> E. Iu. Zubkova, "Malenkov i Khrushchev: Lichnyi Faktor v Politike Poslestalinskogo Rukovodstva [Malenkov and Khrushchev: The Personal Factor in the Politics of the Post-Stalin Leadership]," *Otechestvennaia Istorii*, no. 4 (1995): 103–15.

so influence him there.” Zhukov grinned and said: “I will try.”<sup>279</sup> The next chapter will address how this obstacle to total dominance by Khrushchev was eliminated.

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<sup>279</sup> Serov, *Zapiski iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti* [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death], 515.

## Chapter 4: The Fall of Zhukov

### Introduction: The Men on Horseback

In November 2014, Russian liberal newspaper *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* published an editorial reflecting on the political strength of a man named Igor' Strelkov.<sup>1</sup> Strelkov, a Russian citizen, had fought as defense minister for the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) during the insurrection against the central authority in Kiev until he was suddenly, and mysteriously, removed. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* brought to the attention of its readers a curious fact. Aleksei Naval'nyi, a major leader of the opposition famous for his exposés on corruption in Putin's Russia, was only liked by 14% of those who knew of him. Strelkov, on the other hand, was approved by 41% of the people who were aware of his activities: "Ultimately a majority of Russians sympathize with the DNR and LNR [Luhansk People's Republic], the militias, and the Russian-language population of Ukraine, and Strelkov led the armed fight against the 'Kiev punishers.'"

Yet strangely, Strelkov received far from a hero's welcome when he returned to Russia. The newspaper tried to explain:

It was precisely this potential level of sympathy that might prevent the regime from the media promoting Strelkov. It is advantageous to [the regime] if Vladimir Putin's rating rises on a patriotic wave. But it is not advantageous to it if this resource is used by other, even if only potential, political figures. In particular, those like Strelkov: tough, direct, radical, and consistent practical men. The regime needs more compromised leftists and liberals, but not alternative patriots.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Neudobnyi i Nesistemnyi Strelkov [The Inconvenient and Non-System Strelkov]," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, November 11, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ukrainian intelligence released a phone call in which Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev communicated a request from Father Tikhon Shevkunov, Putin's alleged spiritual advisor, that Strelkov express his loyalty to Putin. As the head of Russia's only independent news channel Mikhail Zygar' noted, "The concern of Father Tikhon and Putin himself was related to the fact that Strelkov's popularity on the internet rose with unbelievable speed." Strelkov was especially dangerous because he argued, publicly, that Moscow sold out the two republics. Mikhail Zygar', *Vsia Kremlevskaia Rat': Kratkaia Istoriia Sovremennoi Rossii [All the Kremlin's Men: A Short History of Modern Russia]* (Moscow: Intellektual'naia literatura, 2016), 353.

Strelkov is far from a sympathetic figure. A “messianic and militaristic” individual, he executed a man for stealing shirts and supports the restoration of the czarist empire.<sup>3</sup> Yet as an archetype, he is a common figure in Russian history: the war hero cast into political oblivion because he had outgrown his usefulness and become a threat. Alexander Suvorov, one of the world’s greatest military figures, was cast into disgrace (twice) by Emperor Paul. The legends of the Russian Civil War did not survive 1937. After supporting Boris Yeltsin’s presidential election in 1996 and receiving a post as Secretary of the Security Council, General Alexander Lebed was shown the door.

But perhaps the most famous story is that of Marshal Georgii Zhukov. How could a man so popular, and who had twice played a crucial role in post-Stalin power struggles, have been defeated by Nikita Khrushchev? In key ways, the answer lies in the theoretical arguments presented in the theory chapter of this dissertation. The economic model fails to explain why Khrushchev felt a danger and decided to move against his former ally. Zhukov was a threat not because of the popularity of his policies but his great personal authority and prestige. The marshal had at best only minimal policy differences with Khrushchev. Just like in so many other cases in this dissertation, Khrushchev over-emphasized policy differences and skillfully employed *kompromat*. Second, Khrushchev could only defeat Zhukov by violating party rules. He held Presidium meetings as well as discussions with the military elite while Zhukov was traveling in Yugoslavia and Albania, a process that culminated in a confrontation with the marshal in the Presidium after his return and then a Central Committee (CC) plenum that affirmed the leadership’s decision. If Zhukov had been allowed to defend himself and not been presented with a fait accompli, the outcome might have been different. Third, Khrushchev purged Zhukov not just because of his popularity but because of his special relationship with the military. The sensitivity of this issue proves once again the importance of controlling the forces of coercion because of weak institutionalization. Khrushchev remembered what happened in two previous chapters of this dissertation, in which the

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<sup>3</sup> Noah Sneider, “Shadowy Rebel Wields Iron Fist in Ukraine Fight,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/11/world/europe/russian-seizes-authority-over-ukraine-rebels.html>.

military played an operational role in the defeat of his opponents. If institutionalization levels were high, Zhukov would not have presented such a danger.

However, this chapter plays a special theoretical role compared to the other cases of this dissertation: it demonstrates the conditions under which the type of authority Zhukov enjoyed could be overcome. In that sense, this chapter both affirms the basic ideas of this dissertation while identifying an important caveat. As a purely military figure, Zhukov would have faced major legitimacy problems if he tried to act entirely outside of party rules and used force to save himself. Although the party's rules might be manipulated and broken, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as an organization still demanded the utmost loyalty. The norm against a truly independent political role for the military, known in Leninist regimes as "Bonapartism," was still strong. In that sense, CPSU was not marked by complete lack of institutionalization but low levels of it.

By manipulating party rules, Khrushchev was able to pose the issue as a choice between Zhukov and the party. Therefore Zhukov's fall is somewhat paradoxical: universal loyalty to the party was a decisive factor in the final outcome, but that outcome was also dependent on blatant manipulation of the party's own rules. The evidence clearly shows that this was an exceedingly difficult emotional decision on the part of everyone, including Zhukov's most serious detractors. Despite this clear emotional tension, the party emerged triumphant. In other words, while in Leninist states the man on horseback may be powerful, he cannot rule the country from the saddle.

These arguments help settle an old debate. Linden and Fainsod believed that this was essentially a contest between the army and the party. In this view, the military, led by Zhukov, was a threat to party primacy at best and party rule at worst.<sup>4</sup> Colton, on the other hand, emphasized "the arts of biography and history," as it was "only a combination of contingencies- such as Zhukov's personality, his status as a

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<sup>4</sup> Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership 1957-1964*, 3 ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970); Merle Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled: Revised Edition*, Revised edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

national hero, and his arrival in the Presidium as part of a precarious leadership coalition- that produced the outcome in 1957.” Colton concludes that the most useful understanding “would emphasize Zhukov’s personal history and peculiar position in the party elite and would de-emphasize elements of institutional conflict.”<sup>5</sup>

Both of these analyses had strengths and weaknesses. Linden and Fainsod were correct to believe that it was important to appreciate the military’s special status as a coercive force. However, they were wrong to assert that the military could ever overthrow the party or simply reject the party’s orders. Colton was correct to point to Zhukov’s personal history as a military hero. However, he did not fully appreciate the extent to which Zhukov’s dominance in the armed forces deeply concerned Khrushchev, and his decision to emphasize “biography and history” under-estimated possibilities for understanding the outcome with social science concepts.

### **Brief Chronology**

After the defeat of the “anti-party group” in the summer of 1957, Khrushchev became increasingly concerned about Zhukov’s popularity and control over the armed forces. While the marshal was on a trip to Albania and Yugoslavia, Khrushchev held two Presidium meetings on October 17 and 19 to prepare charges against him. At the second meeting a document was passed criticizing political work in the Soviet Army. On October 22 and 23, Khrushchev spoke to the top military command to alert them to Zhukov’s “problems.” He also met with top military leaders during a military exercise in Ukraine. When Zhukov returned from his trip outside the USSR, he was confronted at a Presidium meeting on October 26. The marshal was then criticized at a full CC plenum that passed a resolution affirming Khrushchev’s accusations against him.

### **Section 1: Policy Differences vs. Sociological Forms of Authority**

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy J Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority: The Structure of Soviet Military Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 175, 195.

According to the economic model, a crucial component of the struggle between Zhukov and Khrushchev should have been about real policy differences. In this section, I demonstrate the weakness of this conceptualization with the following evidence. First, the potency of Zhukov's personal authority as a military legend was obvious. The evidence shows that the leadership found his growing "cult" threatening, his strongest detractors still deeply respected him, and even when purged Zhukov's war record was only partially criticized. Second, policy differences were minimal. Just like in many other chapters of this dissertation, the problem with Zhukov was not a profound disagreement on key issues but the marshal's independent thinking and initiative. The problem was not so much with fundamental political differences but with the inability of the system to handle initiative, or even independent thinking, from anyone but the top leader. To the extent Zhukov and Khrushchev had a real difference of opinion, it was primarily about the party's access to information in the military for purposes of creating *kompromat* and Khrushchev's personal relationship with other leading military figures.

#### *Zhukov's Authority as Rooted in his Prestige as Military Hero*

Zhukov's authority as a military figure very obviously shaped the dynamics of his relationship with Khrushchev, a factor predicted by hypothesis 1b but not hypothesis 1a. Zhukov's military triumphs are too long to list here, but doing so would hardly matter, as his status as a military leader is not in dispute.<sup>6</sup> Former KGB head Semichastnyi wrote of Zhukov: "Zhukov was a living legend. He led all of the decisive operations during the time of the Great Patriotic War, and the people were deeply grateful to him. No matter where he appeared, he was met with the highest honors that not a single party functionary could expect."<sup>7</sup> At the October plenum that stripped Zhukov from his position as Presidium member and minister of defense, Mikoian stated that "as a military worker, he is one of the best... And such brave

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<sup>6</sup> For the best accounts in English, see Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's General: The Life of Georgy Zhukov* (New York: Random House, 2012); Otto Preston Chaney, *Zhukov*, Rev. (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); William J. Spahr, *Zhukov: The Rise and Fall of a Great Captain* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1993). For a new biography by two leading French scholars, see Zh. Lopez and L. Otkhmezuri, *Zhukov: Portret Na Fone Epokhi [Zhukov: Portrait on the Background of the Era]* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2002), 94.



marshals, generals, who did not falter before death feared to speak against Zhukov.”<sup>8</sup> According to a recent biography, “[i]n Russia Zhukov was- and still is- considered not only the greatest general of the Second World War but the most talented *polkovodets* (military leader) in Russian history.”<sup>9</sup>

The political implications of Zhukov’s popularity were visible as early as July 1943, when the political police reported to Stalin that a writer named P.A. Kuz’ko stated: “Other [than Stalin] the people put forward their own leaders - Zhukov, Rokossovskii, and others. These leaders [*vozhdi*] beat the generals and after victory will demand for themselves their place in the sun. One of these popular generals will become dictator or demand changes in the management of the country. The masses of soldiers, returning after the war, will overthrow Soviet power.”<sup>10</sup>

Stalin demoted Zhukov soon after the war, accusing the marshal of feeling slighted and expressing dissatisfaction with decisions of the government despite his high position. Zhukov, “having lost any humility, and carried away from a feeling of personal ambition” was allegedly stealing credit for operations that he did not deserve. Malenkov, Beria, and Molotov all viciously attacked Zhukov in the military meeting [*Vysshii voennyi sovet*] meeting that discussed Zhukov’s alleged crimes and removed his candidate membership to the CC.<sup>11</sup> In Zhukov’s own words in a letter to Stalin, this “crushed [*ubilo*]” him. He suspected foul play: “I ask you, Comrade Stalin, to listen to me personally and I am sure that unscrupulous men are deceiving you to denigrate me.”<sup>12</sup> According to Soviet mole Oleg Penkovsky, “If

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<sup>8</sup> V. Naumov et al, eds., *Georgii Zhukov: stenogramma oktiabr'skogo (1957 g.) plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* [Georgy Zhukov: transcript of the October (1957) Plenum and Other Documents (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2001), 346.

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, *Stalin's General*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Artizov Artizov and Oleg Naumov, eds., *Vlast' i Khudozhestvennaia Intelligentsiia. Dokumenty TsK RKP(B)- VKP(B), VChK-OGPU-NKVD O Kulturn'oi Politike. 1917-1953* [Power and the Artistic Intelligentsia. Documents of the TsK RKP(B)- VKP(B), VChK-OGPU-NKVD on Cultural Policy. 1917-1953] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1999), 492.

<sup>11</sup> Nikolai Andreevich Svetlishin, *Krutye stupeni sud'by: zhizn' i ratnye podvigi marshala G.K. Zhukova* [Steep Steps of Fate: The Life and Military Exploits of Marshal G.K. Zhukov] (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1992), 228–30.

<sup>12</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 16–20.

you remember STALIN relieved ZHUKOV because he feared an army uprising- not the whole army, but let's say 80%- 75% for sure, well 80%. Some said 90% would have followed ZHUKOV.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1946, a rumor spread through the Ministry of Defense that when Zhukov was removed from power he was accused of imagining himself as Napoleon, to which Zhukov responded: “Napoleon? Napoleon lost his war, and I won!” One former defense official, colonel Victor Filatov, believes this story was started by workers in the General Political Department (GPD) to cast Zhukov in a poor light, but recalls that in actuality the officers who discussed it in the corridors of the ministry took pride in the bravery and wit of the marshal.<sup>14</sup>

Whether Zhukov explicitly relied on his history as a military leader to embellish his personal authority vis-à-vis the rest of the leadership is ambiguous, but generally the evidence indicates that Zhukov was careful in this regard. At the Presidium meeting on February 7 that decided he would become minister of defense, he at first demurred and proposed that Marshal Vasilevskii take the job.<sup>15</sup> In July 1956, Zhukov wrote a memorandum to Khrushchev acknowledging that the general staff had written a short historical account of the battle of Stalingrad that did not mention Khrushchev's name. Zhukov proposed that the document be revised so that it would include “your great organizational, political, military, and economic work directed toward the exhaustion and defeat of the enemy at Stalingrad.”<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, however, on a personal level Zhukov does not seem to have respected Khrushchev's battlefield activities. For example, in April 1965 he wrote a letter to Rokossovskii in which he complained about his praise of Khrushchev in the Battle of Kursk: “As you know, Khrushchev came with me too. I remind you what actually happened: there was a good lunch, after which Khrushchev and

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<sup>13</sup> Meeting #12, London, England, 1 May 1961, National Security Archive Online Database, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Nikolai Zian'kovich, *Marshaly i genseki. Intrigi. Vrazhda. Zagovory. [Marshals and General Secretaries. Intrigues. Enmity. Conspiracies]* (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2000), 71.

<sup>15</sup> A. A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 40.

<sup>16</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 149–50.

Bulganin drank a lot [*krepko podvypili*]. A lot of jokes and anecdotes were told by Khrushchev and Bulganin, and then Khrushchev went to the staff of the Voronezh front...”<sup>17</sup>

Zhukov’s personal relationship with Khrushchev remains ambiguous. One CIA document referred to “one competent Western diplomatic observer” who “noted the fact that whenever the two appeared together, Zhukov wore a ‘look of pride and almost adoration’ and conducted himself in a manner which clearly deferred to Khrushchev’s seniority and authority.”<sup>18</sup> According to former Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, Zhukov behaved more stiffly in Khrushchev’s presence than with others. He was impressed by Zhukov’s reaction after being flattered: “it is possible that not all figures [*deiatel’*] like that people value my work. Stalin also had an unequal attitude toward me.” However, Gromyko also noticed that in their conversations Zhukov did not mention Khrushchev’s role in military operations or their preparation.<sup>19</sup> Shortly before his removal, Zhukov told Khrushchev not to interrupt the toasts of other participants at the birthday party for the wife of a member of the Presidium. Khrushchev responded: “Well, I can say nothing at all, if it is disagreeable for you to listen to me.”<sup>20</sup>

Zhukov’s authority was one manifestation of a broader phenomenon in post-war Russian society: the political power of the *frontovik*, men who had served in the war against Nazi Germany. Such men were rapidly promoted after 1949. In the words of one historian, “denunciation of party officials who had not spent the war years at the front or in the underground became a main component of party life... Party officials repeatedly demonstrated that inner-party hierarchy and status had come to be defined by public recognition of their wartime exploits.” Their special skills were even reflected in popular culture:

A barrage of popular novels on the postwar countryside celebrated a new hero: the demobilized officer who transferred his zeal from the front to pursue the electrification of the backward countryside. As a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 540.

<sup>18</sup> Central Intelligence Agency Office of Current Intelligence, “Soviet Staff Study- Party-Military Relations in the USSR and the Fall of Marshal Zhukov” (CIA FOIA Website, June 8, 1959), 16.

<sup>19</sup> A.A. Gromyko, *Pamiatnoe [Memorial]*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1988), 369–71.

<sup>20</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 632.

rule, the character of the relentless veteran was contrasted with that of a laid-back bureaucrat, most likely one who avoided the front and adapted a 'soft' and conservative approach to the tasks of reconstruction.<sup>21</sup>

The issue of Zhukov's military "cult" was clearly a major issue of concern for the leadership, who almost certainly feared looking like 'laid-back bureaucrats' in comparison with Zhukov's dynamism. Both Bulganin and Brezhnev raised this problem at a Presidium meeting.<sup>22</sup> Bulganin complained about a painting of Zhukov on a white horse and the film *Battle of Stalingrad*, while Brezhnev complained about a book describing Zhukov's trip to India that claimed an elephant he was riding rode faster when the marshal described it as "like a tank."<sup>23</sup> According to a speech by Suslov at the CC plenum, Zhukov wanted the painting, which included him on a white horse in front of the Brandenburg Gate in burning Berlin, to be placed in the Museum of the Soviet Army. Suslov stated: "We all deeply appreciate the contributions of Comrade Zhukov in the Great Patriotic War, but anyone who looks at this painting cannot help but feel annoyance and offense that the entire great victory over fascism of our people, our party, and our glorious Armed Forces is being attributed to only one person: Comrade Zhukov."<sup>24</sup>

Khrushchev clearly understood the power that military glory brought men. He later explained his understanding of Eisenhower's authority to C.L. Sulzberger: "What were Eisenhower's advantages over Kennedy? This was a man in years, old, a hero of the Second World War, he had great authority among American society. Therefore when deciding over the question of war or peace, if Eisenhower said that fighting was impossible, no one would say that Eisenhower was afraid, that he was a coward and so on."<sup>25</sup>

Like military men everywhere, Soviet military leaders squabbled over victories and glory. But for Zhukov, he clearly stood above. When his prestige as a military leader was challenged, his comrades

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<sup>21</sup> Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 49, 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 277.

<sup>23</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 268.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>25</sup> M. Iu. Prozumenshchikov et al, eds., *Venskii Val's Kholodnoi Voiny. Vokrug Vstrechi N.S. Khrushcheva i Dzh. F. Kennedi v 1961 Godu v Vene. Dokumenty [The Viennese Waltz of the Cold War. Around the Meeting of N.S. Khrushchev and J.F. Kennedy in 1961 in Vienna. Documents]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 557.

defended him. In 1966, the top military command used a private meeting to criticize Marshal Chuikov for his public claim that Berlin could have been taken in February 1945. Konev was blunt: “Vasilii Ivanovich, drop your polemic with Zhukov. Why is it necessary for you to raise this issue?” The other legends supported Konev.<sup>26</sup>

At the October 17 Presidium meeting in Zhukov’s absence that prepared for the move against him, Marshals Malinovskii and Konev spoke out to defend Zhukov.<sup>27</sup> According to Ivan Serov, Malinovskii, a close Khrushchev ally, even stated that Zhukov was the best possible minister of defense.<sup>28</sup> At the October 1957 plenum that criticized Zhukov, however, military officers did not speak in his support. Yet some were more measured than others. Marshal Sokolovsky gave a short and calm speech in which he criticized Zhukov for involving himself in matters that should not have concerned him as a military officer and for dominating other high-ranking military officers.<sup>29</sup> Instead of accusing Zhukov of creating a personality cult, Marshal Timoshenko only noted that Zhukov did not do enough to stop others from praising him. Timoshenko admitted that Zhukov had a tendency towards “unlimited power” and a sense of infallibility, and that Zhukov felt himself to be outside of party control, but he then went on to criticize the GPD and spent much of his short speech saying nothing about Zhukov at all.<sup>30</sup> Marshal Konev began his speech by saying that “I have always been favorably inclined toward Comrade Zhukov and saw in him a strong and capable military commander.” He reminded the plenum that he defended Zhukov when Stalin persecuted him after the war. However, like Sokolovskii he argued that Zhukov had dominated his colleagues and that only “open struggle” could be used to protest decisions. He admitted

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<sup>26</sup> National Security Archive, Box 20, Russian and Eastern European Archive Documents Database, 1/17/1966, R12609, Could Berlin have been taken Feb. 1945?, list 8. When Chuikov tried to defend his historical revisionism from the withering attacks of the other marshals, he said: “My blow is for the most part targeted at Zhukov”, to which Konev responded: “It is necessary to approach [this] historically.” List 23.

<sup>27</sup> Fursenko, *Presidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 270.

<sup>28</sup> Ivan Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2016), 523–24.

<sup>29</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 296–300.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 304–7.

that he supported Zhukov becoming a member of the Presidium, but regretted that Zhukov set himself in opposition to the rest of the body.<sup>31</sup> Marshal Rokossovskii told the audience that Zhukov had threatened to have him shot in the Battle of Moscow. Yet like some of the other marshals, much of his speech had nothing to do with Zhukov, instead discussing problems in the military in general.<sup>32</sup>

Participants could clearly tell that many of the speeches were forced, and people in the audience looked depressed and sat with their heads facing the ground.<sup>33</sup> In his own speech, Marshal Malinovskii stated that “during the first break I heard out of the corner of my ear from several that there are no persuasive facts, that it is not clear, that it is stunning [*oshelomlenno*] and so on.”<sup>34</sup> A report on how the October plenum was discussed in the regions noted “individual cases of incorrect understandings.” A Senior Lieutenant Shakhvatov stated: “We are allowing extremes in the evaluation of people: at the June plenum Molotov was torn apart, even though he had great contributions, and now they have dealt with Zhukov, an honored marshal.” Anonymous questions submitted during discussion, a strong but not perfect measure of how people truly felt, also showed skepticism. Party members wondered why the Presidium discussed Zhukov in his absence and how he explained his behavior.<sup>35</sup> Malinovskii’s report on the proceedings in party committees in the military also noted cases in which participants expressed regret over Zhukov’s removal. One sergeant, noting that Molotov and Zhukov were removed in rapid succession, asked who would lead the country if all the good leaders were removed.<sup>36</sup> One veteran of the party apparatus, G.L. Smirnov, recalls that “the message about the removal of G.K. Zhukov everyone met with lack of understanding: all felt that something was not right here.”<sup>37</sup> General Major Zub claims that

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 309–12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 359–62.

<sup>33</sup> N.N. Egorycheva and G.A. Iudinkova, eds., *N.G. Egorychev. Politik i Diplomat [N.G. Egorychev. Politician and Diplomat]* (Moscow: Kniga i biznes, 2006), 83; Leonid Ivanov, *Pravda O “Smersh” [The Truth about Smersh]* (Moscow: Iauza, Eksmo, 2009), 275–78.

<sup>34</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 367.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.

<sup>37</sup> *Neizvestnaia Rossiia. XX Vek [The Unknown Russia. 20 Century]*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Istoricheskoe nasledie, 1993), 370.

by speaking of Zhukov objectively at the party meeting at the Moscow garrison he was denied the position of commissar of the Moscow Anti-Aircraft District.<sup>38</sup>

In Penza, the chairman of the district's civil defense, a man named Monakhov, even spoke out directly: "During the years of the war I had the fortune of meeting twice with Zhukov... It is very hard to believe all that is happening. Indeed, during the war soldiers and officers boundlessly trusted Comrade Zhukov and achieved a mass of achievements executing his orders... Perhaps he has now become different. But we, officers in reserve, should not think that Comrade Zhukov is no more. It may be necessary to fight with him on the same line again." At the same meeting, an anonymous question described Zhukov as an "honored marshal" and argued that Lenin never removed people like Zhukov from work.<sup>39</sup> One man, a colonel in reserve, was even expelled from the party in Leningrad for refusing to vote in support of the CC's resolution. A total of six individuals throughout the Leningrad region refused to vote.<sup>40</sup> Grishin, the head of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, recalls that when he explained the decision to a party meeting in the Leningrad region of Moscow "it felt like people were displeased with the decision of the removal of G.K. Zhukov from his position of ministry of defense of the USSR, as well as member of the Presidium of the CC. They painfully worried for the marshal, highly regarded his contributions to the Soviet Fatherland, our armed forces. In my heart I completely shared these attitudes..."<sup>41</sup> In a letter to Brezhnev and Kosygin in 1966, General-Lieutenant Antipenko noted that several of the marshals who spoke against Zhukov in 1957 were speaking openly about how they were feeling "pangs of conscience" over what they had done.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> S. Bystrov, "Zadanie Osobogo Svoistva [Mission of a Special Nature]," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, March 18, 1988.

<sup>39</sup> RGASPI, fond 556, opis 14, delo 69, list 152, 153.

<sup>40</sup> RGASPI, fond 556, opis 14, delo 69, list 157, 158.

<sup>41</sup> V.V. Grishin, *Ot Khrushcheva Do Gorbacheva: Politicheskie Portrety Pяти Gensekov I A.N. Kosygina [From Khrushchev to Gorbachev: Political Portraits of Five General Secretaries and A.N. Kosygin]* (Moscow: ASPOL, 1996), 25.

<sup>42</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 545.

The power of Zhukov's moral authority was obvious even among his strongest detractors during his removal. In his memoirs, Khrushchev would write that "[f]or me this was a very painful decision. I would even say that this decision was heartrending for me. My feelings were at war with my intellect. My feelings were on Zhukov's side."<sup>43</sup> Even at the Presidium meeting on October 26, Khrushchev stated that "the drama with Zhukov is difficult for me."<sup>44</sup> Mikoian told the October plenum that "I loved Zhukov... it is not very agreeable to criticize Comrade Zhukov."<sup>45</sup> In Khrushchev's closing speech, he described his deep respect for military accomplishments. Yet ultimately the party qua party came first: "When people begin to infringe on the holiest of holies, no friendly or other considerations can be an obstacle to correctly understanding, criticizing and taking necessary measures."<sup>46</sup>

Zhukov's glory as a military leader was so powerful that his role in the war was left relatively unscathed even when the leadership had every reason to discredit it. At the October plenum that removed him from power, the most aggressive military figure was also the one with the closest relationship to Khrushchev: Marshal Eremenko, who along with Khrushchev was a key figure on the Stalingrad Front.<sup>47</sup> Eremenko might have had another reason to be profoundly unhappy with Zhukov: a dispute as to relative credit for the victory at Stalingrad. As Glantz recently demonstrated, Zhukov unfairly stole credit from Eremenko for planning the counter-offensive.<sup>48</sup> Eremenko tried, and failed, to call Zhukov's martial prestige into question. Understanding that this tactic would fail, Brezhnev interrupted Marshal Eremenko: "Andrei Ivanovich, this is spectacular material for history. I listen with attention, like all comrades, but consider the regulations." Ignoring Brezhnev, Eremenko went on to claim that Zhukov never went to Stalingrad. Khrushchev corrected his over-enthusiastic supporter and noted Zhukov came once. A voice

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<sup>43</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, ed. Sergei Khrushchev (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 239.

<sup>44</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 278.

<sup>45</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 348.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>47</sup> David M. Glantz, *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942*, Glantz, David M. *Stalingrad Trilogy* ; v. 2. Y (Lawrence,: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 17.

<sup>48</sup> David M. Glantz, *Endgame at Stalingrad*, vol. Book 1 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 22.



from the hall also yelled out that Zhukov was there during the siege. When Eremenko tried arguing, Khrushchev again cut him off and even emphasized Zhukov's positive role in Stalingrad. Khrushchev emphasized that the point of the plenum was not to "offend" Zhukov but to correct him.<sup>49</sup> Malinovskii, another figure who had fought with Khrushchev, also strongly criticized Zhukov. This possibly can be explained by a hatred for him on the part of Zhukov: Zhukov believed that Malinovskii had refused to return to Russia during the Civil War until the White Admiral Kolchak had been defeated.<sup>50</sup> Knowing that the minister of defense did not respect him as a military figure gave Malinovskii little reason to tolerate Zhukov's leadership. But still, as mentioned above, Malinovskii had defended Zhukov at the October 17 Presidium meeting in Zhukov's absence.<sup>51</sup>

In his concluding speech to the plenum, Khrushchev found it possible to at least try to relativize Zhukov's martial prestige, but he did not dare to suggest Zhukov was not a brilliant military figure. For example, Khrushchev criticized Zhukov for allegedly saying he had never suffered a single defeat and pointed out that Zhukov was chief of the general staff at the disastrous beginning of the war. Zhukov found this insinuation intolerable and pointed out that he was removed from that position as soon as the war started and was sent to Ukraine. Zhukov also interrupted Khrushchev to deny that he wrote to Stalin claiming that the troops were achieving victories when in fact the Soviets were suffering huge losses. Yet Khrushchev was adamant: "Comrade Zhukov, I do not want to minimize your military capabilities... You had successes and defeats, like all other generals."<sup>52</sup>

### *Irrelevance of Policy Differences*

Zhukov's prestige as the great marshal clearly weighed on Khrushchev's decision-making. But were there real policy differences as well? Here again we see reflections of the previous chapters:

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<sup>49</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 314–15.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 612–13.

<sup>51</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 270.

<sup>52</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 384–87.

Khrushchev was more threatened by Zhukov's initiative and independent thinking than real differences, and small differences were played up for political expediency, just as predicted by hypothesis 1b. Individuals who held real policy differences with the leadership saw Zhukov as a possible ally, which, instead of buttressing his position as hypothesis 1a would predict, actually helped inspire the move against him. Moreover, within the military itself, Zhukov's were very obviously popular, a further weakening of the explanatory power of hypothesis 1a. The only policy differences with Zhukov were related to whether high-ranking officers would be vulnerable to *kompromat* and what kind of relationship Khrushchev would have with top-ranking officials. These differences were directly related to the role the military could play in a power struggle. In that sense they are better understood as a validation of hypothesis 3b, which points to the military as a primary battleground in power struggles.

Certainly, Khrushchev was clearly concerned that Zhukov was expressing an opinion on too many issues. A CIA document informed its readers that "Several diplomatic and press observers in Moscow commented during the summer of 1957 that Zhukov was becoming increasingly cocky and that he behaved as if he were second only to Khrushchev."<sup>53</sup> According to the record of a conversation between Khrushchev and Eisenhower, the former said Zhukov "was a man of unshakable convictions, which is a fine thing in a military man, adding with what amounted to a leer, 'so long as this is limited to military things.'"<sup>54</sup> Khrushchev was apparently concerned that Zhukov would learn from Eisenhower's example.<sup>55</sup> When the American ambassador told Khrushchev that Kennedy was strengthening control

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<sup>53</sup> Central Intelligence Agency Office of Current Intelligence, "Soviet Staff Study- Party-Military Relations in the USSR and the Fall of Marshal Zhukov," 18.

<sup>54</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, September 26, 1959. Document 129. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960. Volume X, Part 1, Eastern European Region, Soviet Union. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d129>. Khrushchev also used the opportunity to tell Eisenhower about an alleged mistake Zhukov made during the war at Kharkov and "quoted an old Russian proverb that Generals win cities and soldiers lose them."

<sup>55</sup> Eisenhower had in fact believed Zhukov would succeed Stalin: "After that, he predicted, the United States would have no major difficulties in dealing with the Soviet Union." Others in the administration like Averell Harriman, however, "tried to persuade Eisenhower that he was being unrealistic. All good Communists, they pointed out, shared a horror of 'Bonapartism.'" W. Averell Harriman, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* (New York: Random House, 1975), 502.

over the military, “K [sic] remarked that this was important and said they had a problem with Marshal Zhukov. He had been friend of Eisenhower and thought he was smarter than Eisenhower. When latter became President Zhukov developed big ideas about his own role.”<sup>56</sup>

Certainly, Zhukov had the bad habit of expressing his viewpoints on non-military affairs. Shocked by the low quality of life in his hometown, he told Voroshilov: “You should go and tell Khrushchev what has become of the countryside.”<sup>57</sup> In August 1957, Zhukov forwarded a letter addressed to him along to Khrushchev proposing changes to the Soviet rail transportation system. This begged questions of why it was Zhukov that received such a letter and why he felt forwarding it, and expressing support, was acceptable given his status as a military leader, especially since the letter criticized Gosplan.<sup>58</sup>

Zhukov’s habit of speaking on issues not directly related to his bailiwick in the military clearly concerned his peers. Shepilov recalled a meeting of the Supreme Soviet at which Zhukov asked him: “Listen, Dmitrii Trofimovich. You’re a theoretician. Please tell me- why do we put on this puppet show every year?... Whom are we fooling?”<sup>59</sup> At the Presidium meeting that decided to remove Zhukov from the ministry of defense, Bulganin stated that Zhukov’s policy position on Yugoslavia was incorrect and heavily implied he had overstepped his bounds: “He undertakes too much [*mnogo na sebia берет*].”<sup>60</sup> Immediately after the defeat of the “anti-party group,” Zhukov even presumed to suggest changes to the elite Defense Council, proposing that Mikoian, Kuz’min, and Pervukhin be added after Kaganovich and Molotov were removed. Khrushchev refused to allow Pervukhin to join the body.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Charles S. Sampson and John Michael Joyce, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Soviet Union. Volume V* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1998), 115–16.

<sup>57</sup> Anna Mirkina, “Marshal Pishet Knigu [The Marshal Writes a Book],” *Ogonek*, no. 16 (1988): 12.

<sup>58</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 30, delo 231, listy 48-52 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>59</sup> D. T. Shepilov, *The Kremlin’s Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Krushchev*, ed. Stephen V Bittner, trans. Anthony Austin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 179–80.

<sup>60</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 277.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 259, 1009 fn 4.

The civilian leadership was probably also concerned that individuals unhappy with the status quo, inside or outside the military, would see Zhukov as a force for changing the Soviet system as a whole. Zhukov therefore had a strong similarity to Hua Guofeng, in the sense that both were a danger to the leadership partly because disaffected individuals might see them as a rallying point. After the war, some military officers started to concentrate their dreams of a more liberalized society in Zhukov.<sup>62</sup> Two military officers wrote letters to Zhukov in 1956 complaining that although the radio said matters were improving, local conditions in Krasnodar were terrible. Enemies of the people had allegedly taken over the party and wanted to create a fifth column. The other letter complained of journalists only describing poor situations in other countries and that it was too dangerous to go outside because of thieves. Zhukov forwarded the letters to N.I. Beliaev, the head of party organizations in Russia, whose department concluded that the accusations were lies.<sup>63</sup> That same year, the director of a *sovkhos* wrote a letter to Zhukov after he received no response from Khrushchev or Bulganin with regards to his claims that certain untrustworthy people had taken important posts: Zhukov forwarded this letter to Beliaev as well.<sup>64</sup> Zhukov's support for complaints about party activities in the regions could not have improved his popularity with the civilian leadership.

Zhukov was also opinionated, unsurprisingly, with regards to affairs within the military. In his concluding speech at the October plenum, Khrushchev drew the following conclusions: "He wants to act among us like a representative, to establish a situation in which there are those in the military, the army, and communists, and I am the minister of defense."<sup>65</sup> In other words, Zhukov's position on any given issue had the danger of being understood as the military as a whole supporting one issue or another. But at the same time, the idea that Zhukov did not have the right to express an opinion on issues directly within his charge was problematic.

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<sup>62</sup> Lopez and Otkhmezuri, *Zhukov: Portret Na Fone Epokhi [Zhukov: Portrait on the Background of the Era]*, 583–84.

<sup>63</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 39, listy 38-51.

<sup>64</sup> RGASPI fond 556, opis 14, delo 54, listy 69-71.

<sup>65</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgij Zhukov*, 381.

Zhukov certainly did speak up for military interests. In January 1956, he complained that military construction units were being used by civilian organizations, as soldiers felt offended that they were employed as workers instead of serving in the Soviet army.<sup>66</sup> He originally planned to hold a military parade in honor of the opening of the 20th Party Congress. Khrushchev, however, believed that a party meeting and military parade did not go together, and therefore “corrected” Zhukov and canceled the parade.<sup>67</sup> In May 1956, Zhukov complained that soldiers and vehicles were being used to support agriculture. He even felt it was in his purview to complain to the CC that retired officers were being portrayed negatively in the media. Khrushchev blocked him from firing Marshal Biriuzov, commander of anti-aircraft forces.<sup>68</sup> In April 1957, Zhukov believed that negotiations on conventional arms cuts should be tied to a ban only on hydrogen bombs, not both hydrogen and nuclear; Khrushchev disagreed.<sup>69</sup> In July 1957, Zhukov wanted military concerns to be included in a general decision on construction of housing, but Khrushchev demurred.<sup>70</sup> In August, Khrushchev and Zhukov disagreed over whether the Soviet Union and USA should accept an American proposal to use overflights as part of an arms control plan.<sup>71</sup> When Brezhnev opposed Zhukov’s decision to transfer a military officer serving in Hungary, Brezhnev complained that the Hungarian leader Kadar was opposed. Zhukov responded: “it is necessary to take my opinion into account as well. And do not get excited, I am as much a member of the CC Presidium as you, Comrade Brezhnev.” Zhukov noticed that Khrushchev was unhappy with this response.<sup>72</sup> Zhukov’s characterization of his right to express an opinion as a member of the Presidium is strikingly reminiscent of Molotov, who was also accused of opposing the party line.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>67</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]* (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), 271–72.

<sup>68</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 81, 101–2, 110.

<sup>69</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 252–53.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 263–64.

<sup>72</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 632.

Khrushchev did argue that Zhukov had wrong opinions on the future of Soviet military spending and doctrinal issues. At the October 26 Presidium meeting as well as the plenum, Khrushchev accused Zhukov of demanding too much capital investment for the nuclear industry.<sup>73</sup> According to Khrushchev, “Naturally, as always ministers want to receive more, including Comrade Zhukov... He started to report on the balance of power between us and America and say: I - the minister of defense - declare that if this continues and there is no change to the situation, America will be able to smash us and will smash us... Later I say to Comrade Zhukov: you cannot talk like this.... One cannot behave too opportunistically just to pry out more money.” Khrushchev even claimed Zhukov asked for 2.2 billion rubles for the Ministry of Defense, but which were never used: “this is greed [*rvachestvo*].”<sup>74</sup> He complained that Zhukov did not understand new technology, most importantly rockets: “Our rocket technology literally shocked them: they don’t sleep because we, peasants [*lapotniki*], first launched an intercontinental ballistic rocket, first launched sputnik from earth. But Comrade Zhukov spends more time dealing with how is he painted on a white horse, how movies are made, how the narrative is edited.”<sup>75</sup> According to Zhukov’s daughter and a researcher that met Zhukov on multiple occasions, he opposed Khrushchev’s plans to cut the size of the military.<sup>76</sup> As will be discussed in the following chapter, Khrushchev started to demand that the military-industrial complex place greater emphasis on rockets the same month Zhukov was removed.

Yet as historian Abramova argues, the evidence over whether Zhukov truly opposed budget costs and rockets is ambiguous.<sup>77</sup> This raises the very strong possibility that Khrushchev was deliberately mischaracterizing Zhukov’s positions for political purposes. Even Khrushchev in his memoirs wrote that

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<sup>73</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 278.

<sup>74</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 389–90.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

<sup>76</sup> Iuliia Abramova, “Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS I Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi ‘Ottepeli’ (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’ (1953-1964)]” (Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2000), 236.

<sup>77</sup> Abramova, “Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS I Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi ‘Ottepeli’ (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’ (1953-1964).”

“I should give credit where it is due. Zhukov showed great understanding of the need to reduce arms spending in terms of both monetary resources and material resources. He even took the initiative in reducing the size of the command staffs and proposed a reduction in salaries for some categories of military personnel.”<sup>78</sup> In 1955, Zhukov agreed with Khrushchev’s assessment that the Soviet base in Finland provided no value whatsoever. Khrushchev asked that Zhukov write the report because he wanted the initiative to come from the military.<sup>79</sup> Zhukov supported cutting 340,000 soldiers from the Soviet Army in 1955. In February 1956, Zhukov and Sokolovsky submitted a memorandum that proposed cutting another 420,000.<sup>80</sup> At a speech for military officers in 1957, Zhukov stated that “it is impossible to always have 100%, this is not advantageous for our country. Capital investment must go first to the economy, to automobile, tank, and aviation industries. Rubles do not fall from the moon, money must be saved.” He assured his audience that “we are no small power that can be defeated in a moment without a large war with a sudden attack... at the necessary moment all carefully prepared plans will immediately go into effect.” He was in essence arguing that there would be time to mobilize in the event of a major war.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Zhukov denied that he opposed a greater emphasis on rockets. In October 1961 *Izvestiia* published claims by a special correspondent that “G. Zhukov denied the significance of technical progress, the development of technology for the arms of the army and navy. He affirmed that the rocket - was stupid, and the bayonet - was great...” Zhukov wrote in a letter to Khrushchev and Mikoian in February 1964 that “you know that I never denied rocket weapons, and even more was never a supporter of bayonet tactics.”<sup>82</sup> Therefore in terms of military doctrine, we have simply no concrete evidence that Khrushchev and Zhukov had a serious difference of opinions.

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<sup>78</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 535.

<sup>79</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformator [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]*, 195.

<sup>80</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 51–55, 66; Matthew Evangelista, *UnArmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 96–98.

<sup>81</sup> RGVA fond 41131, delo 47, list 123.

<sup>82</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 495–97.

Zhukov was also criticized at the October 1957 CC plenum for his positions on “political work” in the Soviet Army. “Political work” in the military includes two issues that should be addressed separately. First, with regards to how to eliminate disciplinary infractions, the policy difference was over-emphasized for political effect, and Khrushchev probably held the less popular position. The second issue was about the appropriate extent of civilian oversight over military issues. Here there is more evidence for a real difference of opinion, which can be seen, contrary to the spirit of most of the rest of the dissertation, as some evidence supporting hypothesis 1a. However, two caveats must be made. First, the military very clearly did *not* support the position of the civilians of this issue. Moreover, because the crux of the matter was essentially about castrating the political power of the military in a future power struggle, it is perhaps better seen as evidence for hypothesis 3b (which sees fighting over military control as a significant element in elite power struggles) than a purely policy issue. This is because the question of civilian oversight was less about policy differences about military organization and doctrine than access to information, (or, in other words, possible *kompromat*) and whether Khrushchev would enjoy a special, personal relationship with multiple members of the military high command.

Zhukov was criticized for his supposedly overly strict approach to solving discipline problems. Yet the evidence shows that Zhukov was not acting out of the mainstream or historical precedent, saw the danger of overly dictatorial commands, his position was not so far from Khrushchev, and broad segments of the military almost certainly supported him. Instead this issue was trumped-up as part of the move against Zhukov. Therefore this is a serious weakening of hypothesis 1a.

This was an explosive issue. The Soviet Army suffered from surprisingly and catastrophically low levels of discipline.<sup>83</sup> At a meeting of political workers in the Russian Far East in February 1951, Marshal Malinovskii complained that “the situation among us with discipline and serious accidents is

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<sup>83</sup> Abramova, “Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS I Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi ‘Ottepeli’ (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’ (1953-1964),” 238–39. Abramova was able to access the Ministry of Defense archives (TsAMO) in Podols’k, an exceedingly rare opportunity.



extremely bad... I consider the most important moment [sic] is the strengthening of military discipline.” Every year, for every 60 people in the First Red Banner Army there was a serious accident and every third individual was a violator of discipline. The number of serious accidents in 1950 compared with 1949 was almost double.<sup>84</sup> Low discipline sometimes had tragic consequences, most importantly the destruction of the Soviet warship *Novorossiisk* in October 1955. In reaction to this incident, the CC on February 13, 1956 wrote a letter to the military that noted the disciplinary situation in the Fleet was only getting worse. The letter noted that because of “accidents and catastrophes, negligent treatment of weapons, fights, uproars [*deboshei*], and other accidents many military men have died. The unjustified losses of Soviet soldiers in peacetime is a shame for our float and army.” Local party committees were forced to contact the CC to ask for help managing unruly soldiers.<sup>85</sup> One Russian expert on protests in the Soviet Union pointed out that “the particular significance of military unrest during the period 1953 to 1959 lies in the fact that soldiers became one of the most volatile groups in the Soviet population... Looting and the destruction of housing and administrative buildings, shops, and stores often accompanied fights and mass hooliganism.”<sup>86</sup>

Zhukov clearly believed that an important component of any plan to solve the problem of discipline was “one-man command [*edinonachaliie*]”: the principle that, in terms of purely military issues, the commander should have prerogative over both his commissar and the party committee. The danger, however, was that this principle would lead to officers acting like dictators that used highly coercive measures to punish infractions. At different times the military came down on different sides of this issue, an unsurprising habit given the lack of clear answers. For example, one document from October 1945 emphasized raising the responsibility of commanders and introducing a regime of harsh

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<sup>84</sup> RGASPI fond 17, opis 136, delo 225, listy 210-227. In the Far East in 1950 there were 488 cases of fighting and 2,548 convicted military men, including 182 officers (listy 20-21). In 1950 compared with 1949, the cases of drunkenness and hooliganism increased by 60% (list 109).

<sup>85</sup> RGANI fond 3, opis 22, delo 99, listy 1-4-ob.

<sup>86</sup> Vladimir Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 45.

military discipline. Yet in January 1948, another document told officers that using overly strict punishments was useless: in one artillery corps, 40% of officers were convicted of disciplinary infractions.<sup>87</sup> The military leadership also struggled with the relationship of party committees to officers. In 1950, 228 generals and 1,138 colonels were brought to party responsibility by political organs in the Soviet Army. A document published by the CC Secretariat on 29 December 1950 tried to arrest this trend. In the first ten months of 1951, the GPD received negative material on only five generals and 57 colonels.<sup>88</sup>

One of Zhukov's primary alleged crimes was his role in Order 0090. According to this order, which was released on May 12, 1956 after a meeting of the military leadership, discipline was poor because "some officers, especially officer-political workers, have a wrong attitude with regard to the question of the role of the commander-*edinonachal'nik*." These political workers were accused of hurting discipline by criticizing the professional [*sluzhebnoi*] activity of officers at party meetings. Most important was point two, which stated that any attempts by commanders, political organs, or party or Komsomol organizations to criticize the professional activity of officers must be ended immediately.<sup>89</sup>

But apparently investing officers with too much authority could have the opposite problem. An emphasis on strong discipline clearly created tensions within the military: the MVD reported to the CC that some military officers were inappropriately using the criticism of Stalin and the cult of personality to attack one-man command.<sup>90</sup> In January 1956, Malinovskii, head of Soviet Troops in the Far Eastern Military District, submitted a document to the Ministry of Defense that criticized the habit of relying on

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<sup>87</sup> P.N. Bobylev et al, eds., *Priказы Narodnogo Komissara Oborony SSSR I Ministra Voozruennykh Sil SSSR. 12 Oktiabria 1945 G. - 1949 G. [Orders of the USSR People's Commissar for Defense and USSR Minister of Defense. October 12 1945-1949]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 13–14, 241–43.

<sup>88</sup> RGASPI, fond 17, opis 136, delo 218, listy 198-201.

<sup>89</sup> N. Kovaleva, ed., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957: Stenogramma liun'skogo Plenuma TsK KPSS I Drugie Dokumenty*, Rossiia. XX Vek (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1998), 82.

<sup>90</sup> Karl Eimermacher, ed., *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na XX s"ezde KPSS. Dokumenty. [Khrushchev's Report on Stalin's Cult of Personality at the 22th CPSU Congress. Documents]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), 525.

punishment, as opposed to persuasion, to achieve discipline. His position was not supported by the ministry.<sup>91</sup> In October 1956, the General Department of the CC wrote a memorandum about how officers were writing letters to the CC about the brutality of higher-ranking officers to their subordinates: “in these letters is information that recently in the Army there is the wide-spread practice of mass repressions, disciplinary action, and the persecution of officers, that many commanders see repressions as the basic tool to maintain discipline, show intolerable rudeness to their subordinates, which in some cases goes so far as to debase the dignity of the Soviet person, and do not show the necessary care of the needs of subordinates.”<sup>92</sup>

It seems Zhukov could see both sides of the problem: in November 1956, he wrote a memorandum along with GPD head Zheltov that complained about some officers being too rude to their subordinates and even specifically criticized Marshals Chuikov and Sudets.<sup>93</sup> Even more remarkable was a speech given by Zhukov in May 1957 to the commanders in the south of the Soviet Union [*soveshanii rukovodiashchego sostava yuzhnoi gruppy voisk*].<sup>94</sup> Zhukov complained that “many of us have become true lords, haughty people” and that “true friendship” was absent. Some officers were even constructing their own toilets that they kept locked. For Zhukov, “we must all behave more democratically. Subordinates can only feel proud if their superiors interact with them more outside professional activities and eat together, they see that they are not only commanders but older comrades as well.” He understood the tension between giving officers authority to instill discipline while not allowing such power to turn into abuse. He stated that “there were earlier cases when subordinates beat officers and sergeants, and now correctly struggling against such cases sometimes falls into the other extreme and bullying of subordinates takes place.” Zhukov even acknowledged that party organizations were not speaking out

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<sup>91</sup> Abramova, “Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS I Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi ‘Ottepeli’ (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’ (1953-1964)],” 240. His article was denied publication in the form submitted.

<sup>92</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 603.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>94</sup> RGVA fond 41131 (Mamsurov), delo 47, listy 114-124.

against commanders that were drunks or loafers. The speech concluded by expressing grudging respect for the Chinese military's "army life." This speech reveals that despite the accusations against him, Zhukov was hardly a fanatic when it came to tough discipline.

At the October plenum, Zhukov denied that Order 0090 contradicted the party's interests, noting that he invited the CC secretaries to the meeting but only one person from the CC attended, who did not express any opposition to the decision. He also pointed out that the document contained nothing significantly different from Order 0085, which had been published in 1951.<sup>95</sup> In fact, point two of that earlier document did forbid the discussion of professional activities of commanders at party and Komsomol meetings.<sup>96</sup> The April 1951 session of the Main Military Council that reached this decision concluded emphatically that worsening discipline was a result of "[many political organs, party and Komsomol organizations that] allow the criticism of the professional activity of the commander, which facilitates the collapse of the authority of the commander and cultivates in him a fear to take on all responsibility."<sup>97</sup> Therefore, claims that Order 0090 was fundamentally different from 0085 are incorrect. Clearly members of the military found the accusations outrageous. One participant interrupted GPD head Zheltov to ask if Order 0090 was so problematic how it was possible he allowed it to be passed. Khrushchev had to step in and tell those who wanted to speak to sign up and not interrupt.<sup>98</sup>

It also bears noting that whatever the official rules regarding the acceptability of criticism of officers at party meetings, the norm was for the officer to dominate. When Order 0085 was published, one admiral wrote in his diary: "If in the recent past at meeting and party conferences criticism was allegedly encouraged without respect to the individual, now it is again forbidden. There was hardly any criticism

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<sup>95</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 257–58.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

<sup>97</sup> P.N. Bobylev et al, eds., *Priказы Ministra Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, Voennogo Ministra SSSR, I Ministra Oborony SSSR 1950-1953 Gg. [Orders of the USSR Minister of the Armed Forces, USSR War Ministry, and USSR Minister of Defense]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 220.

<sup>98</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 248.

anyways, and now it is suppressed entirely.”<sup>99</sup> One party member submitted an anonymous question in Gorky at the party meeting discussing Zhukov’s removal: “There was no criticism in the Army earlier either, why are they only blaming Zhukov of this?”<sup>100</sup> In 1961, the CC was still receiving numerous letters (16,402 in 1960, 5,604 in the first six months of 1961) complaining about brutal disciplinary practices among the ranks despite the conclusions of the October 1957 plenum.<sup>101</sup> Given these considerations, the CIA was therefore right to conclude in 1959 that the move to greater emphasis on command personnel was a long-term trend that preceded Zhukov’s tenure as defense minister and persisted afterwards.<sup>102</sup>

A secondary issue related to discipline was the relative importance of commissars and other ideological workers. Certainly, Zhukov was skeptical about these men. At a Presidium meeting on December 24, 1955, Zhukov criticized political work: “What are Zheltov and Zakharov doing? Political work is at a low level.”<sup>103</sup> In the navy, Zhukov fired 36 percent of the party organs and fired 50 percent of the political workers.<sup>104</sup> Certainly, Zhukov wanted propaganda work to be more practical and to avoid over-staffing among those engaged in such work. But in this sense his concerns were shared by other military men. Moreover, we have no evidence that he was fundamentally opposed to political work. As the CIA document concluded, Zhukov was not the only man to criticize political work, and when criticized the target “was not political work per se, but the manner in which it was conducted.”<sup>105</sup>

### *The Importance of Information*

The debate over the relationship between discipline and political work only had an indirect relationship with the question of civil-military relations. The continuing debate over how to solve the

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<sup>99</sup> F. Oktiabr’skii, “Tak Bylo [Iz Dnevniko Admirala],” *Morskoi Sbornik*, no. 1 (1990): 83.

<sup>100</sup> RGASPI, fond 556, opis 14, delo 69, list 92.

<sup>101</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 30, delo 372, listy 143-149 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>102</sup> Central Intelligence Agency Office of Current Intelligence, “Soviet Staff Study- Party-Military Relations in the USSR and the Fall of Marshal Zhukov.”

<sup>103</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 77.

<sup>104</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 263.

<sup>105</sup> Central Intelligence Agency Office of Current Intelligence, “Soviet Staff Study- Party-Military Relations in the USSR and the Fall of Marshal Zhukov,” 5.

perennial problem of poor morale was simply a useful cleavage for Khrushchev to grasp even though in fact Zhukov's policy was quite popular. However, Zhukov and Khrushchev did seem to differ strongly on two related key issues: the flow of information and Khrushchev's personal role with regards to military issues. With regards to the first issue, the question was whether the CC and high-ranking civilian officials would have direct access to what was happening in the Soviet Army. This was essentially a question of power: if the situation in the military was invisible to members of the civilian leadership, they would be incapable of using *kompromat* against Zhukov. As for the second issue, the crux of the matter was whether Khrushchev would continue to enjoy a special and personal relationship with the entire military command. However, the marshal clearly found both close civilian monitoring and Khrushchev's direct interference problematic. Whether he intentionally tried to protect his own position by limiting the party's role or primarily saw such steps as important steps to greater military efficiency is unclear. But the implications for the civilian leadership was the same: without the power of information and personal contacts, the balance of power would shift away from the civilian leadership.

The General Political Department was traditionally the CC's eyes and ears in the party. However, during the Zhukov era, GPD documents were not signed simply "GPD" but "the GPD of the Ministry of Defense". The GPD was required to report not only to the CC but also to the Ministry of Defense. That would certainly limit the outspokenness of complaints. The most important directives on political questions were signed by Zhukov as well as the GPD.<sup>106</sup>

A perhaps even more important organ for monitoring the military was the Administrative Department (AD) [*administrativnyi otdel*]. The AD supervised the military, political police, and procuracy. Although the AD files from the Khrushchev era have not yet been declassified, those from the late Stalin years are available at RGASPI (fond 17, opis' 136). These documents demonstrate a stunning

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<sup>106</sup> Abramova, "Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS i Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi 'Ottepeli' (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev's 'Thaw' (1953-1964)," 249.

level of CC involvement in the everyday affairs of the military. The files are full of letters, both anonymous and signed, to CC secretaries (especially Georgii Malenkov) who then used the AD to conduct investigations.<sup>107</sup> The AD investigated whether a commander was justified in criticizing a man for poorly-preparing food, judged whether the city of Tula should give up a *banya* to the military, and even answered whether a regiment could build a club.<sup>108</sup> The AD also kept a close eye on the General Political Department, and on two occasions conducted investigations that revealed the GPD was not answering complaints in a timely fashion.<sup>109</sup> If the party was used to any military man having the right to write a letter to the CC, as was the case in the late Stalinist era, then Zhukov's attempt to limit party involvement would have constituted a serious change.

Kirichenko told the October plenum that the CC became a "forbidden zone" for communists in the military.<sup>110</sup> Khrushchev emphasized that "with regards to the party organs, with regards to the CC the doors must always be open for each communist and non-communist with regards to any issue."<sup>111</sup> Khrushchev complained in a speech to the military leadership in Moscow that after the June 1957 plenum only Grechko wrote a report on how the outcome was discussed in party meetings in the military. He even claimed that when he complained about this at a meeting with the high command, Timoshenko argued that it would damage "subordination."<sup>112</sup>

At least some in the military found the charges against Zhukov exaggerated. One military officer tried to defend the behavior of the armed forces in this regard: "Here it was asked, why did you not appeal to the CC, if you saw party political work being under-emphasized... Because we thought that reports on the work completed by us presented to the minister and General Political Department were

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<sup>107</sup> For typical dela with numerous anonymous letters, see fond 17, opis 136, dela 369 and 232.

<sup>108</sup> RGASPI fond 17, opis 136, delo 354, list 5, fond 17, opis 136, delo 381, list 196, and fond 17, opis 136, delo 111, list 39. Malenkov managed each of these issues.

<sup>109</sup> RGASPI, fond 17, opis 136, delo 47, listy 160-167 and fond 17, opis 136, delo 128, listy 37-40)

<sup>110</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 292.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

enough... Marshal Grechko was raised as an example - the only one among the commanders who presented a report on the June plenum to the CC. We did not present [a report]. Why? Because we thought it was enough that we present this report to the General Political Department."<sup>113</sup> However, if the GPD was no longer seen as representing the interests of the CC, then the whole point of the criticisms was that there was real dissatisfaction with the situation.

The political leadership was also concerned by Zhukov's positions on military organization. Zhukov proposed that the Main Military Council [*Glavnyi voennyi sovet*], an advisory organ made up of high-ranking military officers, be abolished. This proposal was denied by Khrushchev.<sup>114</sup> Zhukov also proposed changing the Military Councils at lower levels, which included civilian figures, into advisory organizations.<sup>115</sup> At Zhukov's last Presidium meeting, he was criticized for his position on Military Councils, both at the main [*glavnyi*] one at the elite level and others at lower levels.<sup>116</sup>

Understanding the significance of Zhukov's positions requires historical context. Before World War II, the Main Military Council [*Glavnyi voennyi sovet*] attached to the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army was an advisory institution made up of civilians and military officers whose chair was Voroshilov, the head of the military.<sup>117</sup> The situation changed dramatically during the war, but in June 1946 an advisory Supreme Military Council [*Vysshiy voennyi sovet*] inside the military ministry was established, and its chairman was again the minister of defense.<sup>118</sup> In March 1950, however, a Main Military Council

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–87.

<sup>115</sup> RGASPI, fond 82, opis 2, delo 446, list 6. Interestingly this proposal was also signed by Zheltov. Technically, Zhukov wanted to make the councils 'attached [*pri*]' to the commanders.

<sup>116</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 277–78.

<sup>117</sup> Interestingly, other than Voroshilov the only major figures who served on this Council that played a major role in politics after Stalin's death were Malenkov and Zhukov. Molotov, Beria, Bulganin, and Khrushchev were absent. Bobylev et al, *Priказы Ministra Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, Voennogo Ministra SSSR, I Ministra Oborony SSSR 1950-1953 Gg. [Orders of the USSR Minister of the Armed Forces, USSR War Ministry, and USSR Minister of Defense]*, 484 fn 6.

<sup>118</sup> Bobylev et al, *Priказы Narodnogo Komissara Oborony SSSR I Ministra Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR. 12 Oktiabria 1945 G. - 1949 G. [Orders of the USSR People's Commissar for Defense and USSR Minister of Defense. October 12 1945-1949]*, 63.



was established whose decisions, made by majority vote, were necessary for the war minister, although he remained head of the body as well as commander in chief of the Soviet Army.<sup>119</sup> An advisory Supreme Military Council that reported to the Council of Ministers and led directly by the chairman of the Council of Ministers (Stalin) was also created.<sup>120</sup>

Immediately after the 19th Party Congress, in October 1952, the Presidium named the following to a standing commission on defense questions: Bulganin (as chairman), Beria, Vasilevskii, Voroshilov, Gromov, Zakharov, Kaganovich, Kuznetsov, Malyshev, Pervukhin, and Saburov. At the same time, Bulganin's role on the Politburo as point-man on defense issues was removed, instead giving the job of "supervision [*nabliudenie*]" of the military to the standing commission.<sup>121</sup>

Yet the situation changed again dramatically in favor of military autonomy in April 1953, shortly after Stalin's death. Both the Main Military Council (the authoritative body in the military ministry) and the Supreme Military Council (the advisory body in the Council of Ministers) were abolished.<sup>122</sup> Instead, a military collegium was created in the ministry of defense that was chaired by the defense minister and made up entirely of military figures.<sup>123</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, another major military reorganization took place around the time of Malenkov's removal. A Defense Council [*sovet oborny*], chaired by Khrushchev and including mostly civilians, was established (Bulganin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Molotov, Zhukov, Vasilevskii).

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<sup>119</sup> Vasilevskii chaired the body. Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, and Khrushchev were all members, but curiously not Stalin. Bobylev et al, *Priказы Ministra Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, Voennogo Ministra SSSR, I Ministra Oborony SSSR 1950-1953 Gg. [Orders of the USSR Minister of the Armed Forces, USSR War Ministry, and USSR Minister of Defense]*, 60–62.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 62–63.

<sup>121</sup> O.V. Khlevniuk et al, eds., *Politbiuro TsK VKP(B) I Sovet Ministrov SSSR 1945-1953 [Politburo TsK VKP(B) and the Council of Ministers of the USSR 1945-1953]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), 90.

<sup>122</sup> Bobylev et al, *Priказы Ministra Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, Voennogo Ministra SSSR, I Ministra Oborony SSSR 1950-1953 Gg. [Orders of the USSR Minister of the Armed Forces, USSR War Ministry, and USSR Minister of Defense]*, 404–5.

<sup>123</sup> This dramatic increase in military autonomy may have played a role in the post-Stalin attempts to seek favor from the Armed Forces. Bulganin and Shtemenko, who was likely an ally of Beria, signed the document that dissolved the Main Military Council and Supreme Military Council. Bulganin signed the document that ordered the creation of the collegium. However, this remains speculation. Ibid., 408–9.

Khrushchev therefore clearly assumed more direct control of the military than was previously custom. An advisory Military Council [voennyi sovet] made up entirely of military officers was attached to the Defense Council and was clearly inferior to it.<sup>124</sup>

These changes were not made without debate. Molotov believed that no military officers should participate in the Defense Council, while Khrushchev did. Khrushchev, on the other hand, wanted members of the Presidium to participate as members in the Military Council, while Molotov did not, although he believed Presidium members should attend such meetings. Khrushchev triumphed on the first issue but not the second. Voroshilov opposed the creation of two bodies, believing that one well-ordered body was enough. The debate clearly revealed that Khrushchev wanted to be involved in the advisory Military Council. Bulganin said that the body was “extremely important.”<sup>125</sup> Members of the Presidium were required to attend its meetings, although they were not officially members.<sup>126</sup>

Despite the obvious importance that Khrushchev attached to the Military Council, it never held a single meeting. In May 1956, Zhukov wrote a memorandum to the CC proposing that the body be abolished, pointing out that it had never met and that the collegium of the ministry of defense, created in April 1953, was made up of essentially the same members, was led by the same person (Zhukov), and met regularly to discuss military issues.<sup>127</sup> Khrushchev was fully aware of the similarities between the collegium and Military Council, and even argued during the debate with Molotov in December 1954 that without Presidium members it would be just like the collegium [*togda, esli ne vkhodim my, togda est' kollegiia*].

Zhukov also could refer to precedence with regards to his proposal to turn the military councils at lower levels into advisory bodies: an order signed by Stalin in January 1947 had in fact done so. The

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<sup>124</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 28–29.

<sup>125</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 29–31.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>127</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 86–87.

document stated explicitly that such bodies had been created to manage White specialists who might defect or intentionally sabotage military, but now the military command was made up of politically mature and trustworthy communists.<sup>128</sup> Interestingly, Zhukov would use this same language to defend his behavior at the October plenum. These military councils, however, were turned back into “deciding organs” in June 1950.<sup>129</sup>

After Zhukov was removed, the Military Council was renamed the Main Military Council and all members and candidates to the Presidium joined the body. Malinovskii was made its chair, while Khrushchev was named commander-in-chief, although this piece of information was known only to a small number of people. Malinovskii was named vice commander-in-chief.<sup>130</sup> The removal of Zhukov was therefore accompanied with structural changes that further increased civilian control over the military hierarchy.

What, then, are we to make of Zhukov’s proposal to abolish the advisory Military Council subordinate to the Defense Council and turn the Military Councils at lower levels into advisory organs? Zhukov clearly could point to historical precedent as support for his proposals. Since he believed Soviet Army commanders were true communists, he did not believe that over-centralization was a threat to civilian control. Yet when considered in the broader context of concern over Zhukov’s political power, one can see why Khrushchev and other high-ranking civilians would be concerned. In any case, the charge against Zhukov for wanting to disband a group that never met can be filed under the cynical *kompromat* category.

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<sup>128</sup> Bobylev et al, *Priказы Narodnogo Komissara Oborony SSSR I Ministra Voorozhennykh Sil SSSR. 12 Oktiabria 1945 G. - 1949 G.* [Orders of the USSR People’s Commissar for Defense and USSR Minister of Defense. October 12 1945-1949], 171–73.

<sup>129</sup> Bobylev et al, *Priказы Ministra Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, Voennogo Ministra SSSR, I Ministra Oborony SSSR 1950-1953 Gg.* [Orders of the USSR Minister of the Armed Forces, USSR War Ministry, and USSR Minister of Defense], 117–19.

<sup>130</sup> A.V. Sushkov, *Prezidium TsK KPSS v 1957-1964: Lichnosti I Vlast’* [The Presidium of the CC CPSU 1957-1964: Personalities and Power] (Ekaterinburg: Institut istorii i arkeologii UrO RAN, 2009), 40–41.

The final issue that must be evaluated is Khrushchev's personal relationship with the armed forces. When Khrushchev went to visit the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet forces were engaged in staff exercises. When Rokossovskii called Zhukov to ask whether they should be canceled so he and Grechko could go meet Khrushchev, Zhukov told them no and hung up the phone. Grechko went anyways and said to Khrushchev: "I don't know what will happen to me now? Perhaps you will defend me, Nikita Sergeevich?"<sup>131</sup> Zhukov also allegedly refused to allow Marshal Eremenko to visit Stalingrad while Khrushchev was visiting. Mikoian raised the issue of Zhukov refusing to allow Grechko, Rokossovskii, and Eremenko to meet with Khrushchev at the October 26 Presidium meeting.<sup>132</sup> In his speech to the October plenum, Zhukov admitted that it was a mistake to tell Grechko not to leave the military exercise to see Khrushchev, but denied telling Eremenko not to go to Stalingrad.<sup>133</sup> In a letter to the Presidium after Khrushchev's fall, Zhukov explained that he did not want marshals to set up meetings with Khrushchev that were "not provided for in military regulations (then Khrushchev was not head of the government). Khrushchev did not like this, as he had become accustomed to pompous meetings set up for him in other places."<sup>134</sup>

As the October 17 Presidium meeting shows, Zhukov's positions on "political work" in the military, both with regards to propagandists within the military and the role of civilians, were held by other members of the military elite. On October 17, Zheltov, the head of the General Political Department, informed the Presidium that "if you attach red beards on the faces of political workers and give them daggers [which would make them look like bandits] they would have slayed all the commanders," and that as head of the GPD he (Zheltov) was not allowed to go to see troops without permission.

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<sup>131</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]*, 482.

<sup>132</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 277.

<sup>133</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 259.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

The other marshals were skeptical about Zheltov's report. Defense Minister Malinovskii stated that Zheltov's presentation gave the impression that the political organs were only close to Zheltov, but that this was untrue. He accepted that there were tensions, but that everything had to be analyzed objectively. Konev stated flatly that "I cannot agree with the evaluation of the situation of political work in the army given by Comrade Zheltov... The army cadres are loyal to the party."

But the civilian members of the Presidium disagreed. Suslov claimed that Zhukov said political workers over the last 40 years had become accustomed to babbling and lost their sense of smell like old cats. Ignatov said, "I do not understand Malinovskii and Konev, and they must help the CC... Commanders are afraid to come to the CC." Kuusinen was even ruder: "Respected marshals have presented here as if there were no objective facts. But is it really not an objective fact that the minister [of defense] has a scornful attitude towards political workers?" Kozlov raised the tension by stating "Comrades Malinovskii and Konev reacted to Comrade Zheltov's presentation with hostility. There is a tendency to take the army away from control of the party organs." Mikoian expressed lack of understanding about whom Konev and Malinovskii thought they were defending the military against: "Moreover, it is intolerable to create such a situation in the army that people are afraid to express their own ideas." Khrushchev concluded the meeting by criticizing Malinovskii and Konev for being one-sided, criticized the Ministry of Defense for being untouchable, and declared that liquidation of the Military Council "means: just me."<sup>135</sup> Therefore, the decision of the military men not to defend Zhukov to the very end cannot be explained by differences of opinion with him on policy.

The importance of *kompromat* was not only visible in the over-exaggeration of policy differences and the struggle over information control in the military. Most famously, Zhukov was also accused of creating a school for special forces [*diversanty*], allegedly without the knowledge of the civilian authorities. At the Presidium meeting when Zhukov was confronted with his crimes, both Bulganin and

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<sup>135</sup> Fursenko, *Presidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 269–73.

Voroshilov raised this issue. Voroshilov asked: “how can one create a school without a decision by the CC? It is suspicious.”<sup>136</sup> The implication was that Zhukov might use this secret group for his own nefarious political purposes.

Although it’s possible some in the civilian leadership truly believed Zhukov created the school as part of a plot, the evidence indicates that this was *kompromat*. In his speech at the October plenum, Zhukov explained that 17 companies of soldiers had been training in different regions and he had made a simple decision to bring them all together for purposes of convenience.<sup>137</sup> After Suslov claimed at the plenum that it was General Mamsurov who raised concern about the school to the civilian leadership, Mamsurov confronted him. Mamsurov was told that the “CC had to do this in the interests of the affair.” Zhukov later told Mamsurov that he never doubted his integrity.<sup>138</sup>

Semichastnyi wrote that “later, when I was head of the KGB and had counter-intelligence as part of my bailiwick, I never saw any persuasive confirmation of such a conspiracy.”<sup>139</sup> When a Yeltsin-era commission on rehabilitations reversed the verdict on Zhukov, it concluded that there was simply no evidence that Zhukov had been attempting to seize power or execute a coup: “The evidence provided in the report and in the debates was falsified, based on overexposure [*perederzhki*], manipulation, and coaxing. Accusations were based on suggestions structured on the possibility of actions, and not on actual actions.”<sup>140</sup>

## Section 2: Selectorate Theory vs. Rule Manipulation

Unlike any of the other chapters in this dissertation, in this case the man with the greatest martial prestige did not emerge triumphant. How could this have happened? As elsewhere in this dissertation, the

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 277–78.

<sup>137</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 261.

<sup>138</sup> Vladimir Pik, “V Nem Byl Talant Zhit’ - K 100 Letiiu so Dnia Rozhdeniia Kh.D. Mamsurova [He Had a Talent for Living- On the 100 Anniversary of the Birth of Kh. D. Mamsurov],” *Severnaia Osetiia*, September 11, 2003, 170 edition.

<sup>139</sup> Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 95.

<sup>140</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 584–85.

manipulation of decision-making organs played an absolutely crucial role. To establish a *fait accompli*, Khrushchev had to resort to tricks and the manipulation of party rules. As Marshal Vasilevskii told a military historian in 1977: “I will tell you directly: in October 1957 they slandered and maligned Georgii Konstantinovich [Zhukov]. He is a true and honest party member. This entire unworthy campaign deserves condemnation from all honest people.”<sup>141</sup> Interestingly, the CIA picked up less hints of anger at Zhukov’s removal than the *way* he was removed: “On the whole... reactions tended more in the direction of resentment at Khrushchev’s methods—e.g., ousting Zhukov while he was out of the country...”<sup>142</sup> Yet Khrushchev clearly believed that this was less costly than moving against Zhukov according to party rules, which might have allowed the marshal to emerge victorious.

However, this is not the only theoretical implication. The outcome of the struggle suggests a crucial caveat to the broader argument of the dissertation about the low-level of institutionalization in Leninist regimes. Although Zhukov’s moral authority was clearly significant, when the choice was portrayed as a contest between the party and the marshal, the latter could only lose, even if that meant men had to vote against their conscience. As one speaker at the October CC plenum put it, “At the party meetings [meaning military meetings before CC plenum] it was said that they were primarily communists, and only then officers, only then generals, only then commanders and so on and so on.”<sup>143</sup> This attitude of subservience to the party extended to Zhukov himself. Given the way Khrushchev framed the problem, the blatant use of coercion and force upon which Zhukov needed to rely to achieve victory would have too obviously violated the party’s code against ‘bonapartism.’

### *Conviction in Absentia*

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<sup>141</sup> G.A. Kumanev, “A.M. Vasilevskii i G.K. Zhukov [A.M. Vasilevskii and G.K. Zhukov],” in *Tri Marshala Pobedy* (Moscow: In-t rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1999), 194.

<sup>142</sup> Central Intelligence Agency Office of Current Intelligence, “Soviet Staff Study- Party-Military Relations in the USSR and the Fall of Marshal Zhukov,” 20.

<sup>143</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 291.

Khrushchev most clearly broke the party's own rules by not allowing Zhukov to be present while discussing his "problems," instead presenting him with a *fait accompli*. This violated point 3-G of the party constitution active at the time, which allowed party members "to demand personal participation in all situations when a decision is made about his activities or behavior." Khrushchev prepared the case against Zhukov as the marshal was traveling in Albania and Yugoslavia. The Presidium's major discussion of military issues on October 17, described above, took place in Zhukov's absence. On October 19, the Presidium approved a draft resolution of the CC on party and political work in the armed forces and decided to send it by telegraph to the troops, and also decided to hold meetings at the military garrisons in Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>144</sup> This resolution, titled "On the Improvement of Party-Political Work in the Soviet Army and Navy," did not mention Zhukov by name, but it did raise the political temperature and served as a heads-up to the party and military that not all was well: "in the practice of party-political work there are serious deficiencies, and sometimes direct under-appreciation [*priamaia nedootsenka*] of it is manifested."<sup>145</sup>

On October 22, Khrushchev gave a speech to a party meeting of the central departments of the Ministry of Defense, the Moscow Military District, and the Moscow anti-aircraft forces in the Kremlin: the first time such a meeting had been held with military officers there.<sup>146</sup> Khrushchev stated flatly that "education in the army is not being conducted accurately. Management of the army is not being conducted correctly [*nepravil'no idet rukovodstvo armiei*]. The army is not being educated correctly also with regards to the Central Committee. And you know what this means, comrades. This is a matter of the most serious importance." He went on to blame Stalin for the Soviet military's defeats at Kiev and Kharkov: two battles often seen as manifestations of Khrushchev's incompetence, especially the latter.

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<sup>144</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 275.

<sup>145</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 186–88.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 189–203.



Having played up his own martial prestige, Khrushchev went on to attack a dramatic painting of Zhukov on a white horse. Khrushchev claimed that when Zheltov criticized the painting for being similar to an icon of Saint George, the painter said: “Stalin hounded [*travil*] me, and now you are hounding me.” Khrushchev described this as a tragedy: “it is impossible for anyone, no matter how much of a respected comrade he is, to cross party lines...” He concluded by proposing that Zhukov be removed from the Presidium so that “marshals and generals could argue,” implying that Zhukov’s power had made such deliberations impossible.<sup>147</sup>

On the same day as Khrushchev’s speech, all other Military Districts also discussed the resolution on political work. The ranks were clearly confused. In the Caucasian Military District, most of the 50 questions raised by participants were about the origins of this document. Participants were also concerned about whether Order 0090’s sanction against criticism and self-criticism of professional activity was still in force. In the Leningrad Military District, many participants asked how Zhukov felt about the document and why his mistakes had not been discussed earlier.<sup>148</sup>

Remarkably, Khrushchev gave a second speech to the same group of officers in Moscow the next day, suggesting strong skepticism of his speech the day before.<sup>149</sup> Khrushchev continued to raise the political heat, this time primarily by answering anonymous questions from the audience. The first question was whether Zhukov had participated in discussing the resolution on political work. Khrushchev denied that the decision would have been different if Zhukov was present, as the issue was “not in people, but policies.” Khrushchev made a case for discipline based on class consciousness rooted in political work and even went so far as to argue for more democracy among the ranks: “We in the Presidium of the CC decide all issues and it does not hurt us that there are 15 people... We decide military issues as well.”

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–7.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 209–20.

Khrushchev then criticized Zhukov for proposing to remove the Main Military Council, wanting to remove Serov from head of the KGB, and creation of the school of saboteurs.

While Zhukov was still in Yugoslavia, Khrushchev and several other members of the Presidium flew to Kiev to attend a military exercise. Commanders of the Military Regions and the services, as well as representatives of the general staff, were all in attendance. Khrushchev told the other members of the Presidium that his intention was to speak with the generals and gain a better understanding of the situation in the military. Khrushchev asked the generals questions about deficiencies in their work. At dinner, the Presidium members were spaced out to sit with generals, where, according to Mukhitdinov, the conversation became tense and the officers were displeased. Still, Khrushchev was able to conclude: “Well, it seems all is clear. The army is with us, it will not fail us.” The next morning Khrushchev met with the members of the Defense Council.<sup>150</sup> In his concluding speech to the plenum, Khrushchev admitted that he held the exercises because he “wanted to meet with the commanders of the [Military] Districts, wanted to listen to them, to speak with them, and then throw a few hedgehogs. I think that the commanders more or less understood me correctly. I must admit that I was satisfied that you [Zhukov] were not there, because you were not acting as a party member [*ne po-partiinomu*].”<sup>151</sup> When Zhukov heard of the meeting, he called Marshal Chuikov, who warned him that it would have been better if Zhukov was at the meeting and not in Yugoslavia. When he called Khrushchev to ask whether he should come, he was told no.<sup>152</sup>

In his speech to the October plenum, Zhukov complained that problems in the military were being discussed in his absence. When he heard of the discussions taking place in Moscow, “I thought they would summon me immediately, since after all I, as the main accused, should give explanations, should

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<sup>150</sup> Nuriddin Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennyye v Kremle [Years Spent in the Kremlin]*, vol. 1 (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo narodnogo nasledia imeni Abdully Kadyri, 1994), 283–85.

<sup>151</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 394.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 633.

say, perhaps, what is correct and incorrect, to raise documents...”<sup>153</sup> At the meeting with top military figures on October 22, Khrushchev acknowledged that he had received a note from the audience asking why Zhukov was not at the meeting. Khrushchev criticized the anonymous author of the note for worrying about why Zhukov was not present, not the outrages the CC was reporting now.<sup>154</sup> One of the most characteristic anonymous questions submitted at the military party meetings at which Zhukov’s removal was discussed was about his lack of presence during the deliberations about him and why he was not confronted earlier.<sup>155</sup>

Questions at party meetings in Leningrad included: “Why did the meeting of the Presidium of the CC CPSU take place in Zhukov’s absence, is this not a violation?” “How could it have happened that given Zhukov’s such serious mistakes he was recommended and selected as a member of the Presidium of the CC CPSU?” Another question revealed a fear that removing Zhukov was a mistake because of the “complicated international situation.”<sup>156</sup> Some were interested in how exactly Zhukov’s “adventurism” was manifested.<sup>157</sup> One questioner complained that they were not allowed to see the transcript of the plenum, while another asked whether Zhukov admitted to his mistakes at the plenum.<sup>158</sup>

The Presidium confronted Zhukov at a meeting on October 26.<sup>159</sup> In his opening remarks, Zhukov expressed a willingness to recognize criticisms and correct his mistakes, but also stated he thought it was inappropriate to have held a Presidium meeting and party meetings in the military about him without his participation. He considered the conclusion that he tried to separate the armed forces from the party “wild [*vyvod schitaiu dikim*].” He denied that he disregarded political work in the army, and stated that he considered Zheltov to be a weak leader. He accepted that there were “blunders” with regards to his cult of

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>155</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 30, delo 231, listy 65, 68 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>156</sup> RGASPI, fond 556, opis 14, delo 69, listy 72, 73, 88.

<sup>157</sup> RGASPI, fond 556, opis 14, delo 69, list 99, 134.

<sup>158</sup> RGASPI, fond 556, opis 14, delo 69, list 88, 72.

<sup>159</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 276–79.

personality, but also affirmed that he did not need glory. He suggested a commission be established to investigate. Immediately after the Presidium meeting Khrushchev had the KGB begin monitoring his home and telephone.<sup>160</sup>

In a stunning admission in his concluding speech to the plenum, Khrushchev described his reasoning for this approach. During a trip to the Crimea the two went swimming together and Khrushchev already looked at Zhukov differently: “You [Zhukov] ask why I told you nothing? Comrade Zhukov, I would have told you, but it is necessary to know when to tell and whom to tell, otherwise you will tell and become a fool. I did not want to be a fool, because if I told you, friend, it would not have helped, you would have raised your guard and caused trouble, you are capable of this.”<sup>161</sup>

#### *Portrayal of Issue as Zhukov vs. the Party*

Why did the military, or even supportive members in the CC, not stand up for Zhukov? First, Khrushchev made it a question of Zhukov against the party. Mikoian almost perfectly answered the question of why the Presidium could overcome Zhukov’s power: “Why should Zhukov be feared? What for? That we do not have the CC, that there is no party, army? You think the army is ‘yours.’ When the question is put starkly: Zhukov or the party, the army has such a party nature that it would never hesitate.”<sup>162</sup> By playing up Zhukov’s “Bonapartist” tendencies, had the military command resisted Khrushchev, they could have easily been accused along with him.

The political quiescence of the military is even more curious given historical precedent. Konev later described how he and the other marshals defended Zhukov against accusations at a meeting with Stalin, claiming to have reasoned that “If we do not defend Zhukov, 1937 will start again. Moreover during the years of the war we became braver.” Konev told an interviewer: “Stalin had enough brains not to punish Zhukov in such a way as later happened, during the Khrushchev era. They behaved dishonestly

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<sup>160</sup> Mukhitdinov, *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*, 1:289.

<sup>161</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 394.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

with him, unjustly.” Soon before the October plenum, Khrushchev summoned Konev to his office and asked him about Zhukov. When Konev responded by remarking that Zhukov worked 10-12 hour days and sometimes longer, Khrushchev said: “You do not know or notice a damn thing. Zhukov is an adventurist, a dangerous person. We are preparing a plenum of the CC, we will pull him to pieces. You must also speak.”<sup>163</sup>

An article appeared criticizing Zhukov with Konev’s name attached.<sup>164</sup> According to Konev, however, it was prepared in the CC. A version of it was read to Konev over the phone, but it was different from the one ultimately published. Three months after the plenum, Konev asked Zhukov why he never came to visit: “You are still our old comrade, why do you not come to have a talk?” When Zhukov asked what kind of old comrade he could be since Konev told everyone they were not friends, Konev tried to explain: “Well it doesn’t matter what happened then, you know what the situation was like. Then it seemed to all of us that the matter smelled serious.”<sup>165</sup> Konev explained that he was forced to add his signature to the article and that if he had refused, “then nothing would have come of it and the matter might have taken an even more serious turn, it might have led to accusations of a ‘conspiracy.’”<sup>166</sup>

### **Section 3: Coercive Institutions**

Zhukov was not only a threat to Khrushchev because of his personal prestige - the marshal also had a special relationship with the military. The concern over control of the Soviet Army as an actor in power struggles is strong evidence for hypothesis 3b. Khrushchev had reason to feel concerned: Zhukov had played a crucial role in major power struggles, showed a lack of respect to the other power ministries, and created a school for special forces. In March 1958, Khrushchev told a CC plenum that “Zhukov was

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<sup>163</sup> Anatolii Ponomarev, “Marshaly: Kak Delili Slavu Posle 1945-Go [The Marshals: How Glory Was Shared after 1945],” *Rodina*, no. 1 (1995): 78.

<sup>164</sup> V.A. Anfilov, “Razgovor Okonchilsia Ugrozoi Stalina [The Conversation Ended With Stalin’s Threat],” *Voенно-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, no. 3 (1995): 44.

<sup>165</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 612.

<sup>166</sup> A.D. Zharikov, “Maloizvestnoe O Zhukove [Little-Known [Facts] about Zhukov],” in *Tri Marshala Pobedy* (Moscow: In-t rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1999), 141–42.

an adventurer, Zhukov wanted a coup, Zhukov wanted a personal dictatorship. He was dangerous. More strict measures than expulsion from the CC should have been taken against him.”<sup>167</sup> In his memoirs, Khrushchev wrote that Zhukov “started accumulating so much power that the leadership of the country began to feel alarmed. Members of the Central Committee Presidium expressed their opinion to me more than once that Zhukov was heading in the direction of a military coup and a seizure of power.”<sup>168</sup> Khrushchev also apparently believed that Moskalenko had told Zhukov to seize power during the June crisis.<sup>169</sup> In other words, low institutionalization meant the military could continue to play an outsized political role, and that possibility is crucial for understanding why Khrushchev moved against Zhukov. Power to a great extent revolved around control over the armed forces.

#### *Zhukov’s Previous Behavior in Power Struggles*

As described in previous chapters, Zhukov had already shown his capability for decisive action in power struggles, beginning with the purge of Beria in 1953. Yet the defeat of the “anti-party group” was even fresher in the mind of the leadership. As Molotov later said, “[Zhukov] played a decisive role in elevating Khrushchev to a pedestal in 1957. But Zhukov himself cursed him soon afterward...”<sup>170</sup> At the October Presidium meeting, Voroshilov specifically invoked Zhukov’s statement during the struggle against the “anti-party group” that he would appeal to the people and the army, asking “Why you?”<sup>171</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, Zhukov told Saburov that tanks would only move at his command. At the October plenum, Mikoian stated that at the time he thought Zhukov misspoke [*upotrebil*

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<sup>167</sup> RGANI, fond 2, opis 1, delo 302, listy 36-48

<sup>168</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 239.

<sup>169</sup> Grishin, *Ot Khrushcheva Do Gorbacheva: Politicheskie Portrety Piati Gensekov I A.N. Kosygina [From Khrushchev to Gorbachev: Political Portraits of Five General Secretaries and A.N. Kosygin]*, 24.

<sup>170</sup> Feliks Chuev and Vyacheslav Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 354.

<sup>171</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 278.

*nepravil'nyi oborot rechi*], but now he knew differently.<sup>172</sup> In a speech in Belarus after a military exercise and at a party meeting of the Moscow garrison, Zhukov claimed that he told Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov that in his struggle with them he could address the army and the people directly. Mikoian complained about this at the October 26 Presidium meeting as well as the CC plenum.<sup>173</sup> He argued that “this is done in Latin America, in countries where the communist party is underground, not in power, where there are all types of juntas. Our climate is not suitable for such things. Forty years of Soviet power, and such things, unfortunately, are happening.”<sup>174</sup> As will be remembered from the last chapter, Zhukov had shown some troubling sympathy for the positions of the “anti-party group.” Shepilov claims that Bulganin showed Khrushchev Zhukov’s note, in which he suggested that Khrushchev be given a stern reprimand.<sup>175</sup>

#### *Zhukov and the Other Power Ministries*

Khrushchev was clearly troubled by Zhukov’s relationship with the head of the KGB, Ivan Serov. The two formed a strong friendship when they were both working in Germany and opposed military counter-intelligence specialist Abakumov.<sup>176</sup> Their relationship was a target of the anti-Zhukov investigations after the war. When a general tried justifying his betrayal of Zhukov and Serov to the political police by showing the cigarette burns on his arms, Serov said: “You have little bravery if because of cigarettes you slandered the current Minister of Armed Forces of the USSR Marshal G.K. Zhukov and chairman of the KGB, General-Colonel Serov, with whom you seized Berlin.”<sup>177</sup> In the summer of 1957

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<sup>172</sup> In the redacted version of the October plenum, Mikoian’s speech includes a passage arguing that no member of the Presidium remembered hearing this statement at the time, as they would have corrected it immediately. However, Mikoian did say he had proof from several officers that Zhukov told other military officers he made this statement. Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 349.

<sup>173</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 277.

<sup>174</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 350.

<sup>175</sup> Shepilov, *The Kremlin’s Scholar*, 396.

<sup>176</sup> Nikita Petrov, *Pervyi Predsedatel' KGB Ivan Serov [First Head of the KGB Ivan Serov]* (Moscow: Materik, 2005).

<sup>177</sup> Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennyye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]*, 421.

at a birthday party in Crimea, Zhukov gave a toast to Serov: “Don’t forget, Ivan Aleksandrovich, that the KGB is the eyes and ears of the army!” Khrushchev immediately stood and stated emphatically:

“Remember, Comrade Serov, the KGB is the eyes and ears of the party.”<sup>178</sup>

Strangely, instead of complaining about Serov’s close friendship with Zhukov, Khrushchev portrayed the situation as if Zhukov wanted to remove Serov and take control of the KGB for himself. On October 23, Khrushchev told military officers that Zhukov wanted to remove Serov from head of the KGB and install a military figure: “it is impossible to nominate a military figure to this work, this is not military work, it is political work.” Zhukov allegedly said that the KGB’s work needed to be connected to the minister of defense.<sup>179</sup> Khrushchev mentioned Zhukov’s attitude towards the KGB at the October 26 Presidium meeting.<sup>180</sup> Zhukov denied to Serov that he wanted to remove him.<sup>181</sup>

More obvious were Zhukov’s pretensions towards the MVD (the Ministry of Internal Affairs). According to Marshal Sokolovsky’s speech to the October Presidium, Zhukov allegedly wanted to remove Dudorov from his position as head of the MVD, criticized the militia for wearing military uniforms, and wanted border forces to be subordinate to the ministry of defense.<sup>182</sup> Documents confirm that Zhukov did indeed submit a request to the CC that the internal troops of the MVD be transformed into militia and no longer wear uniforms similar to those worn in the armed forces.<sup>183</sup> According to a document submitted by Dudorov to the CC on October 16 (which therefore may be tendentious) Zhukov opposed him on a whole series of issues. When Zhukov tried to cut the size of the MVD internal troops and possibly make them subject to the MOD, Dudorov, who had just started as head of the MVD, fought back. Zhukov told him: You, Comrade Dudorov, do not start your post as Minister of Internal Affairs

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<sup>178</sup> Aleksei Adzhubei, *Te desiat’ let [Those Ten Years]* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 279.

<sup>179</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 216.

<sup>180</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 278.

<sup>181</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 390.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 296–97.

<sup>183</sup> RGASPI, fond 82, opis 2, delo 445, list 319.



with this.” He refused to share anti-aircraft intelligence, provide the MVD with new weapons, or accept a new uniform for the MVD militia. Zhukov even allegedly told Dudorov that if he “snuck off without permission to make any decision on any MVD question to the CC CPSU or USSR Council of Ministers unknown to him or without his permission, then he would give me hell.”<sup>184</sup>

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

It was not only the norm of civilian authority that demonstrated significant institutionalization in this case. Institutions were also important because although their lack of robustness allowed Khrushchev to cheat his way to victory, that same cheating also clearly damaged his popularity. The concern of so many that Zhukov was being treated unfairly revealed a recognition that rules were being disrespected. Cheating could both lead to triumph but also be damaging to the popularity of the victor.

Khrushchev ultimately was able to achieve victory because of the loyalty of all those involved in the party as an organization: an important sign of institutionalization in terms of a universally accepted rule. This remains true even if it was also his manipulation of the rules that allowed him to portray the contest as a struggle between the party and a man dangerously close to relying upon violence to achieve prominence. Respect for the party as an organization was causing doubters to accept cheating rather than actively resist it and damage party unity. In other words, it was an odd combination of *low* institutionalization (the ability to cheat) and *robust* institutionalization (loyalty to the party as an organization) that together created the conditions for victory.

Finally, Zhukov, although he initially tried to defend himself, ultimately accepted the final outcome. This was not entirely because Khrushchev had out-manuevered him, but because he also appreciated the norm against blatant violence being used in Soviet politics. As a professional military man, the idea he would overthrow the Presidium and CC when the cards were already stacked against him must have struck him as folly. In fact, he himself probably had no aspirations to lead the Soviet Union.

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<sup>184</sup> GARF, fond 9401, opis 2, delo 492, listy 257-264

When asked why Khrushchev purged him, Zhukov answered: “Eisenhower was already president then; he thought, apparently, that I dreamed of becoming head of the government. To no purpose! I never wanted state power - I am a military man - and the army is my direct affair.”<sup>185</sup> A violent insurrection would have violated this personal code. Like in some of the other cases of this dissertation, the loser was therefore almost certainly not even considering his own grab for power.

### **Khrushchev and the Military after Zhukov**

Zhukov was not replaced by a marshal with high martial prestige like Konev or Rokossovskii, or even Eremenko or Bagramian. Instead, Khrushchev chose Malinovskii, who was much less of a legend than his peers. Malinovskii himself was apparently shocked: Ivan Serov wrote that after he was named minister he said: “what kind of minister am I? [*kakoi iz menia minister?*]” Former KGB head Semichastnyi wrote in his memoirs that Malinovskii was less ambitious and was able to establish good relations with people: “and moreover his authority could not threaten the authority of Khrushchev himself.”<sup>186</sup> A CIA report described Malinovskii as a lightweight: “Apparently, he is often bypassed and orders are given directly to deputy ministers, for he is not considered capable of pressing matters through to a conclusion. According to reliable evidence, the Supreme Military Council, which is attached to the Ministry of Defense, is chaired by Khrushchev who questions its members directly without consulting Malinovsky.”<sup>187</sup> When Zhukov was told Malinovskii would probably be the one to replace him, he joked: “Well, thank God, I was afraid it would be Furtseva [the single female member of the Presidium].”<sup>188</sup>

Zhukov had called Khrushchev on October 26 and said “you are giving up your best friend.”<sup>189</sup> Khrushchev responded: “Do you think friends act like that?”<sup>190</sup> In many ways, Zhukov was a good friend:

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<sup>185</sup> Anna Mirkina, “Marshal Pishet Knigu [The Marshal Writes a Book],” *Ogonek*, no. 18 (1988): 19.

<sup>186</sup> Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 95–96.

<sup>187</sup> Rodion Yakovlevich MALINOVSKIY, USSR Minister of Defense. National Security Archive Online Database.

<sup>188</sup> Ponomarev, “Marshaly: Kak Delili Slavu Posle 1945-Go [The Marshals: How Glory Was Shared after 1945],” 78.

<sup>189</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 379.

<sup>190</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]*, 477.

he had supported Khrushchev on de-Stalinization, in his power struggles, and on thorny military questions. Although we do not have the necessary evidence to argue whether or not Zhukov would have supported Khrushchev throughout the rest of his tenure, the continued fear among the elites about Zhukov's activities is striking. In 1959, the KGB reported that Zhukov expressed opposition to a new government decision on military pensions, for which he was summoned by the Committee on Party Control and criticized.<sup>191</sup> In 1963, the KGB told Khrushchev that Zhukov criticized Malinovskii for saying yes to everything: "He hides his own opinion far away and tries to please. And right now it is precisely these people who are needed."<sup>192</sup> On June 7, the Presidium decided to summon Zhukov and warn him about his outspokenness: "if he does not understand, then he will be removed from the party and arrested."<sup>193</sup> Instead of letting Zhukov remain part of the team and using his authority as a shield for radically ambitious changes to the military, Khrushchev decided it would be safer to remove the marshal entirely.

The Soviet Union had proved incapable of tolerating its greatest military hero. Instead of excluding the military from politics by establishing real institutions, one of the country's greatest men had to be sacrificed to for the interests of the "party" - not just removed, but humiliated. Zhukov's comrade-in-arms Antipenko wrote a letter to Brezhnev in February 1965 that emphasized the ridiculousness of a situation in which foreign publications and radio praised Zhukov more than those in the Soviet Union.<sup>194</sup> Paradoxically, the man who contributed so much to the annihilation of the Nazi hordes was not ultimately rehabilitated by nationalists. As the "godfather" of glasnost', Alexander Yakovlev, put it, "Who ultimately constructed in Moscow a monument to the commander? The democrats or the Bolsheviks?"<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 492–93.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

<sup>193</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 719–20.

<sup>194</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 522.

<sup>195</sup> M.A. Gareev, "Sud'ba i Deiatel'nost' G.K. Zhukova v Poslevoennye Gody [The Fate and Activity of G.K. Zhukov in the Post-War Years]," *Voennaia Mysl'* 4, no. 7–8 (1997): 50–58.

This chapter would not be complete without one last historical footnote. Concerned by the proceedings in the Soviet Union, in January 1958 Mao Zedong suggested that the People's Liberation Army spend a few days studying Zhukov's mistakes. In August, the Central Military Commission held a notorious enlarged session that discussed "anti-dogmatism." According to Chinese historian Lin Yunhui, the intention was that "the Chinese Zhukov in the eyes of Mao Zedong", Defense Minister Peng Dehuai, would pick up the right signals and use the opportunity to re-affirm party leadership in general and Mao's role in particular. But Peng believed that he himself was the manifestation of the party in the military, and instead used the opportunity to punish those who he believed were not towing *his* line closely enough. Peng had still not learned his place in 1959, when the marshal submitted a letter to Mao criticizing the Great Leap Forward. The chairman exploded in anger, purging Peng and doubling down on a catastrophic political campaign in order to secure his political position. As Lin put it, "at this point the notifications that Mao Zedong raised at the beginning of 1958 that suggested the military learn the lessons of the Soviet 'serious mistakes committed by Zhukov' were finally carried out."<sup>196</sup> And millions died because of it.

The dissertation has now both demonstrated how personal prestige and control over coercive organizations can help a leader dominate a weakly institutionalized system and suggested what conditions are necessary to overcome such powerful forms of authority. The next empirical chapter will investigate the following question - what are the characteristics of a weakly institutionalized system in which no figure enjoys special personal prestige or control over the power ministries?

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<sup>196</sup> Lin Yunhui, *Guoshi Zhaji: Shijian Pian [Notes on National History: On Incidents]* (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2010), 226–32.

## Chapter 5: The Fall of Khrushchev

### Introduction: The Crisis of Authority

In the struggles against Beria and the “anti-party group,” personal prestige and a special relationship with the power ministries had a decisive influence on the course of events. The subsequent defeat of Georgii Zhukov suggested the conditions in which those strengths could be overcome. In this final chapter on the Soviet Union, I examine a final possibility: a situation in which no figure enjoys a high level of personal authority or close personal control over the power ministries. The topic is the purge of Nikita Khrushchev himself in October 1964.

At first glance, it might seem that we have entered a realm in which the economic model provides more explanatory power. To a certain extent, that would be true: utilitarian interests do play, relatively speaking, a greater role here than in previous chapters. However, the authority model *still* does a better job explaining the most important dynamics in the fall of Khrushchev. Moreover, a mechanical application of the economic model to this event would fail to include crucial theoretical takeaways.

According to the first hypothesis in the economic model, we should see Khrushchev adopting policies that would guarantee support for him from crucial constituencies. Instead, as shown in the first section of this chapter, we see him consistently making the worst possible choices in this regard. His reforms created profound dissatisfaction in the military, KGB, and party. Khrushchev’s decision to seek drastic reforms suggests the poor predictive power of hypothesis 1a. De Mesquita and Smith, on a somewhat ad hoc basis, argue that Khrushchev “seems genuinely to have wanted to improve the lot of the Soviet people.” This “well-intentioned” leader, according to them, belongs in the “hall of shame” because he “wanted to do well and didn’t.” Indeed, Khrushchev was removed from power, which at first might be seen as evidence for the power of the economic model.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator’s Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 156–57.

This analysis, however, suffers from a serious problem. Suggesting that Khrushchev deliberately made choices that led to his own removal from power raises an obvious question. How could Khrushchev have not understood the implications of his behavior? The economic model might explain Khrushchev's fall, but it fails to explain why Khrushchev would behave that way in the first place. If the system obviously punished bullies, how could an old party hand like Khrushchev not have understood such a simple principle? The answer to this puzzle is the system was shaped by high levels of ambiguity and contingency. Khrushchev's fall was not inevitable. His policies were generally unpopular, but he was far from universally disliked. No leaders spoke out against Khrushchev before he was removed from the leadership, and they in fact put up with constant personal humiliation. These are not signs of a weak leader.

Second, the economic model predicts that the conspirators would adhere to party rules. Given the apparent level of opposition to Khrushchev throughout the party, if a group of plotters ever believed they could get away with a purge of the top leader without cheating, this would have been the case. However, the plotters *still* chose to execute a palace coup, which suggests the extent to which they believed such manipulation was necessary for a guaranteed outcome. In other words, despite Khrushchev's political problems, the plotters did not believe they had a sure shot. Although they decided not to simply arrest Khrushchev because of concern such an obvious violation of the rules would pointlessly cost them legitimacy, the rules were still twisted to prevent any surprises. By not allowing a full deliberation of Khrushchev's removal in the CC, the plotters also guaranteed that they would be able to divide the spoils amongst themselves and decide the new leadership core and its policies on their own. To achieve such a feat, Brezhnev very heavily relied on the KGB.

Finally, the third hypothesis of the economic model presumes no special role for the power ministries. Because the conspirators had good reason to believe they could rely on strong support from the party, this is the least likely case to expect the use of the KGB or military. However, we instead see the following evidence. First, Khrushchev's opponents only decided to execute the coup once they were sure

of support from both the KGB and also the top military hierarchy. Although the military played a passive role, the move against Khrushchev needed the tacit approval of Defense Minister Rodion Malinovskii.

The fall of Khrushchev is therefore interesting precisely because its lessons about the nature of power are so paradoxical. Losing support from crucial constituencies was a decisive factor in Khrushchev's fall, yet the evidence shows that despite the huge policy differences he had with others, his removal was still exceedingly difficult and fraught with risk. On the other hand, Khrushchev was ultimately defeated by a small group of plotters who did not formally seek the support of the party nor go through the motions of a fully legitimate process. That meant even a small group operating outside party rules could potentially remove a paramount leader.

The birth of Brezhnev's leadership, therefore, provides two crucial lessons. First, he did not enjoy formal, "rational-legal" authority. Pursuing that form of legitimacy would have created an opportunity for Khrushchev to emerge triumphant or allow for the possibility some other figures would reap the benefits of Khrushchev's fall. Second, he likely understood that even a small group could move against him, especially if that group had the implicit or explicit support of the military. Although whether Khrushchev would have eventually found a way to better incentivize economic growth is impossible to determine, the evidence presented in this chapter unmistakably shows that he would have at least intended to drastically cut military budgets. Failure to do so had tragic consequences for the fate of the Union.

These conclusions allow us to judge an old empirical debate among Sovietologists about the Khrushchev era. Scholars in the "totalitarian school" identified a "succession-crisis-personal dictatorship cycle" and saw Soviet politics as a monolith naturally dominated by a dictator after power struggles are finished. These beliefs led one such scholar to conclude in 1960 that Khrushchev was "strong enough... to be beyond a serious challenge to his position."<sup>2</sup> Members of the "conflict" school like Linden,

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Lowenthal, "The Nature of Khrushchev's Power," *Problems of Communism* 4 (August 1960): 5; Merle Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled: Revised Edition*, Revised edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Thomas H. Rigby, "Crypto-Politics," *Survey*, no. 50 (January 1964): 183-94; Myron Rush, *Political Succession in the USSR*, 2 edition (Columbia University Press, 1965).

however, believed that “the opposing tendencies toward oligarchy and dictatorship remained in constant interplay throughout the Khrushchev era. This view sees Soviet leadership politics under Khrushchev as inherently dynamic and unstable.”<sup>3</sup>

As shown below, the “totalitarian school” was right to claim that no signs of conflict among the elite were visible at the time. Linden’s readings of the Soviet press inappropriately led him to conclude that policy differences were being expressed. We now know, for example, that Frol Kozlov, an important Presidium member and possible successor who died before Khrushchev was removed, never directly opposed Khrushchev. Moreover, the “totalitarian school” was also right to identify Khrushchev’s position at the top of the party as useful for the tools it gave him to manipulate party politics. At the same time, however, the “conflict” school was correct to argue that Khrushchev’s position was not guaranteed and that the lack of formal institutions for leadership disputes was a source of this disorder.

### **Brief Chronology**

Having defeated Beria, the “anti-party group,” and Zhukov, Khrushchev began wrenching reforms of the military, political, and party. Yet those reforms severely damaged his support in all of those constituencies. Before he could re-affirm his position by promoting much younger cadres to the top leadership, his colleagues in the Presidium moved against him with the active support of the KGB and the tacit consent of the military. In October 1964, Khrushchev was summoned back to the Kremlin while he was vacationing in the south. After two days of discussion in the Presidium, Khrushchev’s removal was announced to a full CC plenum. That plenum was carefully choreographed to prevent any real discussion. Khrushchev was given a generous pension and he spent most of the rest of his life at his dacha.

### **Section 1: Policy Differences vs. Sociological Forms of Authority**

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of these two schools, see Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership 1957-1964*, 3 ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 3; Robert Conquest, *Power and Policy in the USSR: The Struggle for Stalin’s Succession 1945-1960* (Harper Torchbooks, 1967).



The economic model would prioritize Khrushchev doing his utmost to please those individuals with the most direct say in whether he would continue to serve as leader, and that failing to do so would lead inexorably to his political demise. The evidence tells a different story. Khrushchev's priority was in fact to improve the communist model of governance and improve the livelihood of regular people.<sup>4</sup> This decision had important implications for his authority. Moreover, despite these steps, Khrushchev's defeat was far from inevitable: the plotters were terrified that the plot would fail, and their success was dependent on key contingent factors.

On the outside, the Soviet Union in the late 1950s looked fearsome. But as new documents increasingly show, Khrushchev understood that communism faced a bleak future without major changes. When Khrushchev gave a speech in Murmansk, workers openly grumbled and used "openly offensive words." On more than one occasion, rocks were thrown at his car. According to former KGB head Semichastnyi, "Khrushchev was not blind: he perfectly understood what all this meant." When prices on meat rose, Semichastnyi informed Khrushchev of the negative reaction among the populace. Khrushchev lost control and yelled, "And what did you think? Did you think they would yell 'hoorah'? Naturally people are displeased."<sup>5</sup> In Novosibirsk and Karaganda he fled from angry crowds and was forced to leave Gorkii at night after the people were informed that their bonds were frozen. In Tbilisi, protesters beat on the windows of his car. Unhappy people would flock to Abkhazia and Crimea when Khrushchev vacationed in those places.<sup>6</sup>

Dissatisfaction was not limited to harassing Khrushchev. As Hornby concluded, "[d]uring the second half of the Khrushchev era [a growing sense of embitterment and alienation] could translate into leaflets calling for the removal of the entire Party leadership, riots and demonstrations involving thousands of people, and underground groups that acquired weapons, called for revolution and plotted

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<sup>4</sup> George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2002), 345.

<sup>6</sup> M.C. Dokuchaev, *Moskva. Krem'. Okhrana. [Moscow. Kremlin. Security]* (Moscow: Biznes-press, 1995), 141–42.

terrorist acts.”<sup>7</sup> Between August 1-3, 1959, workers at massive riots at a metallurgy factory in Temir-Tau demanded the right to strike, a six hour day and a rise in salaries.<sup>8</sup> In 1960, Georgians tried to assassinate Khrushchev. Workers went on strike in Tula in May 1961, “mass incidents” occurred in Murom and Aleksandrov in August, workers went on strike in Sen’kin in September, and resolutions opposed to price hikes were found in Penza in the summer of 1962.<sup>9</sup> According to a document submitted to Gorbachev in 1988 about mass riots since 1957, between June 1957 and October 1964 weapons were used in at least eight riots and at least one person was killed in seven riots. 5,728 individuals were convicted for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.<sup>10</sup> “Hostile phenomena” in the first half of 1962 outnumbered those of 1961 by two to three times. According to Kozlov, an expert on protests in the Soviet Union, “[a]uthorities clearly feared that anti-Soviet groups and organizations might link up with spontaneous mass disorders, and thereby turn asocial urban riots into anti-Soviet uprisings.”<sup>11</sup>

For Khrushchev, the key to winning the Cold War was satisfying material needs. He was remarkably honest about his intentions, telling a group of intellectuals:

If you give an American worker not 102 kilograms of meat (on average in America 102 kilograms of meat are produced for each individual), but 30 kilograms, then he will vote not for Eisenhower or Stevenson, but for the communist party... They fear the growth of our industrial and economic potential. This acts stronger than anything, because this acts on the minds of all people... Workers and peasants in 1917 who voted for Lenin, did they understand the philosophy of Lenin? No. This is shown terrifically in the immortal film *Chapaev*, when they ask Chapaev whom he supports. Chapaev answers that he is for the Bolsheviks, but opposed to the communists. And when they asked him which International he supported, he said he did not know what Internationals were... Chapaev asked: ‘And which one is Lenin in?’ ‘The Third.’ ‘Then I am for the Third.’ Who and what do the people follow, comrades, what do they want? They want a better life, to eat what they want, that their lives are better than today. I am prepared to

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<sup>7</sup> Rob Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 138.

<sup>8</sup> A. A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 3. Postanovleniia 1959-1964 [Presidium of the CC CPSU 1954-1964. Volume 3. Resolutions 1959-1964]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 40–54.

<sup>9</sup> O.V. Khlevniuk et al, eds., *Regional’naia politika N.S. Khrushcheva: TsK KPSS i mestnye partiinye komitety, 1953-1964 gg. [The Regional Policy of N.K. Khrushchev: The CC KPSU and Regional Party Committees, 1953-1964]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 428–48.

<sup>10</sup> “O Massovykh Besporiadkakh S 1957 Goda [On Mass Riots Since 1957],” *Istochnik*, no. 6 (1995): 146–53.

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 174.

argue about this. I know that I am raising a controversial question, that I may be criticized for simplification.<sup>12</sup>

On another occasion, Khrushchev explicitly contrasted the importance of economic development over military strength: “They [foreign delegations] are, of course, going to look for such things as the kind of armaments we have. But, especially at housing conditions, medical services, salaries - this is the main problem, and we can’t avoid it.”<sup>13</sup> As early as August 1959, Khrushchev was saying privately that “affairs in the economy are not going entirely smoothly - we are spending many resources on weapons.”<sup>14</sup> Transitioning from a coercion-based economic system to one that placed greater value on incentives, as well as increasingly rooting state legitimacy in bourgeois consumer values, both demanded serious resources.<sup>15</sup>

When the Soviet state raised costs on meat and butter in 1962, the KGB head sent a series of remarkable documents to the Presidium describing the growing dissatisfaction of the population. One citizen went so far as to say “Kennedy will be acting correctly if he throws an atomic bomb at the Soviet Union.” Anti-Soviet posters were found in several major cities. Many of those arrested had not been on the KGB’s radar. The military was not immune: one technical lieutenant [*tekhnik-leitenant*] complained “they decreased the pensions for officers, and now they are rising the price of products.” One soldier in the 747<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Division said: “If the people have a revolt then we will not pacify our own.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> N.G. Tomilina et al, eds., *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev]*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2009), 467–68.

<sup>13</sup> Speech by Comrade Khrushchev at the 6 PUWP CC Plenum, 20 March 1956, Warsaw. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>14</sup> O.A. Grinevskii, *Tysiacha I Odin Den’ Nikity Sergeevicha [One Thousand and One Days of Nikita Sergeevich]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1998), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Alec Nove, “Toward a ‘Communist Welfare State’?,” *Problems of Communism* 1, no. IX (February 1960); Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Kristy Ironside, “Khrushchev’s Cash-and-Goods Lotteries and the Turn Toward Positive Incentives,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 41, no. 3 (November 28, 2014): 296–323; Aaron Hale-Dorrell, “Industrial Farming, Industrial Food: Transnational Influences on Soviet Convenience Food in the Khrushchev Era,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 42, no. 2 (July 9, 2015): 174–96.

<sup>16</sup> *Neizvestnaia Rossiia. XX Vek [The Unknown Russia. 20 Century]*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Istoricheskoe nasledie, 1993), 147–69.

The most important riot occurred on June 2, 1962, when the military killed twenty-four protesters and seriously injured sixty-nine more who had taken to the street to protest the raised prices.<sup>17</sup> For Khrushchev, “the unfortunate incident in Novocherkassk showed us a particularly striking example.”<sup>18</sup> According to his family, Khrushchev “broke down on [*slomalsia*] Novocherkassk... after 1962 he became a different person, much less inclined to listen to another opinion: it was already impossible to either question or persuade him.”<sup>19</sup>

One month later the Presidium approved a resolution to increase the size of the KGB’s counter-intelligence units in the regions by 400. According to the KGB’s order “On the strengthening of the struggle of the organs of state security with enemy manifestations of anti-Soviet elements”:

... In Soviet society there are still anti-societal elements that under the influence of enemy propaganda from outside walk onto the anti-Soviet path, make malicious slander about the policies of the party and Soviet state, spread every type of provocative rumor with the goal of destroying the trust of the people in the party and government, and in certain conditions attempt to use temporary difficulties that appear in the process of communist construction for their own criminal purposes, inciting politically unreliable people to massive disturbances... In recent years, mass disturbances have occurred in some cities of the country, accompanied by occupation of administrative buildings, the destruction of public property, attacks on representatives of authority, and other outrages.<sup>20</sup>

According to another KGB report, in the first half of 1962, 7,705 anti-Soviet flyers and anonymous letters were found, as well as 60 local anti-Soviet groups with 215 participants.<sup>21</sup>

Khrushchev was almost certainly aware of the possibility, especially after incidents in the Soviet satellite states, that mass dissatisfaction could lead to disturbances that opponents in the top leadership could use against him. During elections to the Supreme Soviet in 1957 and 1958, some voters wrote messages on their ballots that showed continued support for his former enemies and unhappiness with

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> A. A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernoye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 581.

<sup>19</sup> Iuliia Khrushcheva, “Khrushchev Khranil v Seife Stikhi Mandel'shtama [Khrushchev Kept in His Safe Mandelshtam’s Poetry],” *Novaia Gazeta*, February 26, 2016. His family claims that he started to realize matters were serious in 1959 [*no primerno s etogo vremeni on nachal ponimat', chto vse probuksovyvaet*].

<sup>20</sup> Fond 89, opis 6, delo 20 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>21</sup> Fond 89, opis 6, delo 21 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

economic trends: “We all await a decrease in the price of all foods. And we get the opposite” “Let the working class live!” “Long live Molotov, Zhukov, Voroshilov, and Budennyi!” “I vote for the death of Khrushchev!” “It would have been better [to select] Malenkov and Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov” “Down with Khrushchev! Give us Malenkov!” “I ask for an answer: Where is Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov? Where is Molotov? I request that he be returned to his post.”<sup>22</sup> In February 1962, unidentified individuals sent a massive number of copies of an anti-Khrushchev anonymous letter to members of the leadership, including members of the Presidium, secretaries of the constituent republics, and the Ministry of Defense - a stunning display of organization.<sup>23</sup>

To his credit, Khrushchev recognized that for the Soviet Union to survive it would need to better meet the economic demands of its citizens. Perhaps he truly believed that as leader of the Union he had a responsibility to try to improve the livelihood of his compatriots. Or perhaps he was afraid of another revolution: “We’ve become like priests and teachers: we promise a kingdom in heaven, but in the here and now there are no potatoes. Only our long-suffering Russian people would put up with something like that, but we can’t go on banking on their patience.”<sup>24</sup>

Khrushchev apparently believed that his authority was strong enough to take risks to address these problems. In an obvious sense, he was wrong, as he did lose his position. Yet at the same time, the very fact that he sought out such changes and was surprised by his removal is strong evidence that his fall was not as inevitable as it might seem looking back. In other words, policy was far from decisive, as in the end game it was still the manipulation of rules and the role of the power ministries that proved decisive.

### *Khrushchev and the Military*

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<sup>22</sup> In more than one hundred cases throughout the Podmoskovski area, two candidates’ names on the bulletin were crossed off and replaced with Zhukov’s name. “Doloi Khrushcheva, Izberem Malenkova [Down with Khrushchev, We Select Malenkov],” *Istochnik*, no. 2 (2001): 42–43.

<sup>23</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 30, delo 378, listy 5-12 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>24</sup> Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 6.

Hypothesis 1a would predict that Khrushchev would design his policies to achieve the maximum amount of support from all members of the elite, including the military. However, instead we see him consistently make decisions that damaged his credibility with a crucial segment of the Soviet political elite. Moreover, the lack of respect for Khrushchev as a military leader very clearly *also* affected the level of support for him in the armed forces to an extent not predicted by hypothesis 1a.

Of course, Khrushchev was not entirely friendless in the armed forces. Of all the members of the civilian elite, Khrushchev had the most meaningful experience as a military leader and served as commissar on many crucial Fronts.<sup>25</sup> In telegrams to Stalin, he made proposals regarding the planning of military operations, including during the crucial battle of Stalingrad, and even made certain recommendations at the level of tactics.<sup>26</sup> The leading scholar of the Soviet side of the war, Glantz, writes that “[d]espite his service as commissar- a post many Red Army officers feared and despised- Khrushchev’s earthy language, sharp native skills, and penchant for suffering hardships alongside his men earned the grudging respect of many Red Army soldiers.”<sup>27</sup> Khrushchev also clearly favored the military over the political police. In 1939, Khrushchev sided with Marshal Timoshenko in a dispute with the NKVD over whether the Kiev Military Region would share vehicles as they were ordered. The NKVD concluded that Timoshenko “held Khrushchev under his influence.”<sup>28</sup> Khrushchev regularly hunted with Marshals Grechko and Chuikov, who had served with him on the front.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Throughout the war he served as commissar (chlen voennogo soveta) on the Southwest Direction [napravlenie], Southwest Front, Stalingrad Front, Southeast Front, South Front, Voronezh Front, and Ukraine Front. N.G. Tomilina et al, eds., *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: dva tsveta vremeni, dokumenty iz lichnogo fonda N.S. Khrushcheva* [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev], vol. 1 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2009), 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:23–25, 30–31.

<sup>27</sup> David M. Glantz, *To the Gates of Stalingrad: Soviet-German Combat Operations, April-August 1942* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 42.

<sup>28</sup> V. N. Khaustov, *Delo Beriia: Prigovor obzhalovaniuu ne podlezhit* [The Beria Affair: The Verdict Cannot be Appealed] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2012), 293–96.

<sup>29</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformator* [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer] (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), 547.

However, Khrushchev was very obviously not seen as a military figure, especially when considered in comparison to an individual like Deng Xiaoping or Kim Il Sung. During the war, officers would sometimes not fully inform Khrushchev about military operations, which led him to complain to Stalin - who was not always pleased with Khrushchev's performance.<sup>30</sup> When fighting on the front against the Nazis, he felt uncomfortable wearing a military uniform and wore it as little as possible, believing that his title as general was a "concession to circumstance [*ustupkoi obstoiatel'stvam*]."<sup>31</sup> Khrushchev freely admits that after Stalin's death "[w]e had in fact no previous experience in working on the defense of our country."<sup>32</sup> Stalin refused to share this issue with any other leaders, as he "considered himself to have exclusive privileges in this realm, and any interest shown by one of us in some type of armament aroused his suspicion."<sup>33</sup> Khrushchev told Charles de Gaulle in April 1956 that "You, general, are a military man and are not a member of a professional union, I am a civilian [*ia zhe chelovek grazhdanskii*], and, therefore, am under the protection of a professional union."<sup>34</sup> In an important meeting with military officials shortly before Zhukov's removal, Khrushchev said he spoke "not because my civilian uniform claims a role as a military figure, I claim simply the role of member of the party..."<sup>35</sup>

One of the men who tried to remove Khrushchev from his position as first secretary in 1957 remarked in his memoirs that "Khrushchev knew that the high command of the Soviet army took a scornful view of his laughable attempts to portray himself as a great military leader."<sup>36</sup> Khrushchev told the Polish United Workers Party that "it is difficult to talk to Marshals, they're always very hot-

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<sup>30</sup> Tomilina et al, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev*, 1:25–28, 615–5.

<sup>31</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformator [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]*, 547.

<sup>32</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, ed. Sergei Khrushchev (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 238.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

<sup>34</sup> "N.S. Khrushchev - Sharl' de Goll': Vstrechi v Parizhe [N.S. Khrushchev- Charles de Gaulle: Meetings in Paris]," *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 2 (1996): 115.

<sup>35</sup> V. Naumov et al, eds., *Georgii Zhukov: stenogramma oktiabr'skogo (1957 g.) plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty [Georgy Zhukov: transcript of the October (1957) Plenum and Other Documents]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratia," 2001), 191–92.

<sup>36</sup> D. T Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Krushchev*, ed. Stephen V Bittner, trans. Anthony Austin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 305.

tempered.”<sup>37</sup> The CIA concluded in 1964 that “to the proud army careerists he is the political commissar and military fraud.”<sup>38</sup>

Khrushchev’s prestige as a military leader was stained by a colossal defeat at Kharkov in May 1942. He found it necessary to shift the blame for Kharkov onto Stalin at the secret 20th Party Congress speech denouncing him.<sup>39</sup> Retrospective accounts of the battle differ, as Khrushchev tied a re-evaluation of the campaign to his broader de-Stalinization efforts, but the most extensive evaluation of the campaign shows decisively that Khrushchev had to share blame for the loss of more than a quarter million men.<sup>40</sup> According to Khrushchev’s son, the disaster at Kharkov tormented Khrushchev until his death and he was disgusted by the habit of marshals claiming glory for themselves in the war.<sup>41</sup>

Khrushchev also hated it when civilians put on military airs. When during the war he saw Kirichenko, a commissar, wearing a greatcoat for generals, Khrushchev became upset: “the tinsel has become more important here than the political nature of the matter.”<sup>42</sup> When Bulganin during a trip to Finland made a comment about how a certain area would make for a good observation post, Khrushchev criticized him. Bulganin defended himself by saying “you are a civilian, I am a military man,” to which Khrushchev responded: “What kind of military man are you [*nu kakoi ty voennyi*]? You need to think before you speak.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Speech by Comrade Khrushchev at the 6 PUWP CC Plenum, 20 March 1956, Warsaw. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>38</sup> Special Report Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency. Khrushchev at 70: An Appraisal of his Leadership Style. Document 26. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. Volume XIV, Soviet Union. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v14/d26>

<sup>39</sup> Karl Eimermacher, ed., *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na XX s'ezde KPSS. Dokumenty. [Khrushchev's Report on Stalin's Cult of Personality at the 22th CPSU Congress. Documents]* (Moscow: ROSSPÈN, 2002), 89–90.

<sup>40</sup> David M. Glantz, *Kharkov 1942: Anatomy of a Military Disaster through Soviet Eyes* (Shepperton: Ian Allan, 1998), 180–81.

<sup>41</sup> Aleksei Adzhubei, *Te desiat' let [Those Ten Years]* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 132–33.

<sup>42</sup> N.S. Khrushchev, *Vremia. Liudi. Vlast' [Time. People. Power]*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), 375.

<sup>43</sup> N. Kovaleva, ed., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957: Stenogramma liun'skogo Plenuma TsK KPSS I Drugie Dokumenty*, Rossiia. XX Vek (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1998), 478.



Khrushchev's difficulties with famous military figures went beyond those with Zhukov described in the previous chapter. When the Soviet admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov resisted Khrushchev's plan for drastic cuts to the navy, Khrushchev concluded that: "we had the impression that Kuznetsov had decided that since Stalin no longer existed, the present leadership didn't need to be taken seriously. This made us angry." Kuznetsov was unceremoniously removed from power at a Presidium meeting in November 1955 at which Khrushchev called him "clearly a dangerous person" and accused the other marshals of protecting him through "cronyism."<sup>44</sup> In his memoirs, Khrushchev wrote that Kuznetsov needed to be used as an example so that "several other obstinate military men would become aware that Bonapartist inclinations were not permissible."<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, Khrushchev was prickly in his relations with marshals in other countries as well. During discussions in Beijing, Khrushchev criticized China's routing of Indian forces, which he described as provocative. When Marshal Lin Biao noted that China defeated India even though Beijing did not start the war, just like how the Soviets defeated Nazi Germany without attacking first, Khrushchev sarcastically stated: "It is not my place as a general-lieutenant to teach you, comrade marshal." When Marshal Chen Yi remarked "I must say that I do not fear your rage," Khrushchev responded: "You cannot spit on us from your heights as a marshal. You do not have enough spit. You cannot cover us with your spit."<sup>46</sup>

Khrushchev's lack of military credentials is especially striking given the ambitious plans he had for military reform. Khrushchev's intentions towards the military were nothing short of radical. Khrushchev seems to have concluded as early as 1955 that the West was not planning to attack.<sup>47</sup> In his

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<sup>44</sup> Fursenko, *Presidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 440.

<sup>46</sup> "Peregovory N.S. Khrushcheva s Mao Tsedunom 31 liulia -3 Avgusta 1958 G. i 2 Oktiabria 1959 G. [Negotiations Between N.S. Khrushchev and Mao Zedong July 31- August 3 1958 and October 2 1959]," *Novaia i Noveishaia Istorii*, no. 2 (March 2001): 101, 105.

<sup>47</sup> Raymond Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 21.

memoirs, Khrushchev states he had concluded that “our country had reached the limit of its endurance because of the unending capital investments in defense.” He believed that the West intentionally was using the arms race against the Soviet Union so it would “collapse of its own accord.”<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the Soviet military always wanted more: “If [the armed forces] were not kept under control, if they were allowed to decide what resources would be used for national security, their inordinate demands could bring our country to ruin despite their being Communists and patriots. And I won’t even mention that military men, including some of the best, can sometimes be infected with irresponsible fantasizing and boastful swaggering.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, cutting the size of the military would free up crucial manpower necessary for Khrushchev’s plans for extensive industrial and agricultural development.<sup>50</sup> Khrushchev encouraged those soldiers he cut from the armed forces to patriotically go to the east of the Soviet Union and work in the Virgin Lands.<sup>51</sup> In 1964, the CIA concluded that the problem was not only the size of military expenditures, but also the fact that advanced weapons “require high quality, scarce material and human resources. We estimate that procurement expenditures for missiles, nuclear warheads, and ground electronics during 1963 were as large as the total of all military procurement in 1958... defense consumed about 35 percent of Soviet durable goods production in 1963 as compared to 25 percent in the US.”<sup>52</sup>

Khrushchev was not only scandalized by the size of military expenditures, but the nature of modern war itself. Khrushchev first saw a film of a nuclear explosion while Stalin was still alive. When he returned home, his son remembered seeing him crushed and extremely worried.<sup>53</sup> Khrushchev told Charles de Gaulle: “I do not know whether the English or Americans showed you a movie filmed by them

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<sup>48</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 431.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Evangelista, *UnArmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 109.

<sup>51</sup> National Security Archive, Record Number 2686, Russian and East European Archives Documents Database. April 2, 1960. Directive. Soviet Union. Ministry of Defense. Malinovskii, Rodion Y. On Personnel reduction in the Armed Forces. Box 17.

<sup>52</sup> Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy. National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-4-64. 22 April 1964. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/89801/DOC\\_0000267917.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000267917.pdf), 9.

<sup>53</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower]* (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), 42.

of the explosion of a nuclear weapon. We recorded the first test. This is a horrific sight [*uzhasnoe zrelische*].”<sup>54</sup> Khrushchev was often flabbergasted by his own generals. At one point, Marshal Grechko came to visit Khrushchev at his dacha and called for an attack on Europe. As Khrushchev listened quietly, Grechko explained how on the second day the Soviets could take the Rhine. On the fifth or sixth day Paris would be taken. After Grechko reached the Atlantic coast, the conversation fell into long silence, after which Khrushchev asked, “and then what?” When Grechko could not answer, Khrushchev exploded: “What, have you never heard of atomic weapons? What offensive? What Paris? You want to be Napoleon? After the first day you won’t even have left a wet spot behind!” Khrushchev demanded that he never hear of such ideas again.<sup>55</sup> At one CC plenum in July 1960, Khrushchev mocked the Chinese for not fearing war: “Our situation, comrades, is spectacular, simply spectacular.... I do not know what words to use. We are shaking the entire world, and now we need war!?... We know imperialistic war, and civil war. What does it mean it is not necessary to fear war, only a madman does not truly fear it.”<sup>56</sup>

Khrushchev believed that a struggle to achieve nuclear parity with the United States would be “fatal” for the Soviet Union.<sup>57</sup> He saw no need for building a massive nuclear force: “We, as opposed to the Americans, are not blood thirsty, they intend to beat up the dead [*bit’ po mertvym*], whereas for us once is enough.”<sup>58</sup> Khrushchev’s son writes that “according to his words, it was not so important how many rockets we really had, as we certainly are not planning to start a war. The most important thing is that the Americans believe in our power. Thus the probability of a war starting would decrease.”<sup>59</sup> In the summer of 1959, Khrushchev even told his companions that “With time, I think, it will be possible to also end the production of the atomic weapon. Possibly, even unilaterally. Because the atom bomb is not a cucumber that is grown and eaten. Once an atom bomb is done it lies at the ready.”<sup>60</sup> The actual number

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<sup>54</sup> “N.S. Khrushchev - Sharl’ de Goll’: Vstrechi v Parizhe [N.S. Khrushchev- Charles de Gaulle: Meetings in Paris].”

<sup>55</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower]*, 113.

<sup>56</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 469, listy 125, 131 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>57</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower]*, 221.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>60</sup> Grinevskii, *Tysiacha I Odin Den’ Nikity Sergeevicha [One Thousand and One Days of Nikita Sergeevich]*, 15.

seems not to have mattered terribly to Khrushchev, who appears to have believed that he could bluff “even long before significant military capabilities were achieved.”<sup>61</sup>

Khrushchev believed that in an era of nuclear weapons, conventional forces were almost meaningless: “Today everything depends on skill in handling thermonuclear weapons.” Khrushchev therefore did not believe conventional disarmament affected Soviet interests: “Why do I think this? By 1964 we had reduced our armed forces to almost half the size they had been in 1953. Well, and what of it? Did we become weaker? Has our fear of war become greater? Nothing of the sort.” In his memoirs, Khrushchev writes that “I have always been and remain an advocate of reducing the size of our armed forces, withdrawing all of our nation’s troops from the territories of other countries, and closing our bases in other countries.”<sup>62</sup> In October 1956, Khrushchev was fully willing to remove troops from Hungary if it meant a non-violent solution to the crisis.<sup>63</sup> Khrushchev’s son-in-law recounts Khrushchev asking the Hungarian leader in 1959 whether it was time for Russian troops to return home.<sup>64</sup> At a meeting of the Warsaw Pact in February 1960, Khrushchev said that it was the time “to reduce and withdraw Soviet troops from Poland and Hungary.”<sup>65</sup> In January 1964, Khrushchev asked the leaders of Poland how they felt about the removal of Soviet troops from Poland.<sup>66</sup> Disarmament played another important foreign policy goal - by saving money that could be used as economic aid for third world countries.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War*, 22–23.

<sup>62</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 523.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 179.

<sup>64</sup> Adzhubei, *Te desiat' let [Those Ten Years]*, 155–56.

<sup>65</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 11 February 1960, Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security, Records of the Political Consultative Committee, 1955-1991, Edited by Douglas Selvaige and Vojtech Mastny.

<sup>66</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]*, 963.

<sup>67</sup> Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015, 2015), 67–69.

At times it felt like Khrushchev was frustrated that his counterparts in the West were too stupid to understand how much technology had changed. In a conversation with the West German ambassador in November 1961, Khrushchev said:

It is necessary to understand that now modern technology creates the possibility of a new kind of politics. If only Kennedy, Adenauer, and de Gaulle understood this! I, for example, believe that we could remove our troops from East Germany, Poland and Hungary. And when Americans reason in their magazines that in the case of a joint removal of troops from the territories of other countries their troops will be so many thousand kilometers from these countries, and the troops of the USSR closer, they, apparently, understand themselves that they are writing stupidity. Indeed, now there are rockets as weapons. We can press a button and it is already in New York. Now is no longer the times of Napoleon or Hitler... Surely, if there's a withdrawal of troops, we and the Western powers will still have rockets. This is the main weapon, not tanks... Military men tell me: let's produce tanks. But I see how we burn through armor with missiles on the practice range... The atom has changed everything. So let us live under the threat of atomic and rocket war, but without the dangerous accumulation of troops.<sup>68</sup>

The Soviet government's inability to provide consumer goods and the effect on morale that defense cuts had on the military hierarchy may also have led Khrushchev to conclude that nuclear weapons were a safer bet than relying on conventional forces. According to Penkovsky, Khrushchev argued that local conflict would develop into nuclear war because he "does not want to deploy his entire conventional army because he fears mass desertions."<sup>69</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the disastrous state of discipline in the ranks means this assessment might not be entirely inaccurate.

Immediately after Zhukov's removal from power, Khrushchev started moving dramatically towards a more rocket-heavy force. On October 21, 1957, the Presidium passed a resolution on "the further development of rocket technology." In response, those in charge of the military-industrial complex worked out a reorganization intended to improve the serial production of rockets: ministries would be replaced by committees run by the Council of Ministers. According to the rough notes of a major Presidium meeting on November 28 that discussed this reorganization, Khrushchev stated that "what the

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<sup>68</sup> M. Iu. Prozumenshchikov et al, eds., *Venskii Val's Kholodnoi Voiny. Vokrug Vstrechi N.S. Khrushcheva i Dzh. F. Kennedi v 1961 Godu v Vene. Dokumenty [The Viennese Waltz of the Cold War. Around the Meeting of N.S. Khrushchev and J.F. Kennedy in 1961 in Vienna. Documents]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 623.

<sup>69</sup> Phase III – PARIS. Meeting No. 31. 20 September, 1961. National Security Archive Online Database, 26.

military men suggest is unacceptable,” but exactly what they proposed is unclear.<sup>70</sup> On December 30, officers in charge of rocket forces proposed to Khrushchev that they be upgraded to their own service [*samostoiatel'nyi rod voisk*].<sup>71</sup>

Khrushchev's belief that rockets changed the meaning of warfare was fully reflected in military purchases. Rockets made up only 8.5% of military orders in 1958, but reached 43.8% in 1961.<sup>72</sup> In 1958, 1.194 billion rubles were spent on rockets, but in 1959 that jumped to 2.69 billion rubles. According to the seven-year plan of 1959-1965, the cost of serial production of rockets was to increase by 26 times, the number of arsenals from 5 to 22, the number of rocket units was to increase by 7, and number of launch stations to increase by 6.<sup>73</sup> In late December 1958, a decision was made to make 500 R-12 missiles in 1959, a larger number than originally planned. A vice chairman of Gosplan complained that because of problems only 350 could be created, and even then with great difficulty.<sup>74</sup> The Soviet government originally planned to spend 7.5 billion rubles in 1959 on rockets [*obshchii ob'em postavok upravliaemogo reaktivnogo vooruzheniia*], but this jumped by 1 billion rubles in order to create more R-12s and ground equipment for ballistic rockets (5.186 billion was spent in 1958). Because spending on non-rocket weapons was to decrease by 260 million rubles as opposed to the previous plan (a clear sign of the new and greater emphasis on rockets as opposed to conventional weapons), the new budget would “only” go beyond the plan by 740 million rubles.<sup>75</sup> In April 1959, a memorandum was sent to the CC asking for 320 million more rubles to speed up development of the R-16 and R-14.<sup>76</sup> In May, a resolution was passed

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<sup>70</sup> V. I. Ivkin and G. A. Sukhina, eds., *Zadacha osoboï gosudarstvennoi vazhnosti: iz istorii sozdaniia raketno-iadernogo oruzhiiia i raketnykh voisk strategicheskogo naznacheniiia (1945-1959 gg.)*. *Sbornik dokumentov*. [Task of Special State Importance: From the History of the Creation of the Rocket-Nuclear Weapon and Strategic Rocket Forces (1945-1959). Collection of Documents.] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), 589–601.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 609–13.

<sup>72</sup> N.C. Simonov, *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kompleks SSSR v 1920-1950-E Gody: Tempy Ekonomicheskogo Rosta, Struktura, Organizatsiia Proizvodstva I Upravlenie* [The Military-Industrial Complex of the USSR in the 1920-1950s: Speeds of Economic Growth, Structure, Organization of Production and Management] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996), 247.

<sup>73</sup> Ivkin and Sukhina, *Zadacha osoboï gosudarstvennoi vazhnosti*, 699.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 731.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 744.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 795–803.

that criticized the USSR Gosplan, republic Gosplans, sovnarkhozes, and others who “first meet general needs, and then the needs of the defense industry... thinking that for the defense industry there can be given material resources at any time beyond the regular funds.” This document stipulated that military needs should be given priority over other demands and threatened violators of this order with even criminal responsibility.<sup>77</sup> According to Uhl, who has worked in the Soviet economic archives, in December 1960 the Soviets decided to invest 2.287 billion rubles in nuclear missiles the following year, an increase of 250 per cent of what was spent in 1959.<sup>78</sup>

Khrushchev’s son writes that his father believed that seven to eight years of building rockets would provide the basis to transition the conventional military into territorial forces.<sup>79</sup> Khrushchev seems to have believed that rockets were cheaper than other weapons. In April 1960 he told Charles de Gaulle: “Indeed a rocket, as opposed to a plane, demands fewer expenditures on production and almost needs no expenditures on maintenance. There is no need to drain the economy with the burden of weapons.”<sup>80</sup>

Khrushchev also opposed the development of a large navy, particularly because he felt that the missile age had made large ships irrelevant. Instead, he supported the creation of a powerful, but cheaper, submarine fleet. In 1960 during the conflict in Congo he reassessed this position and asked the navy to tell him how long it would take, and how much money, for the USSR to have a navy that could show the Soviet flag and support its friends. When a week later he was told that it would take five years and five billion rubles, he said: “it is too expensive. We can find a better way to use this money.”<sup>81</sup> One navy captain in 1960 described “how naval officers had wept as they watched nearly completed cruisers and destroyers at the docks in Leningrad being cut up for scrap on Khrushchev’s orders.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 811–16.

<sup>78</sup> Matthias Uhl, “Nikita Khrushchev,” in *Mental Maps in the Early Cold War Era*, ed. Steven Casey and Jonathan Wright (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 298.

<sup>79</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer* [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer], 678.

<sup>80</sup> “N.S. Khrushchev - Sharl’ de Goll’: Vstrechi v Parizhe [N.S. Khrushchev- Charles de Gaulle: Meetings in Paris],” 122.

<sup>81</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy* [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower], 62.

<sup>82</sup> Arkady N. Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), 93.

A major headache for Khrushchev was finding housing for military officers. Shelest recalled in his diary receiving a request for better housing from Hero of the Soviet Union General Sviridov in 1960. This man, who had liberated Kiev in the war, was living with a family of five in a two-room, 35 square meter apartment.<sup>83</sup> Unhappiness with rising prices on meat and milk affected not only society as a whole, but the military. Shelest had to warn a colonel to keep his mouth shut after the KGB reported to him that the colonel said “there have already been 45 years of Soviet power, and we are still rising prices on foodstuffs.”<sup>84</sup>

Khrushchev needed de-Stalinization to put the final nails in the coffin of his political enemies to ensure that they would not be able to return to power if he faced any serious future political difficulties. Yet these same steps ran the risk of further disappointing the military. Khrushchev writes that “even to this day Konev suffers over the fact that the Twentieth-Party Congress condemned the misdeeds of Stalin and the Twenty-Second Party Congress added further to this condemnation.” Khrushchev complained about how military memoirs would “white-wash” Stalin.<sup>85</sup> According to Marshal Golovanov, his fellow Marshal Rokossovsky was removed from power after refusing Khrushchev’s demand that he write something negative about Stalin.<sup>86</sup>

Paradoxically, after the Second World War the Soviet system had become increasingly militarized. Between 1945 and 1953, the foundations of the Soviet military-industrial complex had been formed. In the words of Russian historian Pyzhikov, “the limitation in the production of consumer goods, ruined agriculture, the lower quality of life for people - hunger, all of this was the consequence of the special position of military industry, guaranteed by the balance of resistance with the capitalist system in

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<sup>83</sup> P. E. Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete: dnevnkovye zapisi, vospominaniia chlena Politbiuro TsK KPSS [So That You Won't Be Judged: Diaries and Memoirs of a Member of the Politburo CC CPSU]* (Moscow: edition q, 1995), 137.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–55.

<sup>85</sup> Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 2: Reformer (1945-1964)*, 102, 216.

<sup>86</sup> Feliks Chuev and Vyacheslav Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 290.



the international arena.”<sup>87</sup> Between 1955 and 1958, however, the Soviet Union was able to decrease military expenditures by one billion rubles.

These cuts had strong implications for the military’s attitude toward Khrushchev. In June 1956, Konev and Zheltov reported to Khrushchev that “there are separate cases of incorrect interpretations [of the cuts]...Among older officers there are places of nervousness and lack of certainty. Some are expressing dissatisfaction with the work of local organs with regards to labor and housing for officers in reserve.”<sup>88</sup> In January of 1958 the USSR decided to cut the military by 300,000. Two months later the KGB reported on more than one hundred secretly-read letters written by military officers that expressed dissatisfaction with the military cuts.<sup>89</sup> In January 1959, Malinovskii reported that the fired officers “as a rule left the army with great reluctance.” In their defense, he claimed that the ministry had evidence that former officers were not being provided for: as of October 1, 1958, 4,736 officers were unemployed and 47,674 had not been given housing. Malinovskii wrote of the 5,000 complaints his ministry had received.<sup>90</sup>

Yet trends were getting worse. The purchase of new forms of weapons threatened to end the movement towards smaller military expenditures: in 1959 military expenditures again raised to 1955 levels, although because of the growing economy they took up a smaller percentage than earlier. After 1959 their share began to slowly but inexorably increase. The lion’s share of military expenditures was now going to new weapons.<sup>91</sup> Khrushchev’s desperation was clear. Searching for a way to solve the crisis on the cheap, in May 1959 he even forwarded to Marshal Sokolovskii, head of the general staff, a

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<sup>87</sup> A.V. Pyzhikov, “Voennye Prioritety Mirnogo Vremeni [Military Priorities of Peacetime],” *Voprosy Ekonomiki*, no. 5 (2001): 148.

<sup>88</sup> “Sokrashchenie Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Seredine 50-Kh Godov [Cuts in the Armed Forces of the USSR in the Mid-1950s],” *Voennye Arkhivy Rossii*, no. 1 (1993): 292.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 301–2.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>91</sup> Irina Bystrova, *Sovetskii voenno-promyshlennyi kompleks: problemy stanovleniia i razvitiia (1930-1980-e gody)* [*The Soviet Military-Industrial Complex: Problems of Formation and Development (1930s to 1980s)*] (Moscow: In-t rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2006), 253–54.

preposterous proposal by an engineer-major named Iroshnikov that called for creating artificial islands near the United States and stationing nuclear weapons on them. In his response memo, Sokolovskii naturally argued that the idea was “based on clearly insufficient political, economic, technical, and military knowledge.”<sup>92</sup>

Yet the military high command was skeptical of rockets. In August 1958, Defense Minister Malinovskii refused a request by Marshal Nedelin to make the rocket forces more powerful organizationally.<sup>93</sup> In October, a review of training exercises throughout the year noticed that rockets and nuclear weapons were not well understood or used appropriately: throughout the military “[they] underestimate the military possibilities of the atomic weapon, rockets and other new means of fighting, and the peculiarities of the situation at the beginning of a period of war.”<sup>94</sup> Another report on October 30 complained that “the officer corps has still not deeply studied rocket technology and does not have strong, sure skills in its use for the destruction of various targets.”<sup>95</sup>

Yet Khrushchev dramatically tried to further decrease the size of standing forces and increase the importance of rockets in 1959 and 1960.<sup>96</sup> The proposal was so explosive that Khrushchev only discussed it with a tiny number of figures, leading one memoirist to describe the process as a “conspiracy.”<sup>97</sup> This led to obvious deficiencies in the quality of its preparation and implementation, especially in terms of finding suitable jobs and apartments for the men cut from the armed forces.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 30, delo 311, listy 114-115 (Harvard Cold War Collection)

<sup>93</sup> Ivkin and Sukhina, *Zadacha osoboi gosudarstvennoi vazhnosti*, 698.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 720–26.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 847–53.

<sup>96</sup> Timothy J Naftali and A. A Fursenko, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*, 1 ed. (New York: Norton, 2006), 241–48.

<sup>97</sup> Grinevskii, *Tysiacha I Odin Den' Nikity Sergeevicha [One Thousand and One Days of Nikita Sergeevich]*, 123.

<sup>98</sup> Iuliia Abramova, “Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS I Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi ‘Ottepeli’ (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev's ‘Thaw’ (1953-1964)]” (Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2000), 116.

Khrushchev was even more convinced of the possibility of an end to the Cold War after a trip to the United States in September 1959.<sup>99</sup> On December 8, 1959, Khrushchev submitted a remarkable memorandum to the Presidium in which he described his vision for a “reasonable” military “without frills.” In this document, Khrushchev proposed that the military be cut by “a million or a million and a half.” Because the Soviet Union had rockets that could “literally wipe from the face of the earth” any country or group of countries that attacked the Soviet Union, and because the Soviet Union did not plan to attack Europe, a large military was no longer necessary. It “would be unreasonable to have atomic and hydrogen bombs, rockets and at the same time have a large army.” Moreover, “to maintain such a large army means lowering our economic potential,” precisely the arena in which Khrushchev hoped to ultimately win the Cold War. Most strikingly, Khrushchev raised the possibility of creating “regiments and divisions on a territorial principle” so as to allow them to continue to participate in the economy. He compared this to the military structure established by Lenin after the Civil War.<sup>100</sup>

On December 14, Malinovskii, Konev, Grechko, Moskalenko, and Nedelin participated in a major Presidium meeting that discussed Khrushchev’s memo, the rough minutes of which are available.<sup>101</sup> Malinovskii remarked that troops in Germany had “known influence” on the USSR’s enemies but agreed to cut forces between 1 to 1.2 million. Konev supported Khrushchev’s memo, agreed with Malinovskii on the size of cuts, and stated that territorial militias were a “correct proposition.” Grechko said that the ground forces could be cut by 500,000 to 600,000 and described Khrushchev’s suggestion as “expedient.” Moskalenko praised Khrushchev for being brave and responsible before the people and history, but also complained that T-34 tanks and artillery were getting too old.

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<sup>99</sup> Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War*, 24.

<sup>100</sup> Iu. Abramova, “Armiu Nado Sdelat’ Bez Izlishestv [The Army Must Be Made Without Frills],” *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 3 (1998).

<sup>101</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 395–97.

The author of this dissertation found a hand-written draft of Zakharov's speech at this crucial meeting in the marshal's personal file at RGVA. The document provides more details than the scattered handful of lines attributed to him in the rough notes of the Presidium. Zakharov spoke of Khrushchev's proposals as being not only necessary but also overdue. However, Zakharov also noted that the military had a habit of holding on to the past and was slow to adopt to new ideas. With regard to the cuts, it would be necessary to "approach this issue with reason" and ensure that they were compensated by improved quality in modern means of warfare. With regards to cutting forces in Germany, Zakharov warned that "we should proceed from what enemy forces oppose us." Although some divisions could be cut, "to a certain level they should be replaced by new means of battle - rocket units." While he accepted Khrushchev's idea of a territorial militia, he also said that it would be necessary to leave on the border "the presently existing organization of troops" and that "we must put into it a new content, which should be connected with new means of battle." He concluded by arguing that it was impossible to decide on all of Khrushchev's ideas at that meeting and suggested that the general staff study them in greater detail over the next two or three weeks.<sup>102</sup>

Zakharov's reluctance to support Khrushchev is much more obvious in a lecture he gave in October that is also available in his personal file at RGVA. In this lecture, titled "Several Theoretical Issues of the Preparation and Conduct of Offensive Operations on the Front at the Beginning Period of War," Zakharov argued that "the further strengthening of the defensive abilities of our country is necessary." He provided a much more measured evaluation of the importance of rockets and nuclear weapons:

The operations of rockets and the air force in the destruction of the economic potential and atomic power of the enemy will play an especially important role, but the decisive role remains with the operations of the land forces, which through their advance into the territory of the enemy are able to strip him of his living space, divide the efforts of the enemy coalition, and then complete his rout... new weaponry and combat equipment did not give any one service [*vidov vooruzhennykh sil*] such advantages as to allow it to independently decide the course and outcome of an armed conflict. It is necessary to note that despite

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<sup>102</sup> RGVA, fond 41143, opis 1, delo 70, listy 1-16.

the destructive power of the atomic weapon, success in future operations is only possible as a result of the correct use of this weapon in conjunction with other strengths and means of military activities.

For Zakharov, this meant the “complete motorization of land forces and an increase in the relative proportion in them of tanks.” In his mind, good intelligence, maneuverability, and vigilance would allow the Soviets to survive a surprise nuclear attack.<sup>103</sup>

According to Khrushchev’s son, his father had originally wanted to cut forces in 1959 by 1.5 million, but because of resistance compromised on the number of 1.2 million.<sup>104</sup> By choosing 1.2 million instead of 1 million, Khrushchev chose the top side of the spectrum approved by Malinovskii and Konev at the Presidium meeting. At the December 14 Presidium meeting, Khrushchev also spoke of the need to “beat the boasting [*vybit’ fanfaronstvo*] out of” military pensioners, to go on the offensive against them and even exclude them from the party. Khrushchev’s son Sergei wrote that his father’s policies were mostly met by “silent resistance.”<sup>105</sup>

Four days later Khrushchev summoned the entire top military elite to discuss his letter on military reform. The meeting was extremely confidential: Khrushchev, in one of his many interruptions, told the participants not to take notes because of a fear that the discussions would leak to the West and that they should keep the deliberations secret. Khrushchev was often interrupted by officers correcting his understanding of military technology, like the distance of artillery, the power of artillery explosions, and the speed of cruisers.

This was only one sign of Khrushchev’s difficult relationship with the top military brass at the meeting. He told sailors that they needed a “cold shower.” He castigated military aviation for its poor performance in the war against Germany. He spoke of punishing Admiral Kharlamov for setting sailors in opposition to the CC by making it seem as if the party did not appreciate the navy. He threatened that Marshal Rokossovskii would no longer be respected if he continued to commit mistakes like supporting

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<sup>103</sup> RGVA fond 41143, opis 1, delo 31, listy 125, 145, 146, 148, 154.

<sup>104</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer* [*Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer*], 678.

<sup>105</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy* [*Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower*], 234.

the former navy commander Kuznetsov. He warned the military not to become a “caste” in society and that it must serve the people. When Varentsov complained about the treatment of the artillery, Khrushchev accused him of slander [*chto vy nagovarivaete?*].

Khrushchev told his audience that the general staff had calculated that only 1,200 rockets were needed to destroy the administrative and industrial centers of their opponents. He reminded them that a counter-attack from the West would be unavoidable. He accused the military of having too many weapons: “I do not want to shift all the blame to you, but I do not want to free you from responsibility.” He told the officers that although he knew they wanted tactical nuclear weapons, “the atomic bomb is a strategic weapon.”

Khrushchev asked why such a large army was needed if enough nuclear weapons were available to crush the enemy in “one gulp [*odnim zalpom*]”. And in any case, war was not inevitable: “I don’t know what you, the military, think, but we in the Presidium think and maintain a strict rule that we ourselves do not plan to fight...” Instead, “we think that the best, the most effective method is economic competition.” He claimed that the planned cuts would save 5-7 billion rubles. He contrasted himself with Mao, who “thinks strangely, in the Chinese fashion” and saw strength in terms of the size of population, which, according to Khrushchev, was seen by the West as “meat”:

Our military men quickly emphasized the military teachings of Mao Zedong. Our army, which fought and crushed the most powerful opponent in the world that was armed with the best weapons, now studies Mao Zedong how to defeat the opponent, whose military experience was nothing more than an obsolete way of fighting. If only they thought even a little bit, if only they had the slightest respect for their own dignity... He [Mao] will work things out and see that he spoke nonsense and then stop respecting you [the Soviet military], since you did not see he was speaking nonsense.

The attending marshals and generals could only have felt unease when Khrushchev said: “Now, comrades, a question, can the army execute the functions of defending the country? No. What is defense of the country? This means having an army... on the borders like a shield and saying that no enemy soldier will cross the border.” This was no longer possible, as “means of annihilation now literally strike

the entire planet. Therefore you will sit in any Il-28 or Iak, and Moscow will fly head over heels to hell, as well as Leningrad and the Urals.”

Participants in the meeting tried not to openly criticize Khrushchev, but their dissatisfaction with some of his ideas was obvious. Grechko said: “Nikita Sergeevich, you suggest a territorial system. I am in complete agreement with this. But we cannot do this everywhere... I do not think that all troops will transfer to a territorial system.” He stated his opposition to “naked cuts, simple, mechanical.” He confirmed his support for introducing age limits, but reminded Khrushchev that “this is very complicated.” Chuikov told Khrushchev that many in the audience were thinking: “Let them cut my neighbor, but spare me from this cut” and complained that the previous experience of involving soldiers in production was not successful. Golikov spoke of the strong reluctance among the troops to fully appreciate the importance of nuclear weapons, while Gorshkov noted that “this cut will touch many thousands of officers and will raise well-known attitudes that must be taken into account.”

Timoshenko was by far the most outspoken. He raised the possibility that if the international situation deteriorated, the people and army might wonder if this was because of the cuts in the military. He spoke of the army’s critical role during the Suez crisis and in the invasion of Hungary, which in his mind were solved in the USSR’s favor because of troops, not nuclear weapons. He was blunt: “I do not presume to guess the details, I only want to in a way make sure [*podtverdit*] that our passion and love for this perfect weapon [the atom bomb] not decrease the significance of our armed forces.” Timoshenko warned Khrushchev not to over-estimate the formal support for his propositions.

I think that a very difficult task lies before us. And that here in the beginning they listened very tensely to the letter and then the speeches, and then it was made to seem as if it was easy, that it would be as easy as throwing hats at someone to defeat them [a Russian idiom meaning a task that can be solved with great ease]. I must tell the Presidium of the Central Committee of the party, that this is a very difficult task... I saw how painful and anxious officers feel at the slightest word that they will be fired. I say with complete responsibility that our officers today are not calm.... Haste leads us, Nikita Sergeevich, not to [thoughtful] placing of cadres but to [careless] shoving of them.

Khrushchev concluded by declaring that the meeting signified consensus, warning that if anyone had the slightest doubt but did not express it would be committing a crime. He ordered the audience not to

shift responsibility and tell their subordinates that the decision was made at the top and that they were forced to simply execute it.<sup>106</sup>

At the December CC plenum, Khrushchev spoke of an encounter with a retired American general who managed a farm: “But our generals will say, how can you say this, what wrong did I do to you [to be sent to work in agriculture], I fought for the fatherland.”<sup>107</sup> On January 14, Khrushchev made his dramatic public announcement to the Supreme Soviet that the armed forces would be cut by 1.2 million. Khrushchev emphasized that the USSR already had enough atomic and hydrogen weapons and the ability to deliver them against any aggressor. He even described the capitalist armies as “allies,” as their great expense would help the USSR to surpass the West in science and consumer goods.<sup>108</sup> On January 18, the CC sent a confidential letter to members of the Soviet Army that identified rockets as the main armament for the Soviet military, emphasized the economic benefits (16-17 billion rubles saved and more labor for the work force), argued that the cuts would put pressure on the West to end the arms race, claimed that the military capabilities of the army would not suffer, and attempted to assuage concerns that the removed army men would not be treated well.<sup>109</sup> Twelve days after his speech to the Supreme Soviet, the American ambassador went on a sleigh ride with Khrushchev. The ambassador reported:

Khrushchev said he had been obliged to use all of his authority to persuade SOV military but that they now agreed with him. He said many soldiers would be withdrawn from East Germany and Hungary where local forces were adequate and he added that they might even withdraw all SOV forces. In his connection he mentioned great expense of keeping SOV troops outside SOV Union. Khrushchev indicated that reduction would also affect Navy and Air Force. He said Stalin had made mistake in attempting build up Sevastopol as strongpoint and said SOV Union intended remove virtually all naval vessels from Black Sea.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> RGASPI, fond 17, opis 165, delo 152, listy 1-278.

<sup>107</sup> RGANI, fond 2, opis 1, delo 427, list 85 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>108</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 30, delo 427, listy 215 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>109</sup> RGANI, fond 3, opis 22, delo 103, listy 1-12.

<sup>110</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, January 18, 1960. Document 141. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960. Volume X, Part 1, Eastern European Region, Soviet Union. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d141>



Former head of the KGB Semichastnyi wrote in his memoirs that the cuts caused “unprecedented tension” in the military.<sup>111</sup> War plans in 1960 did not reflect Khrushchev’s new military doctrine.<sup>112</sup> Soviet mole Oleg Penkovsy told his de-briefers that the marshals did not agree with Khrushchev’s policy of cutting the size of the military and that morale was so poor in the army that in another war “countless numbers of officers and soldiers would simply desert to the other side.”<sup>113</sup> According to Khrushchev’s son, Chief of the General Staff Sokolovski was especially opposed, and was therefore removed from his position.<sup>114</sup> Sokolovski was present at the Presidium meeting with the other marshals, but the rough notes do not record any comments he might have made. According to one account, Sokolovsky opposed Khrushchev at the meeting by simply stating that the cuts would damage the military’s ability to contain an opponent who wanted to hurt the interests of the Soviet Union.<sup>115</sup> Before leaving his position, he told one of his vice commanders at the general staff: “do everything possible to maintain the weapons [tekhniku]. In the near future they might be useful.” He later refused entreaties by Malinovskii to accept a number of leadership positions.<sup>116</sup>

On April 7, 1960, the Presidium discussed an anonymous letter written on March 5 about cuts in the Soviet military. The meeting concluded that educational work among commanders was weak [*slabost’ vospitatel’noi raboty sredi komandnogo sostava*], thus hinting that officers were having trouble accepting Khrushchev’s proposals.<sup>117</sup> That same month saw major changes in the military high command: Timoshenko, Konev, and Sokolovsky, all legendary figures, were removed from their positions. Grechko, who had served with Khrushchev during the war, was made head of the Warsaw Pact Forces, and

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<sup>111</sup> Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 341.

<sup>112</sup> Petr Lunak, “War Plans from Stalin to Brezhnev: The Czechoslovak Pivot,” in *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War: Threat Perceptions in the East and West*, ed. Vojtech Mastny et al (New York: Routledge, 2006), 79.

<sup>113</sup> Meeting #1 (London), 20 April 1961. National Security Archive Online Database, 31.

<sup>114</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]*, 678.

<sup>115</sup> Grinevskii, *Tysiacha I Odin Den’ Nikity Sergeevicha [One Thousand and One Days of Nikita Sergeevich]*, 127.

<sup>116</sup> Sergei Lagodskii, *Vasilii Sokolovskii: Polkovodets, Strateg, Diplomat [Vasilii Sokolovskii: Colonel, Strategist, Diplomat]* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo i tipografiia gazety “Krasnaia Zvezda,” 1995), 279–80.

<sup>117</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 438.

Chuikov, another Khrushchev ally replaced Grechko as head of land forces.<sup>118</sup> In July, Khrushchev's ally Kozlov gave a long speech to a CC plenum that defended the USSR's support for disarmament in the face of Chinese criticisms. At the same plenum, Khrushchev denied cuts were hurting the Soviet Union. He stated that "we are also for disarmament, but through arming." After applause, he continued: "They say the military applauds. But we are all military men. When we made the decision to cut the armed forces, we said directly - we came to this cut because we had the possibility, by cutting numbers, to make our firepower higher by several times. Here is the heart of the matter!"<sup>119</sup>

A Ministry of Defense proposal to Gosplan, the state planning committee, shows the stunning extent to which the military differed from civilians on the issue of military expenditures. Gosplan wanted the economy to be able to produce in the first year of war 2,690 ballistic rockets, 8,155 planes, and 16,175 tanks. The military, on the other hand, wanted 4,730 ballistic rockets, 8,935 planes, and 36,000 tanks. According to Gosplan, these goals were impossible, as they would require 100 billion rubles worth of construction, requiring "50% (!) of the volume of planned expenditures for the national economic plan of 1961."<sup>120</sup>

Yet the international situation continuously threatened to frustrate Khrushchev's goals. After the U-2 Incident in May 1960, he argued that it "should not induce us to revise our plans so as to increase our appropriations for armaments and the armed forces...." He even said that cuts would continue after the ones currently being enacted were finished.<sup>121</sup> The planned cuts to the military temporarily ended during the Berlin crisis in the summer of 1961. Around June 8, a decision was made to increase military

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<sup>118</sup> Michael Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 71. Penkovsky claimed that Grechko "did well on purely military matters before, but now in his present position as a deputy to the Minister, he is called a fool." Meeting #4, at Leeds, England, 23 April 1961, National Security Archive Online Database, 10.

<sup>119</sup> RGANI fond 2, opis 1, delo 469, listy 49-55, 134 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection).

<sup>120</sup> Bystrova, *Sovetskii voenno-promyshlennyi kompleks*, 258.

<sup>121</sup> Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin*, 76.

spending to 12.466 billion rubles: 3.105 billion more than the planned 9.255 billion.<sup>122</sup> In July, Khrushchev announced publicly that the cuts would be suspended and 3.114 billion more rubles would go to the defense budget, casting into doubt Khrushchev's plans to transfer more resources to agriculture and light industry.<sup>123</sup> According to an October 1960 document, the armed forces would receive 2,600 new tanks, 2,000 APCs, 800 new combat aircraft, 10,600 anti-aircraft missiles, 122 warships, and 30 submarines. This was a response to the crisis in Berlin.<sup>124</sup>

In August, Khrushchev submitted a rambling document for discussion that clearly demonstrated how conflicted he felt about his concern for the security of the USSR and his desire to cut military spending. Khrushchev spoke of a "real threat of the possibility of a military attack on us" and bizarrely compared the desperation of the imperialists to a Soviet military officer who shot himself, apparently in front of Khrushchev, at the beginning of the war with Nazi Germany because he was so demoralized by the initial defeats. He used this tortured train of thought to justify stopping the military cuts, and he raised the possibility of increasing forces that could be brought from other parts of the USSR to supplement the front line. Sacrifices for greater military preparedness might mean lengthening the work day from seven hours to eight. Yet at the end of the document, he directly contradicted himself by saying: "We already have rocket technology that is growing every day, both ballistic intercontinental and strategic rockets of different distances with atomic and hydrogen warheads. Therefore we hardly have to assign more funding."<sup>125</sup>

In September and October of that year, the Soviets conducted a major military exercise that led the Soviet military hierarchy to believe that the Warsaw Pact countries could seize all of continental

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<sup>122</sup> Prozumenshchikov et al, *Venskii Val's Kholodnoi Voiny. Vokrug Vstrechi N.S. Khrushcheva I Dzh. F. Kennedi v 1961 Godu v Vene. Dokumenty [The Viennese Waltz of the Cold War. Around the Meeting of N.S. Khrushchev and J.F. Kennedy in 1961 in Vienna. Documents]*, 260.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>124</sup> Uhl, "Nikita Khrushchev," 298.

<sup>125</sup> Prozumenshchikov et al, *Venskii Val's Kholodnoi Voiny. Vokrug Vstrechi N.S. Khrushcheva I Dzh. F. Kennedi v 1961 Godu v Vene. Dokumenty [The Viennese Waltz of the Cold War. Around the Meeting of N.S. Khrushchev and J.F. Kennedy in 1961 in Vienna. Documents]*, 412–26.

Europe within 10-15 days. In a bad sign for Khrushchev, Malinovskii, in his speech evaluating the exercise, spoke of the importance of standing armies: “Under modern conditions, the main mission of smashing the enemy is fulfilled by nuclear strikes. And it is subsequently the mission of the land forces to complete the task of destroying them.”<sup>126</sup>

The CIA believed that internal factors better explained the break in military cuts than the deteriorating international situation: “From Khrushchev himself, we know that the force reductions initiated in 1960 were accepted only reluctantly by the military, and our evidence indicates that the reductions had stalled even before they were publicly suspended in 1961, ostensibly because of the Berlin crisis.”<sup>127</sup>

In any case, the decision to again raise military expenditures in 1961 was only a temporary retreat. At a Presidium meeting on January 8, 1962, Khrushchev provided a timeline for temporarily high military budgets:

What would our expenses be if we behave like an elephant, or a goat or a bull and persistently go forward and push on our horns? It will lead to escalation. We got an escalation and we got certain costs, because we increased the budget. Of course, it must be said that we would have increased the budget, even if the escalation did not happen... we have a program and we must fulfill it, in 1962, in 1963, and in 1965 - until we are done. We will feel real relief, apparently, in 1965-1967... Truly, even after 1965 technology will continue to progress, there will be changes, but not in the same way, because then it will be qualitative change, but now it is quantitative and qualitative - therefore then the budget might be at the same level as in 1964-1965, or, possibly, we may lower it a little bit. But to speak of this now is difficult, because we must survive these three years.<sup>128</sup>

A month later, on February 26, Khrushchev told the head of the German Democratic Republic that “we are up to our neck in medium range rockets of up to two thousand kilometers. We are already no longer

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<sup>126</sup> Lunak, “War Plans from Stalin to Brezhnev: The Czechoslovak Pivot,” 62.

<sup>127</sup> Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy. National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-4-64. 22 April 1964. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/89801/DOC\\_0000267917.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000267917.pdf), 6.

<sup>128</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 539.

building them. We have moved on to the construction of powerful (inter)continental rockets, and next year we will have enough of them.”<sup>129</sup>

In July 1962, Khrushchev wrote an addendum to a memorandum to the Presidium in which he criticized the navy for still not understanding how rockets had fundamentally changed warfare. For Khrushchev, large surface ships were useless, as submarines were “the only real weapon that answers all of the modern demands of modern sea warfare.” Cost was on his mind: “Cruiser-58 costs as much as the largest submarine.” He proposed ending the production of such vessels and concentrate all resources on rocket-armed submarines, although he recognized that the navy had been skeptical of his ideas. Khrushchev concluded: “it is necessary to again put a great deal of work into reevaluation in order to free up funds and not spend money and strength in vain. Comrade Ustinov along with the Navy and Ministry of Defense and Gosplan must do this. This must be done without delay.”<sup>130</sup>

Khrushchev’s prestige also suffered strongly from the Cuban Missile Crisis, itself possibly an attempt by the Soviet Union to solve the balance of power on the cheap and push forward disarmament negotiations.<sup>131</sup> He even tried to blame the entire outcome on the armed forces. In a draft memo to the Presidium on April 1963, he wrote that because of concerns about whether it was possible to install the weapons secretly, the military was ordered to determine whether it was possible. Khrushchev claimed that he was in fact told by the military that it *was* possible: “this conclusion turned out to be groundless, as the

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<sup>129</sup> A. A. Fursenko, *Rossia i mezhdunarodnye krizisy: seredina XX veka [Russia and International Crises: The middle of the 20 Century]* (Moscow: Nauka, 2006), 254.

<sup>130</sup> Tomilina et al, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev]*, 2:644–49.

<sup>131</sup> Charles S. Sampson and John Michael Joyce, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Soviet Union. Volume V* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1998), 568; Ivan Serov, *Zapiski Iz Chemodana. Tainye Dnevniky Pervogo Predsedatelia KGB, Naidennye Cherez 25 Let Posle Ego Smerti [Notes from the Suitcase. The Hidden Diaries of the First Chairman of the KGB Found 25 Years After His Death]* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2016), 567–68; “25-Letie Kubinskogo Raketnogo Krizisa 1962 Goda. Konferentsiia Amerikanskikh I Sovetskikh Politikov I Uchenykh v Kembridzhe (Mass.) [25 Anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Conference of American and Soviet Politicians and Academics in Cambridge (Mass.)],” *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 5 (May 2013): 9.

enemy discovered them and discovered them rather quickly.”<sup>132</sup> The Presidium report to the CC plenum at which Khrushchev was removed included the line: “Ask any one of our marshals, generals, and they will say that the plan of military ‘penetration’ into South America - this is delirium, fraught with a serious danger of war... This history also brought damage to the international prestige of our state, our party, our armed forces, and at the same time helped raise the authority of the USA.”<sup>133</sup> According to one Soviet military officer, “During a meeting with military leaders, in the presence of 300 generals and officers [Mikoian] described the Soviet international military action with the phrase: ‘We sneakily placed a hedgehog next to the Americans.’ In reply to this someone in the room loudly said: ‘And sat on it ourselves.’”<sup>134</sup>

Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko believed that after the Cuban Missile Crisis “Khrushchev had to forget butter” because whenever anyone expressed opposition to a major military build-up “someone would be sure to say, ‘Remember what happened with Cuba?’”<sup>135</sup> However, after the Cuban Missile Crisis the Soviet Union did *not* start a massive nuclear buildup. The US defense establishment was in fact shocked. One July 1963 analysis reads: “even more puzzling than the soft basing and slow reaction time of the Soviet intercontinental force are the questions of its late emergence and small size.”<sup>136</sup> According to a 1964 National Intelligence Estimate, “[i]n the aftermath of Cuba they may have considered a substantial increase in their military effort. Our evidence does not indicate, however, that the Soviets are presently attempting to match the US in numbers of intercontinental delivery vehicles. Recognition that the US would detect and

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<sup>132</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 3. Postanovleniia 1959-1964 [Presidium of the CC CPSU 1954-1964. Volume 3. Resolutions 1959-1964]*, 474.

<sup>133</sup> Andrei Artizov et al, eds., *Nikita Khrushchev. 1964: stenogrammy plenuma TSK KPSS i drugie dokumenty [Nikita Khrushchev. 1964: Stenograms of the Plenum of the CC CPSU and Other Documents]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2007), 198.

<sup>134</sup> V.I. Esin, ed., *Strategicheskaia Operatsiia “Anadyr”: Kak Eto Bylo [The Strategic Operation “Anadyr”: What It Was Like]* (Moscow: MOOVVIK-GUP “Firma Poligrafresursy,” 2000), 147.

<sup>135</sup> Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow*, 118.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 182.

match or overmatch such an effort, together with economic constraints, appears to have ruled out this option.”<sup>137</sup>

In February of 1963, Khrushchev held a special meeting of the Defense Council to discuss rockets. At this meeting, Marshal Grechko, at this point head of the Warsaw Pact forces, complained to Khrushchev that without the mass use of tactical nuclear weapons the Soviet Union could not win a modern war. Khrushchev told him to give it up, as he did not have the money: for him, rockets were not an instrument of war, but to be used for political arguments. For Khrushchev, tactical weapons raised another question. Who would decide to start a nuclear war, the head of state or a division commander?<sup>138</sup>

At the same meeting, Grechko was also disappointed by his failure to convince Khrushchev that it was a mistake that conscripts were only forced to serve for two years. This became especially problematic in the early 1960s, as the birth rate during World War II was so low when all the men were at the front.<sup>139</sup> When Grechko, along with Minister of Defense Malinovskii, raised this problem, Khrushchev responded with a rhetorical question: “who serves whom - the army the people or the people the army?” Khrushchev said that agriculture needed workers. He humiliated Grechko by referring to the 25 year conscription during the reign of Nicolas I, and suggested that the marshal would like that even better. Khrushchev tried to explain that if the economy was strong, the imperialists would no longer be a threat.

Khrushchev went on to claim that even tanks were no longer relevant, as rockets could not destroy them from kilometers away. Planes also lost significance, as rockets could shoot them down from the sky. Khrushchev stated emphatically that “a few warheads are fully enough to drive off any aggressor... We are a socialist power, not colonizers, and we do not plan to conquer anyone.”

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<sup>137</sup> Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy. National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-4-64. 22 April 1964. [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/89801/DOC\\_0000267917.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000267917.pdf), 12.

<sup>138</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower]*, 518–19.

<sup>139</sup> Shelest wrote in his diary about a meeting with General Proshenskii, a military commissar at the oblast' level. According to Proshenski, for those born in 1941 the military was only able to fulfill 73% of the planned number. Out of those 73% only 65% were actually healthy and were approved to serve. Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 138.

Most shocking, Khrushchev suggested that a small, professional army was enough. These forces would defend the rockets and would number 500,000 to one million. The rest of the army would consist of regional militias. They would live at home and spend most of their time doing productive work. Khrushchev admitted that these were only plans for the future after enough rockets had been created. He numbered the necessary amount as “a few hundred [*neskol'ko soten*].”<sup>140</sup> In a personal communication with the present author, Khrushchev’s son stated that his father wanted rockets in the number “between 200 and 400.” Significantly, Malinovskii published an article in *Pravda* that same month (February 2) that clearly minimized Khrushchev’s role in the battle of Stalingrad and emphasized the role of military leaders, including Zhukov.<sup>141</sup> Although we have evidence that the Soviets made a decision to produce the light UR-100 missile in March 1963, a weapon with a simple and cheap nature that would allow the Soviets to pursue parity, we do not know the exact nature of this decision, how it was enforced, or whether it was forced on Khrushchev.<sup>142</sup>

Problems were so obvious that even the American embassy was noticing them. The American ambassador wrote a memorandum to the US Secretary of State in which he argued that “[g]iven the situation within the Soviet Union Khrushchev should want- rather desperately- to at least stop the increase in arms expenditure and if possible to reduce this burden drastically. It is clear that he is in deep trouble with the Soviet agricultural situation and will need to make heavy direct investments in this area as well as to increase production of consumer goods to provide needed incentives both in agriculture and industry. The problem is from what area can he take these measures... The only area where the cuts could be made without causing serious internal difficulties is that of military expenditures.”<sup>143</sup> In October, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko proposed to President Kennedy “an informal or tacit understanding, or

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<sup>140</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower]*, 520–23.

<sup>141</sup> The American ambassador concluded that the “probable explanation of this is that the military are building a backfire against the possibility of Khrushchev again unilaterally cutting back ground forces.” Sampson and Joyce, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Soviet Union. Volume V*, 639; Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 156.

<sup>142</sup> Pavel Podvig, ed., *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 201.

<sup>143</sup> Sampson and Joyce, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Soviet Union. Volume V*, 397–98.



perhaps a gentlemen's agreement" on the reduction of military budgets. Gromyko told the president "he wished to stress the great importance the Soviet Union attached to this matter."<sup>144</sup> Apparently the Soviets took this more seriously than the Americans. On September 26, 1965, Soviet ambassador Dobrynin met with Secretary Rusk and "recalled the budget cutting agreement between the two countries and pointed to the 5 to 6 billion dollar increase in the US military budget... The Secretary took exception to Amb. Dobrynin's use of the word 'agreement' by pointing out that the arrangement had been merely a statement of intentions barring unforeseen developments."<sup>145</sup>

In June 1963, Kennedy made his famous speech "Toward a Strategy of Peace" that called for a new relationship with the Soviet Union. Khrushchev believed this was the best speech an American president had given since Roosevelt, and the speech had a "great impact" on decision-makers in Moscow. Khrushchev responded positively, and a ban on all nuclear tests was swiftly reached, as well as an agreement on a hotline.<sup>146</sup> Khrushchev spoke again on the importance of military cuts on November 10, one month after Shelest wrote in his diary that panicked rumors were spreading in Kiev that there might be bread shortages.<sup>147</sup> He no longer described the higher military budgets as a planned outcome, like he did in January 1962, now instead blaming Kennedy's aggression for delaying the cuts he proposed in 1959. Because the source is an archival document and the context of the meeting is a private session of the Presidium, it deserves to be quoted at length:

Khrushchev: If we freeze defense on this level, then I think it is a good level. I think tomorrow I will call a session of the Defense Council. I think the time has come to return to cutting the armed forces on the basis of the decision of the Supreme Soviet, which was already made. Then we delayed its execution, but executing it is necessary. This was two years ago. Then we delayed its execution because of the adventurism that Kennedy presented us with... Perhaps it is time to return to this? I think, for example, why do our troops stand in Poland? This was eighteen or twenty years ago. Or, for example, the divisions in Germany. Their maintenance is twice as expensive than in our country. If one division near Vienna is left, and two are removed, this means it is 6 million cheaper [this is clearly a typo, as Soviet forces left

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<sup>144</sup> JFK Library. Papers of President Kennedy. National Security Files. Series 01. Countries, Box 187, Folder: USSR, Gromyko Talks, President.

<sup>145</sup> NARA II, College Park, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files 1964-1966, Political and Defense, Box 2870, Folder: Pol-Political Aff. & Rel., US-USSR, 7/1/65.

<sup>146</sup> Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War*, 36.

<sup>147</sup> Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 178.

Vienna in 1955]. The cheapest maintenance for troops is in Hungary and the most expensive: the GDR. There we pay for everything, and it is frightfully expensive. And their salaries are double. If we remove our divisions, for example, from Poland, they have a big army of their own. I spoke of this to Gomulka. He was so angry with me. Then I started to think - why is Gomulka angry? Why, this is an economic issue. He says that politics cannot be subject to economics, politics must command. This is true. But the Poles were always dissatisfied when Russian troops were in Poland. And now they do not want Russians to leave. Now it is understandable to me - how much do we pay in a year?

Malinovskii: 18 million

Khrushchev: With each factory costing 6 million this is three factories. And now we give them - here is 18 million for your budget. This is no paltry sum [*zhuk na palochke*]... Comrades, let's be reasonable. This is not for discussion outside these walls - a brother is a brother, but it is wrong to take from a brother, and a brother should not be a fool to keep his brother [as his brother]. Let us do what the Americans did. That's strengthen military-transport production. If the Americans in six days send an aviation division from America, in one day we send a division from the Soviet Union. For this we need supplies there, equipment in place. Our equipment allows us to do this... In a word, we need to consider everything like new. That is why I brought you here today.<sup>148</sup>

Throughout 1963, the Soviet press intensified its coverage of strategic missiles, hinting that Khrushchev was preparing for another campaign to change military spending.<sup>149</sup> In December, Khrushchev announced a major program to put 57 billion rubles into the chemicalization of industry and agriculture between 1964 and 1970. Although Khrushchev warned the West not to think that by developing chemicals the Soviet Union would forget about defense, he still spoke of decreasing the military budget for 1964.<sup>150</sup> Around this time Marshal Chuikov, apparently disagreeing, openly pointed out that the west understood the problem of one-sided military theories and was therefore building up both ground and nuclear.<sup>151</sup>

Tensions with the military hierarchy continued throughout 1964, as subtle criticisms of Khrushchev's military doctrine appeared in the military press.<sup>152</sup> At the February 1964 plenum, Khrushchev announced further cuts to military expenditures, to which all applauded except the

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<sup>148</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 771-72.

<sup>149</sup> Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads*, 60.

<sup>150</sup> *Pravda*, December 15, 1963

<sup>151</sup> Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads*, 149-50.

<sup>152</sup> Kimberly Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955-1991* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 65-66.

generals.<sup>153</sup> In April 1964, Malinovskii submitted to Khrushchev a memorandum reporting that 200,000 people working for the minister of defense lacked suitable living arrangements. 120,00 had no apartments, while 73,000 lived in dilapidated homes and cellars. Malinovskii noted that according to construction plans the ministry would not be able to end the lack of apartments until 1970. These difficulties led so many officers to want to leave the army that 64% of the positions filled by re-enlisting officers were empty. The minister of defense requested permission to expand construction and to require the constituent republics to stop shirking.<sup>154</sup>

Khrushchev became even more aggressive in September. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, he told a CC plenum that “if in the period of the first Five Year Plans and the post war years we focused on the development of heavy industry as a basis for improving the economy of the country and strengthening its capacity to defend itself, then now, when we have a powerful industry, when the defense of the country is at an appropriate level, the party raises the task of broader development of the production of consumer goods.”<sup>155</sup> The CIA reported:

In his talks with Secretary Rusk and Undersecretary Harriman in the summer of 1963, Khrushchev indicated that he intended to freeze investments in all sectors of the economy other than chemistry and agriculture. However, by the late summer of 1964, Khrushchev apparently had made the critical decision to [go?] far beyond this strategy and to mount a fundamental attack on traditional economic doctrine and the existing division of resources. The breaking point thus came when, in late September, he made his major bid to break the stalemate and to force through a definitive reorientation and overhaul of the economy in which the ‘main task’ would be to ensure a ‘more rapid development of the consumers good industry.’... The thrust of the late September speech, however, strongly implied that defense priorities would be downgraded indefinitely under the new long-term plan. Khrushchev also asserted that traditionally defense-oriented heavy industries must increasingly contribute to consumer production.<sup>156</sup>

In the fall of 1964, the Ministry of Defense held “training-demonstration” activities for new weapons. Khrushchev expressed dissatisfaction with the expensive anti-aircraft gun Shilka (inferior to cheaper shoulder-launched rockets), helicopters (vulnerable to rockets), and tanks (vulnerable to anti-tank

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<sup>153</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer [Nikita Khrushchev: Reformer]*, 968.

<sup>154</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 30, delo 458, listy 29-32 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>155</sup> *Pravda*, October 2, 1964.

<sup>156</sup> Intelligence Memorandum. Implications of Khrushchev’s Downfall. Document 59. October 17, 1964. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968. Volume XIV, Soviet Union. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v14/d59>

weapons). Again, Khrushchev emphasized to the high command that the Soviet Union had no plans to fight anyone: “Then what do we need all these weapons that we saw here today?” Trying to lower the palpable tension, Khrushchev joked to Malinovskii that if the military was given all that it wanted they would end up without any pants, and then he playfully punched him in the side. The joke did not go over well. Khrushchev again brought up his idea of a small professional military and territorial militias. With Khrushchev returning once to these ideas, the high command was increasingly dissatisfied with his leadership.<sup>157</sup>

In September, Malinovskii and head of the Moscow Military District Beloborodov complained to the CC that the military was not receiving even the apartments promised to them. Rostov only gave 2,100 cubic meters of the promised 14,760, Gorkii 3,645 of 9,300, Tula 2,900 of 8,000, and Yaroslavl 2,000 of 6,200. In Primorsk, Khabarovsk, Voronezh, Leningrad, Murmansk, Novgorod, and Moscow, only 766 of 10,800 families had been given housing.<sup>158</sup>

In the fall of 1964, a former bodyguard for Ignatov (one of the anti-Khrushchev conspirators) called Khrushchev’s son Sergei and told him that Brezhnev, Podgorny, Polianski, Shelepin, and Semichastnyi had been preparing for over a year to remove Khrushchev from power. Khrushchev found this to be unbelievable.<sup>159</sup> When the bodyguard met with Sergei and Mikoian to give details on the coup, he provided details on the attitude of the military: “Several times [Ignatov] spoke about this while walking. When prices on meat were raised, shortages started. He says that things are going poorly. He starts to get worked up. One of these times he says: ‘Nevermind, nevermind. There are those in the military who... Ekh! (he made a hook-like movement with his finger) [an implication that the army would react violently]. Nevermind! Nevermind!’” Galiukov mentioned Konev as one of the military figures with whom Ignatov maintained close relations.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower]*, 546–50.

<sup>158</sup> RGANI fond 13, opis 2, delo 851, listy 22-23.

<sup>159</sup> Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Rozhdenie Sverkhderzhavy [Nikita Khrushchev: Birth of a Superpower]*, 553–54.

<sup>160</sup> Artizov et al, *Nikita Khrushchev. 1964*, 159.

Military issues were not a primary reason for the *party* to oppose Khrushchev. However, military issues were present in the official deliberations on his removal. At the Presidium meeting where Khrushchev was confronted, Kosygin complained that Khrushchev monopolized military issues, while Podgorny claimed that the Presidium did not know what was being done with regards to the military.<sup>161</sup> Kosygin complained “You committed a mistake in that you alone held in your hands all defense issues. Members of the Defense Council were not involved in its work.”<sup>162</sup> The Presidium report to the October plenum at which Khrushchev was removed was remarkable in its characterization of his policies towards the military, even accusing him of “political prostitution”:

It is necessary to also draw your attention to his incorrect attitude toward our armed forces and security organs. Essentially he bullies our army and does not take into account our glorious commanders. He imagined himself as a military theorist and propounded a series of ideas that were not supported by the military. Without the slightest basis he sent into retirement Comrades Konev and Sokolovsky, and essentially sent into retirement Moskalenko, Zakharov, Chuikov, and some others. With regards to Minister of Defense Comrade Malinovskii, recently over and over curses and insults were rained upon him. The minister allegedly was a slacker, and knew nothing, did not involve himself in anything, should be removed and so on. True, this was not said straight to his face but behind his back. For ‘balance’ in the presence of the minister compliments are presented. But, to put it openly and directly, is this not an example of political prostitution?

With regards to the officers, Khrushchev does not call them anything but slackers, he introduced proposals to strip them of various benefits. Moreover he ignores the opinion of the military when deciding the most important issues related to the defense of the country. The agreement of ending nuclear tests was concluded without discussion in the CC Presidium of the considerations of the minister of defense and chief of general staff.... In general all of us must more gently and carefully treat our pride, the glorious Soviet army.<sup>163</sup>

Damaged relations with the military had implications not just for Khrushchev but the entire leadership. Kirilenko, then the second secretary of the CC, told Khrushchev: “Nikita Sergeevich, give up your reform - only troubles will come of it. The people are in ferment. Riots will begin, like in Hungary.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>162</sup> “Kak Snimali Khrushcheva: Beseda S Uchastnikom Tekh Sobytiy [How Khrushchev Was Removed: A Conversation with a Participant in Those Events],” *Dialog*, no. 7 (1993): 53. Podgorny complained at the same meeting “With regards to defense issues Comrade Khrushchev strongly criticized Stalin, but you yourself, Nikita Sergeevich, did not grasp all issues. Military men say that you do not know how things stand with regards to the defense of the country.” 54.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 207–8.

The army is the main support for us, but you are putting it under the knife. On whom will we rely?"<sup>164</sup> Moreover, strong forces within the party itself favored the military-industrial complex. In September 1962, the CC CPSU Bureau for Russian affairs released a document forbidding defense enterprises from being used by kolkhozes and sovkhozes.<sup>165</sup>

A report on the discussion of Khrushchev's removal at a party meeting of the military leadership in Germany revealed no opposition in the ranks to the purge. Even the anonymous questions, a common method for expressing doubt in a political decision, did not hint at disappointment in the change in leadership. One of the "most characteristic questions" was whether the attitude towards Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich would now change - a sign that Khrushchev had failed to fully discount their prestige and popularity.<sup>166</sup>

In the summer of 1964, Khrushchev called Zhukov and said: "You know, it was difficult for me then to figure out what was going on inside your head, people were coming to me and saying: 'Zhukov is a dangerous person, he ignores you, at any moment he can do whatever he wants. His authority in the army is too strong, apparently the 'crown of Eisenhower' does not give him peace' ... Now I am very busy. When I return from vacation we will meet and discuss matters as friends."<sup>167</sup> Was Khrushchev considering a rapprochement with Zhukov? Did he remember Zhukov's comment that he was his "best friend?" But this possible last attempt to grope for allies failed. In October, Khrushchev would be removed from power.

#### *Khrushchev and the KGB*

Khrushchev not only had big plans for the military. Profoundly skeptical of the KGB, he planned to undermine its ability to ever again lead the country into a period of terror like that of the Stalinist era.

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<sup>164</sup> Grinevskii, *Tysiacha I Odin Den' Nikity Sergeevicha [One Thousand and One Days of Nikita Sergeevich]*.

<sup>165</sup> Fond 89, opis 17, delo 8 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>166</sup> RGANI, fond 3, opis 22, delo 16, listy 18-20.

<sup>167</sup> Naumov et al, *Georgii Zhukov*, 539.

He promoted either individuals personally beholden to him or individuals without a background in political police work. Yet by trying to destroy its political power, he ultimately undermined his own: the head of the KGB, unhappy with his boss' attempts to denigrate his department, played a crucial role in his removal in October 1964.

At first Khrushchev relied on Ivan Serov, a man whom Khrushchev met in Ukraine despite his traditional antipathy towards men from the "organs."<sup>168</sup> Given Serov's role in some of the bloodiest tragedies of the Stalinist era, he understood that only Khrushchev could guarantee his political survival and strongly supported him. Yet Khrushchev did not love the KGB, and never entirely trusted even Serov. In the summer of 1957, Khrushchev gave a toast during which he said to Serov: "The KGB is our eyes and ears, but if it looks in the wrong direction, then we will tear out their eyes, their ears we will rip off, and we will act like Taras Bul'ba said: it was I who gave birth to you, and it is I who will kill you."<sup>169</sup>

Khrushchev defended Serov from his detractors as late as November 24, 1958, arguing that he behaved loyally. But everything changed shortly after a December 3 Presidium meeting, where it was revealed that Ignatov lied over the phone that Serov was not in his office when in fact he was. Suddenly it seemed like Ignatov and Serov might have had a private relationship threatening to Khrushchev's interests. One Presidium member claimed that Malinovskii was somehow involved, but the rough record of the meeting does not provide details [*byl Malinovskii pri etom dele*].<sup>170</sup>

One of the reasons for Serov's removal was also his "departmental patriotism and unwillingness to move to serious cuts in the KGB apparatus." In September 1958, Zheltov, now head of the Administrative Department in the CC, proposed mass cuts to the KGB, which Serov opposed. On February 24, 1959, Khrushchev publicly declared his intention to cut the size of state security workers.

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<sup>168</sup> Nikita Petrov, *Pervyi Predsedatel' KGB Ivan Serov [First Head of the KGB Ivan Serov]* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 27.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>170</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 340-41.

Khrushchev was forced to nominate figures from the party apparatus, like Shelepin and Semichastnyi, to run the KGB.<sup>171</sup> However, even Shelepin, a man with a purely party background, ended up supporting the KGB and expressed opposition in March 1959 to Khrushchev's attempts to lower pensions for KGB officers.<sup>172</sup>

Shelepin and Semichastnyi were chosen to run the KGB because they lacked background in that organization. Khrushchev told Shelepin that his mission was to restore to the KGB party style and methods of work: "I have one favor: do everything you can to ensure that they do not eavesdrop on me."<sup>173</sup> Semichastnyi was stunned when Khrushchev told him he would replace Shelepin as head of the KGB, as he had no experience in the political police. Khrushchev cut him off, explaining he was picked precisely for that reason: the KGB did not need a specialist, but instead someone who "would understand well why these organs existed, and to execute in them the policies of the party" and continue to enact reforms.<sup>174</sup> Semichastnyi also claimed that he informed Khrushchev of only the most important affairs and did not discuss daily operations.<sup>175</sup>

Khrushchev upset the KGB by proposing that, like the party, it also be divided into urban and rural departments. He even proposed turning the KGB into a civil organization: in other words, stripping KGB officers of military ranks and their right to wear uniforms. Semichastnyi found the idea preposterous. If it was a civil organization, then professional unions would have a say in operations. Discipline would deteriorate. Ultimately Khrushchev accepted these arguments, but Khrushchev did not promote a single KGB officer to the rank of general while Shelepin or Semichastnyi ran the

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<sup>171</sup> Aleksandr Kokurin and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Lubianka: organy VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917-1991: spravochnik [Lubyanka: Organs of the VChK-OGPU-NKVD-NKGB-MGB-MVD-KGB, 1917-1991. Directory]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratia," 2003), 156–57.

<sup>172</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 30, delo 295, listy 22-25 (Harvard Cold War Studies Collection)

<sup>173</sup> Aleksandr Shelepin, "Istoriia- Uchitel' Surovyi [History- A Stern Teacher]," *Trud*, March 14, 1991.

<sup>174</sup> Iurii Aksiutin, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: materialy k biografii [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Materials for Biography]* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1989), 52–53.

<sup>175</sup> Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 180.



organization.<sup>176</sup> Khrushchev also targeted the political power of the MVD. In January 1960, he proposed that it be dissolved and its authority transferred to the Union's constituent republics.<sup>177</sup>

As soon as Khrushchev was removed from power, the new leadership moved to meet the goals of the KGB. In November, Semichastnyi was made a full member of the CC. On December 9, 1964, a large group of chekists who had been waiting years were finally awarded the rank of general. Semichastnyi himself was made general-colonel, almost certainly because of his role in Khrushchev's removal.<sup>178</sup> In October 1957, Khrushchev told Semichastnyi that the examples of Beria and Zhukov had led the party leadership to the conclusion that the KGB and minister of defense should not be members of the Presidium, as "this will bring them much more power, and they do not always use it appropriately."<sup>179</sup> This decisions would be reversed during the Brezhnev era.

#### *Khrushchev and the Party*

Khrushchev, contrary to the expectations of hypothesis 1a, also had bad news for the party itself. Having finally achieved personal security after the horrors of the Stalin era, party and state bureaucrats fell into an atmosphere of "bribery, corruption, and moral decay."<sup>180</sup> Khrushchev's plans were difficult for them to implement and the bureaucrats lied when they failed. Khrushchev desperately tried to find a way to fix the party, but his continuous reorganizations only created a level of dissatisfaction that his opponents could use in their move against him. As the editors of a collection on Khrushchev's regional policies argue, "there were no effective methods to combat 'regionalism,' bureaucratism and the ineffectiveness of the apparat. Without the possibility (for subjective and objective reasons) to use

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 342–43.

<sup>177</sup> Kokurin and Petrov, *Lubianka*, 133.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>179</sup> Abramova, "Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS i Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi 'Ottepeli' (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev's 'Thaw' (1953-1964)," 289.

<sup>180</sup> Iu. V. Aksiutin and A.V. Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe Obshchestvo: Problema Liderstva i Transformatsiia Vlasti [Post-Stalinist Society: The Problem of Leadership and the Transformation of Power]* (Moscow: Nauchnaia Kniga, 1999), 216–17.

Stalinist methods, Khrushchev engaged primarily in reorganizations of the party-government structure and the intimidation of officialdom.”<sup>181</sup> Khrushchev’s attempts to control and reform the apparatus demonstrate the difficulty of controlling a party regime without strong, formalized ‘rational-legal’ institutions, strong personal prestige, or the use of force. His preemptive purges of factions, attempts to structurally weaken the party apparatus, establishment of a parallel monitoring structure, and the promotion of younger leaders more beholden to his leadership all failed to save him or made the situation even worse. At the same time, however, the political dynamics at the time were marked by a great deal of contingency. In other words, these policy disputes were hardly decisive, and the move against Khrushchev was still highly risky.

The act of promoting allies to higher positions did not entirely fail to inspire at least some gratitude, but it was a weak tool. Khrushchev was also known to promote individuals with shady pasts, such as his nomination of Frol Kozlov to the leadership of the Leningrad party organization, hoping that they would be entirely dependent on his continued leadership. He placed himself in the formal positions of first secretary of the party, chairman of the Russian bureau in the CC, and chairman of the Council of Ministers (the premiership). Because he did not have the time to control every decision and needed to rely on assistants, he used the tactic of nominating a “primary” assistant and a “secondary” assistant as a balance to make sure no one individual grew too powerful.<sup>182</sup> When a faction of Presidium members (Ignatov, Aristov, and Furtseva) started to form, Khrushchev tried to initiate conflicts between them.<sup>183</sup> When Mukhitdinov persuaded Kozlov and Kirichenko, two feuding Presidium members, to bury the hatchet, Khrushchev essentially exiled him by making him ambassador to Great Britain.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Khlevniuk et al, *Regional'naja politika N.S. Khrushcheva*, 14.

<sup>182</sup> A.V. Sushkov, *Prezidium TsK KPSS v 1957-1964: Lichnosti i Vlast' [The Presidium of the CC CPSU 1957-1964: Personalities and Power]* (Ekaterinburg: Institut istorii i arkeologii UrO RAN, 2009), 77.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

Yet these tools failed to solve Khrushchev's problems. The question of how to use a second-in-command who could help him manage an intense workload remained intractable. In 1959, Kirichenko, the second secretary (Khrushchev's formal position was first secretary), was assuming too much independence. He was removed from the top leadership and the position of second secretary was abolished. Yet when the practice of having members of the secretariat serve as second secretary in alphabetical order proved unworkable because of a lack of decisiveness, which led the bureaucracy to escape from the control of the top leadership, Khrushchev was forced to recreate the position and install Kozlov.<sup>185</sup>

Khrushchev also struggled to defeat the natural growth of factions, including those made up of the allies who had helped him defeat the "anti-party group," like Aristov, Ignatov, Furtseva, and Mukhitdinov.<sup>186</sup> These figures were all suddenly removed from the leadership in 1961. However, the structural conditions Khrushchev faced made such maneuvers a weak weapon at best, and its usefulness could only deteriorate. As Sushkov concluded, "[a]s time showed, the members of the Presidium of the CC made the appropriate conclusions about the personal qualities of Khrushchev, who for the first time in front of them without a twinge of conscience removed from his shoulders all responsibility and placed it on other leaders..."<sup>187</sup> The sudden purge of Khrushchev's former allies led to "the strongest psychological shock" among the leadership.<sup>188</sup>

Although Khrushchev had forsworn the use of the KGB as a political weapon to control the party, what about another parallel structure? The Soviets back during the Lenin era had devised such a mechanism: the party and state control commissions.<sup>189</sup> Khrushchev decided to re-emphasize these structures at the end of 1961 when it was becoming obvious that the decisions made at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>189</sup> Mark R Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline and Soviet Power* (London: Tauris, 1988).

Congress were not being executed. Unlike Khrushchev's other reforms, these took time to execute, as, unsurprisingly, they were opposed by party figures like Kosygin and Mikoian.

Yet at the same time, even Khrushchev feared this organization becoming too powerful. Khrushchev emphasized: "I want to emphasize that it is necessary to avoid any possibility of some sort of contradiction between [the Committee on Party Control] and the CC CPSU. Therefore it is necessary to firmly establish that the entire work of the Committee take place under the leadership of the CC CPSU and the Presidium." Yet by March and April of 1963, the Committee on Party and State Control saw the addition of the Armed Forces and the KGB was added to its bailiwick. Although the Committee was controlled by Khrushchev's protégé Aleksandr Shelepin, the danger that this institution would grow too powerful for Khrushchev's liking was obvious. That concern was obviously justified: Shelepin played a major role in Khrushchev's removal in October 1964. Moreover, the logistical problem of monitoring the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was enormous. By April 1963, 3,270 committees at various levels had been established without any obvious improvement in governance or military reform. Pikhovitskiy correctly identifies the paradox inherent to this organization: it not only placed enormous power in a potential competitor, but it also annoyed the party it was meant to control.<sup>190</sup>

Another possible parallel structure to the party was the state legislature: the Supreme Soviet. Khrushchev was heavily involved in creating a new constitution. According to drafts completed before he was removed, Khrushchev intended to transform the Supreme Soviet from a purely legislative role to the most important institution for running the country as a whole [*verkhovnogo upravleniia stranoi*]. New functions included expanding constitutional control, increasing the number of state organizations that members of the Supreme Soviet could address with a question, a greater number of standing commissions, and more free time for the deputies to serve on these commissions.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> R. G. Pikhovitskiy, *Sovetskii Soiuz: istoriia vlasti, 1945-1991* [*The Soviet Union: A History of Power, 1945-1991*] (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia gossluzhby pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 1998), 245–51.

<sup>191</sup> A. Pyzhikov, *Khrushchevskaiia "Ottepel"* [*Khrushchev's "Thaw"*] (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2002), 312.

Khrushchev also tried to improve his power by promoting younger leaders. Ukrainian party boss Shelest wrote in his diary that Brezhnev was concerned about Khrushchev's repeated statements that the leadership was old and it was necessary to make it younger.<sup>192</sup> On October 1, Khrushchev met Shelest in Simferopol. Khrushchev complained to him that the Presidium was a "company of old men [*obshchestvo starikov*]." He complained about Suslov, Podgorny, and even Mikoian, but especially Brezhnev, whom he described as an "empty person [*pustym chelovekom*]." Khrushchev said, "We will summon a plenum, and we will put each in their place, show them how everyone should work and where." Shelest concluded that Brezhnev must have felt that if this plenum was allowed to happen, he would be the first to be punished: "therefore he was mortally afraid of the upcoming plenum, and he had only two options: to force the 'matter' with Khrushchev or give up everything to him."<sup>193</sup>

Khrushchev himself admitted that losing touch with broad segments of the elite was a mistake: "All is finished. Kaganovich once taught me that it was necessary to meet with the secretaries of the obkoms more, not less, than twice a week. I neglected this, I had someone else do it."<sup>194</sup> The new leader better met the concerns of the Soviet elite: it was no coincidence that Brezhnev was selected as leader. As Khrushchev's son-in-law and former editor of *Izvestiia* argued, "The apparatchiks saw in Brezhnev one of their own, they felt that he was prepared to place responsibility on other shoulders so that it would be easier to live."<sup>195</sup> Brezhnev, "closely tied with the old generation at the top of the nomenklatura, as well as with the military-industrial complex," forged an alliance with the younger generation, known as the "komsomols" because of their earlier leadership of the party youth organizations.<sup>196</sup> He was supported by the military-industrial complex, which he had overseen for many years. Vladimir Chelomei, a major military engineer, told Khrushchev's son, "I know [Brezhnev]'s character. He will agree with everything

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<sup>192</sup> Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 201.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>194</sup> Oleg Troianovskii, *Cherez Gody I Rasstoianiiia. Istoriia Odnoi Sem'i [Through the Years and Distances. History of One Family]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1997), 263–64.

<sup>195</sup> Adzhubei, *Te desiat' let [Those Ten Years]*, 300.

<sup>196</sup> A.B. Bezborodov et al, eds., *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza [History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2013), 321.

that Ustinov [chairman of the Military-Industrial Commission] tells him. Ustinov commands him as he likes, he [Brezhnev] is completely subservient to his will.”<sup>197</sup>

The above evidence suggests that Khrushchev was making so many enemies that he was doomed to fail. However, that interpretation fails to account for the great deal of contingency that shaped elite politics at this time. First, Khrushchev was not entirely without support even within the CC, and second, as opposed to the conclusions of many Soviet watchers at the time, until he was removed there was no visible opposition to him in the leadership.

Khrushchev’s decided to split the party into industrial and agricultural segments. In the memorandum to the Presidium where he explained this decision, Khrushchev argued that the party leadership too often had a “campaign character”: in other words, there would either be too much focus on industry and too little on agriculture, or vice versa. As economic tasks grew more complicated, party leaders would need to be able to spend more time on more specialized tasks. Two party committees were to be created in each oblast’ (at the republic level, a single CC would remain, but two “bureaus” would be created<sup>198</sup>. Khrushchev essentially forced the decision down the throat of the party, even quoting a famous line from a novel by Ilf and Petrov to describe his behavior at a Presidium meeting ten days later: “there will be a parade, and the one commanding the parade will be me.”<sup>199</sup> At discussions of Khrushchev’s removal at party meetings throughout the Union, the most common emotional refrain was criticism of his constant reorganizations, especially the split into agricultural and industrial obkoms.<sup>200</sup> Local party secretaries immediately tried to limit the extent to which Khrushchev’s new reorganizations

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<sup>197</sup> Sergei Khrushchev, *Pensioner Soiuznogo Znacheniiia [Pensioner of National Importance]* (Moscow: Vremia, 2010), 59.

<sup>198</sup> Tomilina et al, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev]*, 2:657–84.

<sup>199</sup> Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii. Stenogrammy. [Presidium of the CC CPSU. Volume 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]*, 576.

<sup>200</sup> RGANI, fond 3, opis 22, delo 16, list 14.

were implemented in their locales.<sup>201</sup> Gorbachev theorized that Khrushchev was trying to destroy the party apparatus and build a new political base: with two first secretaries in every region, it would have been easy for Khrushchev at the next Party Congress to drastically change the makeup of the CC.<sup>202</sup> In the summer of 1964, Khrushchev started moving towards an even more aggressive assault, the elimination of party committees at the *raion* level, the realization of which “would in practice bring a serious strike on the position of the ruling party as a whole.”<sup>203</sup>

Certainly Khrushchev’s splitting of the party was an important contribution to his defeat, and hypothesis 1a should be given its due. However, recent scholarship by Russian historian Khlevniuk suggests that this conclusion must be strongly qualified. Khrushchev did not in fact completely and irrevocably destroy support within the CC, which suggests that policy differences might not have been as important as was previously appreciated. In other words, if the context of the final showdown had been different, Khrushchev might have had some reason to believe the CC would not have inevitably forsaken him.

First, the split did not include the leadership at the republic level, and therefore “in reality these measures did not have serious impact on the position of the old republic leaders, and therefore did not meet special doubts in the regions.” With regards to the leadership at the *krae* and *oblast’* level (of which only 60% were affected), the cadres proved skilled in ensuring that the reforms were limited. Khlevniuk writes: “It’s obvious that the split of the apparatus was a good way of reshuffling regional leaders. But Khrushchev only used it to an insignificant extent. The posts of the new ruling structures were basically

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<sup>201</sup> Khlevniuk et al, *Regional’naia politika N.S. Khrushcheva*, 457–67, 519–21.

<sup>202</sup> O.V. Khlevniuk, “Rokovaia Reforma N.S. Khrushcheva: Razdelenie Partiinogo Apparata I Ego Posledstviia. 1962-1964 Gody. [The Fatal Reform of N.S. Khrushchev: The Separation of the Party Apparatus and Its Consequences. 1962-1964],” *Rossiiskaia Istoriiia*, no. 4 (August 2012): 165.

<sup>203</sup> Andrei Postnikov, “Dokumenty Federal’nykh Arkhivov O Smene Rukovodstva SSSR v Oktiabre 1964 G. (Istochnikovedcheskii Analiz) [Documents of the Federal Archives on the Change in the Leadership of the USSR in October 1964]” n.d., 115.

filled by old leaders.” The former leader of the region tended to dominate whomever was posted in the other committee in the same region.

Therefore, Khlevniuk concludes the following:

The relatively restricted impact of the Khrushchev reform on the apparat was facilitated by three factors. First, the reform from the beginning was not of a radical nature. The apparat of a significant number of oblasts and autonomous republics remained untouched. Second, the split of oblast’ and krai structures was not accompanied by a noticeable cadre rotation. Third, the reform was conducted under the control of the leaders of the previous obkoms and kraikoms which maintained their superior position.... This tactic of conducting reorganization was the result of a compromise between the center and regional officials.<sup>204</sup>

In other words, this policy position was not entirely fatal for Khrushchev.

As opposed to the old Sovietologists who believed Khrushchev was constantly struggling against factions opposed to his policies, the available evidence strongly indicates that resistance to Khrushchev before he was suddenly removed was only latent and at best expressed only very indirectly. Khrushchev constantly allowed himself to verbally humiliate the other members of the elite.<sup>205</sup> For example, at a Presidium meeting in August 1964, Khrushchev asked a colleague to stick a memorandum into the nose of a Presidium member who contradicted the first secretary.<sup>206</sup>

Despite these humiliations and policy differences, the elite rarely contradicted Khrushchev openly. As Molotov asked in a letter to the CC in the mid-1960s, “where, in all the material after 1957 and all the way up to October 1964, can even the slightest opposition to Khrushchev be found? It is not on a single one of the thousands of pages published all these years from CC CPSU plenums, party congresses, the dozens and hundreds of meetings at the highest level both on the all-union and republic level.”<sup>207</sup> When the division of the party took place in 1962, one observer noticed that it was

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<sup>204</sup> Khlevniuk, “Rokovaia Reforma N.S. Khrushcheva: Razdelenie Partiinogo Apparata I Ego Posledstviia. 1962-1964 Gody. [The Fatal Reform of N.S. Khrushchev: The Separation of the Party Apparatus and Its Consequences. 1962-1964],” 177.

<sup>205</sup> William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 1 ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), 578–619. Taubman writes that on one occasion, Khrushchev’s behavior “recalled Stalin’s last years, when he had humiliated Khrushchev by making him dance.” 610.

<sup>206</sup> Artizov et al, *Nikita Khrushchev. 1964*, 94–95.

<sup>207</sup> V.M. Molotov, “Pis’mo V.M. Molotova v TsK KPSS (1964 G.) [Letter from V.M. Molotov to the CC CPSU],” *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 3 (March 2012): 94.



enthusiastically applauded and supported although privately he did not hear “one good word about the new organization, only bewilderment and outright rejection.”<sup>208</sup> The CC plenums were hardly serious discussions. Khrushchev drastically increased the number of individuals who could attend them and was making the meetings “parade brouhaha” to “avoid possible criticism from the members of the CC.”<sup>209</sup>

Despite this power, Khrushchev still failed to improve the USSR in the way he wanted. He revealed the paradoxical nature of his power to Castro:

You’d think I, as first secretary, could change anything in this country. Like hell I can! No matter what changes I propose and carry out, everything stays the same. Russia’s like a tub full of dough, you put your hand in it, down to the bottom, and think you’re the master of the situation. When you first pull out your hand, a little hole remains, but then, before your very eyes, the dough expands into a spongy, puffy mass. That’s what Russia is like!<sup>210</sup>

These conflicting tendencies mean the use of terms like “strong” or “weak” poorly encapsulate Khrushchev’s position after 1957. On the one hand, he clearly made decisions that upset others within the elite. His attempts to stabilize his authority often only worsened his position, and the party often found ways to subtly slow down his reform efforts. He was of course removed in 1964. On the other hand, Khrushchev’s policies were not universally unpopular, and other members in the elite only rarely dared to express a different position from Khrushchev. As the rest of this chapter reveals, this paradoxical political environment made rule manipulation and control over the coercive forces extremely important.

## **Section 2: Selectorate Theory vs. Rule Manipulation**

Despite significant opposition to Khrushchev, the conspirators *still* did not use established party rules to engineer Khrushchev’s removal. Ukrainian party boss Shelest described Khrushchev’s removal as a “heinous political villainy committed surreptitiously, through conspiracy and intrigue” that was just like

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<sup>208</sup> Nikolai Barsukov, “The Rise to Power,” in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 62.

<sup>209</sup> The context of this accusation was a speech by Suslov in the version of the 1964 October plenum sent to party members. However, at the real plenum Suslov’s short speech did not include this. Artizov et al, *Nikita Khrushchev. 1964*, 242.

<sup>210</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 598.

the palace intrigues of old.<sup>211</sup> What explains this puzzle? As this section demonstrates, although Brezhnev and his allies understood that Khrushchev was unpopular, a) that unpopularity did not guarantee a successful coup and b) allowing the CC as a whole to participate in the decision created the possibility that Brezhnev's own position would come under threat. He therefore lacked the authority a fully legitimate process might have provided him.

If Khrushchev could rely on the maneuverability a close relationship with the military and KGB provided, might he have emerged victorious? As discussed in the previous section, Khrushchev was unpopular, but not universally disliked. Shelest in his memoirs wrote that "it would be wrong to say that N.S. Khrushchev did not enjoy a certain authority and prestige, popularity among the party and people. Saying otherwise would violate truth and history."<sup>212</sup> Suslov was afraid that the conspiracy might lead to a split in the party or even a civil war.<sup>213</sup> One CC member wrote a memo on October 14 that said "The Presidium is meeting, something is going on. I agree that something must be said about deficiencies, but it is wrong to run to extreme measures... Brezhnev is vain and power-hungry." She was summoned to a "certain place" so her activities could be controlled.<sup>214</sup> Another Khrushchev supporter, L.N. Efremov, had been sent to remote Kyzyl to give an award so he could not participate in the plenum.<sup>215</sup> According to one former member of the apparat, before his removal there were many rumors that Khrushchev would introduce many new young people into the Presidium. Although some spoke of a plan to remove Khrushchev, very few people believed it.<sup>216</sup> According to a major Russian historian, Barsukov, despite

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<sup>211</sup> Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 241.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>215</sup> "Kak Snimali Khrushcheva: Beseda S Uchastnikom Tekh Sobytii [How Khrushchev Was Removed: A Conversation with a Participant of Those Events]," *Dialog*, no. 7 (1993): 48.

<sup>216</sup> Aleksandr Iakovlev, *Omut Pamiati [Whirlpool of Memory]* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), 151.

Khrushchev's hugely unpopular plans for more changes to the party structure, the next plenum would almost certainly still have approved those plans if not for the conspiracy.<sup>217</sup>

According to Semichastnyi, while the Presidium was meeting on October 13, he received phone calls from members of the CC and members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet who said to him: "Why are you sitting [doing nothing], they are removing Khrushchev, and you are inactive!" Semichastnyi called Brezhnev to warn him that the discussion in the Presidium must not be allowed to drag on: "there could be unpredictable actions: there is a lot of excitement around."<sup>218</sup> He also warned Brezhnev: "if a group of members of the CC come, I won't be able to stop them. I cannot use physical violence against them. Some will come to save you, others - Khrushchev." When Brezhnev exclaimed this must not be allowed to happen, Semichastnyi asked: "And you... will do what? Refuse to allow them to appear in the waiting room?" He emphasized that one side was asking him, as head of the KGB, to summon Brezhnev to order [*prizval vas k poriadku*]. Semichastnyi later told an interviewer: "It's unlikely I would have been able to hold on through the second night as the demands to arrest Brezhnev and the other plotters against Khrushchev were getting more insistent."

Semichastnyi portrays his behavior as apolitical, but warning Brezhnev, lying to callers that he did not know what was going on, and choosing to accept the legitimacy of the Presidium over CC members clearly shows the importance of the KGB.<sup>219</sup> If he wanted to behave like then-KGB head Serov in June 1957, he could have easily rallied pro-Khrushchev sentiment. A repeat of those events was clearly on the mind of the plotters. When Polianskii's speech at the Presidium meeting went on too long, Kosygin interrupted: "it is necessary to not talk so long, otherwise we will be waiting until like it was in 1957, the

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<sup>217</sup> N.S. Khrushchev, 1894-1971: *Materialy Nauchnoi Konferentsii, Posviashchennoi 100-Letiiu so Dnia Rozhdeniia N.S. Khrushcheva, 18 Aprelia 1994 Goda* [N.S. Khrushchev, 1894-1971: *Material from a Scientific Conference Dedicated to the 100 Birthday of N.S. Khrushchev, April 18 1994*] (Moscow: Rossiiskii gos. gumanitarnyi universitet, 1994), 116.

<sup>218</sup> *Neizvestnaia Rossiia. XX Vek* [The Unknown Russia. 20 Century], vol. 1 (Moscow: Istoricheskoe nasledie, 1992), 278.

<sup>219</sup> Nikolai Dobriukha, "Poslednee Otkrovenie Semichastnogo [Semichastnyi's Final Revelation]," *Ogonek*, no. 3-4 (January 22, 2001).

members of the CC will come and carry us all out of here.”<sup>220</sup> According to Khrushchev’s son, the members of the Presidium also agreed to not answer their telephones so as to prevent Khrushchev from persuading any of them from defecting from the coup.<sup>221</sup>

During the Presidium meetings, Khrushchev asked to be allowed to address the plenum, which was a right given party rules. However, Brezhnev interrupted him and stated emphatically: “This will not happen.”<sup>222</sup> Brezhnev proposed to the CC plenum following the Presidium meetings that the decision to remove Khrushchev simply be passed, not discussed. Polianski proposed that Brezhnev be named first secretary, and the decision was confirmed not in private voting but by a show of hands.<sup>223</sup> The entire plenum ended quickly, serving essentially as a rubber stamp for the Presidium’s decision. Semichastnyi and Egorychev both told Russian historian Aksiutin that this was done because they were afraid that discussions would spiral out of control, Brezhnev himself might be criticized, and the leadership would have its hands tied by whatever may come out of a free discussion about mistakes over the Khrushchev era.<sup>224</sup> When a KGB operative later asked Andropov why there was no debate at the plenum after Suslov’s presentation, Andropov answered: “And did you not count how many members of the plenum had been appointed during the Khrushchev era?”<sup>225</sup> Polianskii prepared a much harsher speech towards Khrushchev in case he insisted on speaking to the plenum or the proceedings somehow began to slip out of the control of the conspirators.<sup>226</sup> Luckily for them, it turned out to be unnecessary.

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<sup>220</sup> “Kak Snimali Khrushcheva: Beseda S Uchastnikom Tekh Sobytiï [How Khrushchev Was Removed: A Conversation with a Participant in Those Events],” 52.

<sup>221</sup> Khrushchev, *Pensioner Soiuznogo Znacheniiä* [*Pensioner of National Importance*], 90.

<sup>222</sup> P.E. Shelest, “Vospominaniia Uchastnika Sobytiï O Neprostykh Momentakh v Istorii Strany. O Khrushcheve, Brezhneve, I Drugikh [Memoirs of a Participant of Events of Complicated Moments in the History of the Country. On Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Others],” *Argumenty I Fakty*, no. 2 (January 14, 1989): 5–6.

<sup>223</sup> Artizov et al, *Nikita Khrushchev. 1964*, 236–37.

<sup>224</sup> Iurii Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaia “ottepel” i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953-1964 gg. [Khrushchev’s “Thaw” and Societal Attitudes in the USSR 1953-1964]* (Moscow: ROSSPËN, 2004), 574.

<sup>225</sup> Aleksandr Bovin, *XX Vek Kak Zhizn [The Twentieth Century as Life]* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2003), 124.

<sup>226</sup> “Takovy, Tovarishchi, Fakty... (Doklad D.S. Polianskogo) [These, Comrades, Are the Facts... (Report by Polianskii)],” *Istochnik* 2 (1998). This document included the line “We believe that it would be most reasonable to behave such that comrade Khrushchev himself resigned from his positions.”

Evidence for the extent to which rules were being violated can be seen through a close read of the two different records of the October CC plenum in the archives: the one that contained the actual deliberations [*nepravelannaia*], and the edited version [*stenograficheskii otchet*] that was disseminated as the official version. First, according to the edited version, participants of the plenum spontaneously spoke out against having an open debate; the unedited version shows that in fact Brezhnev suggested to the plenum that there not be such a debate. Second, according to the edited version, Suslov told the plenum that Khrushchev decided on his own that he did not want to speak. Other documents show that Khrushchev did in fact want to address the plenum and that the plenum was never given a reason for why Khrushchev was not allowed to defend himself. This was highly unusual, as even the “anti-party group” and Zhukov had been given such a chance.

Third, the edited version claims that Brezhnev’s candidacy as party secretary was proposed spontaneously by the participants of the plenum. In fact, this was done by Podgornyi. Moreover, no discussion was allowed for this proposal. Podgornyi asked: “are there any other proposals?” and immediately answered himself in the negative. According to Mukhitdinov, when Timoshenko heard Podgornyi’s proposal in favor of Brezhnev, the marshal said: “Who? Lenya as first secretary? Geez...”. By the time Timoshenko raised his hand to request the right to speak, the decision had already been made not to open the proposal up for discussion.

The proceedings turned even more into a farce when CC member M.A. Lecechko made a proposal to introduce the position of second secretary. Although a decision to create such a position had been made at the Presidium on October 14, the idea mysteriously disappeared at the CC plenum. Lecechko had apparently heard a rumor about these discussions. Brezhnev did not allow Lecechko to

finish speaking, instead interrupting him to say that “now we are not raising this issue.” Before Lecechko could respond, Brezhnev declared the meeting over.<sup>227</sup>

The uncomfortable questions the leadership might have faced in a more open plenum can be seen in a document written a few months later. At a seminar of a lector group [*na seminare lektorskoi gruppy TsK*] held in the agricultural department of the CC, a number of questions were raised by party, state, and science workers about a CC plenum held in March 1965 about agricultural issues. The more typical of those questions were included in a special note written in May 1965. That list included: why were mistakes only recognized openly many years after the people suffered an enormous loss? It turned out that Khrushchev, like Stalin, wanted his own cult and was a poor leader. This raises the question. Where was the Presidium of the CC? What attitude should we have to the debate in the Presidium CC in 1957, when some of the leadership (Khrushchev) made a bet on new eastern virgin regions, and another part supported the investment into traditional regions, which the March CC plenum brought attention to?<sup>228</sup>

By all accounts, Brezhnev was terrified of Khrushchev. When Shelest suggested that instead of a coup the leadership simply meet and discuss the situation, Brezhnev almost screamed: “I already told you, I do not believe in open conspiracies, whoever speaks first will be the first to be hurled out of the leadership.”<sup>229</sup> According to Moscow party boss Egorychev, after Khrushchev told Mikoian to investigate the evidence of a plot, Brezhnev started crying and said: “Kolia, Khrushchev knows everything. He will shoot all of us.” When Egorychev argued that they were not violating any party rules, Brezhnev responded: “You don’t know Khrushchev well.” Egorychev even had to take Brezhnev to a sink and tell

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<sup>227</sup> Postnikov, “Dokumenty Federal’nykh Arkhivov O Smene Rukovodstva SSSR v Oktiabre 1964 G. (Istochnikovedcheskii Analiz) [Documents of the Federal Archives on the Change in the Leadership of the USSR in October 1964],” 231–36.

<sup>228</sup> A.I. Shevel’kov, “‘Pochemu Ia Dolzhen Verit’ Martovskomu Plenumu TsK KPSS?’ ‘Neudobnye’ voprosy Partiinomu Rukovodstvu. Vesna 1965 G. [‘Why Do I Have to Believe the March CC CPSU Plenum?’ ‘Inconvenient’ Questions to the Party Leadership. Spring 1965],” *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>229</sup> Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 203.

him to clean himself up.<sup>230</sup> Suslov was also afraid of what would happen. When he was told of the plot, his lips turned blue and his mouth twitched: “What are you talking about?! There will be a civil war.”<sup>231</sup>

Shelest’s written diaries, available in RGASPI, include a crucial detail not present in his published memoirs. Shelest wrote that one of the options considered by the conspirators was to arrest Khrushchev on the road. They chose not to pick this option because they were afraid Khrushchev’s bodyguards would open fire, but also “in case of arrest how would it be justified, motivated?... This is already treason, a coup. And the consequences are a liability.” He also, however, noted that they only came to this conclusion after extended arguments and conversations. This remarkable admission is interesting for two reasons. First, it showed the extent to which wholesale ignorance of party institutions was considered as a possible option for the conspirators. Second, it shows that although institutions could be manipulated, the conspirators understood that wholly ignoring them would lead to a greater cost in terms of how legitimate their actions would be considered.<sup>232</sup>

Brezhnev allegedly even wanted to murder Khrushchev. According to Semichastnyi’s memoirs, Brezhnev wanted the KGB to arrest Khrushchev after returning from Leningrad and isolate him. Semichastnyi refused. Semichastnyi even claims that Brezhnev hinted that he wanted Khrushchev to be assassinated [*sklonil razgovor k vozmozhnosti fizicheskoi likvidatsii Khrushcheva*].<sup>233</sup> According to one former KGB operative, in 1988, after reading Semichastnyi’s account, Gorbachev called for an investigation into the matter. The KGB chairman ordered Semichastnyi to write a formal report on the organization’s experiments with poisons and Brezhnev’s alleged instructions, but Semichastnyi refused.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> *Neizvestnaia Rossiia. XX Vek [The Unknown Russia. 20 Century]*, 1992, 1:291.

<sup>231</sup> Shelest, “Vospominaniia Uchastnika Sobytiia O Neprostykh Momentakh v Istorii Strany. O Khrushcheve, Brezhneve, I Drugikh [Memoirs of a Participant of Events of Complicated Moments in the History of the Country. On Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Others].”

<sup>232</sup> Postnikov, “Dokumenty Federal’nykh Arkhivov O Smene Rukovodstva SSSR v Oktia bre 1964 G. (Istchnikovedcheskii Analiz) [Documents of the Federal Archives on the Change in the Leadership of the USSR in October 1964],” 80–81.

<sup>233</sup> Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 351–52.

<sup>234</sup> Pavel Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness- a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 284.

In his closing remarks to his last Presidium meeting, Khrushchev stated: “I am happy - finally the party has grown up and can control any person. You all met and spread shit all over me, and I cannot oppose you.” Khrushchev was right: the party had finally reached the point that it could overthrow leaders who refused to take their interests into account. But the victory contained a paradox: in the words of a Soviet analyst of international relations, “the changeover was met with approval, and even joy, almost everywhere” but was also a “*coup d’etat* in the truest sense of the term.”<sup>235</sup>

### Section 3: Coercive Institutions

Although Khrushchev was unpopular in much of the party, the KGB and military played a decisive role in his removal. Key figures only agreed to the move against Khrushchev after they were sure that the power ministries supported Brezhnev, and even Brezhnev himself did not return to Moscow to participate in the final preparations until the defense minister made his position clear. This critical role for the power ministries is very strong evidence for hypothesis 3b. The importance of this element despite strong opposition to Khrushchev among the Presidium and in much of the CC speaks to the weakness of the economic model even when no leader enjoys an especially high level of personal prestige or control over the armed forces.

Former KGB head Semichastnyi wrote in his memoirs that Brezhnev and Podgornyi understood that without guaranteeing the support of the KGB, they would not be able to remove Khrushchev, and indeed Semichastnyi played an important role.<sup>236</sup> On October 12, the day the conspirators moved against Khrushchev, Brezhnev called Semichastnyi’s office at Lubyanka, the KGB headquarters, every hour to ask if there was news.<sup>237</sup> When Khrushchev arrived in Moscow after being summoned by the conspirators, he was met by Semichastnyi with several KGB operatives.<sup>238</sup> In Moscow, he was blocked

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<sup>235</sup> Georgi Arbatov, *The System: An Insider’s Life in Soviet Politics*, 1 US Paperback Edition (New York: Random House, Inc., 1993), 100–101.

<sup>236</sup> Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 349.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>238</sup> Iakovlev, *Omut Pamiati [Whirlpool of Memory]*, 153.



from using the phone to rally support and his bodyguards were changed. Shelest remarked that Khrushchev, still officially first secretary of the CPSU and chairman of the Council of Ministers, could not even call his wife.<sup>239</sup>

Yet Semichastnyi was not the only important figure from the power ministries supporting Brezhnev. Brezhnev was also supported by Nikolai Mironov, the head of the Administration Department of the CC, an innocuous sounding institution that managed the KGB, police, military, procuracy, and the courts. According to one account, Mironov, who enjoyed great authority among the generals and KGB, served as the “chief of the general staff” in preparing the plenum that approved the Presidium’s decision to remove Khrushchev from power.<sup>240</sup> For example, Mironov called Nikolai Mesiatsev, a party apparatchik, a few days before the October plenum to ask: “apparently Khrushchev will be removed from his positions, what is your attitude towards this?” Mironov also told him he would become head of the Committee on Radio and Television.<sup>241</sup>

Unfortunately for Khrushchev, his ability to manage the power ministries had recently collapsed. Froz Kozlov, Khrushchev’s planned successor, held the position of party secretary managing the armed forces, military industry, and KGB. Kozlov admitted to another figure in the leadership that other members of the Presidium were afraid of him, since at any moment he could use *kompromat* to remove them from their position [*podsidet*’]. Unfortunately this work load proved too much, and Kozlov had a stroke in 1963 and died shortly afterwards. According to one party figure, “I will say here, that my strictly personal opinion is that if Kozlov had lived [until] the CC plenum in October 1964, Khrushchev’s opponents would have achieved nothing.”<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 231.

<sup>240</sup> V.F. Nekrasov, *Apparat TsK KPSS v Pogonakh I Bez. Nekotorye Voprosy Oborony, Gosbezopasnosti, Pravookhranitel’noi Deiatel’nosti v TsK KPSS [The Apparatus of the CC CPSU In and Out of Uniform. Several Issues of Defense, State Security, and Judicial Activities in the CC CPSU]* (Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2010), 74.

<sup>241</sup> “V Gody ‘Kul’tprosveta’ [In the Years of Kul’tprosvet],” *Zhurnalist*, no. 1 (1989): 36.

<sup>242</sup> V.N. Novikov, “V Gody Rukovodstva Khrushcheva [In the Years of Khrushchev’s Leadership],” *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 2 (February 1989): 106, 114.

Semichastnyi spoke of the need to guarantee Defense Minister Malinovskii's support for the coup: "No one wanted to end up in the position of Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Shepilov, who joined them. Khrushchev was still the commander in chief, and although a direct clash with him was highly unlikely, nevertheless this possibility could not be excluded until the last minute." Brezhnev feared meeting with Malinovskii and waited until the last moment to speak with him: "if R. Ia. Malinovskii did not support the plan, everything would become extremely difficult [*chrezvychaino oslozhnilos' by*]." Most interestingly, "on the eve of the conspiracy L.I. Brezhnev went to the GDR and returned only after Malinovskii gave his agreement on October 10."<sup>243</sup> Shelepin later said that Malinovskii "also immediately agreed! And this was understandable: Khrushchev sharply argued with the military. And the matter was not simply in the cuts in the army of 2.5 million people, which, I think, was done correctly, but he constantly rudely insulted the marshals, ignoring their human dignity."<sup>244</sup> Historian Roy Medvedev wrote that when Khrushchev was summoned to Moscow to be removed from power, Malinovskii also came to the phone, although he provides no evidence.<sup>245</sup>

Shelest provided a somewhat different account of the military's behavior. In his diary he wrote that sometime between October 5 and 7 he received a call from Brezhnev and Podgorny. They told him that there was "a conversation with A.A. Grechko with regard to the 'role' of the army in all of these 'activities with regard to the matter' - he took all this with a big fright and essentially avoided giving a direct answer. R. Malinovskii answered definitively that the army would not participate in solving issues of internal politics."<sup>246</sup> We cannot judge for certain which of these accounts regarding Malinovskii is more accurate, but Semichastnyi was more deeply involved in the plot and Brezhnev could have been lying to ensure Shelest's support.

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<sup>243</sup> Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 350, 358.

<sup>244</sup> *Neizvestnaia Rossiia. XX Vek [The Unknown Russia. 20 Century]*, 1992, 1:279.

<sup>245</sup> R. Medvedev, "N.S. Khrushchev. God 1964-I - Neozhidannoe Smeshchenie [N.S. Khrushchev. The Year 1964-Unexpected Removal]," in *Stranitsy Istorii KPSS* (Moscow, 1988), 642.

<sup>246</sup> Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 221.

General Beloborodov, commander of the Moscow Military District, also agreed to the removal of Khrushchev. The KGB's military counter-intelligence and counter-intelligence units in the Moscow District were ordered to follow even the slightest movements in the Soviet Army and to immediately inform the KGB if troops moved toward Moscow.<sup>247</sup> The general commanding the Transcaucasian Military District escorted Khrushchev from his vacation home to the airport, which was clearly meant to ensure Khrushchev's departure.<sup>248</sup> Military cadets were sitting on the floor of the coatroom at the entrance to the CC.<sup>249</sup> However, the military did not actively take part in Khrushchev's removal. As Russian historian Abramova argues, its role was "more passive than active."<sup>250</sup> Yet this passivity was necessary for the plot to succeed, and it is especially glaring given the absolutely crucial role the military played in the power struggles of 1953 and 1957 as discussed in other chapters.

The importance of the military and KGB for the outcome can also be seen in how their positions affected the attitude of key members of the leadership. The memoirs of Novikov, head of external economic relations, include the following passage: "I asked, 'what, are they planning to remove Khrushchev?' Ustinov confirmed this. I had a question, how did the military and KGB feel about this? I received an answer: everything is in order, there will be complete support. Then I agreed."<sup>251</sup> When Kosygin was told of the plot, he asked: "Who is the army and state security with?" and when told Malinovskii and Semichasnyi were aware of the course of events [*v kurse dela*] also agreed.<sup>252</sup> Suslov

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<sup>247</sup> Semichasnyi, *Bespokoinoe Serdtse [Restless Heart]*, 358–60.

<sup>248</sup> Khrushchev, *Pensioner Soiuznogo Znacheniiia [Pensioner of National Importance]*, 86.

<sup>249</sup> Iakovlev, *Omut Pamiati [Whirlpool of Memory]*, 154.

<sup>250</sup> Abramova, "Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS I Sovetskoii Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi 'Ottepeli' (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev's 'Thaw' (1953-1964)]," 161.

<sup>251</sup> Novikov, "V Gody Rukovodstva Khrushcheva [In the Years of Khrushchev's Leadership]," 115.

<sup>252</sup> Iu. V. Aksiutin, ed., *L.I. Brezhnev: Materialy K Biografii [L.I. Brezhnev: Material for Biography]* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), 51.

also asked who the military and KGB supported before giving an answer.<sup>253</sup> Therefore, three crucial figures only made a decision after it was clear who the power ministries supported.

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

Institutions mattered once again in the ways identified by the theory chapter. First, Brezhnev did not go any further beyond what was necessary to guarantee victory. Although the prospect was considered, Khrushchev was not simply arrested or assassinated. Even though he did not allow any real debate or discussion at the meeting, Brezhnev did summon a CC session to legitimize the removal of Khrushchev.

Second, Khrushchev did not choose to resist the united Presidium. Realizing that fighting back would only hurt the party and lead to uncertain results, he ultimately accepted the Presidium's demands that he resign without even trying to force a potentially damaging discussion at the CC. Khrushchev flew to Moscow to meet the conspirators without apparently first trying to summon military forces in another city or build up resistance in some other city.

Third, although the position of the power ministries was absolutely critical, in terms of action their role can still be described as subtle. No violence was actually used. Malinovskii had to give his permission to the plotters, but he did not actively participate. Semichastnyi possibly might have persuaded Brezhnev not to simply assassinate Khrushchev. Moreover, when Semichastnyi recognized that the longer the political deliberations were delayed the more likely it was that Khrushchev's supporters would rally, he warned Brezhnev that he would not be able to hold them off forever.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>253</sup> Abramova, "Vzaimootnosheniia Rukovodstva KPSS i Sovetskoi Armii v Period Khrushchevskoi 'Ottepeli' (1953-1964) [Mutual Relations Between the Leadership of the CPSU and the Soviet Army in the Period of Khrushchev's 'Thaw' (1953-1964)]," 159.

We cannot answer whether or not Khrushchev would have ultimately found a solution to the Soviet Union's structural economic deficiencies. Most importantly, despite his increasingly desperate attempts to find a better model for agricultural production, which included positive steps like higher procurement prices and the end of mandatory deliveries, he never seemed to see failures in that realm as anything more than low levels of education and poor leadership - not in the separation of peasants from the fruits of their own labor. His decision in 1958 to reverse his earlier moves in favor of private plots for peasants was so disastrous that it had implications for the geopolitics of the entire twentieth century.<sup>254</sup> Scholars have pointed to the difficulty of reforming the Soviet system even with political will at the elite level.<sup>255</sup>

Yet Khrushchev was far from an ideological hack. The great historian of the USSR Volkogonov wrote that "[t]he decade of Khrushchev's rule demonstrated his potential as an innovator, a demolition artist, experimenter, opportunist, and inventor."<sup>256</sup> He in fact often made comments on ideological matters quite similar to Deng Xiaoping. In a speech to intellectuals in 1957, he claimed that if Marx, Engels, or Lenin came back to life they would complain that people were not studying the new situation and were even looking at their old works to "see how to act in a certain region with a machine-tractor station."<sup>257</sup> One party member recalls how Khrushchev once "read a long ideological segment [of a speech] and, apparently, tired, sighed with relief and said 'Well, now let's get down to business.'"<sup>258</sup> He referred to

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<sup>254</sup> Tomilina et al, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva* [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev], 2:7–8; Il'ia E. Zelenin, "N.S. Khrushchev's Agrarian Policy and Agriculture in the USSR," *Russian Studies in History* 50, no. 3 (December 2011): 44–70.

<sup>255</sup> János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, "Soviet Industry in the World Spotlight: The Domestic Dilemmas of Soviet Foreign Economic Relations, 1955–1965," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 9 (November 2010): 1555–78.

<sup>256</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy of an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 210.

<sup>257</sup> Tomilina et al, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva* [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev], 2:466–67.

<sup>258</sup> *Neizvestnaia Rossiia. XX Vek* [The Unknown Russia. 20 Century], 1993, 3:381.

propagandists as loafers and freeloaders unneeded by the people, who need “gulash.”<sup>259</sup> He was not unaware of the importance of material inducements.<sup>260</sup> In February 1963 he told the American editor of *Saturday Review* that he wanted responsibility to be decentralized to the “action level” and that “the Soviet Union would be placing more and more emphasis upon personal incentives in order to get on with the job.”<sup>261</sup> Scholars who emphasize the Chinese communist system’s supposed greater relative capacity for experiments forget that the late Khrushchev years saw a great number of such experiments in Soviet factories.<sup>262</sup> And as described above, a fundamental reason for his dismissal was the amount of political capital he spent on a desperate series of political reorganizations that attempted to solve these problems.

Khrushchev also hoped to better institutionalize the Soviet system through a new constitution. However, we see the drafts of that constitution becoming gradually less radical as the time of the coup approached. Although earlier drafts provided for a President of the USSR, multiple-candidate elections, and a limited number of terms deputies could serve, these ideas did not appear in the final draft, nor did they appear in the Brezhnev-era document that appeared many years later.<sup>263</sup> Khrushchev describes his failure to introduce a new constitution as one of his three greatest failures, along with not rehabilitating Bukharin or opening borders.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> K.T. Mazurov, “Ia Govoriu Ne Tol’ko O Sebe [I Speak Not Only of Myself],” in *Ot Otpepli Do Zastoia* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1990), 129.

<sup>260</sup> Tomilina et al, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev]*, 2:470.

<sup>261</sup> Sampson and Joyce, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Soviet Union. Volume V*, 630.

<sup>262</sup> Igor’ Karpenko, “Na Vysokikh Gosudarstvennykh Postakh [At the Highest Government Posts],” in *Prem’er Izvestnyi I Neizvestnyi: Vospominaniia O A.N. Kosygine*, ed. T.I. Fetisov (Moscow: Respublika, 1997), 8–9; Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J Perry, “Embracing Uncertainty: Guerrilla Policy Style and Adaptive Governance in China,” in *Mao’s Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, ed. Elizabeth J Perry and Sebastian Heilmann (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

<sup>263</sup> Postnikov, “Dokumenty Federal’nykh Arkhivov O Smene Rukovodstva SSSR v Oktiabre 1964 G. (Istochnikovedcheskii Analiz) [Documents of the Federal Archives on the Change in the Leadership of the USSR in October 1964],” 165–67.

<sup>264</sup> Khrushcheva, “Khrushchev Khranil v Seife Stikhi Mandel’shtama [Khrushchev Kept in His Safe Mandelshtam’s Poetry].”

In September 1964, Khrushchev wrote a memorandum to the Presidium, in which he complained that the Soviet Union was not learning enough from foreign countries. He proposed purchasing models and licenses of foreign technologies to produce at home: “The example of Japan is relevant. Japan quickly developed its industry and technology, it developed on the basis of copying and purchase of licenses.” He noted that western firms were willing not only to sell but to provide credit.<sup>265</sup> In another memorandum that same month, Khrushchev complained that the USSR was behaving in an autarchic fashion with regards to science and technology and that history had shown autarchic nations were “beaten.”<sup>266</sup> In August, Khrushchev told the Presidium that more encouragement was needed so that individuals would be more interested in their work and complained that shepherds were making twice as much as doctors.<sup>267</sup> His inclination was towards decentralization: his opponents accused him of proposing that industrial territorial departments [*proizvodstvennykh territorial'nykh upravlenii*] be liquidated and that kolkhozes and sovkhoses be run directly at the oblast' and krai level.<sup>268</sup>

Determining the extent to which Khrushchev's ideological blinders would have prevented him from ultimately finding the right answers with regard to industry or agriculture and whether such reforms were possible given the nature of the Soviet system will require more research. However, the evidence provided in these chapters is an integral part of the story of the failure of the Soviet Union as a political project - how weak authority limited even attempts to find a way to make the system work.

As early as the 1950 and 1960s, a Soviet leader had fully understood the unsustainability of the Soviet model and tried to instigate reforms. He realized that an arms race with the West would lead to unsustainable expenditures on nuclear and conventional weapons.<sup>269</sup> He refused to rule using the power

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<sup>265</sup> Tomilina et al, *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva Tsveta Vremeni, Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Two Colors of the Times, from the Personal File of N.S. Khrushchev]*, 2:745–46.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:750.

<sup>267</sup> Artizov et al, *Nikita Khrushchev. 1964*, 94.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>269</sup> At a conference commemorating the Cuban Missile Crisis, former Khrushchev advisor Fedor Burlatskii said: “Why was it after this horrible shock for both countries we continued to compete in weapons? This is a very

ministries, the KGB or military, as supplemental bases of support outside the party.<sup>270</sup> He ultimately was removed by the powerful groups that he tried to change and replaced by an individual who represented more conservative forces. At the very least, we can be almost certain that if Khrushchev's authority had been more secure, fewer resources would have been devoted to heavy industry and the military. Yet Brezhnev could not have failed to draw lessons from Khrushchev's fall. For decades, the Soviet Union chose to ignore the persistence of those structural deficiencies. In Volkogonov's words, "It was during Brezhnev's rule that the machine approached its apogee... The power of the apparatus made puppets of the General Secretaries, with the result that the country approached the future at a slower and slower rate."<sup>271</sup>

The way that Khrushchev achieved victory over his opponents in 1957 and was removed from power in 1964 is therefore a prologue to the stagnation of the Brezhnev era: in both cases, the interests of the regions as expressed in the CC had triumphed over the leadership at the top, and the top leadership had not been selected according to a truly democratic sense. As one group of Russian historians and archivists argues:

The removal of Khrushchev in October 1964 was a fact with great political significance, which had significant impact of the political consciousness on both the highest Soviet leaders as well as the Soviet bureaucracy as a whole. The entrenched party-state 'nomenklatura' for the second time in a relatively short period of time demonstrated that it was a real power in solving the most important question - about the highest positions in power in the country. This circumstance played its role in the gradual change in the center's regional policy in the 1970s, in the proclamation of the guarantee of the so-called stability in cadres - the immovability of cadres and the weakening of central control over regional leaders.<sup>272</sup>

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important issue. I believe that this was not Khrushchev's decision. I believe that this was made by the next leadership as an answer to the actions of the Americans... I believe that after the death of Kennedy and the removal of Khrushchev both countries lost a good opportunity to cut weapons."25-Letie Kubinskogo Raketnogo Krizisa 1962 Goda. Konferentsiia Amerikhanskikh I Sovetskikh Politikov I Uchenykh v Kembridzhe (Mass.) [25 Anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Conference of American and Soviet Politicians and Academics in Cambridge (Mass.)," 27.

<sup>270</sup> For an explanation of why Khrushchev resisted an alliance with the intellectuals, who sympathized with his anti-bureaucratic sensibilities and de-Stalinization, see V. M. Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>271</sup> Volkogonov, *Autopsy of an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime*, 274.

<sup>272</sup> Khlevniuk et al, *Regional'naiia politika N.S. Khrushcheva*, 17.



Khrushchev had one great triumph: the end of terror as a mechanism for control. But in doing so, he destroyed any ability to lead the party. In the words of Aksiutin, “Khrushchev was sure that [the secret report denouncing Stalin] was a guarantee that [the Terror] would never be repeated. The apparat would work not by fear, but by conscience. He was wrong. Our apparat cannot work by conscience, it does not work that way. It works either by fear, or by something more material: for privileges, for benefit, for money.”<sup>273</sup> When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, having learned the lessons of the Khrushchev-era, he chose to step outside the confines of the party and derive support for his policies by opening up to a more open media, elections, and citizen participation. Xi Jinping has decided not to repeat Gorbachev’s mistakes. But in doing so, he may be repeating Khrushchev’s mistakes.

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<sup>273</sup> Lev Lur’e and Irina Maliarova, eds., *1956 God. Seredina Veka [1956. Middle of the Century]* (Saint Petersburg and Moscow: Neva, 2007), 125.

## Chapter 6: The Fall of Hua Guofeng (First Two Hypotheses)

### Introduction: Return of the Old Comrades

Mao Zedong watched the power struggles in Moscow described over the last four chapters with rapt attention and increasing dismay. The politics of Khrushchev's Soviet Union ultimately convinced the chairman that the party of Lenin and Stalin had become a self-interested bureaucracy corrupted by capitalist inclinations. Only this degeneration could explain why the USSR had adopted such anti-revolutionary policies. In a desperate attempt to prevent "revisionism" from occurring in his own country, Mao launched one of the most radical political experiments in human history: the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.<sup>1</sup> The result, even according to the party's own official verdict, was a disaster of epic proportions. This was especially true for the old guard who saw their status and power stripped away by those who had not contributed nearly as much to the Chinese Communist Party's stunning victory in 1949. Mao knew that the Cultural Revolution was not loved: "Only heaven knows what will happen to you after I die [你们怎么办? 只有天知道]," he allegedly remarked on his deathbed.<sup>2</sup> Soon after Mao died, his successors applied their own lesson from Soviet politics: the Gang of Four was arrested by a group with support in the military and security services so they could not rally support from the Central Committee [CC] like Khrushchev did in 1957 to defeat the "anti-party group."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Walder, *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Michael Schoenhals and Roderick MacFarquhar, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Shi Yun and Li Danhui, *Nanyi Jixu de "Jixu Geming": Cong Pi Lin Dao Pi Deng [The "Continuous Revolution" That Was Difficult to Continue: From Criticizing Lin to Criticizing Deng], 1972-1976* (Hong Kong: Quanzhou faxing zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2008), 660.

<sup>3</sup> When plotting against the Gang of Four, Beijing party head Wu De thought a Politburo vote against them would be better than arresting them suddenly. Li Xiannian asked him: "Do you know how Khrushchev came to power?" Li believed that although they had a majority on the Politburo, they were less sure about the Central Committee. If legal measures were used, the Gang would have a chance to seek out support from the CC, which could override the Politburo. The Gang was therefore arrested before any official decision on them to prevent their supporters from mobilizing. Wu De, *Wu De Koushu: Shinian Fengyu Wangshi-Wo Zai Beijing Gongzuo de Yixie Jingli [Wu De's Oral Account: Past Events during the Ten Years' Storm-Some Experiences from My Work in Beijing]* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2004), 237-238.

At the time of Mao's death a man named Hua Guofeng sat at the top of the party, state, and military structures. After having considered an astonishing number of possible successors, Mao had unenthusiastically settled on this man whom he described as "honest but not well-educated [厚重少文]". Mao was forced to name Hua as the successor because the "needle wrapped in cotton" Deng Xiaoping had disappointed him for the last time. When Premier Zhou Enlai's legendary administrative talents started to fail to his debilitating cancer, Mao summoned Deng, who had been purged at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, to bring the country back to its feet. But Deng was too good at his job, and Mao and the radicals became afraid that he was not loyal to the legacy of the Cultural Revolution. So by the end of 1975, Deng's rectification goals were on the ropes, and, by April 1976, he was removed from all of his positions. When Mao died and the extremist Gang of Four was destroyed by a group led by Hua, Deng was still under house arrest, only hearing the news of the Gang's destruction in his toilet with the water on to prevent eavesdropping, a cigarette shaking in his hand, asking his daughters to repeat the news because of his bad hearing. "It looks like I can spend my last days in peace," Deng said.<sup>4</sup>

Yet by 1981, Deng had eclipsed the younger Hua as paramount leader, thus inaugurating what would become known as an era of "old person politics [老人政治]." Mao's attempt to pass the baton to a younger generation was thwarted. Unlike in the Soviet Union, the transition away from the politics of a cult of personality saw the reassertion of the power of the old comrades. The Cultural Revolution proved to be a temporary hiatus before traditional authority relations were once again re-established. The subject of this and the next chapter explains the puzzle of how this came to happen.

Although some elements of this story have been accurately identified by historians and political scientists, newly-available evidence allow us to now make a serious revisionist account of this time period (as well as provide much more expansive corroboration of what previous scholars got right). To a

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<sup>4</sup> Cheng Guanjun, "Ye Xuanji Jiangshu Fensui 'Sirenbang' Yu Deng Xiaoping Fuchu [Ye Xuanji Discusses Smashing the 'Gang of Four' and the Return of Deng Xiaoping]," *Tongzhou Gongjin*, no. 2 (2012); Deng Rong, *Deng Xiaoping and the Cultural Revolution: A Daughter Recalls the Critical Years* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2002), 440–41.

significant extent, the consensus position of China scholars maps out well according to the principles of the economic model introduced in the theory chapter of this dissertation. According to this position, Hua Guofeng, although not as sinister as the Gang of Four, still adhered to a dogmatic and radical ideology. He tried to prevent Deng Xiaoping from returning to work. He attempted to block the rehabilitation of old revolutionaries purged during the Cultural Revolution. His economic policies were disastrous. He was surrounded by his own faction, known as the “whateverists.” As recently as 2011, Lowell Dittmer wrote that “as a beneficiary of the Cultural Revolution (and Mao’s personal benediction), Hua felt obliged to continue the heaven-storming policies of radical Maoism, thereby losing the support of the moderates who had helped him dispose of the Gang.” Dittmer describes this viewpoint as “consensually accepted by the scholarly community.”<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, Deng replaced Hua as a result of his more popular policies being selected through a manifestation of inner-party democracy. Hua was an exceptionally weak figure whose fall was inevitable. The military did not play an especially important role in the transition.

These characterizations range from outright fabrications to gross simplifications. Using primary source material from the Hubei provincial archives, the Cultural Revolution Database, the Service Center for Chinese Publications, the Harvard Fung Library, and official publications, as well as memoirs, history journals, and history books published in the mainland or Hong Kong, in the next two chapters I present a different narrative of the crucial years of 1976-1981. These materials decisively show the greater explanatory power of the authority model.

Because this is a work of political science, the evidence in these two chapters is not arranged chronologically but functionally. I therefore begin this first chapter with a brief chronology so that the evidence provided henceforth is legible to readers not familiar with this time period. In this chapter I will also evaluate the first and second hypotheses of the economic and authority models, respectively. Placing

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<sup>5</sup> Lowell Dittmer, “Mao’s Forgotten Successor: The Political Career of Hua Guofeng. Robert Weatherley. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010,” *The China Quarterly* 205 (2011): 174–76.

all of the relevant information into one chapter would make it too long. The following chapter will focus entirely on the third hypotheses of those models by analyzing the crucial role of the military.

With regards to the first hypotheses of the economic and authority model, we see support for the latter in the following ways. First, the economic model would predict that the most democratic, consensus-oriented figure would win a political contest by his superior ability to co-opt threats. Those adjectives fit Hua Guofeng closely, but the winner, Deng Xiaoping, had an autocratic, dictatorial personality not given to compromise. Second, no real policy differences separated Hua and Deng. This included economics, the return of old comrades to work after being purged during the Cultural Revolution (including Deng), and ideology. The most important divide separating Hua from Deng was generational and their differing roles during the Cultural Revolution. Although the importance of Deng's authority as a revolutionary leader has been identified correctly by previous scholars, I provide not only new evidence corroborating that theory, but also show exactly *how* it mattered and contextualize it in crucial ways.

The reason we have such a wrong interpretation of Hua's role is the importance of *kompromat*: all of these charges were made against him to justify his removal from the leadership. We see the importance of *kompromat* in other areas as well. Hua's relationship with a man who controlled access to compromising materials, Wang Dongxing, meant that Hua was unfortunately tied to historical issues in a way unlucky for him. To remove Hua from any positions of formal power after his de facto defeat, Deng not only emphasized fake policy differences but also unfairly criticized Hua's historical role and employed personal attacks.

With regards to the manipulation of party rules, we do not see as much evidence as in other cases in this dissertation. However, two crucial factors support the authority model. First, a key moment on the trajectory to Deng's victory was the work conference before the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. That work conference saw the power of the Central Committee take the initiative away from the Politburo - a violation of the strongly entrenched informal rules regarding the relationship between those two bodies. Second, after Hua was eclipsed as paramount leader but while still formally the leader of the

country, he still enjoyed significant authority. His status as Mao's hand-picked successor, crucial role in the destruction of the Gang of Four, respect for old comrades, democratic sensibility, reformist inclination, and youth made him popular with many. Moreover, leftist forces started to rally (almost certainly without his encouragement) to Hua's banner. Instead of acknowledging leftist attitudes in the party, as well as signs that Hua was supported by significant portions at lower, middle, and even top sections of the party, Deng stripped Hua of any residual power, formal or otherwise, by directing the debate over his future in an undemocratic spirit.

### **Brief Chronology**

After the destruction of the Gang of Four in October 1976, Mao's successor Hua Guofeng supported political and economic reforms to rebuild society after the Cultural Revolution. Hua also sought a condominium with the revolutionary elders who suffered terribly during that time period, including Deng Xiaoping. Deng officially returned to work in the summer of 1977, when he took the positions of party vice chairman and chief of the general staff of the PLA. Both Hua and Deng had similar inclinations about the importance and nature of reform. However, the two had a major falling out in the spring of 1978, when a series of events related to control over the military led Deng to turn an obscure theoretical debate into a power struggle that would weaken Hua. Deng not only used the military to move that debate forward, but also demonstrated his control over the PLA by forcing an unpopular decision to attack Vietnam and dramatically reforming the armed forces. Hua's lack of status as a major revolutionary leader, his connection to a man with more ambiguous attitudes towards the old revolutionaries (Wang Dongxing), and suspicions among the old revolutionaries towards his history as a beneficiary of the Cultural Revolution also weakened his position. At the end of 1978, the famous 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum and its preceding work conference saw a focus on historical issues, the criticism of a slogan (the "two whatevers") connected to Hua, and the return of major revolutionary elders to high ranking positions.

In February 1980, four powerful individuals connected to Hua were removed from the leadership and Hua gave up his position as premier. Soon after, Hua made a speech with strongly “leftist” phraseology to a military meeting that deeply concerned Deng, who was afraid that radicals, especially young ones in the PLA, would rally to Hua. In August 1980, Deng made a major speech implicitly criticizing Hua. Hua offered his resignation that same month. Yet Deng still felt it necessary to engineer the inclusion of a deeply tendentious section on Hua in a decision on party history. Hua was also attacked with *kompromat* so outrageous that it was not included in that decision. Although Hua was stripped of any real power by the end of 1980, Deng left Hua in his formal positions as a false show of unity while preparing trumped-up charges to justify his rival’s removal. Despite significant support for Hua among regular party members and also among key top officials, Hua was demoted to vice chairman of the party in June 1981 and became a simple member of the CC in 1982.

### **Section 1: Policy Differences vs. Sociological Forms of Authority**

In this section I evaluate the first hypotheses of the economic and authority models. The evidence falls decisively on the side of the authority model. The economic model would have failed to predict that the more consensus-oriented leader would win. No real policy differences separated Hua and Deng, but Hua did not enjoy the revolutionary prestige Deng had, and Hua’s history during the Cultural Revolution made him an unfair target for *kompromat*. Finally, Hua was removed from all of his formal leadership positions more because he was *too* popular within the party, and therefore a potential rallying point for those dissatisfied with the leadership, than that he lacked popularity.

#### *The Democrat and the Autocrat*

According to hypothesis 1a, we should expect to see the leader best able to aggregate interests and co-opt threats achieving victory. If this was the case, Hua Guofeng, whose personality was very consensus-oriented, should have easily emerged the victor. However, we see instead support for hypothesis 1b: the individual with the more dictatorial personality, Deng Xiaoping, handily defeated Hua.

After having considered an astonishing number of possible successors, Mao Zedong had settled on a man whom he described in the following way: “Comrade Guofeng, I understand him very well, he has integrity and is honest, he can care for the masses, he can do investigations, he can unite comrades.” Ye Jianying agreed: Hua was “modest, careful, sincere, he has a democratic style...” Li Xiannian believed that he was “extremely principled.”<sup>6</sup> Deng Liqun in one of his speeches on party history remarked: “This person Hua Guofeng was very cunning [心计比较多], but it should be said that he did not engage in conspiracies...it should be said that Hua Guofeng’s life was just and honest [光明正大].”<sup>7</sup> After Hua was replaced by Hu Yaobang, a popular attitude negatively contrasted Hu’s carelessness [说话随便] with Hua’s carefulness and steadiness [谨慎稳重].<sup>8</sup> According to historian Xiao Donglian: “he was honest, his style was relatively democratic.”<sup>9</sup>

Hua told a group preparing his official biography of him that “After the destruction of the “Gang of Four” and when I was Chairman, collective leadership was very strongly emphasized, democratic centralism. It was not one or two people who could make decisions, collective leadership was needed. If collective leadership was good, matters would be dealt with well. The party center all lived at Yuquanshan together, stabilizing measures were all discussed collectively. All of my speeches were discussed by the Politburo collectively.”<sup>10</sup> According to former editor of *People’s Daily* Hu Jiwei, “[Unlike Mao,] when Hua Guofeng made mistakes, he could be criticized... he did not exert strict control, his methods were not cruel.”<sup>11</sup> Hua was a consensus builder. In April 1978, the propaganda

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<sup>6</sup> Li Haiwen, “Hua Guofeng Tan Shi Zhuan Xie Zuo [Hua Guofeng Discusses the Writing of History],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 4 (2015): 10.

<sup>7</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun’s Lectures on National History]*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo shigao bianweihui, 2000), 359.

<sup>8</sup> Chen Wenbin, “Zai Shuo Wu Jiang ‘Yi Wai Zao Yu’ [Discuss Again Wu Jiang’s ‘Unexpected Misfortune’],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>9</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]* (Hong Kong: Quanqiu faxing zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2008), 343.

<sup>10</sup> Li Haiwen, “Hua Guofeng Tan Shi Zhuan Xie Zuo [Hua Guofeng Discusses the Writing of History],” 8.

<sup>11</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Cong Hua Guofeng Xiatai Dao Hu Yaobang Xiatai [From the Fall of Hua Guofeng to the Fall of Hu Yaobang]* (Brampton: Mingjing chubanshe, 1997), 85.



apparatus put pressure on Hua to speak out on controversial ideological issues. Hua refused, saying that, as party chairman, speaking out too quickly would unfairly cause any debate to be stillborn.<sup>12</sup> To his credit, his decision not to rely on his formal position to fight tooth and nail against his removal speaks to his consensual and democratic personality. He told one interviewer that with regard to his resignation: “If the party had another internal struggle, the regular people would suffer. I stubbornly resigned from all positions. I told Marshal Ye before I did it. Some said that I was a fool. Some said that I was too honest. I do not regret it.”<sup>13</sup>

If Hua was the “reconciler,” as late China watcher Michel Oksenberg wrote in a memo to Zbigniew Brzezinski in May 1978, then Deng was the “asskicker.”<sup>14</sup> In a December 1973 meeting with the military high command, Mao said:

We now have invited a chief of the general staff [referring to Deng’s promotion to that position]. Some people are afraid of him, he deals with matters rather resolutely [办事比较果断]... You [Deng], people are a little afraid of you, I will describe you with a few words [我送你两句话]: toughness inside softness, a needle wrapped in cotton. On the outside you are a little gentle, but inside you are a steel factory.<sup>15</sup>

Mao’s conclusions were shared by many others. On October 31, 1976, Marshal Ye Jianying told an old friend: “This man Xiaoping, he never takes things easy, he monopolizes power [擅权], as soon as he comes back he will steal the show, and it will be impossible for Hua to show his stuff.”<sup>16</sup> Ye also blamed Deng for being too aggressive in 1975, when his rectification attempts went too fast and incurred Mao’s wrath: “This person is always like that, he is presumptuous [自以为是], he does not listen to the opinions of other people, he likes to take over the world by himself, he does not stop until he hits a

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<sup>12</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan Shishi (xu)’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng (Part 2)],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 9 (2011): 9.

<sup>13</sup> Li Haiwen, “Hua Guofeng Tan Shi Zhuan Xie Zuo [Hua Guofeng Discusses the Writing of History],” 7.

<sup>14</sup> Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Staff Material, Far East, Oksenberg Subject File, Box 56, Policy Process: 5/16–31/78. Secret; Sensitive.

<sup>15</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong nianpu: 1949-1976 [Chronology of Mao Zedong: 1949-1976]*, vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 512.

<sup>16</sup> This line was cut from the officially published version in Xiong Lei, “1976 Nian, Hua Guofeng He Ye Jianying Zenme Lianshou de’ [How Hua Guofeng and Ye Jianying United in 1976],” *Yanhuang chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 10 (2008). See <http://blog.china.com.cn/home.php?mod=space&uid=1235824&do=blog&id=203323>

wall.”<sup>17</sup> In early 1982, Ye privately warned Hu Qili, a member of the secretariat, about the dangers of one person making all the decisions: almost certainly a subtle jab at Deng, who was de facto leader of the country by then.<sup>18</sup> Ye’s concerns are not surprising. Even though he was one of the ten great marshals of the People’s Republic, his entire family suffered terribly during the Cultural Revolution. Despite his deep respect for Mao he understood the implications of complete autocracy, and this explains why he so emphatically described the importance of democracy and opposing “feudalism” in his concluding speech at the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum.<sup>19</sup>

Party intellectual Li Honglin remarked that “I discovered that Deng Xiaoping was a true “steel factory,” an absolute autocrat [一言堂]. Even when Hu Yaobang [then party secretary] went to him, he could not talk back, let alone other people.” As opposed to Mao, who when interacting with people would tell jokes and chat, “if [you] were in front of Deng Xiaoping, you could only accept his commands totally obediently [只能规规矩矩的接受指示].”<sup>20</sup> Revolutionary elder Li Rui has concluded that “Deng Xiaoping is half a Mao Zedong.”<sup>21</sup>

After becoming party secretary in 1987, the highest formal position in the party, Zhao Ziyang was confronted by key elder Chen Yun and asked why he never held any meetings. The answer was that Deng did not want to give Chen a chance to express his opinions. Zhao explained: “I’m just a big secretary. To have a meeting, we’ll have one after you discuss with Comrade Xiaoping.”<sup>22</sup> Deng’s own words revealed

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<sup>17</sup> Gao Wenqian, *Wannian Zhou Enlai [Zhou Enlai’s Later Years]* (Carle Place: Mirror Books, n.d.), 576.

<sup>18</sup> Cheng Guanjun, “Ye Xuanji Jiangshu Fensui ‘Sirenbang’ Yu Deng Xiaoping Fuchu [Ye Xuanji Discusses Smashing the ‘Gang of Four’ and the Return of Deng Xiaoping].”

<sup>19</sup> Han Gang, “Quanli de Zhuanli: Guanyu Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [A Shift in Power: About the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress],” *Lingdao zhe [Leaders]*, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>20</sup> Dong Daling, *Deng Xiaoping Bu Ke Gaoren de Mimi [Untold Secret of Deng Xiaoping]* (Deer Park: Mingjing chubanshe, 2013), 31.

<sup>21</sup> Rui Li, *Li Rui koushu wangshi* (Hong Kong: Dashan wenhua chubanshe, 2013), 455.

<sup>22</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]* (Hong Kong: Tian di tu shu you xian gong si, 2010), 315.

his attitude towards personal authority. In 1987, he informed the other elders that he would be the only “mother-in-law” for the PSC. On June 16, 1989, Deng would state that:

Any leadership collective must have a core, without a core the leadership is unreliable... In actuality I was the core of the second generation. Because there was this core, even though there were two leadership changes [secretaries-general Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang] it did not influence the leadership of our party, the leadership of the party was always stable.<sup>23</sup>

### *Irrelevance of Policy Differences*

The consensus view is that Hua and Deng also differed on major policy issues. Hypothesis 1a would assume that the victor in a political power struggle would be the one whose policy or patronage platform was more popular. Hypothesis 1b, on the other hand, instead allows for the possibility that power struggles can occur when policy differences are minimal and those differences are inflated for political purposes. New evidence emphatically demonstrates the greater explanatory value of hypothesis 1b. Deng in fact cooperated with Hua on a whole host of issues. According to Deng Liqun, “Deng [Xiaoping] and Chen [Yun] were united on some issues with Hua and conflicted on other issues, there was unity within the struggle [斗争中间有统一], it certainly was not that they opposed Hua Guofeng on every issue.”<sup>24</sup>

The dominant view is that Hua was an economic dogmatist and that he made major economic mistakes. Baum, for example, referred to the “unswerving public devotion [of Hua and his supporters] to whatever Mao said or did.”<sup>25</sup> Although Harding recognized that Hua “seemed to recognize the country’s need for a period of political normalcy and economic development,” he also concluded that Deng “had

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<sup>23</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan [Collected Works of Deng Xiaoping]*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), 310.

<sup>24</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun’s Lectures on National History]*, 2000, 3:356.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.

become convinced of the need for much more sweeping political and economic reforms than Hua Guofeng was willing to undertake.” Harding believed that Deng had “an attractive alternative program.”<sup>26</sup>

Recently, that argument has been under increasing attack. Hua began steps towards economic reform that are most commonly associated with Deng Xiaoping. As Teiwes and Sun show, on economic issues Hua was not an ideologue, and to the extent his policies were a failure Deng was equally culpable. They write that “on all key dimensions- the overambitious drive for growth, a newly expansive policy of openness to the outside world, and limited steps toward management reform- Hua and Deng were in basic agreement.”<sup>27</sup> They also show that Deng did not support key agricultural reforms as quickly as Hua, and that moreover this issue also had no bearing on their relative authority.<sup>28</sup> Teiwes and Sun also show Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping used the question of economic readjustment between 1979 and 1981 as a weapon against Hua Guofeng, even though Hua basically supported the change, Deng had been a major supporter of the policies that created a need for the adjustment in the first place, the readjustment was not popular among the top party elite, and readjustment was less ambitious in terms of “reform” than the expansionist policies supported by those elites.<sup>29</sup> Chinese historian Cheng Zhongyuan provides a series of examples of Hua contributing to changing ideological perceptions of economic issues, ranging from emphasizing production as a key element of revolution and challenging dogmatic views on not giving material benefits for hard work.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Harry Harding, *China's Second Revolution: Reform after Mao* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), 54–58.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, “China’s New Economic Policy Under Hua Guofeng: Party Consensus and Party Myths,” *The China Journal*, no. 66 (July 2011): 2.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *Paradoxes of Post-Mao Rural Reform: Initial Steps toward a New Chinese Countryside, 1976-1981* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, “China’s Economic Reorientation After the Third Plenum: Conflict Surrounding ‘Chen Yun’s’ Readjustment Program, 1979–80,” *The China Journal* 70 (July 2013): 163–87.

<sup>30</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, “1977-1978: Jingji Lingyu de Sixiang Jiefang Yu Gaige Kaifang de Qibu [1977-1978: Thought Liberation in the Economic Field and the Start of Reform and Opening],” *Jinyang Xuekan [Jinyang Journal]*, no. 3 (2010).

Most importantly, new evidence shows that Hua did not oppose changing the “key link” from class struggle to economic construction at the famous 3rd plenum. First of all, during Hua’s tenure “class struggle” did not have the same meaning it had during the Cultural Revolution. Then it meant the campaign to expose and criticize the Gang of Four. As historians Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua explain, “[a]t the time it was thought that the contradiction between socialism and capitalism, the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and the contradiction between Marxism and revisionism were collectively manifested as the contradiction between the Chinese Communist Party and ‘the Gang of Four.’”<sup>31</sup> Such a formulation made sense in the context of a major purge of leftists. After all, by August 1978, over one third of the top leaders in the provinces and autonomous cities had been removed.<sup>32</sup>

At the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1977, Hua and the top leadership’s plan was to finish the “ferreting-out (清查)” phase of exposing and criticizing the Gang of Four within the year or a little longer. As for the deep and systematic criticism of the Gang of Four’s “counter-revolutionary revisionist line and reactionary world-view,” this was “a long-term and more difficult mission.” As early as December 1977, Hua rejected suggestions to extend the “ferreting-out” any longer than a year.<sup>33</sup> At the Fifth National People’s Congress in February and March 1978, Hua said that the “ferreting-out” campaign was basically finished on a national scale.<sup>34</sup> But for some unclear reason, the top leadership never officially declared an end to the campaign as the “key link” or establish a new one. But the evidence is clear that Hua never intended for class struggle as the “key link” to mean a continuance of the Cultural Revolution, or that it would continue forever.

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<sup>31</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 2 (2011): 18.

<sup>34</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 21.

Deng has been credited with opposing “class struggle” as the “key link.” Evidence certainly shows that Deng made statements in this spirit. However, they were exclusively in regards to the situation in the *military*. There the situation was significantly different than in the party as a whole.<sup>35</sup> Those associated with Lin Biao had already been purged, and the Gang of Four itself had limited influence there, which was a major reason the PLA supported their destruction. Moreover, focusing on a purge of “gang” elements, as opposed to military training, meant the military was not doing what it was supposed to do: prepare for war. Deng therefore had reason to support a different timetable for the military than the rest of the party.

On August 23, 1977, Deng Xiaoping, who had only returned to work a month earlier, made a speech at a Central Military Commission (CMC) discussion meeting that questioned the long-term usefulness of the “key link” of class struggle as described at the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Deng said: “Chairman Hua suggested that presently the struggle to expose and criticize the ‘Gang of Four’ is our key link, and that it is imperative to execute this struggle to the end, but of this of course has a time limit (但这总也有一个时间限制嘛), that is to say, any time period always has a key link for that time period.” Most critically, Deng said “any department has its own key link.” In the military’s case, Deng wanted to end the expose and criticize movement to more quickly give education and training a “strategic status.” Historian Han Gang suggests that Deng behaved this way to “use the partial to supplant the whole” in order to weaken and change the “key link” of class struggle.<sup>36</sup>

Around September, a group led by Luo Ruiqing, the CMC secretary, began to prepare documents for a plenary session of the CMC in December. The topic of the main work report for the session was decided to be “grasp the key link to manage the military, prepare to fight a war.” This title was clearly reminiscent of the major military conference run by Deng Xiaoping before he was purged in 1975. In

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<sup>35</sup> I thank Warren Sun for clarifying this point.

<sup>36</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 17–18.

October, the authors of the report for the CMC meeting took a train with Deng to join Ye, who had already arrived in Guangzhou.

On this trip, Deng revealed that he was considering the best way to manage the “key link.” When discussing the draft of the main work report privately, Deng mused: “This document should still dress itself in the spirit of rectification and preparing for war... The title is alright, it should not be changed. What is the key link for this document? What is a key link? Criticizing and exposing Lin Biao and the ‘Gang of Four’ can be called a key link, but this is temporary, we still must make long-term considerations. How about class struggle as the key link?” Luo Ruiqing responded forcefully: “We cannot use ‘class struggle as the key link’ again, this is a stick for beating people.” Deng continued:

We cannot only speak of class struggle, we must also speak of stability and unity, we should improve the national economy. Every time period and type of their work have their own key link, how would it be if the entire socialist era always treated class struggle as the key link? For a certain time period exposing and criticizing Lin Biao and the ‘Gang of Four’ as the key link is alright, but military rectification and preparing for war is also class struggle... Lin Biao and the ‘Gang of Four’ also spoke of class struggle, they used the bourgeois to fight the proletariat, they tried to overthrow many old cadres.<sup>37</sup>

After arriving in Guangzhou, Deng decided that criticizing and exposing Lin Biao and the Gang of Four could be the “key link,” but that this had to be changed very soon. But Luo was unsure of the best way to execute this decision and asked the authors of the work report to come up with a way not to mention class struggle. After considering the matter, Luo decided to use a speech Mao gave in 1948, in which he spoke of the difference between the “mass line” and the “concrete work line.” In a similar spirit, Luo decided that although the “mass line” would be class struggle as the “key link,” the practical emphasis would be on the “concrete work line.” For the military, the concrete work line would be rectification, modernization, and preparing for war. Therefore, Luo successfully avoided the hugely controversial act of relinquishing class struggle but achieved a rationalization to move onto practical work while avoiding a discussion of “class struggle.”

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<sup>37</sup> Hua Nan, *Zhengtu Ganlu [Record of Feelings on a Journey]* (Beijing: Changzheng chubanshe, 2007), 115–17.

To strengthen the theoretical justification for such a move, Hua Nan made a phone call back to Beijing to ask the *People's Liberation Army Daily* to prepare a document called "The expositions of Chairman Mao on the 'key link.'" This document demonstrated that the formulation of the "key link" could change over time. When Luo was presented with this material, he was very happy. Luo said that if anyone criticized making "criticizing and exposing" the "key link," the response could be that this was merely a concrete manifestation of the "key link." Luo then ordered them to further prepare ways of rejecting "class struggle as the key link."<sup>38</sup>

The main report for the plenary session was controversial in another way as well: it did not emphasize Hua Guofeng's leadership position as much as other documents at the time. At the CMC standing committee meeting before the plenary session at which the document was discussed, Luo Ruiqing told Hua Nan that he would read the document because he expected there to be criticisms. His assumption was correct: several individuals complained that Hua's role did not receive enough attention. Luo rebutted these claims by quoting Lenin and the document was passed.<sup>39</sup>

Hua Nan provides the following reasons for precisely why the document for the December CMC plenary session was significant:

Under those historical conditions, Comrade Xiaoping still could not clearly refute 'class struggle as the key link.' But he cleverly imputed this way of thinking into the main report, and this can be seen in the content of the first and second pages of the main report. The content of the first page was about executing the struggle to expose and criticize Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four' to the end and achieve complete victory. The content of the second page was implementing the strategic thought of Mao Zedong and doing war preparation. The first page was the main key link [总纲], or in other words was the mass line of Comrade Xiaoping's speech, and in appearances, the piece did not violate 'class struggle as the key link.' But actually, the emphasis was on the second page. The second page was really our concrete key link, what Comrade Xiaoping called the concrete line. This clever differentiation allowed rectification of the military to be legitimate, and other people would be unable to cause trouble.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Fu Yi, "Weirao 'Liang Ge Fanshi' de Jiaofeng He 'Gang' de Zhuanyi- Fang Hua Nan Tongzhi [The Clash over the 'Two Whatever's' and the Change in the 'Key Link'- An Interview with Comrade Hua Nan]," *Bainian Chao* [Hundred Year Tide], no. 1 (2001): 8–9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. The interviewer's response: "I could never have expected that such a few short lines could contain such a deep esoteric meaning."



In 1978, Deng continued to criticize the “key link’s” focus on the Gang of Four in favor of more practical work, but again only in the context of the military. On March 20, in a meeting with the leadership of the GPD on the upcoming political work meeting, Deng encouraged them to edit the draft document for the conference by spending less time on the Gang of Four.<sup>41</sup>

Deng also implied dissatisfaction with the “key link” in a speech to the military political work conference in June: “times have changed, conditions have changed and those to whom our work is directed have changed so the approaches we take must change as well.” Therefore, the military needed “specific guidelines and policies for political work...In short, we are following Comrade Mao Zedong’s teaching that we should have specific guidelines and policies for our work in addition to the general line and general policies.” Although Deng recognized that “the exposure and criticism of the Gang of Four is the key task at present and will be so for some time to come”, he also emphasized practical work was also important:

When we discuss seeking truth from facts and the new period of development and new historical conditions, we should also discuss the question of destruction and construction. At present - and for some time to come - ‘destruction’ means exposing and criticizing in depth the Gang of Four and, collaterally, Lin Biao, so as to eliminate their pernicious influence. ‘Construction’ means understanding Mao Zedong Thought correctly and as an integral whole and restoring and carrying forward, under the new historical conditions, the fine traditions and style of work of our party and army.<sup>42</sup>

In September 1978, during Deng’s trip to the northeast he spoke with the top leadership of the Shenyang Military Region. In these conversations, he expressed dissatisfaction with the length of the campaign. Deng said: “With regards to the campaign, you can research, how does it end? There is never a complete victory. The campaign can’t really go on like this, right? When campaigns go too long people get sick of them. It is a little superficial, there is no goal, it’s formalism.”<sup>43</sup> On October 3, Deng met with Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun. Deng told them: “This time in the Shenyang Military Region I discussed the

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<sup>41</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Zuo Hao Xin de Lishi Tiaojian Xia de Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo [Doing Well Military Political Work Under New Historical Conditions]” (Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2004), 92–93, Deng Xiaoping junshi wenji [Selections of Deng Xiaoping’s Military Writings], Vol 3.

<sup>42</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Speech at the All-Army Conference on Political Work,” in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 134–36.

<sup>43</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 18.

issue of exposing and criticizing the ‘Gang of Four’, I said there must be an end to the campaign to expose and criticize the ‘Gang of Four’, we certainly cannot continue for another three or five years!”<sup>44</sup>

We now know that Hua did not oppose Deng on this matter. On October 9, Hua met with members of a committee doing work on Mao’s writings. Hua told them that when Deng was in Shenyang, the head of the Shenyang Military Region Li Desheng said that the officers at the grassroots levels had gotten sick of the campaign. Hua also said that Deng had raised five criteria for ending the campaign in the military. These were: whether or not the military’s traditions had been restored, whether or not unity had really been achieved, whether the image of the military in the eyes of the local government and people had changed, whether discipline had been achieved, and whether rectification of the cadre ranks had been completed.<sup>45</sup> Hua did not express opposition to Deng’s comments.

At a meeting on October 9, Hua suggested that the November work conference discuss this issue, a proposal that was approved by the Politburo.<sup>46</sup> On October 13, Deng wrote a notification on a GPD report about using the masses to expose and criticize the Gang of Four. Deng proposed that the report be discussed by the CMC standing committee and then discussed at the upcoming work conference. The next day, Deng told Wei Guoqing, head of the GPD, that his comments in the northeast (clearly meaning his speech on the “key link” to the Shenyang Military Region) could be communicated on a limited basis to top-ranking officers (可以在机关少数干部中先讲一讲). Deng said that the campaign to expose and criticize the Gang of Four would basically end by next year.<sup>47</sup>

On the night before the work conference meeting, Hua told some speechwriters: “It should be clear that the change [away from class struggle as the “key link”] will be made on January 1. Stubbornly

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<sup>44</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 394.

<sup>45</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 18.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:402; Liang Biye, *Wo Zai Renmin Jundui [Me in the People’s Army]* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1997), 380.

change. The opinions of local governments have been sought out, the Standing Committee has discussed, the Politburo has talked, everyone supports this, if again the change does not happen, work will be delayed.” However, Hua wanted the “change in emphasis” to still fall under the slogans of “class struggle is the key link” or “expose and criticize the ‘Gang of Four’ as the key link.” Hua’s reasoning for this as explained at the October 9 meeting was: “Liberating thinking is not intended to belittle the Chairman’s thinking... liberating thinking is not liberation from the Chairman’s thinking, that is simply not what is meant.” According to Han Gang, “with regards to [the work conference before the 3rd plenum], it was only on this little point that Hua’s opinion was slightly different from Deng’s.”<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, the differences between Hua and Deng were subtle. First, Hua wanted to use more ideological cover for the dramatic changes being planned in the leadership. As other sections of this chapter will reveal, this would almost certainly have led to less political instability over the next two years. Second, it is highly possible that the consistent delays in moving away from a primary focus on the purges was due to serious delays in implementation, not Hua’s opposition to change. The scope of the purges was enormous. As mentioned above, one third of the leaders at the provincial and autonomous city level were purged during this time period. Moreover, the purge ultimately reached enormous proportions, expanding well beyond those with direct connections to the Gang.<sup>49</sup> According to Hu Jiwei, ultimately 400,000 cadres were punished.<sup>50</sup>

Even in the armed forces, anyone with even suspected ties to the Gang of Four like Ding Sheng, Wang Meng, and Xiang Shouzhi, were punished, even though they were almost certainly innocent.<sup>51</sup> The problem was that who exactly was a “leftist rebel” was exceedingly difficult to determine, and some

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<sup>48</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 18.

<sup>49</sup> Cai Wenbin, ed., *Zhao Ziyang Zai Sichuan [Zhao Ziyang in Sichuan]* (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chuban jichuanmei youxian gongsi, 2011), 122.

<sup>50</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Hu Zhao Xin Zheng Qishilu [The Beginnings of Reform Under Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang]* (Hong Kong: New Century Media & Consulting Co. Ltd., n.d.), 97.

<sup>51</sup> Yuan Wei, *Fuzhi Changzai: Wang Meng Jiangjun Zhuan [Biography of General Wang Meng]* (Hong Kong: Beixing chubanshe, 2008).

leftist rebels later decided to support the old revolutionaries after realizing the folly of the Cultural Revolution, like Cai Wenbin. Some old revolutionaries joined the leftist rebels to attack their compatriots, like Ma Tianshui. The danger, however, was that if the purges were not complete, the equivalent of a ticking time bomb might be left inside the party. For example, at a discussion meeting about the purges held in September 1977 by the GPD, it was recognized that the purge was running into serious obstacles. Evidence was being destroyed or moved, and some murders and suicides were even taking place. The meeting concluded that “in sum, ferreting-out work must be complete, there must be a complete victory, stopping halfway through is impossible, we cannot finish up in a sloppy way, we cannot leave behind hidden dangers [留下隐患].”<sup>52</sup> In a speech on March 3, 1978, Marshal Xu Xiangqian described the dangers of not thoroughly purging the remnants of the Gang of Four in apocalyptic terms. Xu pointed out that in at least one case after the Gang of Four was defeated, a commander of a regiment refused to support the decision. He went on to argue:

The military cannot be careless, if things are done poorly they [the leftists] will seize power. They will murder, and that will mean the end of the party and nation... If the military is not in our hands, if rectification is not executed, can Soviet revisionism and imperialist invasion be defeated? Chairman Hua says our military is good, but we cannot say that our military has no problems, that there are no evil people.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, Deng might have been somewhat more ambitious than others in the military about the progress of the purges. But generally speaking, Deng was of course certainly not opposed to the purge of leftists. The leadership in Sichuan felt sympathy to some of the demands of the “leftist rebels,” many of whom by that point had lost interest in revolution and were only concerned with practical interests. But

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<sup>52</sup> “Zhuanfa Zong Zhengzhibu ‘Guanyu Quanjun Jiepi “Sirenbang” Qingcha Gongzuo Zuotan Hui de Qingkuang Baogao’ [Disseminating the GPD’s ‘Report Regarding the Military-Wide Expose and Criticize the ‘Gang of Four’ Ferreting-out Work Discussion Meeting]” (Service Center for Chinese Publications, n.d.), Series 27, Volume 3.

<sup>53</sup> Hubei provincial archives SZ-1-4-807. Xu went on to complain that Hua’s orders were being ignored by the military: “The problem of nepotism has been discussed by Chairman Hua ten times, **no one is listening**, it is not being enacted. Chairman Hua is the leader of our military, whether or not you support him is a question of attitude. [bold added by author]”

when Deng visited the province in the spring of 1978, he forced the leadership to be more aggressive in arresting people.<sup>54</sup>

The evidence on the question of the “key link” can therefore be summed up in the following ways. First, “class struggle” did not mean leftist politics, but in fact the opposite: a purge of those associated with the Gang of Four. Second, Hua never intended for this campaign to last forever. The reason it lasted so long was likely because of difficulties in execution. Third, Deng’s comments about the “key link” were specifically related to the situation in the military as a whole. He never specifically stated before the 3rd plenum work conference that the “key link” for the party should become economic construction. Fourth, even if Hua might have believed that a more leftist sounding slogan was useful for justifying a move to focusing on economic construction, this does not mean he opposed a change of emphasis as such. In fact, as subsequent events showed, a greater sensitivity to ideological justifications might have led to less political instability. And finally, we have no evidence that Hua strongly opposed making the change.

Another important political question at the time was the rehabilitation of purged revolutionaries. Hypothesis 1a would predict that the loser in a power struggle would be the one that was either unable or unwilling to co-opt political challengers. At first glance, this might seem to explain why Hua was removed. Vogel argues that Hua “did not support the full-scale return of senior officials who had been brought back to work under Deng’s leadership.”<sup>55</sup> Harding similarly concluded that Hua tried “to prevent the reemergence of more senior leaders who might threaten his political dominance.”<sup>56</sup> This is an important point to evaluate, because his alleged lack of respect for his elders, including Deng, was identified as one of Hua’s principal crimes.

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<sup>54</sup> Cai Wenbin, *Zhao Ziyang Zai Sichuan [Zhao Ziyang in Sichuan]*, 123.

<sup>55</sup> Ezra F Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 185.

<sup>56</sup> Harding, *China’s Second Revolution*, 56.

Instead we see more support for hypothesis 1b: Hua *did* try to co-opt his potential challengers, but was still removed from the leadership. As historian Han Gang points out, Hua took a personal interest in the rehabilitation of such important cadres as Hu Yaobang, Hu Jiwei, and the old general Zhang Aiping, who had all been purged along with Deng near the end of the Cultural Revolution. Hua also played important roles in solving the huge Inner Mongolia and “61 Traitor Clique” cases. Han also shows Hua’s attitude by revealing some of his comments to Hu Yaobang and Tan Qilong on July 4, 1978: “Why is it that some old cadres cannot come out [*be liberated*]? Why can’t there be reciprocal forgiveness? Isn’t it good that Xi Zhongxun and Song Renqiong have come out? Zhou Hui wants to go to Inner Mongolia. Some old cadres have been on the sidelines for many years, why aren’t they allowed to come out? There is a fear not to use talents that are not presently serving the country [怕举逸民]. They are all proletarian hermits.”<sup>57</sup> The head of the personnel department, Guo Yufeng, was removed for blocking the reversal of unjust cases and replaced by Hu Yaobang as early as December 1977.<sup>58</sup> When Ye affirmed Hua’s leadership of the country after the destruction of the Gang of Four, he listed his respect for old comrades (along with his youth, honesty, democratic sensibility, and work experience) as one of his most important positive qualities.<sup>59</sup> Shortly before Hua was officially removed from the chairmanship, even Li Xiannian affirmed that Hua did not block the rehabilitation of veteran Comrade Wang Renzhong and the “61 Traitor Clique.”<sup>60</sup>

Even more amazingly, it was not Hua but *Deng* that opposed the other major old revolutionary, Chen Yun, from returning to work. Hua revealed in June 1981:

At the 1<sup>st</sup> plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress everyone suggested that Comrade Chen Yun, Comrade Deng Yingchao, and Comrade Wang Zhen enter the Politburo, at the Politburo when I spoke and mentioned the

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<sup>57</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 16.

<sup>58</sup> Dai Huang, *Hu Yaobang Yu Pingfan Yuanjia Cuo’an* [*Hu Yaobang and the Reversal of Unjust Sentences*] (Hong Kong: Jingbao wenhua qiye youxian gongsi, 1997), 50–58.

<sup>59</sup> Wu Jianhua, “Ye Jianying Wang Dongxing Mitan Chuzhi Sirenbang [Ye Jianying and Wang Dongxing Secretly Discuss Defeating the Gang of Four],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu* [*Chinese Annals*], no. 2 (2013): 16.

<sup>60</sup> “Zhongyang Changwei Zai Liu Zhong Quanhui Yubei Hui Ge Xiaozu Zhaoji Ren Pengtou Hui Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress],” June 22, 1981.

situation, it was not I who opposed it, at the time it really was discussed, Comrade Xiaoping first suggested wouldn't it be better if no changes were made this time...

When Deng finally suggested that Chen become a vice chairman at the 3rd plenum, Hua immediately accepted Deng's proposal.<sup>61</sup> Hua also supported the ascension of another major elder, Peng Zhen, to the PSC, but was blocked by *both* Deng and Chen.<sup>62</sup>

In a meeting dedicated to criticizing Hua many years later, Hua did a self-criticism over the "two whatevers," leftism in economics, and taking steps to create his own personality cult. But of all the trumped-up charges he flatly refused to admit that he blocked the rehabilitation of old revolutionaries: "You say that I blocked the return of cold cadres, who did I block exactly? I am not going to say any more, say whatever you want!" But Deng's charges showed the import of Hua's inability to satisfy the old revolutionaries: "What was your attitude towards the rehabilitation of old cadres? Did you raise the issue, or did other people raise it? *What was your attitude towards old cadres as a whole* [italics added]? You have to look at matters in this way, otherwise you will always feel you are being wronged."<sup>63</sup> As will be discussed below, the issue was more about authority correctly matching prestige levels than Hua's unjustified repression of old comrades.

Hua's conciliatory behavior is remarkable considering the fact that the rehabilitated cadres would be natural Deng allies. He appeared to have thought that appeasing the interests of this wing of the party would be more stable than resisting them. It is possible Hua also simply did not expect that the old revolutionaries would oppose him, given his democratic sentiments and history of cooperating with them during the Cultural Revolution. Marshal Ye Jianying certainly believed that the old revolutionaries could, and should, support Hua from behind the scenes.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> According to interviews conducted by Warren Sun, Hua wanted to promote Peng as a balance to Deng and Chen.

<sup>63</sup> "Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhuanfa de Zhongyang Changwei Zai Shiyi Jie Liu Zhong Quanhui Qijian Zhaokai Gezu Zhaojiren Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress Distributed by the Party Center]" (Chinese University Press, n.d.), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

Unfortunately for Hua, he was associated in the minds of many with Wang Dongxing, who ran the special case committees and was certainly more aggressive in blocking the reversal of unjust verdicts. When the party center decided that the special case committees should give all documents on Cultural Revolution-era cases to Hu Yaobang's organization department, Wang only turned over the verdicts, refusing to give up all the files.<sup>64</sup> Hua's defeat was in large part due to his perceived relationship with individuals that were more clearly problematic than he was.

Wang was clearly more loyal to Hua than Deng, and Wang appears to have been at least somewhat more concerned about ideological proprieties of dogma and slower with regards to rehabilitating elders. However, apparently even he was not implacably opposed to Deng and the "old comrades." In April 1976, Wang reported to Mao that there was a danger Deng would be physically attacked and was given permission to place Deng and his family in a safer place.<sup>65</sup> When planning the destruction of the Gang of Four, Wang went out of his way to communicate to Ye Jianying that he had done his best to protect old comrades like Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Tao Zhu in July 1967.<sup>66</sup>

For scholars of Chinese politics, Hua Guofeng is perhaps most famously known for the "two whatevers," a political slogan associated with him implying that Mao's political line would be continued without any changes. This slogan was interpreted by many high-ranking cadres at the time as both an affirmation of extremist ideology and an attempt to block Deng Xiaoping from returning to work, and this interpretation has been adopted by the vast majority of writings on this period. Baum wrote that Hua and his loyalists "adamantly opposed" Deng's rehabilitation.<sup>67</sup> This is an issue of crucial importance. Was

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<sup>64</sup> Dai Huang, *Hu Yaobang Yu Pingfan Yuanjia Cuo'an [Hu Yaobang and the Reversal of Unjust Sentences]*, 1997, 315–16.

<sup>65</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong nianpu*, 6:647.

<sup>66</sup> Wu Jianhua, "Ye Jianying Wang Dongxing Mitan Chuzhi Sirenbang [Ye Jianying and Wang Dongxing Secretly Discuss Defeating the Gang of Four]," 3.

<sup>67</sup> Baum, *Burying Mao*, 42.



Hua defeated based on an inner-party democratic process that rejected his dogmatic policy platform, as hypothesis 1a would predict, or was Hua a reformer who sought a condominium with Deng?

New evidence now shows that the origin of the “two whatevers” had nothing to do with political or economic orthodoxy or a justification for opposing Deng’s rehabilitation. Historian Han Gang writes: “According to official accounts, the ‘change in emphasis [重点转移]’ was a historical change that happened after the ‘Cultural Revolution,’ and Deng Xiaoping was the first to suggest this strategy. Some accounts even say that this was the result of a struggle against the ‘two whatevers,’ which in direct or indirect ways draws a line between Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping. Actually it was nothing like this.”<sup>68</sup>

The leadership was already changing its position on Deng soon after the destruction of the Gang of Four. On December 10, Deng was allowed to enter the PLA No. 301 Hospital to treat an infected prostate. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the Central Committee voted to allow Deng to read classified materials, and on the 16<sup>th</sup>, Hua and Wang Dongxing approved a partial prostatectomy. A number of military officers that were patients at the hospital came to visit.<sup>69</sup> Marshals Xu Xiangqian and Nie Rongzhen, both vice chairmen of the Central Military Commission (CMC) went to the hospital to see Deng after the surgery on December 24.<sup>70</sup> During this time, Deng took a trip to Yuquanshan to listen to Hua, Ye, Li and Wang give an account of the fall of the Gang of Four.<sup>71</sup> On January 28, Deng requested that his personal needs [供应关系] be managed through the General Staff Department, and Chen Xilian promised to discuss the matter with Hua, Ye, and Wang.<sup>72</sup>

After the October meeting at which Hua approved Deng returning to work at some time in the future, Li Xiannian proposed that he, Chen Xilian, and Wu De would go inform Deng of this

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<sup>68</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 17.

<sup>69</sup> Deng Rong, *Deng Xiaoping and the Cultural Revolution: A Daughter Recalls the Critical Years*, 445–47.

<sup>70</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 153.

<sup>71</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:153–55.

<sup>72</sup> Yang Chengwu nianpu bianxiezu, *Yang Chengwu nianpu 1914 nian- 2004 nian [Yang Chengwu Chronology 1914-2004]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2014), 521.

development. Although Wu wrote that he did not remember when this visit took place, because he says that it happened when Deng was in the Western Hills, it was likely sometime after February 3 the next year. The last time the “criticize Deng” campaign was mentioned was as early as December 25, and it was in the context of criticizing the Gang of Four for manipulating the campaign.<sup>73</sup>

Han Gang points out that allowing Deng to look at classified documents and undergo surgery, attend a meeting with the top leadership to learn about the fall of the Gang of Four, and see high-ranking cadres at his residence were all signs of a political loosening.<sup>74</sup> Soon after Deng’s surgery, Ye sent his son to the hospital to tell Deng to take care of his health and prepare to return to work.<sup>75</sup> Deng therefore had to know that sooner or later he would soon be rehabilitated.

Han provides crucial new information from the archives about a speech Hua gave to the Politburo on January 6, 1977, as recounted by Li Xin on January 14 to the Central Committee Theory Study Group. These excerpts from Hua’s speech are crucial to this revisionist history of Deng’s rise and therefore deserve to be described in detail. The most important revelation is that Hua had already approved Deng’s return to power at an appropriate time. Hua said: “The issue of Deng Xiaoping was considered repeatedly while managing the ‘Gang of Four’ issue... the issue of Comrade Deng Xiaoping will be solved, and actually is already being solved... The issue of Deng Xiaoping, in the process of exposing and criticizing the ‘Gang of Four,’ has been clarified a bit; the issue of coming back to work should be a matter of time [水到渠成,瓜熟蒂落], our minds should be clear.”<sup>76</sup>

Hua also provided a rationale for this policy:

Now there are people who propose not doing it this way, they propose after knocking down the ‘Gang of Four’, Deng Xiaoping should come out to work immediately. If Deng Xiaoping comes out to work

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<sup>73</sup> Han Gang, “‘Liangge Fanshi’ de Youlai Jiqi Zhongjie [Origins of the ‘Two Whatever’s’ and Their End],” *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu [Research on CCP History]*, no. 11 (2009): 57.

<sup>74</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng De Ruogan Shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]* no. 2 (2011): 11-12.

<sup>75</sup> Ye Xuanji, “Ye Shuai Zai Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou [Marshal Ye Before and After the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress],” *Nanfang Zhoumo [Southern Weekly]*, October 30, 2008.

<sup>76</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 12.

immediately after knocking down the ‘Gang of Four,’ it is possible we would be falling into a big trap... If we hastily and in a big hurry [急急忙忙] suggest Deng Xiaoping come out to work, then Documents No. 4 and 5, these issues that Chairman Mao managed, do they still count? Then wouldn’t people say this is overturning the verdict on Deng Xiaoping? Doesn’t this mean we are not carrying out the unfulfilled wishes of Chairman Mao?<sup>77</sup>

According to an article by historian Cheng Zhongyuan, Hua even expressed confidence that Deng would understand the need for some delay before returning to work.<sup>78</sup>

Hua also discussed the verdict on the important Tiananmen Square Incident of 1976, which for complicated reasons was intrinsically tied up to the question of Deng’s status. Because of its importance in the post-Mao political struggles, it is necessary to take a moment to describe this incident. After Zhou Enlai’s death in January 1976, the Gang of Four tried to minimize positive coverage of his life to focus attention on the “criticize Deng” campaign. At this point Deng was under attack for alleged mistakes during his time in power in 1975, but had yet to be completely purged. The failure to appreciate Zhou in the press was inflamed by a particularly provocative article on March 25 in *Wenhui bao*, which was interpreted as implying that Zhou was a “capitalist roader.” By April 1 wreaths commemorating Zhou had covered Tiananmen Square, sparking a political crisis. The Gang of Four understood that this movement was not just about Zhou but was also a popular demonstration against their extremist policies. Frederick Teiwes describes it as “truly a threat to the party from below.”<sup>79</sup>

The Politburo decided to remove the crowds on the square. On April 5, Mao labeled the Tiananmen disturbances a “counterrevolutionary rebellion,” allowed the use of force, and said that Deng should be placed under investigation because of his alleged role in the affair. That night, the people’s militia, policemen, and soldiers armed with clubs entered Tiananmen Square and beat the 200 people who had not heeded the warnings to leave. On April 7, after condemning the incident as a parallel to the Hungarian revolution in 1956 during a conversation with his nephew, Mao also made a decision about

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, “Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Pingjia Wenti [Regarding the Issue of Evaluating Hua Guofeng],” *Jinyang Xuekan [Jinyang Journal]*, no. 5 (2009): 72.

<sup>79</sup> Warren Sun and Frederick C. Teiwes, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 475.

Deng: “Throw him out!” On the same day the Tiananmen Square Incident appeared in the news, in which it was described as a counter-revolutionary incident, it was also announced that Deng’s problem was that of an “antagonistic contradiction” and that all his positions both inside and outside the Party would be stripped away. During the crisis, Hua was not only the Minister of Public Security but was also chairing the Politburo meetings.<sup>80</sup> After the incident, Hua officially replaced Deng as the most important leader after Mao. However, Hua in fact had always wanted to solve the situation peacefully, and even argued against the Gang of Four when they accused Deng of visiting the Square.<sup>81</sup>

Following Mao’s death, the issue of whether or not to reverse the verdict on the Tiananmen Square Incident was particularly sensitive, and was made more complicated by the fact that it was broadly seen as related to Deng’s status in the post-Mao political world. Yet just as the consensus view that Hua opposed Deng returning to power must be questioned, the idea that he also refused to consider reversing the verdict on Tiananmen must also be re-examined given the new evidence about the January 6 Politburo meeting. He did continue to emphasize that “there really was a minority of counter-revolutionaries” at Tiananmen Square. Because Chairman Mao had spoken out specifically on this issue, if it was said he made mistake, “it would cause a major dispute among the masses.” Yet already he was signaling that he would not adopt a particularly hard line on the issue. For example, Hua noted that the issue “really was suppressed by the ‘the Gang of Four’” and that “the Tiananmen Incident was forced [*implying the Gang of Four’s behavior was a cause of the incident*].” Hua counseled patience: “if there are some other opinions it is not a big deal, they must be guided...”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Hua took parallel positions on both Deng and Tiananmen: to focus first on stabilizing the situation but leaving open the possibility for change in the future.

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<sup>80</sup> For the two best English-language accounts of the incident, see *Ibid.*, 466–96; Schoenhals and MacFarquhar, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 422–30.

<sup>81</sup> Li Haiwen, “1976 Nian Mao Zedong Jiaoquan Hua Guofeng [Mao Zedong in 1976 Transfers Power to Hua Guofeng],” *Dangshi Bolan [General Review of the Communist Party of China]*, no. 12 (December 2015): 4–10.

<sup>82</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 13–14.

Marshal Ye Jianying's position on this issue is of crucial interest. Ye had played an important role in the fall of the Gang of Four, so important in fact that Hua offered to give up leadership of the country to him. Ye continued to dominate in the leadership of the PLA. Although Ye has traditionally been identified as supporting Deng's swift rehabilitation, the evidence now contradicts that argument. According to a collection of party speeches made by Deng Liqun intended for internal circulation only, Ye both wanted to protect Hua Guofeng's status but also bring Deng back to work, which meant he was "caught between two difficulties [有一个两难]." <sup>83</sup> As early as October 8, Ye said that although it was necessary now and in the future to criticize Deng's mistakes, Chairman Mao had been sick when Deng was criticized, and only heard the strongly-tainted reports of his nephew Mao Yuanxin. <sup>84</sup> According to Ye's nephew, Ye called for Deng's return before Hua had announced his position on the question. Although Hua and Wang were not the first ones to suggest Deng return to work, they did not oppose it when Ye raised the issue. <sup>85</sup> Ye seems to have thought Deng would be easily controlled. At a Politburo meeting after the fall of the Gang of Four, Ye said: "I suggest that Deng Xiaoping come back to work, us comrades in attendance aren't afraid of him are we? After entering the Politburo and returning to work, he won't get picky [挑剔] with us, right?" <sup>86</sup> When Ye was told about Deng's "my last days in peace" comment, he laughed happily. <sup>87</sup>

Other evidence supports Deng Liqun's characterization. On October 31, 1976, Ye Jianying met with his old friend Xiong Xianghui. Ye told him that "wise leader [英明领袖]," the term used to describe Hua in the press, was selected by him. Xiong told Ye about how old comrades wanted Deng to return to

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<sup>83</sup> Deng says Ye cared more about the former than the latter. Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun's Lectures on National History]*, 2000, 3:348.

<sup>84</sup> "Zhongyang Lingdao Ren Guanyu Jieji Sirenbang Wenti de Jianghua [Conversation Among Central Leaders about Solving the Gang of Four Issue]" (The Chinese University Press, October 8, 1976), Cultural Revolution Database.

<sup>85</sup> Su Yongtong, "Ye Jianying: Zuihou Shinian, Manmu Qingshan Xi Zhaoming," *Nanfang Zhoumo [Southern Weekly]*, December 18, 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Fan Shuo, *Ye Jianying Zai Guanjian Shike [Ye Jianying at the Critical Moment]* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2001), 386.

<sup>87</sup> Ye Xuanji, "Ye Shuai Zai Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou [Marshal Ye Before and After the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress]."

work. Ye responded: “Deng will return to work, but it will be a little later. When a car turns too quickly it will turn over. The matter of Xiaoping was raised by Chairman Mao, the Politburo decided to leave him in the party to watch him, to see if the offender mends his ways, it is not good [不行] if [he] all of a sudden returns to work, there must be a process. Otherwise it would really be a palace coup.” Ye also emphasized the importance of “us old guys [我们这些老家伙]” to establish Hua’s legitimacy. He did, however, tell Xiong that leaving positive comments about Deng in volume 5 of Mao’s collected works was intended to provide a basis for Deng ultimately returning to work.<sup>88</sup>

The immediate challenge facing Hua, whose position was supported by at least one key elder (Ye), was how to show his flexibility on the Deng and Tiananmen Issues without allowing those signals to raise concerns that Hua was moving too fast to reject the Maoist legacy. Unfortunately for Hua, this problem was handled in a particularly clumsy way, and it was this clumsiness, as opposed to political dogmatism or opposition to Deng, that led to the “two whatevers.”

The day after Hua’s speech to the Politburo in January, Wang Dongxing, the Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of propaganda work, told Li Xin to write an editorial calling on everyone to study an old Mao speech called “On the Ten Great Relationships” and a speech by Hua at an agricultural meeting. Wang said that focusing on studying those documents was intended to draw attention away from the explosive Deng and Tiananmen issues. On January 14, Wang changed this assignment, telling Li to write two speeches for Hua - the first to be given to a small group, and another to be given at a meeting to “study Dazhai (an agricultural meeting).” The first speech was intended for a meeting of the top leadership in the party, government, and military to announce that Deng would return to power once the situation had stabilized. When Li met his work group to begin these speeches, he also told his assistants to include criticisms of rumors and “splittist” talk, which was code for discussions of Deng and Tiananmen. Li suggested that one way to prevent the Deng and Tiananmen issues from becoming explosive was to

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<sup>88</sup> Xiong Lei, “‘1976 Nian, Hua Guofeng He Ye Jianying Zenme Lianshou de’ [How Hua Guofeng and Ye Jianying United in 1976],” 8.

emphasize the big picture. The most obvious way to do this was rallying around Mao. Therefore, on January 21, the first draft of Hua's planned January speech was completed, in which the following phrase appeared: "whatever policies Chairman Mao raised, they must be protected, they cannot be violated; whatever language and behavior damages Chairman Mao's image, they must be controlled, they cannot be tolerated."

Li Xin later explained why he included these words: "In the process of writing the draft, the most difficult matter to manage was, under the circumstances of the time, stabilizing the situation, which meant raising high the banner of Chairman Mao, it was impossible to say Chairman Mao made mistakes, it could not be said that 'criticize Deng, counter-attack the rightist verdict-reversal wind' was a mistake; at the same time, it was necessary to say that Deng Xiaoping returning to work was correct and necessary. Therefore, drafting was extremely difficult, no matter what was said it was imperfect. Because I emphasized raising high the banner of Mao Zedong and stabilizing the situation, in the second draft of the speech the expression 'two whatevers' appeared."

By the time the fourth draft of Hua's January speech was finished, the situation had changed. Instead of a meeting for leading cadres in the party, government, and military, a work meeting of the Central Committee would take place - but later. On February 3, Li Xin informed his group that the speech would be delayed and an editorial would be published first instead. The next draft also included some changes suggested by Wang Dongxing, who had seen earlier drafts. The next day, the fifth draft was given to Wang, who asked Geng Biao, Zhu Muzhi, Li Xin, Hua Nan, and Wang Shu (all members of the propaganda apparatus) to read and publish. Li, however, failed to show them the document. On February 6, the editorial, called "Study the Documents Well and Grasp the Key Link," was read on the radio and published in *People's Daily* the following day. This editorial contained the infamous "two whatevers": "We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow

whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave.”<sup>89</sup>\* The “two whatevers,” therefore, was not, as Vogel argues, the result of Hua “direct[ing] his supporters to prepare a theoretical article to show his commitment to the Maoist legacy.”<sup>90</sup>

Both the appearance of the “two whatevers” and the delay in more broadly announcing the plan to rehabilitate Deng had disastrous long-term political repercussions for Hua. Deng Liqun interpreted the “two whatevers” as an attempt to prevent Deng Xiaoping from returning to work - a gross misunderstanding. Liqun told crusty old general Wang Zhen of this interpretation. A few days later, Wang Zhen lambasted the “two whatevers” at a meeting of the national defense industry office of the State Council. Then Wang told Deng Xiaoping about how he and Deng Liqun had interpreted the “two whatevers.”<sup>91</sup>

Historian Han Gang writes: “The planning at the top to solve the Deng Xiaoping issue was unknown to the outside world, and even the majority of the membership of the party, including senior members [党内大多数人包括资深人士], did not understand, so it was difficult to avoid giving the impression of ‘delay.’” A horrible mistake had been made: “But when the ‘two whatevers’ appeared, matters did not move in the direction hoped for by its creators, but instead created an unforeseen reaction. It seemed like they created a political restriction for more deeply exposing and criticizing the ‘Gang of Four,’ and that the creators had not fundamentally understood the connection between the ‘Cultural

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<sup>89</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng],” 14.

\* This is the most famous formulation of the two whatevers, but there are three other versions. First, Hua made a similar surrounding remark soon after the Gang of Four was destroyed, but was referring narrowly to how the criticism of the Gang of Four should proceed. Second, Wu De, the mayor of Beijing, made similar remarks around the same time, but it was hardly a statement of a political platform. Third, Hua made the last ‘two whatever’-ish comment at the 1977 March meeting, but this was the same meeting at which it was more broadly announced that Deng would return to work and was less extreme sounding than the February version.

<sup>90</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 2011, 188.

<sup>91</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun’s Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]* (Hong Kong: Dafeng chubanshe, 2006), 84.



Revolution’ and Mao Zedong’s mistakes in his later years and therefore could not solve or completely eliminate the mistakes of the ‘Cultural Revolution’...”<sup>92</sup>

Wang Dongxing’s behavior also raised questions about Hua’s intentions. On November 18 at a nation-wide propaganda work meeting, Wang said: “After the premier died, it was discovered that Deng Xiaoping was no good. This person Deng has mistakes, the mistakes are serious, he did not listen to Chairman Mao, he still got up to his old business. At the time Mao said: ‘he’s no good, find someone else.’”<sup>93</sup> At the work conference in March that declared Deng would be brought back to work at an appropriate time, he said: “Now, people say that ‘criticizing Deng and resisting the right reversal of cases’ was incorrect, they want to invite Deng back to work, they even want him to become premier, they say how competent he is. I am familiar with this man Deng Xiaoping, in terms of ability he has a little bit, but his mistakes are even more.”<sup>94</sup> Wang’s comments, along with the “two whatevers” must have enraged Deng.

Despite the assertions of many Chinese scholars that figures like Chen Yun tried and failed to persuade Hua to allow Deng to return to work at party meeting in March 1977, it was in fact at this meeting that the decision to allow Deng to return to work (already made) was revealed publicly.<sup>95</sup> Hua seems to have understood that the delay, and especially the “two whatevers,” had raised suspicions about his intentions. He therefore tried to explain himself:

Recently within the party and masses there has been no small amount of debate around the issues of Deng Xiaoping and the Tiananmen Incident... With regards to Deng Xiaoping, everyone knows that ‘criticizing Deng and opposing the rightist reversal of cases’ was decided by the great leader Chairman Mao, criticism is necessary, but how the Gang of Four criticized Deng was different, they violated Chairman Mao’s order... this was an important part of their plan to take over the party and seize power... When the

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<sup>92</sup> Han Gang, “‘Liangge Fanshi’ de Youlai Jiqi Zhongjie [Origins of the ‘Two Whatevers’ and Their End],” 57.

<sup>93</sup> Wang Dongxing, “Wang Dongxing Zai Quanguo Xuanchuan Gongzuo Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Wang Dongxing’s Speech at the National Propaganda Work Conference],” November 18, 1976, Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

<sup>94</sup> Wang Dongxing, “Wang Dongxing Zai Zhongyang Gongzuo Huiyi Shang de Yi Ci Jianghua Zhaiyao [A Portion of Wang Dongxing’s Speech at the Central Work Conference]” (Chinese University Press, March 1977), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

<sup>95</sup> Han Gang, “‘Liang Ge Fanshi’ de Yi Duan Gong’an [The Case of the ‘Two Whatevers’],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 2 (February 2016): 1–9.

center solved the problem of the Gang of Four anti-party clique, it believed that the issue of Deng Xiaoping should be solved correctly, that it should be done in phases, as part of a process, the center's decision to continue to 'criticize Deng and the rightist reversal of cases' was considered multiple times, by doing it this way, it would fundamentally destroy and excuse for the Gang of Four and its remnants and other counter revolutionary powers from using this issue to provoke counter-revolutionary activity, thereby stabilizing the entire country... Some comrades do not really understand, do not really support the center's decision, believing that once the Gang of Four was defeated, it was necessary to immediately have Comrade Deng Xiaoping return to work, this position did not consider the question from the perspective of the struggle on a comprehensive level... It has now been demonstrated by investigation that a small group of counter-revolutionaries had a counter-revolutionary policy of calling for Comrade Deng Xiaoping to return to work to force the center to take a position, and then attack us for violating the last wishes of Chairman Mao, thereby over-throwing the party Central Committee..."<sup>96</sup>

Hua declared that an official decision for Deng to return to work would be made at the 3rd plenum of the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. In his speech at the same work meeting, Ye Jianying argued that Mao had shown party "revisionists" could be defeated with another Cultural Revolution, apparently trying to quell fears that Deng's return to power would imply a victory of revisionism.<sup>97</sup> Even Chen Yun, who is described in many sources as unhappy with Hua's policies at this time, said: "I strongly support having Comrade Deng Xiaoping return to work when the time is ripe."<sup>98</sup>

At the end of the November 1978 work conference, the landmark meeting that signified an important defeat for Hua, Hua did a self-criticism for the "two whatevers," explaining that they were more about unity and protecting Mao's image than as a weapon to attack Deng:

At the time my intention was that while giving a free hand in mobilizing the masses to start the great struggle to expose and criticize the 'Gang of Four' it was absolutely imperative not to damage the glorious image of Chairman Mao. This was an important issue I was always considering in theoretical terms immediately after the smashing of the 'Gang of Four.' Later I discovered that the first part [of the "two whatevers"] was too absolute, the second part really did need to be emphasized, but how to restrict this I did not say clearly. At the time I did not consider these two expressions completely enough.

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<sup>96</sup> Hubei Provincial Archives. SZ-1-4-501-(19-21)

<sup>97</sup> Ye might have been making an implicit warning to Deng not to overstep his bounds. The extreme leftist implications of suggesting the propriety of another Cultural Revolution, especially in the context of Deng's return to work, once again show that party accounts of Ye as reformist Deng supporter are extremely misleading. SZ1-4-501-(11-13)

<sup>98</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 40.

Reflecting now, if only I had not raised the ‘two whatevers’ things would have been fine [现在看来，不提 ‘两个凡是’ 就好了].<sup>99</sup>

But the “two whatevers” concept was pinned to Hua, and later Deng would use this expression against him. Granted, the “two whatevers” did not appear out of nowhere: Hua did believe that Mao would always serve as a legitimating force no matter what practical decisions were made, a position to which Deng himself would forcefully return later. And Hua must take the blame for settling on such a clumsy way of balancing the need of stabilizing the situation while preparing for Deng’s return. But the precise formulation of the “two whatevers” did not well encapsulate Hua’s true intentions, and this mistake was used rather cynically against him later.

The “two whatevers” upset Deng, and he criticized the expression almost immediately, but he appears not to have drawn any immediate conclusions about the appropriateness of Hua’s rule. At least when the Gang of Four was first destroyed, Deng felt neither a rush to return to work nor any animosity towards Hua. A few short days after the fall of the Gang, Deng wrote a remarkable letter to Hua and Ye in which he said:

From the bottom of my heart I defend the decision of the center for Hua Guofeng to become party chairman and chairman of the CMC, I shout for joy for the epic significance that this extremely important decision has for the the party and socialist project. Both in terms of politics and ideology Comrade Hua Guofeng is the most suitable successor to Chairman Mao, and in terms of age he can ensure that the stability of the proletariat leadership *can last for fifteen to twenty years* [!], how important this is for the entire party, military and people! How could it not cause people to be filled with exultation?<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, another source also indicates that around this time Deng was telling people that Mao had “selected the right person” and was explaining how the “honest but educated” epithet was Mao’s way of

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<sup>99</sup> Hubei Provincial archives. SZ 1-4-791. See also Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo* [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1997), 302.

<sup>100</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *You Guan Deng Xiaoping Fuchu de Wenjian* [Documents on Deng Xiaoping Returning to Work] (Document available at Harvard Fung Library, n.d.). The letter is genuine: an identical copy can be found in the Hubei provincial archives in SZ1-4-503.

comparing Hua to a hero from the Three Kingdoms time period.<sup>101</sup> As mentioned above, Deng also remarked that he could “spend his last days in peace” after he heard the news of the Gang’s destruction. All of this points to the strong possibility that Deng did not harbor intentions of unseating Hua as quickly as possible from the very beginning.

Deng was almost certainly not oblivious to signs that Hua was taking steps to prepare for his return. But Deng was obviously extremely upset about the appearance of the “two whatevers” and took pains to show that he was displeased with the expression. Several possible reasons exist for this behavior. The first is that the publication of the “two whatevers” raised Deng’s suspicions about Hua’s long-term intentions. A second reason is that he felt that the “two whatevers” might surround him with a continuing stigma that would prevent him from working efficiently. The third reason is that Deng possibly realized early on that a mistake as big as the “two whatevers” could be later used in a more long-term bid for power if people were not allowed to forget about it.

The immediate steps Deng took to undermine the “two whatevers” are the following. On April 10, Deng wrote a letter to Hua Guofeng, Ye Jianying, and the Central Committee. Four days later, Deng made revisions to the letter at the request of Hua and Ye. On May 3, this letter, along with the one Deng wrote in October 1976, were distributed to the entire party at Deng’s request.<sup>102</sup> In this second letter, Deng expressed support for Hua’s decision to make him wait to return to work: “As for the personal issue of me working, what I will do, and what time I return to work is most appropriate, I completely obey the considerations and arrangements of the center.” Deng also made a self-criticism.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Cheng Guanjun, “Ye Xuanji Jiangshu Fensui ‘Sirenbang’ Yu Deng Xiaoping Fuchu [Ye Xuanji Discusses Smashing the ‘Gang of Four’ and the Return of Deng Xiaoping].”

<sup>102</sup> According to Deng’s *Chronology*, this took place after April 10. According to Cheng, Wang, and Li, the meeting took place on April 7. See pg 31.

<sup>103</sup> SZ-1-4-503-2. “When I was working in 1975, even though I did some useful things, but I had some deficiencies and mistakes, I again express sincere acceptance of the criticism and guidance of our glorious leader and guide Chairman Mao.”

Although clearly used as grease to ease the wheels of his return to work, having to write a self-criticism, praise Hua, and accept delay before returning to work seem to have rankled Deng. In June 1981, in a meeting criticizing Hua Guofeng, he would complain about the latter forcing him to make a self-criticism.<sup>104</sup> Deng would later explain that the formulation of a “correct and comprehensive” application of Mao Zedong Thought in his letter was intended to be a criticism of the “two whatevers.” At some point around the time the second letter was written, Wang Dongxing and Li Xin went to speak with Deng.<sup>105</sup> At this meeting, Deng expressed opposition to the “two whatevers.” According to Li Xin, Li tried to explain that the point of the “two whatevers” at the time was to stabilize the situation, not to oppose Deng. But after considering Deng’s complaints, Li decided that Deng was right.<sup>106</sup>

But Deng rejected Li’s attempts to explain the “two whatevers” was not about him. On May 24, Deng Xiaoping had an important meeting with Wang Zhen, Deng Liqun, and Yu Guangyuan.<sup>107</sup> Deng told them about his meeting with Wang Dongxing and Li Xin in April when he criticized the “two whatevers.” According to Deng, it was impossible to explain why the verdict on him was reversed or that the Tiananmen Incident was not a counter-revolutionary incident under the “two whatevers.” He also attacked the viewpoint from a theoretical perspective, arguing that it was impossible to apply what was said for one problem at one given time to another problem at a different time. Even Mao himself had admitted mistakes. Neither Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, nor Mao had spoken of any “whatevers.” Deng also expressed certainty that he would manage military affairs when he returned to work: “The matter of my returning to work has been settled, as for what type of work I will do, it will certainly include managing the military [军队是要管的], and now I am also considering managing science and

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<sup>104</sup> “Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhuanfa de Zhongyang Changwei Zai Shiyi Jie Liu Zhong Quanhui Qijian Zhaokai Gezu Zhaojiren Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress Distributed by the Party Center].”

<sup>105</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:157.

<sup>106</sup> Han Gang, “‘Liangge Fanshi’ de Youlai Jiqi Zhongjie [Origins of the ‘Two Whatevers’ and Their End],” 63.

<sup>107</sup> Deng’s *Collected Works and Chronology* say he only met with two individuals, a rather puzzling mistake. See Feng Lanrui, *Bie You Ren Jian Xing Lu Nan: 1980 Niandai Qianhou Zhongguo Sixiang Lilun Fengyun Ji Qita* (Hong Kong: Shidai guoji, 2005), 88–89.

technology.”<sup>108</sup> The record of Deng’s words at this meeting were shown around Beijing by Wang Zhen’s son. Hu Yaobang later claimed that this was an important first step in creating consciousness that the “two whatevers” was a problem.<sup>109</sup>

Hua seems to have immediately taken Deng’s criticisms of the “two whatevers” to heart. As Zhao Ziyang pointed out in 1978, Hua very quickly moved away from the “two whatevers” and accepted Deng’s terminology:

I believe that the ‘two whatevers’ spoken of at the March work conference of last year had were a result of the historical conditions at the time, it is understandable. That’s because the Gang of Four had just been destroyed and it was necessary to decrease the amount of guessing going on in other countries and moreover the solving of everyone’s thinking needed to go through a process. At the 3rd plenum of the 10th Party Congress [July 1977], Chairman Hua and vice chairman Deng suggested the comprehensive and accurate understanding of Mao Zedong Thought, and practically speaking this was a clarification, and already the issue was solved.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, Hua has also been traditionally known for his alleged opposition to the “practice is the sole criterion of truth (henceforth shortened to “practice”)” viewpoint, and that the appearance of the “practice” position was originally a reaction to Hua’s “two whatevers.” Once again, if Hua truly opposed the supposedly popular “practice” position because of his dogmatic viewpoints, and was punished politically for it, this would be support for hypothesis 1a. However, newly available evidence now shows that for several reasons this characterization is extremely misleading. Instead, the evidence now supports hypothesis 1b: that the “practice” issue was politically manipulated for the purposes of political struggle.

First, Hua was certainly careful with regards to ideology, but he was not a dogmatist, and Deng himself was no stranger to leftist rhetoric, especially when it suited his immediate political interests. Few historians remember, or simply do not know, that when Deng officially returned to power in July 1977, he remarked that:

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<sup>108</sup> Deng Xiaoping *Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:159–60.

<sup>109</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun’s Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]*, 2006, 95.

<sup>110</sup> Han Gang, “‘Liang Ge Fanshi’ de Yi Duan Gong’an [The Case of the ‘Two Whatevers’],” 9.

If it was not for the Cultural Revolution started by Chairman Mao, if not for big character posters, speaking out freely, airing views freely, and holding great debates\* making us see things clearly, I would have really allowed Liu Shaoqi to lead me around by the nose, what does this show? I had had a few years of peace, and my thinking went cloudy, I could not see the line clearly, many cadres could have made this mistake, now basically things have turned around, this is the main achievement of the Cultural Revolution. So the achievement of the Cultural Revolution is fundamentally guaranteeing the nature of our party and guaranteed that the rivers and mountains do not change color.”<sup>111</sup>

During the famous work conference before the 3rd plenum, on December 1, 1978, Deng told commanders of the military regions and provincial party secretaries that “historical issues can only be dealt with in a rough way” and that “it is also necessary to avoid the issue of the ‘Cultural Revolution.’”<sup>112</sup> Deng’s “four cardinal principles” introduced in 1979 were hardly any less “leftist” than any of Hua’s pronouncements.<sup>113</sup> When a major document on party history was prepared in 1980, a group of more than 4,000 party members wanted a more negative assessment of Mao than Deng was prepared to tolerate.<sup>114</sup> Deng was no “rightist.”

Second, the “practice” debate was originally not about ideology in general but a much narrower topic: how to reverse verdicts on cases that had been personally approved by Mao, which, as discussed above, was supported by Hua. The problem was that to reverse political verdicts on purged cadres, Mao’s personal orders would somehow have to be addressed.<sup>115</sup> On October 9, 1977, Ye Jianying gave a speech at the party school in which he called on the school to do research on party history, especially the three “line struggles” during the Cultural Revolution. In December, Hu gave a speech on how to study history in which the term “practice is the sole criterion of truth” was first used. Hu said: “With regards to history over the last ten plus years, do not just use one document or one speech by a comrade, it is necessary to

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\* Known as the ‘four bigs’, these four types of criticism are now synonymous with Cultural Revolution excesses.

<sup>111</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *You Guan Deng Xiaoping Fuchu de Wenjian [Documents on Deng Xiaoping Returning to Work]*.

<sup>112</sup> Yang Chengwu nianpu bianxiezu, *Yang Chengwu nianpu 1914 nian- 2004 nian [Yang Chengwu Chronology 1914-2004]*, 533.

<sup>113</sup> Upholding the socialist path, upholding the people’s democratic dictatorship, upholding the leadership of the CCP, and upholding Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism-Leninism.

<sup>114</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 57.

<sup>115</sup> Han Gang, “Quanli de Zhuanyi: Guanyu Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [A Shift in Power: About the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress].”

do analysis with practice as the criterion.” In other words, Hu was rejecting the automatic acceptance of documents personally approved by Mao with regards to the purges, but the terminology he was using was “practice is the sole criterion of truth.”<sup>116</sup>

Finally, the “practice” viewpoint was not originally targeted at the “two whatevers,” let alone Hua. The story begins after the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in August 1977, when old cadres, especially old marshals, started publishing articles emphasizing the importance of practice and experience. The first important article was written by Marshal Nie Rongzhen and published on September 5 in *People’s Daily*. Nie wrote: “The entirety of our correct thinking at the most fundamental level can only come from practice, from actual experience, and moreover must return to practice, to be tested by practical experience.” Nie emphasized that when studying Marxist-Leninism or Mao Zedong Thought, it was necessary to grasp its essential nature: “[we should] stubbornly oppose taking a few phrases from Marxist-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought and making them a dogmatism separate from time, space and conditions.” On September 15, Marshal Xu Xiangqian published another article in *People’s Daily* with similar themes, followed on September 28 by Chen Yun.<sup>117</sup>

When Hu Yaobang was preparing to re-open the party school, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of Nie Rongzhen’s letter. Hu described the article by the old marshal as “really the only true research [才是真正研究了]... only this can really be called true loyalty to Mao Zedong Thought.” As historian Shen Baoxiang argues, Hu’s comments show that an article written by a military man helped inspire him.<sup>118</sup> On October 9, 1977, Ye Jianying gave a speech at the opening ceremonies of the party school. Ye’s speech emphasized the importance of connecting theory with reality and subjecting theory to practical tests. Hu Yaobang helped draft this speech and make it more liberal in terms of ideology.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Shen Baoxiang, “Hu Yaobang de Yici Fayan [A Speech Given by Hu Yaobang],” *Tongzhou Gongjin*, no. 11 (2012).

<sup>117</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 11.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua agree: see pg 36.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



The key moment was publication of an article on May 11 in *Guangming Daily* and then again the next day in *People's Daily* and *People's Liberation Army Daily*. The article made the argument that truth could only be evaluated through practice [实践]. If theories failed to achieve their intentions, they should be changed in the face of experience. This article had nothing to do with the “two whatevers.”<sup>120</sup> In 1999, Wang Qiang, the head of the philosophy group in the theory department at the newspaper that published the article, said he had never discussed the “two whatevers” with the article’s author, Hu Fuming. Although Hu would later say that he was thinking about the “two whatevers” during the writing process, Wang questioned this account, writing: “but as the person who invited him to write an article, the person who sent the manuscript to the composing room, and the editor responsible for publication, speaking honestly, at the time I did not feel this, I did not know and had never spoken to him on this.” Wang said that if he or the author had realized the importance of criticizing the “two whatevers,” they would have emphasized this in the article. Wang argues that regular people at the time would have found it impossible to conceive of the importance of criticizing the “two whatevers.” In other words, this was not a meaningful cleavage at the time of his creation.

Negative reaction to the article was swift. On 11 pm on May 12, Wu Lengxi, who was working for a committee editing Mao’s documents, called Hu Jiwei, an assistant editor at *People's Daily*. According to Hu, Wu said: “This article made a fundamental mistake [方向性的错误]. In theoretical terms it is a mistake, in political terms the problem is even bigger, it is very bad, very bad [很坏很坏].” Wu said that the article rejected both the relativity of truth and the universal truth of Marxism. He pointed out that Lenin made theoretical predictions before they came to pass: that did not mean they were not theories before the events transpired. One did not have to wait many years to realize that the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was truth. In Wu’s mind, the article called for a philosophy of doubting everything. “Mao Zedong Thought is the basis for our unity, if we go and suspect the Chairman’s directives are wrong, if

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<sup>120</sup> Ma Peiwen, “Bi de Cheng Qing de Yi Zhuang Zhong Da Shi Shi [A Very Important Historical Fact That Must Be Clarified],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 1 (2015).

we think they should be revised, if everyone goes and debates which are wrong and which need to be changed, can our party still maintain unity?"<sup>121</sup> Wu's points were not entirely unreasonable. Even if the "practice" viewpoint was just about rehabilitations, its formulation did have problematic implications, especially because of fears in the party about moving too quickly away from Mao's legacy.

Wu told Hu not to tell anyone about the phone call, but still he went to tell Hu Yaobang. On May 13, Hu Yaobang met with the theoretical group from the party school at his home, which began with Hu Jiwei recounting the telephone call. Hu Yaobang remarked that turning a theoretical, academic debate into a political issue was a mistake of the Stalin years and the PRC over the last ten-plus years.<sup>122</sup> The meeting ended without any decisions.

Top officials in the propaganda apparatus did their best to prevent a broader discussion of the principles in the *Guangming* article. Wu Lengxi was not the only one unhappy with the piece. On the night of May 13, the editor at *Red Flag*, the most important magazine in the PRC, called the top leader at the Xinhua News Agency to tell him that Xinhua had published an article with mistakes in it. On May 17, a new editor was assigned to *Red Flag*. On the same day, this editor gave a speech at which he said that the *Guangming* article, as well as another article on how to pay workers, were mistakes and that it was now time to emphasize following the basic tenets of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought. On May 17, the PSC member in charge of propaganda, Wang Dongxin, asked: "Which party center is this the opinion of? It must be investigated, people must be taught a lesson, thinking must be unified, this must not set a precedent."<sup>123</sup> On May 18, Wang told the editor of *Red Flag* that these articles were opposed to Mao and were not the thinking of the party center. Wang said that newspapers and magazines should be more

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<sup>121</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 108–9.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>123</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 93.

careful and have more “partyiness.”<sup>124</sup> On the same day, the head of the propaganda ministry, Zhang Pinghua, told representatives from a national education work conference, which included the propaganda heads from the provinces, that just because *People’s Daily* published something, it was not necessarily correct: “no matter where the wind comes from, use your nose to give it a sniff.”<sup>125</sup>

Wang’s tough reaction threatened to end discussion of “practice.” Historian Shen Baoxiang writes: “if powerful support was not available, this discussion of the criterion of truth that had just begun would have been stopped and forced down.”<sup>126</sup> But suddenly the discussion was given a boost by Deng, who was beginning to make a political issue of it. However, up until this point he only spoke of this individually with top-ranking leaders. Wang writes: “Therefore, at the time only a minority of top ranking leading cadres knew. As for the *Guangming Ribao* where I was working, even though it was one of the most important central news organs, I had never heard this even among small circles, so people far away from Beijing and even leading cadres, if they did not have access, it would be very difficult for them to get classified information at this high level.”<sup>127</sup> Therefore, historian Long Pingping is correct to argue that “the authors and organizers of the article did not plan beforehand and did not even think that the article’s publication would cause a big discussion. The reason that it could turn into a big discussion on a national scale that would last for a prolonged period of time and develop into a thought movement, fundamentally speaking, is because Deng Xiaoping started and led it.”<sup>128</sup> As will be discussed in the next chapter, that support came from three places, all related to the military: discussion of “practice” within the military

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<sup>124</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 114. Cheng, Wang, and Li say the date was May 17. See pg 93.

<sup>125</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 93–94.

<sup>126</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 121.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 71–72.

<sup>128</sup> Long Pingping, “Deng Xiaoping Shi Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Da Taolun de Fadongzhe Yu Lingdao zhe [Deng Xiaoping Was the Initiator and Leader of the Discussion of the Criterion of Truth],” *Beijing Dangshi [Beijing Party History]*, no. 3 (2008).

(especially the general staff), Deng's actions at the PLA political work meeting mentioned in the previous paragraph, and General Luo Ruiqing and the *People's Liberation Army Daily*.

Hua's plan for managing the situation remains somewhat mysterious, but he very obviously did not try to squash the debate. Wu Jiang, one of Hu Yaobang's assistants at the time, writes that Hua Guofeng personally criticized Yang Xiguang, Hu Jiwei, and Wu, who were all involved by the "practice" article, by name in front of Hu Yaobang.<sup>129</sup> According to Deng Liqun, although it looked as if Hua was not directly participating in the debate over the "two whatevers," Hua did complain about certain articles having "gone too far [说过头了]." Because of these comments, Hu Yaobang summoned Yu Guangyuan and Deng Liqun to discuss the matter. Hu told them that he would "work" on Hua Guofeng so that Hua would not interfere.<sup>130</sup> According to Hu Yaobang's daughter, on May 13 two individuals from *People's Daily* told Hu that Hua Guofeng wanted him to be more cautious on theoretical issues.<sup>131</sup> According to an account by Xiong Fu in late 1980, Wang Dongxing told him that when he (Wang) suggested that *Red Flag* should not support the "practice" position, Hua said: "Right! Of course don't support. The center simply did not know about this discussion. I am the chairman, I did not know, standing committee members of the Politburo did not know either." Xiong also had heard that Hua in September had criticized Zhou Yang, Liu Zihou, and the vice commissar of the Shenyang military region for turning the debate into a line issue, which took matters too far.<sup>132</sup> In his book on the reversal of unjust cases, Dai Huang says that in May or June Hu Qiaomu told Hu Yaobang that "the debate was started by you. It is targeted against Chairman Hua. Chairman Hua is already unhappy, Wang Dongxing has already started

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<sup>129</sup> Wu Jiang, *Shinian de Lu-He Hu Yaobang Xiangchu de Rizhi [Ten Year Road- The Days I Associated with Hu Yaobang]* (Hong Kong: Jingbao wenhua qiye youxian gongsi, n.d.), 38.

<sup>130</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun's Lectures on National History]*, 2000, 3:352.

<sup>131</sup> Man Mei, *Sinian Yiran Wujin: Huiyi Fuqin Hu Yaobang [Longing Still Never Ends: Remembering My Father Hu Yaobang]* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2005), 291.

<sup>132</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 235–36.

asking which party center you represent. If this debate continues, it will inevitably cause a new split in the party!”<sup>133</sup>

But the generally accepted narrative that Hua actively tried to squash debate is an exaggeration. As Han Gang points out, direct evidence that Hua took bold steps to swiftly crush an ideological loosening is extremely weak.<sup>134</sup> Many of the anecdotal accounts about Hua’s attitude came after he had already been identified by party historians as an opponent of “practice.” Moreover, Hua even provided some of his own language to justify moving on to new things, like “new period, new situation, and new topic” and both “studying new things and studying old things.” Around August, Wang Renzhong asked Hua about the “practice” position. Hua’s response was that it was an important question that needed to be clarified, but that it should begin and end with unity.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, the best assessment of Hua’s behavior at the time is that he was concerned about the implications of the “practice” debate, but still unwilling to act autocratically to shut down discussion because of his emphasis on consensus and unfamiliarity with theoretical issues.

Here it bears remembering that Hua never intended the “two whatevers” as an ideological statement and no leader or media organ had made the expression in any form since March 1977. Hua probably realized that the “two whatevers” as expressed early on were not worth defending. At the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in August 1977, he had adopted Deng’s expression of a “comprehensive and correct” understanding of Mao’s thought: a remarkable sign of flexibility given that Deng himself admitted that the phrase was an explicit criticism of the “two whatevers.”<sup>136</sup> We also know from his actions that Hua was open to moving rapidly away from the Maoist political model in practice.

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<sup>133</sup> Dai Huang, *Hu Yaobang Yu Pingfan Yuanjia Cuo’an [Hu Yaobang and the Reversal of Unjust Sentences]*, 1997, 92.

<sup>134</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan shishi’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng].”

<sup>135</sup> Shen Baoxiang, “Hu Yaobang Yu Hua Guofeng (Xia) [Hu Yaobang and Hua Guofeng- a Few Situations I Know (Part 2)],” *Tongzhou Gongjin*, no. 44 (2009): 46.

<sup>136</sup> Han Gang, “‘Liangge Fanshi’ de Youlai Jiqi Zhongjie [Origins of the ‘Two Whatevers’ and Their End],” 63.

Yet despite the unfairness of the situation, Hua was clearly associated with the “two whatevers” and Deng was attacking this viewpoint more and more directly. He was therefore in an impossible position. If any leader publicly spoke out against the “practice” articles or a media organ published a refutation, the split at the top would be even clearer. But if he continued to do nothing, the debate would move in a direction that more clearly threatened the “two whatevers.” And in any case, Hua wanted to ensure that loyalty to Mao’s memory was the ideological cornerstone, no matter how much of a fig leaf that cornerstone really was. The best way to describe Hua’s behavior in the theoretical sphere is cautious. Han makes the point that this caution may have been a result of Hua’s career in more practical positions that rarely touched upon ideology.<sup>137</sup>

At his closing speech at the work conference at the end of 1978, Hua gave the following account of his actions:

On May 11<sup>th</sup> of this year *Guangming Daily* published and on May 12 *People’s Daily* and the PLA newspaper re-printed this article on practice being the sole criterion of truth, because at the time I had just returned from North Korea, there were many issues that needed to be dealt with, so I did not have time to read it in June or July. Several members of the Politburo Standing Committee one after the other told me what they had heard about this, at this point I learned that there were different viewpoints on these two articles, when the Standing Committee of the Politburo had a meeting, they discussed this issue, they believed that the topic of the article was good, but they did not specially go and specially research the multiple articles that came out later, there were many domestic and international reactions, Marshal Ye believed that the State Council theory meeting went well, so he suggested having a theory working meeting with all the comrades together... have everyone with different opinions express them, on the basis of democratic discussion unify thinking and solve this problem, and all standing committee members agreed with this, because I wanted all standing committee members to be present to solve this problem, when Comrade Xiaoping went on a business trip, there was no time to have this [theory meeting] before this work conference started.

Hua went on to say that although the discussion of practice was good, he pointed out that “it is necessary to be appropriate, to pay attention to consequences, for some matters Chairman Mao should not be mentioned and it is not appropriate to mention him, newspapers should be extremely careful, if they go a

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<sup>137</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan Shishi (xu)’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng (Part 2)],” 2011, 9.

step too far, truth can become an error.”<sup>138</sup> In other words, Hua was making the case that he did not disagree with the ideas behind the “practice” debate, admitted he had been passive during its early stages, claimed he had tried to resolve the issue in a democratic way, but still expressed some reservations about the way the debate was conducted.

Finally, the role of Wang Dongxing must be addressed. Wang was extremely outspoken in his criticism of the “practice” position. Hua Nan, then editor of *People’s Liberation Army Daily*, later said that although Hua, as the top leader, had to take responsibility for the “two whatevers,” “in reality Comrade Wang Dongxing was the direct executor and creator of the ‘two whatevers.’” In fact, Hu Yaobang also felt that Hua’s problem was precisely because he was allowing Wang to lead him around by the nose.<sup>139</sup> Historian Han Gang writes: “At the time certainly not all of the standing committee members thought the article was good. There is no evidence that shows whether Hua liked the topic - but there is also no evidence that he attempted to squash the debate. Hua at most was cautious and simply did not want to express a position on the theoretical issue, and this simply cannot be compared with Wang Dongxing’s squashing and criticism.”<sup>140</sup>

In fact, it seems that Hua outsourced his authority on propaganda to Wang. Hua almost always let Wang chair meetings on propaganda issues, likely because of his lack of comfort in the ideological sphere. But when Wang went on a warpath, Hua never helped to turn up the heat, but instead had a calming effect. Hua even defended a major supporter of the “practice” debate, Hu Jiwei, from Wang’s attacks.<sup>141</sup> But Wang’s zeal put Hua in a difficult position. By taking such an antagonistic attitude towards the “practice” debate, Wang was exacerbating the sense that Hua was more of a leftist than he really was. But at the same time, Wang was a critical ally of Hua in the smashing of the Gang of Four, and Hua could

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<sup>138</sup> SZ1-4-791-(4-6)

<sup>139</sup> Zhang Liqun et al, *Huai Nian Yaobang [Remembering Yaobang]*, vol. 4 (Hong Kong: Yaotai guoji chuban youxian gongsi, 2001), 296.

<sup>140</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan Shishi (xu)’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng (Part 2)],” 2011, 9.

<sup>141</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Hu Jiwei Zishu [Hu Jiwei’s Self-Statement]*, vol. 3 (Hong Kong: Zhuoyue wenhua chubanshe, 2006), 35.

count on Wang's support in a power struggle against Deng. Therefore, criticizing Wang directly would not only have made the leadership split at the top clearer, but it would have been a clear victory for Deng. This complicated relationship also helps explain Hua's passivity. In any case, Wang's swift reaction to the *Guangming* article put a stop to the "practice" debate in the press - until the military, especially General Luo Ruiqing, stepped in, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Deng made the "two whatevers" into a political issue and used it to weaken Wang, and indirectly, Hua. But soon after this issue exploded at the work conference before the 3rd plenum, Deng himself back-tracked. On March 28, 1979, a meeting on theory restarted after a break during the war against Vietnam. In his speech, Deng reverted to profoundly conservative principles in an attempt to stabilize the situation. Essentially, now that Hua had been defeated, Deng was now using language almost reminiscent of the "two whatevers" to bring order to the worsening situation he had largely created through the "practice" discussion and the PLA's poor showing in Vietnam. Deng introduced the "four cardinal principles": the principle of upholding the socialist path, the principle of upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, the principle of upholding the leadership of the Communist Party, and the principle of upholding Mao Zedong Thought.<sup>142</sup>

Intellectuals who had helped defeat the "two whatevers" were shocked, feeling that the values of the 3rd plenum were being reversed and that now the emphasis would be on attacking the right, not the left.<sup>143</sup> Su Shaozhi writes that Deng had used intellectuals and calls for greater democracy outside the party to improve his position, but once they were no longer needed, and indeed saw that they were threatening broader stability, he immediately turned on them. Su concludes: "while the sound of Deng Xiaoping's assault on the 'whateverist faction' was still ringing in your ear, he himself also 'whatevered'

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<sup>142</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles," in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984).

<sup>143</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Cong Hua Guofeng Xiatai Dao Hu Yaobang Xiatai [From the Fall of Hua Guofeng to the Fall of Hu Yaobang]* (Brampton: Mingjing chubanshe, 1997), 88.



up to Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought.”<sup>144</sup> Deng had placed himself on one scale in the ideological spectrum to defeat Hua: now, expedience demanded that he revert back to more conservative principles.

### *Revolutionary Authority and Kompromat*

If hypothesis 1a is not able to answer what cleavage separated Hua from Deng, what is the real answer? As hypothesis 1b would predict, the evidence reveals that the more important dynamics were personal prestige and the skillful use of character assassination and mischaracterizations. The most important characteristic of elite politics after the defeat of the Gang of Four was the division between two types of high-ranking cadres. These were decisively not factions.<sup>145</sup> As discussed above, Hua’s group was not defined by a separate policy agenda or united aggression against other groups. Hua and others were also unfairly grouped together based on a generally wrong misperception of their roles during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, the word “faction” implies more cohesion than is appropriate.

However, the group most associated with Hua Guofeng did have enough in common that it is useful to describe them as the “took the stage group [上台派]”: individuals who had somehow survived the assaults of the extremists and avoided being purged.<sup>146</sup> By one way or another, these cadres had survived while countless numbers of their compatriots fell. This group must be distinguished from another whose political fortunes had ended abruptly in October 1976 - the extremists who supported the Gang of Four. These were the “leftist rebels [造反派]” who had overthrown the old revolutionaries at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. The “took the stage group,” on the other hand, was reactive to the broader purges and harbored more pragmatic sympathies. For example, when the Cultural Revolution started Hua Guofeng was himself targeted by the leftist rebels and was even kidnapped for forty or fifty days to be dragged around to struggle sessions. He refused to “*liangxiang* [亮相],” a word from Beijing

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<sup>144</sup> Su Shaozhi, *Shinian Fengyu: Wenge Hou de Dalu Lilun Jie [Ten Years of Wind and Rain: The Theoretical World in the Mainland after the Cultural Revolution]* (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1996), 105–7.

<sup>145</sup> Baum refers to the ‘whateverists’ as a “powerful and ambitious rival faction.” Baum, *Burying Mao*, 9.

<sup>146</sup> Han Gang, “Quanli de Zhuanyi: Guanyu Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [A Shift in Power: About the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress].”

Opera that means “striking a pose” but came to refer during the Cultural Revolution to openly declaring support for a leftist rebel faction. Hua hated the rebels: “What kind of revolution is this! This is personal slander!... These leftist rebels, they attack anyone working on the front line... those people on the Central Cultural Revolution Group still don’t think it’s chaotic enough!”<sup>147</sup> Many of these individuals who benefited from the purges, but did not participate directly in them, also cooperated in Deng’s brief rectification campaign in 1975. Although Vogel argues that members of this group like Wang Dongxing and Chen Xilian were “genuine radicals,” they were fundamentally different from the “leftist rebels” and had in fact both played major roles in the destruction of the Gang of Four.<sup>148</sup>

The second group was the old revolutionaries, which of course included Deng Xiaoping [also known as the “fell off the stage group [下台派].” Deng had established especially close relations with this group both during the revolution and as secretary-general of the party after the founding of the People’s Republic.<sup>149</sup> The old revolutionaries, including Deng, had been mostly purged at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Although they had started to return to power after Lin Biao’s death in 1971, they faced another setback when Deng and many of his compatriots were purged again in the last year of the Cultural Revolution. Some important members of this group, especially in the military, had never actually been fully purged, but were instead attacked or sidelined by the Gang of Four, often for their alleged connections to Lin Biao. Numerous political scientists and historians inferred the importance of

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<sup>147</sup> Li Haiwen, “Mao Zedong Weihe Xuan Hua Guofeng Jieban? Bei Zhongyang ‘Lao’ Shanglai [Why Did Mao Zedong Select Hua Guofeng to Be His Successor? He Was ‘Scooped’ up by the Party Center],” *Wenshi Cankao*, July 28, 2011; Miao Changqing, “Hua Guofeng zai ‘Wenhua Dageming’ chuqi [Hua Guofeng in the Early Period of the ‘Cultural Revolution’],” *Dangshi Bolan [General Review of the Communist Party of China]*, no. 2 (2015): 13–18.

<sup>148</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 2011, 363.

<sup>149</sup> For a superb account of Deng’s role in the PRC before the Cultural Revolution, see Yanlin Zhong, *Wenge qian de Deng Xiaoping: Mao Zedong de “fushuai”, 1956-1966 [Deng Xiaoping Before the Cultural Revolution: Mao Zedong’s “Vice Commander”, 1956-1966]* (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2013). For a full account of Deng’s life that includes the pre-Cultural Revolution period, see Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine, *Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

the revolutionary prestige of these individuals, especially Deng, even without the new, corroborating evidence presented in this chapter.<sup>150</sup>

The old revolutionaries had a suspicious attitude towards the Cultural Revolution “took the stage group”. First, the old revolutionaries had lost their jobs to these younger counterparts. The “took the stage group” often saw their careers skyrocket to the top, a type of career development that was later referred to by their detractors as “helicoptering.” Second, those who benefited from the Cultural Revolution, by simple fact of their remaining in power for such a long time in an environment like the Cultural Revolution, often had no shortage of skeletons in their closet - a result of their constant need to mouth the official line and to come to an understanding with the leftist extremists. Third, the old revolutionaries, who had spent decades leading the Communist Party to victory by fighting the Japanese and the Nationalists, had little respect for these individuals who joined the party later or played smaller roles in those glorious times. In the words of Vogel, “Hua lacked Mao’s and Deng’s heroic revolutionary past.”<sup>151</sup> Fourth, many of the old revolutionaries knew they could not take out their anger on Mao’s memory, but still felt the need to punish someone. Finally, these arrivistes had come to power during something the old revolutionaries could not help but hate: the Cultural Revolution. The old revolutionaries, then, were suspicious that the Cultural Revolution “took the stage group” still harbored sympathies for those dark old days.

The core of the problem was the difficulty for the old revolutionaries to distinguish the difference between the “took the stage group” and true “leftist rebels,” which ultimately led to misunderstandings and unfair treatment. According to Hu Yaobang’s son, “some old comrades criticized Hua Guofeng for being one of the ‘Cultural Revolution’s’ leftist rebels.”<sup>152</sup> As Mao himself put it in March 1976:

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<sup>150</sup> Roderick Macfarquhar, “The Succession to Mao and the End of Maoism, 1969-1982,” in *The Politics of China*, 3 ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Harding, *China’s Second Revolution*; Baum, *Burying Mao*.

<sup>151</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 2011, 185.

<sup>152</sup> Hu Deping, “Weihe ‘Yaobang Bu Yuan Dong Hua Guofeng’? [Why Was It That ‘Yaobang Was Not Willing to Move Hua Guofeng’?],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 8 (2010): 53.

Do not underestimate the old comrades, I am the oldest, the old comrades are still useful. It is necessary to be merciful to the leftist rebels [高抬贵手], do not 'expel' them at a moment's notice. Sometimes they made mistakes, did we old comrades not make mistakes? [We] also made mistakes. It is necessary to emphasize integrating the old, middle, and young. Some old comrades have not worked for seven or eight years, there are many things they do not know, they have been in Peach Blossom Spring [an anecdote meaning an isolated place], they do not know about the Han [dynasty], let alone [the subsequent] Wei or Jin [meaning they are not aware of the situation]. Some people have been attacked a little bit, they are unhappy, they are angry, this is an understandable human reaction [在情理之中], it can be forgiven. But [one cannot] be angry with the majority, with the masses, to stand opposite them and command them.

And indeed Mao's fear was justified: the "old comrades," who did not know of the "Han," let alone the "Wei" or "Jin," did not distinguish between the true leftist rebels who had "committed mistakes" and the others.<sup>153</sup> According to Zhao Ziyang, Chen Yun did not distinguish Hua from the "leftist rebels" and this fact disqualified him from the leadership: "this person cannot stay [这个人不能留]."<sup>154</sup> None of these figures had the revolutionary legitimacy of the old comrades. As Teiwes puts it, "Hua's decline essentially had nothing to do with policy disputes: it had everything to do with historical status in the CCP."<sup>155</sup>

At the time of the Gang of Four's destruction, the power of the "took the stage group" and their allies should not be underestimated. Hua Guofeng was chairman of the party, premier of the government, and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Wang Dongxing was party vice chairman in charge of ideology, Wu De ran Beijing, Ji Dengkui was a vice premier whom Mao had considered as a possible successor, Zhang Pinghua ran the propaganda ministry, Hu Sheng ran the Party History Research Office, and Xiong Fu was the editor of *Red Flag*. A number of other party scholars such as Wu Lengxi, Li Xin, and Zheng Bijian were also closely connected to Hua.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong nianpu*, 6:641–42.

<sup>154</sup> Daozheng Du, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuo guo shen me?: Du Daozheng ri ji [What Else Did Zhao Ziyang Say? Diary of Du Daozheng]* (Hong Kong: Tiandi, 2010), 159.

<sup>155</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes, "The Study of Elite Political Conflict in the PRC: Politics inside the 'Black Box,'" in *Handbook of the Politics of China* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2015), 32.

<sup>156</sup> Su Shaozhi, *Shinian Fengyu: Wenge Hou de Dalu Lilun Jie [Ten Years of Wind and Rain: The Theoretical World in the Mainland after the Cultural Revolution]*, 32.

Hypothesis 1a would assume that policy or patronage would be the most important political issue. But in this case, we see the clear importance of *kompromat*, which is predicted by hypothesis 1b. Wang Dongxing, Ji Dengkui, and Wu De, moreover, were in charge of the notorious “special case committees [专案组]” set up during the Cultural Revolution to investigate purged cadres, which made them both exceptionally powerful while also making their relationship with the old revolutionaries especially difficult.<sup>157</sup> Their control over those committees also meant they had control over compromising material.

Wang’s behavior was particularly disconcerting for the military. The problem was that although military officers were already returning to the ranks, they were often not given a final political verdict clearing them from the charges that caused them to be purged in the first place, causing them to feel like a sword was still hanging over their heads.<sup>158</sup> It also raised questions about Wang’s intentions. At the work meeting before the 3rd plenum, Tan Zhenlin, an old revolutionary with major military experience, revealed that Luo Ruiqing, the former secretary of the CMC who had died shortly before, told him “it is necessary to dissolve the first, second, and third special case committees [which controlled *kompromat*], otherwise they are a ticking time bomb.” Lu Zhengcao, who became a general [*shangjiang*] in 1955, suggested on the second day of the meeting that the three special case committees be turned over to the organization department, because they were “keeping secrets,” which was equivalent to “keeping secrets for Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.”<sup>159</sup> Documents available in the Service Center for Chinese Publications show that verdicts on a number of major military officials were reversed only after the 3rd

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<sup>157</sup> “Wang Dongxing Yu Hu Yaobang Chen Yeping de tanhua[A Conversation between Wang Dongxing and Hu Yaobang and Chen Yeping]” (Chinese University Press, June 9, 1978), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

<sup>158</sup> Chen Heqiao, *Chen Heqiao Huiyi Wenji [Collection of Chen Heqiao’s Memories]* (Beijing: Guofang gongye chubanshe, 2000).

<sup>159</sup> Zhu Jiamu, *Wo Suo Zhidao de Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [What I Know about the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998).

plenum in late 1978, even though many of them had already returned to work.<sup>160</sup> Just like in the Soviet case, fear over the possible uses of *kompromat* had a powerful effect.

Control over *kompromat* made men like Wang and Ji political antagonists of the old revolutionaries, and their relationship with Hua indirectly, and largely unfairly, hurt his authority. But *kompromat* mattered for another important reason as well: it was used very cynically against Hua himself. All of the flawed analyses of Hua discussed above were a result of false charges brought against him to justify his removal from all formal positions. The necessity of this dissertation project, in other words, speaks to the major role of *kompromat* in Chinese political history. Stunningly, the decision to criticize Hua in the document on party history and introduce the worst of the *kompromat* happened *after* Hua had already agreed to resign.<sup>161</sup> As Hua himself put it, “Writing history, writing true history, is very, very difficult. Official history writers [史官] walk with the emperor, [Han Dynasty historiographer] Sima Qian wrote *Records of the Grand Historian*, [Emperor] Han Wudi did not disseminate a single chapter.”<sup>162</sup>

Justifying the removal of Hua Guofeng from the leadership demanded character assassination. As historian Xiao Donglian put it:

In the eyes of the people, Hua did not have high prestige, he was not particularly wise, and it was difficult for him to manage the three top positions. But by capturing the ‘Gang of Four’ he had made a major contribution, and he had not made any unforgivable mistakes, he was honest, his style was relatively democratic, and there was no reason to definitely knock him off his horse. This type of domestic opinion and feeling could not be ignored.<sup>163</sup>

Moreover, Hua was also young and could have played an important transitional role. As Ye also told his friend: “I won’t say anything else, Hua is in his fifties, we are close to eighty, Xiaoping is over seventy,

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<sup>160</sup> Service Center for Chinese Publications, Series 26, Volume 4. For example, officers tied to the infamous “Devil Palace in the General Political Department” and “Yang [Chengwu], Yu [Lijin] and Fu [Chongbi]” cases were only rehabilitated in March 1979.

<sup>161</sup> According to interviews conducted by Warren Sun, Hua made a decision to resign based on his own volition on August 10, 1981.

<sup>162</sup> Li Haiwen, “Hua Guofeng Tan Shi Zhuan Xie Zuo [Hua Guofeng Discusses the Writing of History],” 9.

<sup>163</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 343.

picking this man [Hua] was a good choice! Like finding a piece of gold among the sand found in the waves!”<sup>164</sup>

Hua, in other words, could not simply be removed: he also had to be humiliated. As Deng himself put it at one point:

In the past during discussion with regards to the two years after the smashing of the Gang of Four, some comrades asked whether Comrade Hua Guofeng’s name should be mentioned [in the history document]. Of course, this is a good opinion. Later everyone thought about this carefully, it seemed that not raising his name would be no good... Comrade Hua Guofeng’s name must be put here, because it fits a need [合乎实际]. If he is not mentioned, there is no justification to change Comrade Hua Guofeng’s work.

This decision was ultimately the reason for all the revisionist history presented in this chapter.

Beyond the fallacious accounts of Hua’s policy differences with others in the leadership discussed above, Hua’s enemies also resorted to pure character assassination. One example is the picture of the “gang of eight.” In February 1980, right before the 5<sup>th</sup> plenum that saw a number of the “took the stage group” lose their positions, an official photographer informed the assistant editor of *People’s Daily* about a picture he had taken three days after the death of Mao. This picture, taken next to Mao’s dead body, included not only the Gang of Four but also Hua Guofeng, Wang Dongxing, Chen Xilian, and Mao Yuanxin (Mao's nephew, another radical). The evidence indicates this picture probably appeared at this time because of a personal squabble between the photographer and Wang Dongxing. The picture was sent to Chen Yun with the implication that Hua had a closer relationship with the Gang, and a weaker relationship with Ye Jianying, than was previously understood. The accusation was outrageous. Hu Jiwei, who was involved in the affair, later even expressed remorse: “Looking back now, this conclusion was incorrect.”<sup>165</sup> According to historian Xiao Donglian, although an issue like the “gang of eight picture” could not be written into official documents, “it was enough to put Hua Guofeng even more into a passive

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<sup>164</sup> Xiong Lei, “‘1976 Nian, Hua Guofeng He Ye Jianying Zenme Lianshou de’ [How Hua Guofeng and Ye Jianying United in 1976],” *Yanhuang chunqiu* [Chinese Annals], no. 10 (2008)

<sup>165</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Cong Hua Guofeng Xiatai Dao Hu Yaobang Xiatai* [From the Fall of Hua Guofeng to the Fall of Hu Yaobang], 1997, 73–83.

position.”<sup>166</sup> In June 1981, Chen Yun explicitly mentioned the picture as a useful way to convince people who believed Hua was a good person. At the same meeting, Hua pointed out that the picture was taken *after* he had already set plans in motion to destroy the Gang of Four. Li Xiannian and Hu Yaobang criticized the use of the picture and defended Hua.<sup>167</sup>

During the discussion of a party resolution on its own history among more than 4,000 party members in 1980, discussions of whether to include the period of Hua’s leadership did not touch upon whether he should resign. However, the specter of *kompromat* once again showed its influential power. According to an account of the preparation of the history decision:

As the exposition and criticism of Hua Guofeng’s mistakes gradually deepened, especially when Li Qiang on October 25 raised [the issue of] after the destruction of the ‘Gang of Four’ forty-four exemplary youth were killed, Li Jiebo on October 27 raised [the issue] of after the Tiananmen Incident Hua Guofeng at a Politburo meeting strongly supported expelling Deng Xiaoping from the party, Yang Jingren on October 27 raised [the issue] of Hua Guofeng calling the document-writing small group [to tell them] not to write the fourth section and his mistakes on these three issues, everyone’s attitude became more intense.<sup>168</sup>

The “forty-four exemplary youth” were also mentioned by Bai Xiangguo, Zhang Zhichen, and Ding Tieshi on November 5 and 9. This refers to the execution of between forty and sixty individuals (the exact number is unclear) after Mao’s death for spreading political rumors. As historian Han Gang points out, this was a major mistake on Hua’s part. Yet he also points out that these executions were intended to prevent political instability, hints that it was largely the result of zealous regional officials over-reacting to documents from the center, and notes that “the roots of this mistake were not Hua Guofeng, but the long period of a “dictatorial” system and tradition.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]* (Hong Kong: Quanqiu faxing zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2008), 393.

<sup>167</sup> “Zhongyang Changwei Zai Liu Zhong Quanhui Yubei Hui Ge Xiaozu Zhaoji Ren Pengtou Hui Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress].”

<sup>168</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 221.

<sup>169</sup> Han Gang, “‘Guanyu Hua Guofeng de Ruogan Shishi (xu)’ [Some Historical Facts Regarding Hua Guofeng (Part 2)],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 9 (2011): 16–17.



Moreover, the timing and manner of the investigation into these executions raises important questions. Dai Huang, a man heavily involved with reversing the unjust verdicts from the Cultural Revolution, went from Beijing to Jiangxi to investigate the late 1977 torture, execution, and mutilation of a young woman named Li Jiulian. His trip took place in late November 1980, precisely when *kompromat* against Hua was most in demand. By this time, the regional officials had already decided that the execution was too heavy a punishment for Li. When Dai returned to Beijing, he wrote a report that unfairly implied Hua's complicity in the execution by claiming the main charge against Li was "viciously attacking" Hua.<sup>170</sup>

The idea that Hua had tried to expel Deng from the party was an accusation that has no evidentiary basis.<sup>171</sup> However, it was especially outrageous to the military. According to the newsletter of the military's sixth discussion group:

All of the comrades in the group, after seeing summary newsletter [报总] #48's report that after the 1976 Tiananmen Incident Comrade Hua Guofeng at a Politburo meeting strongly supported expelling Comrade Deng Xiaoping from the party, felt very surprised and very angry. Everyone said, even Chairman Mao did not say it was necessary to remove comrade Deng Xiaoping from the party, why did Comrade Hua Guofeng stubbornly want to remove Deng Xiaoping from the party? [We] demand that Comrade Hua Guofeng make a written answer.<sup>172</sup>

A major reason many continued to support Hua was because of his heroic role in the destruction of the Gang of Four: praise that the historical record shows he deserved. In a speech given by a man named Feng Wenbin to the party school in July 1981 explaining the decisions of the 6th plenum, Feng noted that "some people see the destruction of the 'Gang of Four' entirely as the sole contribution of Comrade Hua Guofeng, they say something like not letting him become chairman is supposedly 'crossing the river and burning the bridge.'" According to Feng, Hua only sought out Ye Jianying's support after Li

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<sup>170</sup> Dai Huang, *Hu Yaobang Yu Pingfan Yuanjia Cuo'an [Hu Yaobang and the Reversal of Unjust Sentences]* (Hong Kong: Jingbao wenhua qiye youxian gongsi, 1997), 153–72.

<sup>171</sup> At a Politburo meeting shortly after Mao's death, only Jiang Qing wanted Deng to be stripped of his party membership. Warren Sun and Frederick C. Teiwes, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 557.

<sup>172</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 225.

Xiannian and Chen Xilian told him that the Gang of Four were about to move against him. Moreover, “everyone knows that at the time, if not for the support for the military would it have worked? No.” Feng told the group that “According to the way Comrade Chen Yun put it, Comrade Hua Guofeng did something that a communist party member should have done.”<sup>173</sup>

### *Significant Support for Hua*

To remove Hua entirely from power required more work. But why did Hua have to be removed from the leadership entirely? One possibility is that Hua was simply less popular than Deng and therefore his removal was just the inevitable result of structured political deliberations within the elite. That would be predicted by both hypotheses 1a and 2a. Instead, we see support for hypotheses 1b and 2b: Hua was removed because he was *too* popular, and the engineering of his final expulsion was marked by decidedly undemocratic tricks. Hua was dangerous because of the possibility leftist forces would rally to him. In the party as a whole, we have strong reason to believe that Hua would have enjoyed support if he had portrayed himself as more loyal to Mao’s memory. Some were rallying to him even *without* his deliberate seeking of their support. Moreover, key individuals at the elite level still hoped that Hua would continue to play a real role in the running of the country, precisely because he was young, honest, and democratic.

Leftist attitudes were powerful. Of the 38 million members who had joined the party by 1980, 20 million had joined during the Cultural Revolution. Xiao Donglian writes:

Just from open reports it could be felt that in all regions a new and serious blocking force had appeared when executing all the policies of the 3rd plenum. In Shanghai, there was a popular expression among cadres: ‘The 3rd plenum cut down the flag [of Mao Zedong Thought], the change in emphasis left the line (重点转折离了线), liberating thought has gone off the rails, developing democracy has caused a disaster.’<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Feng Wenbin, “Feng Wenbin Tongzhi Chuanda Liu Zhong Quanhui Jingshen de Baogao [Report on Comrade Feng Wenbin’s Communication of the Spirit of the Sixth Plenum],” July 4, 1981.

<sup>174</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 195.

The party committee of the Yuncheng region in Shanxi raised big character posters covered with leftist slogans, leaflets accusing Hu Yaobang and Hu Qiaomu of revisionism appeared on the streets of Beijing, and in April, *People's Daily* and *Guangming Daily* received 16,000 pamphlets criticizing Deng.<sup>175</sup> The party center was particularly shocked when 70,000 students sent to work in the countryside in Yunnan went on strike and lay en masse on train tracks.<sup>176</sup> Conservative, leftist forces were using the opportunity to blame Deng for the chaos.<sup>177</sup> In essence, Hua was proven right: moving too quickly and carelessly with ideological issues would prove to be destabilizing.

Deng was seen by many as “the behind-the-scenes supporter of de-Maoification [非毛化的后台].”<sup>178</sup> Chen Yun stated at the preparatory work conference before the 6th plenum: “if Chairman Mao is described too terribly, it will not be supported by old peasants and old workers.” Li Xiannian agreed: “It will not be supported among the cadres either.”<sup>179</sup>

Hua's support was definitely significant at middle to lower levels of the party. According to a speech given by Deng Liqun in July 1981, “Among high-ranking cadres, this issue has been solved, at least for the vast majority of cadres. Among medium and lower levels, and among some of the masses, this matter has yet to be solved well. What kind of issue is this? This is a issue of appearance and true nature. Comrade Xiaoping says that by appearance there is humility, but in the stomach there is a plot. Comrade Chen Yun spoke of a reaction among some people, the first is [Hua] has made a contribution,

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<sup>175</sup> Yu Guangyuan et al, *Mengxing de Shike: Shiyijie Sanzhong Quanhui Shi Zhou Nian Jinian Zhuanji [The Moment of Awakening: Special Documents Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress]* (Beijing: Zhongwai wenhua chuban gongsi, 1989), 58.

<sup>176</sup> Hu Deping, “Hu Yaobang Zai ‘Zhenli Biaozhun’ Da Taolun [Hu Yaobang in the Great ‘Truth Criterion’ Debate],” *Juece Luntan [Policy Discussion Platform]*, no. 11 (2008): 22.

<sup>177</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 15.

<sup>178</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun's Lectures on National History]*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo shigao bianweihui, 2000), 300.

<sup>179</sup> “Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhuanfa de Zhongyang Changwei Zai Shiyi Jie Liu Zhong Quanhui Qijian Zhaokai Gezu Zhaojiren Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress Distributed by the Party Center],” n.d.

second is humble, the third is [even] if he lacks experience, the old comrades can help, why must he resign, why is it necessary to change his job.”<sup>180</sup>

The danger that some disaffected individuals would rally to Hua was real. When Hua went to Nanjing after a trip to Japan, the local party officials organized an extravagant welcome party. In early July 1980, a phrase Hua made during a trip to Dalian was published in the local newspaper for five days. As historian Xiao Donglian puts it, “for local officials who were not in the know Hua still had significant influence... the methods of these regional officials were certainly not according to Hua Guofeng’s wishes, but Hua did not clearly stop them. Whether he wanted to use this to restore his decreasing influence is impossible to know, but the result was the opposite, Hua was criticized even more and pressure against him increased.”<sup>181</sup>

Concern over Hua’s continued popularity at the top of the leadership was clearly expressed by Deng Xiaoping. He told an enlarged Politburo session in May 1981:

With regards to this ‘decision’ [on party history] there were also some comrades that suggested perhaps it would be better not to rush it. No, it must be done, because everyone is waiting, both inside and outside the country, inside and outside the party... If it is not presented, everyone will say that there is internal dispute, the contradiction has not yet been resolved, there is this and that faction, they cannot reach a joint opinion.<sup>182</sup>

Deng Liqun told a group of military officers in July 1981 the following:

Comrade Xiaoping mentioned a political trend that deserves attention, which is that the vestiges of the ‘Gang of Four,’ the so-called dissidents, all want to wave, or have already waved, the flag of Hua Guofeng. This issue Comrade Xiaoping spoke of, Comrade Hua Guofeng did not participate in these issues, he is not involved in these matters. But people want to save his flag, this issue definitely requires

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<sup>180</sup> Deng Liqun, “‘Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Dang de Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi’ Qicao Guocheng He Zhuyao Neirong de Jieshao [Introduction to the Writing Process and Main Content of the ‘Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China’],” July 7, 1981.

<sup>181</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 386.

<sup>182</sup> Feng Wenbin, “Feng Wenbin Tongzhi Chuanda Liu Zhong Quanhui Jingshen de Baogao [Report on Comrade Feng Wenbin’s Communication of the Spirit of the Sixth Plenum].” I thank Warren Sun for sharing this document with me.

attention. This relates to the comprehensive evaluation of Comrade Hua Guofeng, the issue of how to comprehensively understand Comrade Hua Guofeng.<sup>183</sup>

Defusing the danger of leftist political power, therefore, included two measures; first, supporting a generally positive evaluation of Mao, and second, expelling Hua from the leadership to make sure radicals did not use him as a rally point. In other words, disenfranchising the leftists was a key element of a two-handed approach. Policy positions were not being co-opted: they were being squashed. As will be described in the next chapter, the most pressing concern was that lower levels of *the military* would rally to Hua.

Hua was not only supported by many at the middle and lower levels of the party. At the May 1981 enlarged Politburo session, “a majority of comrades” agreed to criticize Hua Guofeng by name in the history decision. However, several important figures, including from the military, opposed this (Huang Kecheng, Han Xianchu, Deng Yingchao, Wu Lanfu, and Xu Xiangqian).<sup>184</sup> As discussed elsewhere, Ye supported Hua until the end. In his speech accepting that Hua would be removed, Ye was emotional. He admitted that the special appellation for Hua, “wise leader,” was invented by him. Ye also told the story of Mao calling him back a second time to his deathbed to stare into his eyes, which he had interpreted as Mao telling him to watch after Hua. After admitting that this type of behavior was “feudal,” he burst into tears.<sup>185</sup> Ye claimed that “at the time he clearly knew that Comrade Hua Guofeng’s opinions were incorrect, but after he refused my advice, I did not persist.” Ye said that if Hua refused to do a self-criticism, then he would take the responsibility for him.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Deng Liqun, “‘Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Dang de Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi’ Qicao Guocheng He Zhuyao Neirong de Jieshao [Introduction to the Writing Process and Main Content of the ‘Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China’].”

<sup>184</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 116.

<sup>185</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun’s Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]*, 2006, 172.

<sup>186</sup> Su Yongtong, “Ye Jianying: Zuihou Shinian, Manmu Qingshan Xi Zhaoming.”

Li Xiannian, another major elder, had no reason to oppose Hua. The two had planned the destruction of the Gang of Four closely together.<sup>187</sup> Although Li seems to have gone along with the decision to remove Hua, at a meeting immediately before Hua was removed from his position as party chairman in June 1981, he summoned the courage to speak a few words in Hua's favor.<sup>188</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Hua also seems to have also enjoyed a relationship with Peng Zhen.

Hu Yaobang, who replaced Hua as formal head of the party, also opposed the change.<sup>189</sup> Hu, who had worked with Hua in 1964, disagreed with Deng's assessment that Hua was really a "leftist rebel [造反派]" who had "helicoptered" to the top of the party.<sup>190</sup> Hu believed that Hua could have adopted his position on "practice," but that unfortunately he had been led poorly by individuals like Wang Dongxing.<sup>191</sup> In his speech to the Politburo on November 19, Hu admitted that up until two or three months before, he had only spoken of Hua's strengths (which, incidentally, also showed that Deng's decision to remove Hua had only become known to him shortly before).<sup>192</sup> Hu revealed to his son that Zhao Ziyang and Hu Qili also opposed the move: "the new thinking in my opinion is a risky move, me, Zhao [Ziyang], Hu [Qili?], are all not very supportive... making personal issues [人事] the most important issue, not principles, is no good!" In Hu's mind, this would have been a good opportunity to

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<sup>187</sup> Wu Jianhua, "Ye Jianying Wang Dongxing Mitan Chuzhi Sirenbang [Ye Jianying and Wang Dongxing Secretly Discuss Defeating the Gang of Four]."

<sup>188</sup> "Zhongyang Changwei Zai Liu Zhong Quanhui Yubei Hui Ge Xiaozu Zhaoji Ren Pengtou Hui Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress]."

<sup>189</sup> Zhao Ziyang's attitude is unclear, although we have reason to believe he did not get along with Hua. In February 1976, during the 'criticize Deng' campaign, Zhao told Hua to be careful when criticizing Deng because it could affect the rectification more generally. Hua told Jiang Qing about Zhao's comments, who then put great pressure on Zhao. Zhao's refusal to take the 'criticize Deng' campaign seriously was probably an important reason for why he became premier. Cai Wenbin, ed., *Zhao Ziyang Zai Sichuan [Zhao Ziyang in Sichuan]* (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chubanshan jichuanmei youxian gongsi, 2011), 113.

<sup>190</sup> Hu Deping, "Weihe 'Yaobang Bu Yuan Dong Hua Guofeng'? [Why Was It That 'Yaobang Was Not Willing to Move Hua Guofeng']," *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 8 (2010).

<sup>191</sup> Man Mei, *Sinian Yiran Wujin: Huiyi Fuqin Hu Yaobang [Longing Still Never Ends: Remembering My Father Hu Yaobang]*, 374; Zhang Liqun et al, *Huai Nian Yaobang [Remembering Yaobang]*, 4:296.

<sup>192</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 390.

create a “chairmen Presidium [主席团]” with multiple chairmen. Each of them would have one vote: “in the top leadership we would simply go and create a completely democratic leadership, a completely collective leadership.” Deng, however, opposed such an institutionalized system.<sup>193</sup>

The new PSC established in June 1981 included, in rank order, Hu Yaobang, Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang, Li Xiannian, Chen Yun, and Hua Guofeng. Of this group, only Deng and Chen had unambiguously negative opinions of Hua. Peng Zhen, another elder who Hua believes might have helped him balance against Deng and Chen, was not allowed on that body. With strong leftist sentiments at the middle and lower ranks of the party, and strong support even among the top, Hua was far from completely powerless.

## **Section 2: Selectorate Theory vs. Rule Manipulation**

With regards to whether Chinese elite politics is best understood as marked by a defined selectorate or an ambiguous inter-relationship among different decision-making bodies, we once again see evidence for the authority model. The famous work conference of the CC before the 3rd plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was so unprecedented that even Deng Xiaoping was surprised. Never before had the CC taken the initiative away from the Politburo Standing Committee: Hua’s opponents were violating a previously untouchable informal rule. Second, although Deng had successfully surpassed Hua as de facto leader, the party as a whole was not convinced that Hua had to be criticized and stripped of all formal positions. The maneuvering towards that outcome was conducted in an undemocratic spirit. Deng unfairly directed the discussion of Hua’s leadership after Mao’s death.

Deng’s attitude towards “inner-party democracy” was clear: he only supported it when it favored him. Former editor of the *People’s Daily* Hu Jiwei recalled in a memoir how surprised he was by Deng

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<sup>193</sup> Hu Deping, “Weihe ‘Yaobang Bu Yuan Dong Hua Guofeng’? [Why Was It That ‘Yaobang Was Not Willing to Move Hua Guofeng’?],” 2010, 54.

Xiaoping's reaction to a speech he gave at a meeting of the National People's Congress (the Chinese state legislature) in June 1979. In his speech, Hu criticized Wang Dongxing for corruption and suggested Wang should be removed from the chairman group [主席团] of the NPC. Hu was supported by other representatives, but Deng exploded: "this is a list determined by the Politburo, you still dare to give an opinion?!" [这是中央政治局决定的名单，你还提意见?!] According to the NPC's rules, Hu had every right to discuss something the Politburo proposed. Moreover, Wang was in fact a political *enemy* of Deng and would be removed shortly thereafter in February 1980.<sup>194</sup> Deng's inclination, in other words, was to support discussion at lower levels when he was ready for it and could direct it.

### *The 3rd Plenum and Preceding Work Conference*

Hypothesis 2a would predict that rules on leadership selection would be standardized and formal. However, the first great political defeat for Hua Guofeng occurred because of an event that had no precedence (and never repeated) in the history of the CCP: the CC took the initiative away from the Politburo Standing Committee. In one way, the CC was working the way it was supposed to. But at the same time, the behavior of Hua's opponents were clearly violating decades of the tradition of democratic centralism. Rules were therefore somewhat ambiguous. But it is clear that while "inner-party democracy" was tolerable for the old revolutionaries when it was in their favor, that was not the case for Hua. Although the evidence shows that Deng did not expect the work conference to proceed in the way it did, his manipulation of the "practice" issue clearly helped set the stage for what happened. Chen Yun, another major elder, had no qualms about pushing the debate in a direction not pre-approved by the Politburo. Therefore, we see clear support for hypothesis 2b: the importance of which decision-making body is allowed to make a decision within a broader context of ambiguous rules, not one clear set of rules in which elites operate.

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<sup>194</sup> Jiwei Hu, *Hu Zhao xingzheng qishilu: bingdui "xin minzhu zhuyi" jinxing poxi* [The Beginnings of Reform Under Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang *[sic]*] (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chubanshe, 2012), 157–58.



The 3rd plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and preceding work conference are almost universally seen as the moment Deng defeated Hua to become the de facto leader of the country and party. The event is interpreted as an expression by the party for Deng's more reformist program. As shown above, however, no real policy differences separated the two. And as Teiwes and Sun have shown, Hua was still playing an important role in major political decisions after the plenum.<sup>195</sup> Ye was still writing poetry about his loyalty to Hua as late as September 1979.<sup>196</sup> Yet the work conference and plenum were still an important milestone. Men and policies associated, largely unfairly, with Hua were criticized, and although he did not oppose bigger changes he was caught in a passive position. Hua was ready to talk about all the issues Deng had raised, from the "key link" to the Tiananmen Incident to reversing Cultural Revolution-era verdicts. As Yu Guangyuan argues, "Simply put, Hua was passive on all of these issues, although he also did not resist them. Although he could not completely change, he also took an attitude of considering everyone's opinions and even accepting their opinions."<sup>197</sup>

The work conference had no precedent in Chinese political history, and nothing like it has ever been seen since. The ironclad rule of democratic centralism was violated. Instead of using his formal authority to quash debate, Hua allowed the work conference to move beyond his expectations and damage his political position. For the first and last time, the initiative was taken away from the Politburo Standing Committee and put into the hands of the CC. Just like in the Soviet cases, the most important question was therefore *where* political decisions were made. Hua's own democratic sensibility hurt him by allowing this unprecedented attack on his authority to proceed. Hu Jiwei later reflected on how strange it was that a leader chose not to squash positions that affected his personal authority by labeling them counter-revolutionary or against the socialist system, thereby justifying "brutal struggle and cruel

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<sup>195</sup> Teiwes and Sun, *Paradoxes of Post-Mao Rural Reform*, 49.

<sup>196</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 347.

<sup>197</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Wo Qinli de Na Ci Lishi Zhuanzhe: Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui de Taiqian Muhou [That Historical Change I Witnessed: Behind the Stage at the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress]* (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 1998), 207.

attacks”. Both the criticism of below and the tolerance for such criticism from above was revolutionary: “this was one of the most civilized changes in leadership positions in the history of our party.”<sup>198</sup> In other words, Hua’s willingness to accept the more “democratic” interpretation of party rules counter-intuitively helped contribute to his defeat.

Most of the important events took place at the preceding work conference, not the actual plenum.<sup>199</sup> Ye had suggested that the preparatory meeting first be held in order to “unify thinking”: “after the destruction of the Gang of Four until now, the opinions of those of the standing committee and the rest of the Politburo are in unison. What about the members of the Central Committee? It is necessary to hold a preparatory meeting to unify thinking.”<sup>200</sup> It is most likely that Ye called for the preparatory meeting to manage the growing dissatisfaction among the Central Committee sparked by the “practice” debate before it got out of control.

Hua began the work conference with a speech that announced three topics for the meeting: agriculture, economic growth in 1979 and 1980, and a speech Li Xiannian had recently given to the State Council. Yet Hua also said that before moving on to these topics the work conference would discuss the shift of party work to socialist modernization.<sup>201</sup> The problem for Hua was that the discussants refused to discuss the three issues as outlined by Hua in his opening speech, instead addressing historical issues and

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<sup>198</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Cong Hua Guofeng Xiatai Dao Hu Yaobang Xiatai [From the Fall of Hua Guofeng to the Fall of Hu Yaobang]*, 1997, 84–85.

<sup>199</sup> A document in the Hubei archives reveals more detail on the political environment of October 1978. At the Third National Civil Defense Meeting, Hua Guofeng began by criticizing Li Xiannian and Deng Xiaoping for including the phrase “actively develop”, saying that it was more important for focus on three other slogans. He then showed his familiarity with defense issues by discussing which cities and regions should be more strongly defended in case of a Soviet attack. Later on the speech, however, Hua strongly praises Deng’s general staff and argues that it should take the lead in civil defense issues and twice referenced Deng’s opinions in a positive way. Deng interrupted Hua multiple times, sometimes to qualify one of Hua’s statements and at other times to agree with him. The general sense is one of Hua asserting his position but going out of his way to be polite to Deng. At one point Wang Dongxing disagreed with Hua, Li, and Ye over the possibility of building taller buildings and underground structures in Beijing. Ye Jianying was silent until the end and simply expressed support for the discussions. SZ 1-4-821.

<sup>200</sup> Ye Xiangzhen, “Ye Jianying Zhongyang Gongzuo Huiyi Jianghua Qicao Ji [Record of the Writing of Ye Jianying’s Speech at the Central Work Conference],” *Caijing* 227 (n.d.).

<sup>201</sup> SZ 1-4-791

attacking top party leaders like Wang Dongxing.<sup>202</sup> The import of raising historical issues was essentially tied to the question of the status of the old revolutionaries. The speech evidence demonstrates that the concern was over historical questions and the position of *kompromat* in Wang Dongxing's hands, not policy issues.

The tide turned decisively against Hua on November 11 when Chen Zaidao, Tan Zhenlin, Fu Chongbi, and Li Chang spoke out in support of changing the verdict on Tiananmen. On the second day, Lu Zhengcao, Chen Guodong, Jin Rubai, and Yao Yilin also spoke out.<sup>203</sup> The military, which as will be discussed in the next chapter had strong loyalties to Deng, played a crucial role. Chen, Fu, Lu, Fu, and Jin were all serving high-ranking military officers, and Tan Zhenlin was one of the major generals of the revolutionary war. Chen Zaidao, an old military subordinate of Deng from the Second Field Army, was the first person at the work conference that called for reversing the verdict on the Tiananmen Incident. He also explicitly said that practice was the sole criterion of truth.<sup>204</sup> Lu was the first in the East China Group to refer to the Tiananmen Incident, going so far as to compare it to the famous May 4 Movement after World War I.<sup>205</sup> He even personally criticized Wu De for attacking Deng at the time.<sup>206</sup> Fu Chongbi expressed the need to “tell the masses clearly” that the Tiananmen Incident was “revolutionary [in the positive sense].”<sup>207</sup> On November 12, General Yang Yong, chair of the Northeast Group at the plenum, asked key elder Chen Yun to be the first to speak.<sup>208</sup> Chen's speech was important and is often treated as the turning point at the conference, but the atmosphere had already completely changed. According to an

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<sup>202</sup> Zhu Jiamu, *Wo Suo Zhidao de Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [What I Know about the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress]*, 51.

<sup>203</sup> Ye Xuanji, “Ye Shuai Zai Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou [Marshal Ye Before and After the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress]”; Fan Hong, *Dangnei Juexingzhe: Li Chang Zai Zhongguo Gaige Niandai [Actor in the Party: Li Chang in the Age of China's Reform]* (Hong Kong: Mingbao, 2008).

<sup>204</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Deng Xiaoping Shakes the World: An Eyewitness Account of China's Party Work Conference and the Third Plenum (November-December 1978)* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2004), 68.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>206</sup> Hong Fan, *Dangnei Juexingzhe: Li Chang Zai Zhongguo Gaige Niandai. Shang [An Awakened Person in the Party: Li Chang in China's Era of Reform. Part 1]* (Hong Kong: Mingbao, 2008), 163.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>208</sup> Fu Yi, “Weirao ‘Liang Ge Fanshi’ de Jiaofeng He ‘Gang’ de Zhuanyi- Fang Hua Nan Tongzhi [The Clash over the ‘Two Whatevers’ and the Change in the ‘Key Link’- An Interview with Comrade Hua Nan],” 5.

interview Ezra Vogel conducted with a relative of Ye, after the speeches on November 11th “[t]he atmosphere was so electric by the end of the day that Marshal Ye advised Hua Guofeng either to accept the changed mood or prepare to be left behind.”<sup>209</sup>

High-ranking military officers were outspoken throughout the conference. The day after Chen’s speech, Wang Ping, then commissar of the General Logistics Department, gave a speech calling for Chen Yun to enter the Politburo and to reverse more verdicts on Cultural Revolution cases.<sup>210</sup> On November 17, Yang Dezhi and Li Chengfang, commander and commissar of the Wuhan Military Region, said that along with the Tiananmen Incident, the verdict on the Wuhan Incident of 1967 should also be reversed.\* Five days later, Marshal Nie Rongzhen expressed support for Chen Yun’s position to revisit important Cultural Revolution-era verdicts.<sup>211</sup> According to the memoirs of General Chen Heqiao, although the criticisms were pointed at the “two whatevers” and Wang Dongxing, Zhang Pinghua, Xiong Fu, and Li Xin, without referring to Hua Guofeng by name, as the leader of the country and initiator of the expression it was clear Hua was also under attack.<sup>212</sup> The official *Biography of Hu Qiaomu*, however, shows that Hu in his speech at the work conference pointedly stated that the question of “practice” was also a political question and suggested that Hua make a speech in which he clarified his position on the matter.<sup>213</sup>

On November 22, Hua Nan, who worked for *People’s Liberation Army Daily*, personally criticized Wang Dongxing and called on the party center to study the “practice” position.<sup>214</sup> On November 26, Marshal Nie Rongzhen spoke in support of “practice” and called for a reversal on all wrong Cultural

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<sup>209</sup> Vogel incorrectly puts Lu’s speech on November 11. Ezra F Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 233.

<sup>210</sup> Wang Ping, *Wang Ping Huiyilu [Memoirs of Wang Ping]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1992), 615.

\* The Wuhan Incident was a case in which a group supportive of the military kidnapped two prominent leftists visiting the city (and viciously beating one), leading to the purge of the Wuhan Military Region Chen Zaidao.

<sup>211</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 287–88.

<sup>212</sup> Chen Heqiao, *Chen Heqiao Huiyi Wenji [Collection of Chen Heqiao’s Memories]*, 601.

<sup>213</sup> Hu Qiaomu zhuan bianxiezuz, *Hu Qiaomu zhuan (xia) [Biography of Hu Qiaomu (Part 2)]* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2015), 589.

<sup>214</sup> Fu Yi, “Weirao ‘Liang Ge Fanshi’ de Jiaofeng He ‘Gang’ de Zhuanyi- Fang Hua Nan Tongzhi [The Clash over the ‘Two Whatevers’ and the Change in the ‘Key Link’- An Interview with Comrade Hua Nan],” 6.

Revolution verdicts.<sup>215</sup> On November 30, General Chen Heqiao blamed Wang Dongxing for his role in military purges during the Cultural Revolution and provided evidence for his crimes.<sup>216</sup> Chen and another general, Liu Zhen, distributed evidence from the navy about the role of the infamous Cultural Revolution “Central Group for the Examination of Special Cases,” which investigated alleged crimes of the purged, a further blow to Wang and the other Cultural Revolution beneficiaries.<sup>217</sup>

At other times, Generals Xu Xiangqian, Su Yu, and Zhang Zhen spoke out against the lack of collective leadership - a clear broadside against Hua’s so-called personality cult.<sup>218</sup> General Xu Shiyou screamed at Ji Dengkui: “you were promoted as a leftist rebel, you entered the Politburo, your rank was high, what was that about. You basically went with the Gang of Four.” General Wang Ping said that it was inappropriate for one person to hold all the numerous positions that Wang Dongxing did. Zhang Aiping called for the figures under attack to do a self-criticism. Chen Heqiao, Han Xianchu, Liu Zhen, and Hua Nan all called for Hu Qiaomu to run the office managing the publication of Mao’s works.<sup>219</sup> Yu Guangyuan writes that “[t]o my surprise, a few army participants who were members of our group were quite familiar with theoretical work. When we talked with one another, we shared a great deal of common ground.”<sup>220</sup> Significantly, the plenum also decided that the military’s role in politics during the Cultural Revolution should be seen “historically,” its achievements should be affirmed, and that the responsibility for any mistakes should be taken on by the party center.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> *Nie Rongzhen Nianpu [Chronology of Nie Rongzhen]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), 1145.

<sup>216</sup> Chen Heqiao, *Chen Heqiao Huiyi Wenji [Collection of Chen Heqiao’s Memories]*, 607.

<sup>217</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Deng Xiaoping Shakes the World: An Eyewitness Account of China’s Party Work Conference and the Third Plenum (November-December 1978)*, 123–24.

<sup>218</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 187.

<sup>219</sup> Zhu Jiamu, *Wo Suo Zhidao De Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [What I Know About the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress]*, 72–84.

<sup>220</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Deng Xiaoping Shakes the World: An Eyewitness Account of China’s Party Work Conference and the Third Plenum (November-December 1978)*, 107.

<sup>221</sup> Liu Jie, *Deng Xiaoping He Chen Yun Zai Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou [Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun Before and After the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2009), 227.

On December 3, General Han Xianchu made a remarkable speech in which he revealed that the military hierarchy had been supporting the old revolutionaries since the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the previous summer:

Comrade Xiaoping's position that adding is fine but not removing [referring to personnel changes] is correct. I support the Central Committee and Politburo adding a few old comrades, this is what everyone demands. At the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the military delegation had suggested that Chen Yun, big sister Deng [referring to Deng Yingchao, Zhou Enlai's wife], Wang Zhen and others join the Politburo, and I heard that other delegations did not have differing opinions, but the congress did not accept everyone's opinion. I support Comrade Wang Zhen's opinion to add Chen Yun as a party vice chairman and standing committee member, and I suggest that he be placed in front of Comrade Dongxing...Among the members of the Central Committee, he is the oldest.<sup>222</sup>

What was Ye's strategy at the conference? Ye, still a major power broker with important influence in the military, seems to have continued the policy he adopted a few months earlier: to encourage Hua to address the seriousness of the political threat by taking the initiative. Ye had expressed support for Chen Yun's speech before Chen took the floor. On November 12 and 13, Ye told Hua to change his mind on Tiananmen to avoid being put in a passive position [从速表态，以免被动]. According to Ye's *Chronology*, Ye and Deng also began to discuss "strengthening collective leadership" and opposing giving prominence to individuals in propaganda after Deng returned from Japan in November, a clear sign that Ye's retreat on these issues was a critical reason for the outcome of the work conference.<sup>223</sup> At a speech at the work conference, Ye explicitly endorsed the practice position.<sup>224</sup> But he had not retreated entirely. When Hua did a self-criticism for acts reminiscent of a personality cult, Ye publicly praised him.<sup>225</sup> On December 17, Ye refused to allow those figures who had been criticized at the work conference to do self-criticisms at the full 3rd plenum.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 229–30.

<sup>223</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986) [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2007), 1157.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:1161.

<sup>225</sup> Chen Heqiao, *Chen Heqiao Huiyi Wenji [Collection of Chen Heqiao's Memories]*, 606.

<sup>226</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986) [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)]*, 2:1162.

The outcome of the work conference and the plenum was a major victory for Deng. The verdict on the Tiananmen Incident was reversed. Old revolutionaries Chen Yun, Deng Yingchao, and Wang Zhen were added to the Politburo. Chen Yun, now also a member of the PSC, even became a vice chairman of the party and replaced Wang Dongxing as the man responsible for reviewing old cases. Other old revolutionaries Huang Kecheng, Song Renqiong, Hu Qiaomu, Xi Zhongxun, Wang Renzhong, Huang Huoqing, Chen Zaidao, Han Guang, and Zhou Hui were added to the central committee. Chen Xilian lost all practical power in the military.<sup>227</sup> Hua Guofeng gave a speech at the end of the work conference at which he accepted that the term “Chairman Hua-party center [华主席党中央]” would no longer be used, but instead just the party center or the party center with Comrade Hua Guofeng at the head. Hu Qiaomu gave a speech praising this change, arguing that leaders needed to be constricted if the party and nation were to progress. Hua’s “cult,” in other words, was criticized.<sup>228</sup>

This account should make clear that the consensus on why the work meeting and 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum was so important is misleading. The main import of the plenum was not an ideological change, but a power shift. Deng determined the main outcomes of the meetings, such as how to deal with historical problems, make personnel changes, and how to evaluate Mao Zedong.<sup>229</sup> But Hua was still officially party chairman, CMC chairman, and premier. Although a major shift in power had occurred, the story was not over. Ye had not entirely given up on Hua, arguing that the latter’s self-criticism over the “two whatevers,” as well as accepting the title of “comrade” as opposed to “wise leader” in the press, as signs of the latter’s democratic sensibilities.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 343.

<sup>228</sup> Hu Qiaomu zhuan bianxiezhu, *Hu Qiaomu zhuan (xia) [Biography of Hu Qiaomu (Part 2)]*, 590–92.

<sup>229</sup> Han Gang, “Quanli de Zhuanyi: Guanyu Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [A Shift in Power: About the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress].”

<sup>230</sup> Hubei Provincial Archive SZ1-4-791. Remarkably, Ye’s official Collected Works completely redacted all of Ye’s comments on Hua in his closing speech. Ye Xiangzhen, “Ye Jianying Zhongyang Gongzuo Huiyi Jianghua Qicao Ji [Record of the Writing of Ye Jianying’s Speech at the Central Work Conference].”

## *Engineering Hua's Final Removal*

To overcome lingering support for Hua after the 3rd plenum, Deng stepped up the emphasis of historical issues and *kompromat*, as hypothesis 1b would predict. The use of this information was conducted in a decidedly undemocratic and unfair spirit, as hypothesis 2b predicts. Between October and November 1980, discussions began among more than 4,000 top-ranking cadres about party history. Party organs were represented by 345 individuals in eight groups, government agencies were represented by 451 individuals in 16 groups, the military was represented by 390 people in 11 groups, and the regions were represented by 3,000 people. 938 newsletters were published, including 307 from the military alone.<sup>231</sup>

One major question for the history document was whether to cover the time period since the Cultural Revolution (meaning the Hua era). In late September, Hu Qiaomu wrote a new fourth section that included criticisms of the “two whatevers” and Hua Guofeng. This was done without a discussion among the PSC. Already Deng had created pressure for such a section to be included. When this section was submitted to that body, Hua expressed his opposition, pointing out that the document on history written at the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress did not cover the war against Japan since the war was still ongoing. A decision was made that the fourth section would only be included if the 4,000 decided it was necessary.<sup>232</sup>

However, the 4,000-plus party members did not have an entirely democratic discussion. As historian Xiao Donglian puts it, “On the eve of the 4,000 person discussion, Deng Liqun made a hint [把风放了出去]. When the draft seeking opinions was distributed, Deng Liqun and others required that everyone express an opinion: should this section be written?”<sup>233</sup> Subsequently, Deng Liqun gave two

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<sup>231</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 437.

<sup>232</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun's Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]*, 2006, 168–70.

<sup>233</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 384.



speeches on October 15 and 18 to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in which he delineated Hua's alleged crimes. Li Weihan distributed Deng Liqun's speech to his discussion group. Thus, a theoretical justification was being provided to the party for why Hua should be removed, and the hint was that they should support including this reason in the historical decision.<sup>234</sup> Deng Liqun in his memoirs reflected that the charges were unfair: "Now looking back, my evaluation of Hua Guofeng at the time included several not entirely justified opinions. It can be put like this I suppose: in order to purge someone [拱倒], no matter whether it is a big figure or a small one, you list all of his mistakes together, it is alright to include some that are in fact not issues of political principle, but things were taken too far [但讲得过于上纲了]".<sup>235</sup> As discussed above, *kompromat* was introduced by several other figures during this time period as well.

Ultimately, 300 participants, including the entirety of three small groups and the majority of four other small groups, supported including criticism of Hua in the decision. Only 13 participants suggested waiting until the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress before discussing the years after the Gang of Four. On October 25, Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang said "many small groups demand that the time period after the destruction of the 'Gang of Four' be added... it appears that this period must be written."<sup>236</sup> During these discussions, Generals Su Yu and Chen Zaidao (along with several other non-military figures) called for Hua's resignation.<sup>237</sup> However, Deng Liqun's hints and the introduction of *kompromat* raise the question of whether the process was really democratic or representative among the 4,000. In any case, the idea that the 4,000 man group would be allowed to discuss Hua, a member of the PSC, *despite* his opposition, was clearly a violation of established practice.

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<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>235</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun's Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]* (Hong Kong: Dafeng chubanshe, 2006), 171.

<sup>236</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 442-43.

<sup>237</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 225.

The calls for Hua's resignations while discussing the historical document led the leadership to believe they could remove him.<sup>238</sup> A series of nine Politburo meetings beginning on November 10 and ending December 5 discussed Hua. Before the Politburo meetings began, Deng met individually with top-ranking cadres to talk to them about his plans for removing Hua. That letter was distributed on October 23. On November 10, the first day of the series of Politburo meetings, Hua offered his resignation.<sup>239</sup> The final declaration for the Politburo meetings was written by Hu Qiaomu on December 1, who sent a draft to Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Hu Yaobang, and Zhao Ziyang: but not, apparently, Hua Guofeng. Deng met with Hu Qiaomu on December 2, told him he supported the draft, and asked him to seek Hua's opinion. Hua told Hu repeatedly on December 3: "I welcome criticism, demand an investigation, and resign from my posts [欢迎批评, 要求调查, 辞去职务]."<sup>240</sup> According to a document passed by the Politburo, Hua had committed "some serious mistakes" in the years after the Gang of Four, and "many comrades" demanded that his formal positions be reconsidered.<sup>241</sup> Despite Hua's wishes, he was not allowed to resign. The Politburo decided that until the 6<sup>th</sup> plenum in the summer of 1981, Hu Yaobang would manage the Politburo and PSC and Deng would chair the work of the CMC *without* taking the formal titles.<sup>242</sup>

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

The above sections strongly indicate that institutionalization was not robust. But it was not entirely absent. Most obviously, the leadership took steps to make it seem like the removal of Hua was justified. That helps explain both the use of *kompromat* and the decision to keep Hua in office for so long.

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<sup>238</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 50.

<sup>239</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 387. According to interviews conducted by Warren Sun, Hua had also already offered to resign in August.

<sup>240</sup> Hu Qiaomu zhuan bianxiezhu, *Hu Qiaomu zhuan (xia) [Biography of Hu Qiaomu (Part 2)]*, 639.

<sup>241</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 51.

<sup>242</sup> Hu Qiaomu zhuan bianxiezhu, *Hu Qiaomu zhuan (xia) [Biography of Hu Qiaomu (Part 2)]*, 640.

Hua Guofeng's humiliation was prolonged: he was only removed from his party chairmanship position in June 1981, and he was still kept on as vice chairman until the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in September 1982. Deng wanted to keep the real reasons for the split hidden. In the words of Ezra Vogel, "Deng's informal authority would trump Hua's formal authority, but Deng, like his colleagues, tried to avoid any public dissension."<sup>243</sup> Chinese political culture had been unkind to Hua. In a mockery of the power of formal authority, he had been forced to stay as party chairman in a fake show of unity while the history decision was prepared and more *kompromat* was introduced. Disgusted by this treatment, Hua refused to show himself at a new year's gathering, placing the top leadership in a difficult position.<sup>244</sup> Marshal Ye, having initially agreed to have Hua removed on the condition that Deng declared himself chairman of both the Party and the CMC, was not impressed by Deng's "playing the good guy" for not taking up the party chairmanship.<sup>245</sup> Neither Ye nor Peng Zhen attended the new year's festivities either. In the words of General Zhang Aiping, "Comrade Hua Guofeng is an honest man, I have always been grateful to him. He was treated unjustly."<sup>246</sup>

Institutions also mattered to Hua Guofeng and he obviously hewed closely to a more democratic interpretation of the party's rules than Deng. When he realized that his position was under attack from Deng, he did not choose to put the party through yet another power struggle. This can almost certainly be explained largely by his respect for the party itself. Therefore, Hua deserves credit not only for being involved in the beginning of the reform process, but for respecting the party enough not to damage it by subjecting it to another political crisis.

## Conclusion

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<sup>243</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 2011, 248.

<sup>244</sup> Man Mei, *Sinian Yiran Wujin: Huiyi Fuqin Hu Yaobang [Longing Still Never Ends: Remembering My Father Hu Yaobang]*, 373–74.

<sup>245</sup> Personal communication with Warren Sun, March 23, 2016.

<sup>246</sup> Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zoulai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2008), 381.

Why was Hu Yaobang the one to replace Hua Guofeng as leader? Historian Xiao Donglian argues the main reason was his role in liberating the old comrades and reversing bad verdicts. Hu himself admitted in a speech to the Politburo on November 19 that “with regards to the issue of cadres, I achieved a good reputation.” Hu’s respect for the old comrades was obvious. At the closing session of the 6th plenum, Hu remarked that “I have the responsibility to tell the plenum that two things have not changed: one is that the role of the old revolutionaries has not changed, and the other is that my quality has not changed... The old revolutionary generation are still the core figures that play the main role in the party. Can this situation be told to the entire party? I think it is not only appropriate, but even should be done.” He made it clear that even though he was party leader, Deng was in command. Deng was pleased: “just now [Hu] gave a short speech, I think that this speech also proves that our choice was correct.”<sup>247</sup> The Hua era was officially over: “‘old man politics’ had truly arrived.”<sup>248</sup> As the next chapter reveals, this time period revealed another underlying feature that would shape the politics of the next decade: Deng’s absolute control over the PLA.

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<sup>247</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 2008, 396–97.

<sup>248</sup> Teiwes, “The Study of Elite Political Conflict in the PRC: Politics inside the ‘Black Box,’” 33.

## Chapter 7: The Fall of Hua Guofeng (Third Hypothesis)

### Introduction: Military “Coups” with Chinese Characteristics

Immediately after the 3rd plenum, Ji Dengkui, a member of the “took the stage group,” went to tell Deng Xiaoping he wanted to resign from his position as commissar of the Beijing Military Region. Ji later explained his reasoning to his son: Deng had also resigned from his positions in the military immediately after coming under a cloud near the end of the Cultural Revolution. He did so despite continuing, at least for a little while, to manage other affairs like foreign policy. When Ji’s son asked whether positions in the military were really that sensitive, his father responded that “holding military power and being a civilian are of course different.” Ji declared: “in peace-time, holding military power is playing with fire!”<sup>1</sup>

In the last chapter, I presented two crucial dynamics shaping Deng’s ascension to the top Chinese leadership after Mao’s death: the importance of sociological aspects like prestige and *kompromat*, as well as the manipulation of party rules. Here I examine what Ji described as “playing with fire”: the issue of control over the military. This chapter is of interest for both empirical and theoretical reasons. Most analysts of this era have either ignored the importance of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), simply flagged it as an important issue without providing evidence for why, or only identified single aspects. Here I present a holistic account based on previously unavailable material, as well as Chinese secondary sources.

This chapter is not about the behavior of the men in uniform as members of political decision-making bodies, which was already discussed previously when analyzing the other two hypotheses. Here we examine the PLA as a coercive organization. Although the evidence presented here shows the PLA having major political import, it does not show the armed forces participating in a typical *coup d’etat*. The

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<sup>1</sup> Ji Pomin, “Ting Fuqin Ji Dengkui Tan Wangshi [Listening to My Father Ji Dengkui Talk about the Past],” *Nanfang Zhoumo* [Southern Weekly], November 6, 2003.

theoretical implications are therefore distinctive and previously unappreciated: how can the armed forces have an outsized effect on politics without even the implicit threat of a full-blown *coup*? In short, the years 1977-1981 are instructive because they show the extent to which Deng Xiaoping equated political power with control over the PLA.

I begin the chapter by comparing Hua and Deng's relationships with the military. Deng was not just a party man with military experience - he was one of the key military figures of the wars against the Japanese and KMT, and Deng himself often described his profession as that of a military man. Military figures were intensely loyal to him. Although Hua had fought in a particularly gruesome battlefield during the war against Japan, his exploits simply could not compare.

The next section of this chapter shows how a major break in relations between Hua and Deng occurred because of concern that Hua was improving his relationship with the military at the expense of Deng. Deng subsequently used the military to push forward the "practice" debate in a way that hurt Hua and Wang Dongxing. Third, Deng used his position as chief of the general staff to enact wrenching reforms on the military, which showed his ability to overcome difficulties in defense issues as well as his intention to quickly establish control and authority over the armed forces. Deng's decision to attack Vietnam despite serious opposition within the military, and probably the party as well, revealed that it was he who was in command of the armed forces, although the PLA's poor performance in the war did damage his prestige.

Finally, a major factor explaining Deng's decision, even after he had become the *de facto* leader, to strip Hua of any token formal authority was related to his concern that Hua was making inroads into the military and enjoyed the support of leftists at middle and lower levels. The sensitivity question of loyalty among the men with guns proved to have an outsized effect on Hua's fate, even though no evidence hints that he was in fact deliberately attempting to seek support from leftist military officers.

*Prestige and Authority in the Armed Forces*

According to hypothesis 1a, we would expect members of the military to follow purely organizational interests, and according to hypothesis 3a, the military would only execute orders that had the imprimatur of a single legitimate political decision. However, we see instead more evidence for hypotheses 1b and 3b: the military was more beholden to personal ties than organizational interests, and those ties explain military behavior more than formal authority. To understand why this was the case requires a comparison of the personal historical relationships of Hua and Deng to the PLA.

Hua's relationship with three military figures are especially important: Chen Xilian, Su Zhenhua, and most significantly, Ye Jianying. Chen Xilian had been in charge of the military in the northeast during the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Because of the chaos brought by the CR, the PLA came to run broad swathes of the country. The military in the northeast did a particularly poor job in this regard, which created a cloud over Chen.<sup>2</sup> During this time, Chen also developed a bad relationship with an old revolutionary named Song Renqiong, later going so far as to resist his rehabilitation and thus more squarely placing him in the Cultural Revolution "took the stage group" in the eyes of the old guard.<sup>3</sup> Chen was also blamed in part for the rise of Mao's radical nephew, Mao Yuanxin, who was a military officer in the region. Suspicions about Chen were raised even further when in February 1976 Ye Jianying was declared to be sick (he was not) and Chen was put in charge of the daily affairs of the CMC. The day after the destruction of the Gang of Four, Chen tried to immediately give up control of the CMC in favor of Ye. Hua told him not to submit a resignation because he wanted Ye to focus on helping him run the country. Ye's official return to managing the CMC did not occur until March. This raised doubts among Chen's colleagues in the military about his ambitions.<sup>4</sup> According to a document in the Cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Chen Xilian, *Chen Xilian Huiyilu [Memoir of Chen Xilian]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2007), 354.

<sup>3</sup> Hu Yaobang, "Hu Yaobang Tongzhi Zao Zhongyang Dangxiao Chuanda Zhongyang Gongzuo Huiyi, Sanzhong Quanhui Jingshen [Comrade Hu Yaobang Communicates the Spirit of the Central Work Conference and Third Plenum at the Central Party School]" (Service Center for Chinese Publications, n.d.), 2, Series 18, Volume 1.

<sup>4</sup> Chen Xilian, *Chen Xilian Huiyilu [Memoir of Chen Xilian]*, 384.

Revolution database, on October 8 Hua went out of his way to explain how Mao had personally picked Chen Xilian to run the military after affirming his military experience.<sup>5</sup>

Chen had a particularly close relationship with Hua. A few days before the purge of the Gang of Four, Hua saw an article in *Guangming Daily* that made Hua suspect the Gang of Four were up to something. Hua immediately summoned Chen back to Beijing from Tangshan. Because Chen had moved after the 1976 earthquake, he and Hua had even become neighbors. On the night Chen gave permission to Wu De and Wu Zhong to use military force in the move against the Gang of Four, Hua went by foot to Chen's home to ask him about the preparations.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between Hua and Chen should not be considered factional. Chen was a member of the Second Field Army, Deng's "mountaintop" from before 1949. According to Chen's memoirs, Deng on multiple occasions defended Chen against attacks, saying that he was not a "leftist rebel." Before the 3rd plenum in 1978, Deng invited Chen to his home where he told Chen that he had made serious mistakes in the northeast. But Deng emphasized that Chen's mistakes were made in the provinces, not in Beijing, and that everything would be fine if Chen behaved himself in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the fact remains that in February 1980 Chen was purged along with three other major figures as part of a general attack on Hua's political position. Chen had five strikes against him. First, Hua had better relations with Chen than he did with any other military figure, perhaps besides Su Zhenhua. Second, Chen had serious skeletons in his closet from his time in the northeast. Third, Chen was one of the "took the stage group," and almost all figures of this type were broadly disliked, especially in the military. Fourth, suspicions might have been aroused when Chen Xilian and Li Xiannian visited Deng after his operation. After listening to Chen talk, Deng was silent. Later in the conversation Deng asked about the document that both declared the Tiananmen Incident to be counter-revolutionary and removed

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<sup>5</sup> "Zhongyang Lingdao Ren Guanyu Jieji Sirenbang Wenti de Jianghua [Conversation Among Central Leaders about Solving the Gang of Four Issue]" (The Chinese University Press, October 8, 1976), Cultural Revolution Database.

<sup>6</sup> Chen Xilian, *Chen Xilian Huiyilu [Memoir of Chen Xilian]*, 390.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.



his positions. Chen did not know how to respond, as he was running the military and was not entirely clear on the broader political situation.<sup>8</sup> Slight mistakes like Chen's failure to answer could have devastating implications in the atmosphere of uncertainty following the Cultural Revolution.

Su Zhenhua also had strong ties with Hua. As one of the very first generals to be rehabilitated after the death of Lin Biao, his subsequent meteoric rise to the top of the party and military hierarchy, and also because of his particularly strong criticism of Deng when he was purged again in 1976, members of the old revolutionary faction had reason not to trust him. Yet it would be a stretch to say that Su was a natural part of Hua's "faction": in late 1976, Su would tell Deng he hoped he would return to work as quickly as possible.<sup>9</sup> But as will be discussed in detail below, Su would play perhaps the most critical role in sparking the struggle between Hua and Deng by arranging for Hua to make a naval inspection without Deng's permission. Su was especially vocal in his support for Hua, surpassing most other individuals in the leadership. In March 1977, he gave a speech at a work plenum in which he argued that "Hua Guofeng deserves the title of Chairman Mao's hand-picked successor, deserves the title of helmsman that pushes forward the project started by Chairman Mao, deserves the title of our party's brilliant and wise leader and commander [英明领袖和统帅]." Su went on to argue that Hua's heroism in the destruction of the Gang of Four moreover guaranteed his leadership position.<sup>10</sup> On November 19, 1980, in a speech justifying Hua Guofeng's resignation, Hu Yaobang would place Su Zhenhua along with Wang Dongxing, Ji Dengkui, and Wu De as the primary members of the Hua "faction."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Shu Yun, "Chen Xilian Huiyi Deng Xiaoping [Chen Xilian Remembers Deng Xiaoping]," *Bainianchao [The Hundred Year Tide]*, no. 6 (2001): 34.

<sup>9</sup> Yang Zhaolin, Chou Yunzhou, and Qiao Ya, *Cong Gaoshan Dao Dahai: Gongheguo Shangjiang Su Zhenhua [From the High Mountains to the Great Seas: General of the Republic Su Zhenhua]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2001), 397.

<sup>10</sup> Hubei provincial archives. SZ-4-501-24. General Qin Jiwei, although supportive of Hua, was much less enthusiastic at the same meeting. SZ-1-4-501-(1-16)

<sup>11</sup> Hu Yaobang, "Hu Yaobang Zai Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhengzhiju Huiyi Shang Tan Hua Guofeng Cizhi Wenti [Hu Yaobang at a Politburo Meeting Discusses the Matter of Hua Guofeng's Resignation]" (The Chinese University Press, November 19, 1980), The Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

Yet the most important military figure throughout this time period was Marshal Ye Jianying. Although attacked early in the Cultural Revolution period for his role in the “February Adverse Current,” Ye was never purged completely and returned to run the daily affairs of the military immediately after the death of Lin Biao. Ye had played a critical role in the move against the Gang of Four, and after the coup Hua suggested that Ye become leader of the country: an offer the marshal refused, reminding Hua that Mao had picked him.<sup>12</sup>

One major old revolutionary, Chen Yun, believed that Ye was a critical bulwark against a political coup executed by the “took the stage group.” At the work meeting before the 3rd plenum, Chen said, “Now there is much discussion within the party, people are afraid that there will be a problem in the standing committee, because Marshal Ye is old, people are afraid there will be an incident, they are afraid that Deng Xiaoping will be purged again.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet Ye was also the single most important supporter of Hua Guofeng. According to a collection of classified speeches on party history by Deng Liqun, a party scholar who often focused on historical issues, this grew out of a sense of personal loyalty to Mao. When Mao was on his deathbed, members of the Politburo went one by one to pay their respects. When Ye was leaving, Mao motioned for him to come back. Mao could no longer speak, but he stared into Ye’s eyes. Right or wrong, Ye interpreted this as Mao asking him to support Hua.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Ye’s loyalty to Hua was possibly tied to almost feudal understandings of authority - an adjective he would use to describe his behavior towards Hua at a tearful self-criticism in late 1980. Ye compared the situation to Liu Bei putting his son in the hands of the famous strategist Zhuge Liang during the Warring States Period. Ye admitted to seeing Hua as “the

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<sup>12</sup> Fan Shuo, *Ye Jianying Zai 1976 [Ye Jianying in 1976]* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dang xiao chu ban she, 1990), 304.

<sup>13</sup> Jin Chongji, Chen Qun, and Cao Yingwang, *Chen Yun Zhuan [Biography of Chen Yun]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun’s Lectures on National History]*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo shigao bianweihui, 2000), 348. According to an interview conducted by Ezra Vogel with someone close to Mao's nephew Mao Yuanxin, this never happened. Ezra F Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 372.

emperor's son [后主].”<sup>15</sup> He was so supportive of Hua that the former head of the Beijing Military Garrison once complained that charges that Hua started his own personality cult were overblown because the phrase “wise leader [英明领袖]” was in fact started by Ye.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, however, Ye was unlike most other military figures in that he had never been completely overthrown and therefore had a clearer sense of the nature of power politics at the very top. As opposed to other leaders out of the loop, this would have given him a clearer sense that Hua Guofeng was neither like the Gang of Four nor power hungry.

Whatever the reason for Ye's support of Hua, the common interpretation that Ye was a stalwart Deng ally is simply incorrect. In one of his speeches on party history, Deng Liqun says he asked Hu Sheng and Wu Lengxi about their support for Hua in the propaganda apparatus: “Why are you doing this, it is not that you do not understand Comrade Xiaoping, why is it that you are so extremely deferential to Hua Guofeng?” Their response was that Ye had given them a heads up and told them to protect Hua's authority, which they could do by propagating Hua's image from their position in the office in charge of publishing Mao's works. Deng Liqun says that when he later told Deng Xiaoping about this, he just laughed and said nothing.<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, Ye was a key bellwether and kingmaker but a failed mediator. He was so powerful that when Chen Yun learned Ye had decided the Tiananmen verdict would not be reversed in March 1977, he decided not to push the issue even though Deng had secretly rallied the old revolutionaries to criticize Wu De by name at the meeting. Before Chen made his famous speech at the work meeting before

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<sup>15</sup> Xue Qingchao, *Lishi de Jianzheng: “Wenge” de Zhongjie [Witness of History: The End of the “Cultural Revolution”]* (Beijing: Jiuzhou chu ban she, 2011), 424.

<sup>16</sup> Wu Zhong, “Wu Zhong Tan Zhua ‘Sirenbang’ [Wu Zhong Discusses Grabbing the ‘Gang of Four’],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 5 (2012).

<sup>17</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun's Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]* (Hong Kong: Dafeng chubanshe, 2006), 172; Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun's Lectures on National History]*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo shigao bianweihui, 2000), 352–53.

the 3rd plenum in 1978, he first met secretly with Ye to get his permission.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, only when Ye conceded would Hua's defeats be complete, both when Hua's informal authority ended in late 1978 and when the decision to strip Hua of his party chairmanship and CMC positions was made in late 1980. Ye was not only kingmaker, but personally reflected several countervailing forces of the time: he respected Deng's martial prestige and supported his returning to work, but as one of the few figures with a deep understanding of the nature of elite politics at the end of the CR, he had a unique appreciation for Deng's weaknesses and Hua's strengths.

Beyond these three men, it is difficult to point to any other strong supporters of Hua among the military. This begs the question: why was it so easy for the old revolutionaries to command support from the military but not for Hua? One interesting case is that of General Ding Sheng. After the Gang of Four was destroyed, the highest-ranking general to be purged for having illicit relations with the extremists was Ding, commander of the important Nanjing Military Region. Recent Chinese scholarship however has shown that the accusations against Ding were overblown, thus raising the question of why Ding would have been targeted. According to Chi Zehou, a major military historian, the answer has to do with Hua Guofeng.

According to Chi, during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, Hua's political position in Hunan province was entirely dependent on the military's ability to create stability. When the military commander who was in charge of Hunan politics was transferred to another region, another military officer should have taken his place. Instead, Ding decided that Hua, a civilian, should be in charge. After Ding's support, Hua was especially polite to Ding. Chi writes that some researchers interpret Hua's purge of Ding as a type of vengeance: Ding was a powerful military figure from an embarrassing moment of Hua's history, and Hua wanted to clean out his closet. This hypothesis is supported by evidence that Hua had purged a whole number of former officers from the Guangzhou Military Region (which included

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<sup>18</sup> Ye Xuanji, "Ye Shuai Zai Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou [Marshal Ye Before and After the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress]," *Nanfang Zhoumo [Southern Weekly]*, October 30, 2008.

Hunan). Ding had also resisted Hua's attacks on another general, Pu Zhanya, in 1972, when Pu was accused of having illicit relations with Lin Biao. At a CMC full plenum discussion meeting on March 24, 1977, Hua accused Ding of falling into the Gang of Four camp and participating in plans for a revolution in Shanghai after their destruction.<sup>19</sup>

After coming to work in Beijing, we do see evidence that Hua tried to develop relations with some top officers. The cases of Chen Xilian and Su Zhenhua were already discussed above. But Hua also tried to cultivate a relationship with the powerful Zhang Aiping. During the last months of the Cultural Revolution, leftists attacked Zhang for his attempts to rectify the defense industry. At a special meeting convened to discuss Zhang's alleged crimes, Hua saved Zhang by ending the meeting early.<sup>20</sup> Soon after the destruction of the Gang of Four, Hua gave Zhang a collection of poetry the latter wrote while in jail during the Cultural Revolution - a clear sign that Hua was courting Zhang.<sup>21</sup> At a meeting with the heads of the services on December 12, 1976, Chen Xilian spoke out in support of Zhang Aiping's rehabilitation even though Mao had personally criticized him. When the tide was turning against the Cultural Revolution beneficiaries, Zhang would speak out to defend Chen Xilian and Wu De: "Chen Xilian protected me under such great pressure. Today my speaking for him is not entirely because of my gratitude. We cannot jump to criticize some comrades for being forced to say some things when they were on stage. This includes Comrade Wu De, who supported the rectification of the Seventh Department [七机部]. Not looking to history and behaving in such a way has no justification."<sup>22</sup> At one point, Zhang's son asked him if he had heard that he was considered one of Deng's four great supporters [四大干将] in the 1975 rectification. Zhang said: "I am not! I am nobody's man!"<sup>23</sup> Hua also sought amicable relations

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<sup>19</sup> Ding Sheng, *Luonan Yingxiong: Ding Sheng Jiangjun Huiyilu [Hero in Distress: Memoir of General Ding Sheng]* (Hong Kong: Thinker Publishing Ltd, 2011), 369–71.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zoulai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2008), 381.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

with Luo Ruiqing. When the two met after Luo was rehabilitated, Hua ran over, took his hand, and introduced himself.<sup>24</sup>

Deng Xiaoping's own personal authority was inextricably linked with his history as a major military figure.<sup>25</sup> Deng had extensive military experience and saw himself as primarily a military man: "I am a soldier, my true profession is fighting wars."<sup>26</sup> After studying abroad in France and the Soviet Union, Deng's first assignment was head of the political department at Sun Yat-sen Military Academy in Xi'an. In 1929, Deng was sent to Guangxi to work with sympathetic KMT strongmen. While in Guangxi, Deng started a revolution and helped forge the Red Army 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Corps, ultimately becoming commissar and secretary of the former.<sup>27</sup>

At the communist basecamp in Jinggangshan, Deng became secretary general of the General Political Department in the Red Army. On the Long March he was assigned by Mao to lead propaganda in the Political Department of the First Army Group of the First Front Army.<sup>28</sup> In 1937, he was promoted to vice head of the GPD of the entire Red Army and by 1938 he was political commissar of the legendary 129<sup>th</sup> Division (one of three at the time), which later became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Army.<sup>29</sup> Deng was especially close with the commander of those armies, Liu Bocheng. Their forces were known as the "Liu-Deng army." All major decisions were made after the two researched the problem together. Liu often concluded meetings by saying: "let the matter be solved according to Comrade Xiaoping's opinion." Deng even

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<sup>24</sup> Luo Yu, Gaobie Zongcanmou Bu [*Farewell to the PLA General Chief of Staff*] (Hong Kong: Kaifang chubanshe, 2015), 20.

<sup>25</sup> June Teufel Dreyer, "Deng Xiaoping: The Soldier," *The China Quarterly*, no. 135 (September 1, 1993): 536–50; David S. G. Goodman, *Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Revolution: A Political Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Deng Xiaoping zhuan (1904-1974)* [*Biography of Deng Xiaoping (1904-1974)*], vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2014), 236.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:135.

<sup>28</sup> By this time Deng had proven his loyalty to Mao by repeatedly showing support for his military tactics, even when it hurt him politically. *Ibid.*, 1:207–9, 219, 235.

<sup>29</sup> David S. G. Goodman, *Social and Political Change in Revolutionary China: The Taihang Base Area in the War of Resistance to Japan, 1937-1945* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

commanded some campaigns on his own.<sup>30</sup> When Deng returned to power, he urged that Liu be rehabilitated because of attacks on him at the so-called “anti-dogmatism” CMC enlarged plenum in 1958: “‘anti-dogmatism’ was mostly about purging Marshal Liu [Bocheng], finally I suggested to Chairman Mao that Liu be protected. At the time, people said that the Second Field Army mostly relied on me to fight. I said to Chairman Mao, without a good commander, how could I be a good commissar?”<sup>31</sup>

In the war against the KMT after the defeat of the Japanese, Deng led a joint committee that commanded both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Armies in the decisive Huaihai campaign.<sup>32</sup> Deng was not only secretary of the Front Committee - Mao told him that he had the power to command.<sup>33</sup> When Mao introduced Deng to Khrushchev, he said, “Don’t look at him as small, he was the commander-in-chief of our Huaihai battle, secretary of the Front Committee, and he is in charge of the daily work of the CC.”<sup>34</sup> A few months after the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989, Deng met with the old comrades writing a history of the Second Field Army and said: “During the entire War of Liberation, from the beginning to the end, the Second Field Army was at the very front of the struggle against the enemy [都处在敌人针锋相对斗争的最前面].”<sup>35</sup> As a military leader, Deng was famous for being exceptionally severe and strict, even going so far as to criticize a high-ranking officer who took furniture from a landlord for his wedding. Deng was remembered for sharing the hunger of his soldiers and wearing the same dusty clothes.<sup>36</sup> From

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· Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Deng Xiaoping zhuan (1904-1974)* [Biography of Deng Xiaoping (1904-1974)], 2014, 1:209, 501.

<sup>31</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997)* [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997], vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 678.

<sup>32</sup> Gary J. Bjorge, *Moving the Enemy: Operational Art in the Chinese PLA’s Huai Hai Campaign*, Leavenworth Papers No. 22 (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Deng Xiaoping zhuan (1904-1974)* [Biography of Deng Xiaoping (1904-1974)], vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2014), 747.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine, *Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 193.

<sup>35</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan [Collected Works of Deng Xiaoping]*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), 336.

<sup>36</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Deng Xiaoping zhuan (1904-1974)* [Biography of Deng Xiaoping (1904-1974)], 2014, 1:295–96, 534.

1949 until the Cultural Revolution, Deng was Mao's point man in the secretariat in charge of managing military affairs.<sup>37</sup>

Since martial prestige is such a powerful totem of authority, when Deng was purged in the Cultural Revolution his war record became an issue of intense focus. The most controversial incident revolved around Deng's time in Guangxi. When the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Corps was trying to link up with Mao's basecamp at Jinggangshan, Deng left his troops for the Central Committee in Shanghai. Some evidence hints that Deng did this without approval from the Front Committee.<sup>38</sup> Mao's wife Jiang Qing even pressured two of Deng's former subordinates to write letters declaring him to be a deserter.<sup>39</sup> In 1967, Mao even summoned Deng in the middle of the night to discuss the allegations. In Mao's own words, his decision not to purge Deng permanently was strongly related to his respect for his protégé's military abilities. He explicitly stated that Deng should be treated differently from Liu Shaoqi, the purged PRC state chairman, because "he has fought in war." Mao repeatedly expressed his admiration for Deng as a military man: "this man Deng Xiaoping, I want to say a few words for him because he fought enemies during the war against Japan and the War of Liberation, no historical problems were found, he was never a traitor or surrendered..."<sup>40</sup> In a meeting with the military elite in December 1973, Mao told them "As for [Deng], I like him, although some people are afraid of him. When it comes to fighting war, this person is a good person!"<sup>41</sup> He also described Deng to the military elite as "your old commander [你们的老上

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<sup>37</sup> Yanlin Zhong, *Wenge qian de Deng Xiaoping: Mao Zedong de "fushuai", 1956-1966 [Deng Xiaoping Before the Cultural Revolution: Mao Zedong's "Vice Commander", 1956-1966]* (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2013), 50–55.

<sup>38</sup> Pantsov, *Deng Xiaoping*, 79–81.

<sup>39</sup> Wang Li, *Wang Li fansilu [Record of Wang Li's Self-Reflection]* (Hong Kong: Beixing chubanshe, 2001), 733–34.

<sup>40</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Deng Xiaoping zhuan (1904-1974) [Biography of Deng Xiaoping (1904-1974)]*, 2014, 2:1354–58.

<sup>41</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Mao Zedong nian pu: 1949-1976 [Chronology of Mao Zedong: 1949-1976]*, vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 514.



司].”<sup>42</sup> Deng reminded the military of his competence during the brief but important rectification in 1975, shortly before he was purged once again.<sup>43</sup>

Even though Ye supported Hua, Ye also deeply respected Deng. In the spring of 1977, Ye held a party for his eightieth birthday and invited the other old marshals (including Wang Zhen, Yu Qiuli, Yang Chengwu, Nie Rongzhen, and Xu Xiangqian.). Deng suddenly appeared and said: “The old marshals are all having a big party here! I will also come and wish [him] a happy birthday [老师们都在这里盛会啊! 我也来祝贺].” Ye rushed up to greet him and said loudly: “You are also an old marshal, you are the commander of us old marshals [你也是老师嘛, 你是我们老师中领班的].” Deng was particularly chummy with the old generals at the party. When Su Yu arrived late, Deng joked that there was no room and not to let him in. Deng also suggested adding another candle to Ye’s cake to symbolize long life. Deng and Ye sat right next to one another.<sup>44</sup> All of this took place before Deng officially returned to work, and Hua appears not to have attended the party.<sup>45</sup>

Loyalties to Deng not predicted by hypothesis 1a were visible immediately after the fall of the Gang of Four. Moreover, the expression of that loyalty also clearly contravened the predictions of hypothesis 3a, which would assume strong institutional control over the armed forces. At the festivities celebrating the founding of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) on August 1, 1977, when a giant portrait of Deng Xiaoping, with a waving military flag behind him, appeared on the stage backdrop during the anniversary celebrations, the entire crowd stood up to wildly applaud. The problem, however, was that Deng had only returned to his old positions less than a month before, and Hua Guofeng was still the leader of the country. Responding to this breach of decorum, the party center released a notification that

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 6:512.

<sup>43</sup> Warren Sun and Frederick C. Teiwes, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 251–64.

<sup>44</sup> Fan Shuo, *Ye Jianying Zai 1976 [Ye Jianying in 1976]*, 315–16.

<sup>45</sup> Ye’s birthday party was on May 14. See Yang Chengwu nianpu bianxiezu, *Yang Chengwu nianpu 1914 nian- 2004 nian [Yang Chengwu Chronology 1914-2004]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2014), 523.

labeled the event a serious political incident in violation of party rules and discipline. But staff officers in the general departments\* mocked [插科打诨] the document and even the military's General Political Department (GPD) was not serious about promulgating it.

The son of General Zhang Aiping writes of the incident: “This was the first time that the voice of the center seemed so weak and powerless. For generals who led troops, the mindset was Mao Zedong is gone, Zhou Enlai is gone, commander Zhu [De] is gone, it’s just you guys, but you still issue orders right and left, who do you think you are [就你们几个家伙，还指手画脚的，算老几阿]? Deng Xiaoping, this secretary of the forward committee in the Huaihai and Dujiang Campaigns, in the eyes of the generals of the PLA, after the deaths of Peng Dehuai and Lin Biao, was the undisputed commander-in-chief of the military [无可争辩的统帅].”<sup>46</sup>

On October 12, after a meeting to inform top officials about the Gang of Four, General Yang Yong, commander of the Xinjiang Military Region, was extremely upset that the propaganda apparatus continued to emphasize “criticize Deng.” At a party standing committee meeting of both the local government and military region back in Xinjiang on October 31, where he was the top military leader, Yang asked openly why Deng was still being criticized. When a major party figure (unnamed) said that they should do what the party center told them to do, Yang had his first open debate with a major figure at a standing committee session since arriving at his post four years ago. The next day Yang asked the Central Committee Office whether it was appropriate to continue using a certain document from the Cultural Revolution when “criticizing Deng,” subtly showing his opinion on the question. That night, the Politburo discussed the issue, and Hua told Yang through an intermediary that Cultural Revolution

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\* General Staff, General Logistics Department, and General Political Department

<sup>46</sup> Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zou lai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]*, 412.

document would no longer be used and that the focus would be on criticizing the Gang of Four, not Deng.<sup>47</sup>

The most remarkable step Yang took, however, was the decision to feign sickness to make a trip to the south and rally support for Deng to return to work. First, Yang took a trip to Beijing at the beginning of December. While there, General Luo Ruiqing, after hearing of Yang's plans, decided to go with him. Yang was even able to get a special plane for their trip from General Chen Xilian. Along with Han Xianchu, head of the important Lanzhou Military Region, they first traveled to Wuhan to discuss the matter of Deng returning to work with Wuhan Military Region commander Yang Dezhi and his commissar Wang Ping."<sup>48</sup>

When the generals arrived, Yang and Wang were not present, so they decided to wait a few days. After ten days passed, they decided to stop waiting and continue heading south to Guangzhou (Han stayed in Wuhan). Xu Shiyou, head of the Guangzhou Military Region, expressed support for Yang and Luo. After the beginning of the new year, Xu, Yang, and Luo met with other leaders of the Guangzhou Military Region to discuss both Deng returning to work and reversing the verdict on the Tiananmen Incident. After the meeting, Yang called Geng Biao with an update. Yang asked whether video of Deng giving the eulogy for Zhou Enlai could be broadcast, but Geng said this was impossible. At some point a few days after January 7, Yang and Luo asked Ye Jianying's son to tell his father to open a central work conference to solve the Deng problem.<sup>49</sup>

In February, Yang and Luo returned to Wuhan where they often conferred with Generals Yang Dezhi and Wang Ping. When the infamous "two whatevers" editorial was published, they conferred

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<sup>47</sup> Shu Yun, *Yang Yong Shangjiang [General Yang Yong]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 2005), 354–55; Jiang Feng, Ma Xiaochun, and Dou Yishan, *Yang Yong Jiangjun Zhuan [Biography of General Yang Yong]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2001), 479.

<sup>48</sup> Shu Yun, *Yang Yong Shangjiang [General Yang Yong]*, 357.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 359–61.

quietly behind closed doors, interpreting the editorial to be directed against Deng returning to work. They decided to return to Beijing immediately. Three days after that, Yang went to visit Deng.<sup>50</sup>

Military officer Chi Haotian started taking steps to pressure a reevaluation of the Tiananmen Square Incident even though it was clearly a political issue, not a military one. During the last few years of the Cultural Revolution, Chi was vice commissar of the Beijing Military Region. When the Gang of Four was destroyed, Chi was sent to control *People's Daily* as part of a broader attempt to ensure that leftists did not use print or broadcasting resources to resist the move against the Gang. Chi, still in uniform, remained at *People's Daily* for several months as head of a work group whose charge was to expose and criticize the Gang of Four. During this time period, Chi discovered evidence that the Gang of Four pressured *People's Daily* to collect false information in order to portray the Tiananmen Incident as counter-revolutionary, which Chi interpreted as evidence Mao had been tricked. On December 12, Chi, knowing that the incident was connected to Deng Xiaoping's status, wrote a letter to the propaganda apparatus, Hua Guofeng, and the Central Committee arguing that Mao's evaluation of the Tiananmen Incident was a result of the Gang of Four's manipulation and attaching the evidence he had discovered from the *People's Daily*.<sup>51</sup>

According to German scholar Jurgen Domes, the commander and commissar of the Guangzhou Military Region, Generals Xu Shiyou and Wei Guoqing, wrote a joint letter to Hua Guofeng on February 1977. In this letter, Xu and Wei pointed out that Hua had only been appointed by the Politburo, not the Central Committee, and that Hua's legitimacy was solely based on Mao's words "With you in charge, I am at ease!" They made the shocking statement that "no matter how golden these words may shine, they can only represent Chairman Mao's personal opinion, and they cannot express the will of the Party, the army, and the people." They also argued that Mao's purge of Deng Xiaoping was incorrect. Domes' interpretation of this letter was: "If Teng [Deng] were not speedily rehabilitated, the southern leaders

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 363–64.

<sup>51</sup> Kong Fanjun, *Chi Haotian Zhuan [Biography of Chi Haotian]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), 211.

would challenge the legitimation of Hua himself.”<sup>52</sup> Although Jing Huang dates the letter to early April, making the exact date questionable, its very existence points to a serious crisis in civil-military relations.<sup>53</sup> The Nanjing Military Region also supported Deng’s return to work. On the second day of the March work conference, the commissar of the NMR Liao Hansheng secretly went with his vice commander Li Shuiqing to visit Deng when they were supposed to be reviewing meeting documents.<sup>54</sup>

At some point in the first half of 1977, Deng also took a mysterious trip to Wuhan that is only discussed in the memoir of General Wang Ping. In his discussions with representatives of the Wuhan Military Region, Deng was shockingly frank. Deng told them that the “two whatevers” was incorrect. Deng again used his formulation of a “comprehensive and accurate understanding” of Mao Zedong Thought. Most strikingly, however, was Deng’s expression of defiance. He said that “some people” wanted him to do a self-criticism and take responsibility for the Tiananmen Incident. Deng said that his response was: “I cannot do a self-criticism for this, if you want me to come out then let me, if not then don’t, I will not trade in principles.” Deng affirmed Hua as chairman “under the present circumstances” but noted that it was necessary to “prevent other people from giving him bad ideas.”<sup>55</sup> This account is nothing short of remarkable. Even before he officially returned to work, Deng was in the presence of military figures laying out the possibility that the as yet undisputed leader of the party might be compromised by bad eggs. Just as importantly, Deng was pinning a slogan to Hua and criticizing it. In doing so, Deng was implying what the future political struggle might look like.

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<sup>52</sup> Jurgen Domes, *The Government and Politics of the PRC: A Time of Transition* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 146–47.

<sup>53</sup> Jing Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, Cambridge Modern China Series (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 352. The extreme tone of this letter casts some doubt on its authenticity. But the fact that Domes and Huang both saw this document raises interesting questions about the origins and intent of the forgery.

<sup>54</sup> Liao Hansheng, *Liao Hansheng Huiyilu [Memoir of Liao Hansheng]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2012), 583–84. The commander of the MR, Ding Sheng, was under investigation. See above.

<sup>55</sup> Wang Ping, *Wang Ping Huiyilu [Memoirs of Wang Ping]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1992), 593–94.

At the 3rd plenum of the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress between July 16 and 21, Deng's positions were finally restored: he became a Politburo standing committee member, vice chairman of the party, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, vice premier, and chief of the general staff of the PLA. A month later, at the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, a new CMC was determined.<sup>56</sup>

Hua Guofeng	Chairman
Ye Jianying	Vice Chairman
Deng Xiaoping	Vice Chairman
Liu Bocheng	Vice Chairman
Xu Xiangqian	Vice Chairman
Nie Rongzhen	Vice Chairman
Li Xiannian	Standing Committee
Wang Dongxing	Standing Committee
Chen Xilian	Standing Committee
Wei Guoqing	Standing Committee
Su Zhenhua	Standing Committee
Zhang Tingfa	Standing Committee
Su Yu	Standing Committee
Wang Zhen	Standing Committee (added March 9)
Luo Ruiqing	Standing Committee, CMC Secretary
Yang Yong	Non-voting Standing Committee Member
Liang Biye	Non-voting Standing Committee Member
Zhang Zhen	Non-voting Standing Committee Member
Wang Ping	Member
Wang Zheng	Member
Wang Bicheng	Member

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<sup>56</sup> Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun bianxie zu, *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Junshi* [Military History of the Chinese People's Liberation Army], vol. 6 (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2010), 296–97.

Wang Shangrong	Member
Wang Jian'an	Member
Deng Hua	Member
Kong Shiquan	Member
Gan Weihai	Member
Lu Zhengcao	Member
Liu Zhen	Member
Liu Zhijian	Member
Xu Shiyong	Member
Du Yide	Member
Yang Chengwu	Member
Yang Dezhi	Member
Li Shuiqing	Member
Li Zhimin	Member
Li Desheng	Member
Li Jukai	Member
Li Yaowen	Member
Wu Kehua	Member
Song Shilun	Member
Song Chengzhi	Member
Zhang Caiqian	Member
Zhang Aiping	Member
Chen Xianrui	Member
Chen Zaidao	Member
Chen Heqiao	Member
Jin Rubai	Member
Hong Xuezhi	Member
Qin Jiwei	Member
Nie Fengzhi	Member

Xu Liqing	Member
Guo Linxiang	Member
Gao Houliang	Member
Tang Liang	Member
Xiao Hua	Member
Xiao Ke	Member
Xiao Jingguang	Member
Xiao Wangdong	Member
Huang Xinting	Member
Han Xianchu	Member
Zeng Siyu	Member
Liao Hansheng	Member
Tan Shanhe	Member

This new CMC leaned heavily in Deng’s favor. Liu Bocheng was in very poor health at this point, but to the extent he played any political role it would have been in favor of Deng, as Liu was commander to Deng’s commissar during the war against the KMT. Xu Xiangqian and Deng were very close. Xu was the most prestigious general of the Fourth Front Army, one of the most important and oldest factions in the military. The members of Fourth Front Army later became the bulk of Deng’s troops in wars against Japan and the KMT as the 129 Division and Second Field Army. Xu himself had been Deng’s assistant at certain times in those wars and became defense minister in March 1978.

The situation among standing committee members was more complicated. Chen Xilian and Su Zhenhua were discussed in the previous section and should be considered part of the “took the stage group” (again, with all the caveats surrounding that term). Wang Dongxing was the most obvious supporter of Hua. Li Xiannian had characteristics of both the old revolutionaries and “took the stage



group.” Li was attacked as part of Hua’s group in 1981, but was defended by Chen Yun.<sup>57</sup> Li, however, had not been a military officer since the founding of the PRC. Zhang Tingfa fought with Deng during the war and Deng had put Zhang in charge of the air force during the Cultural Revolution. Wang Zhen was squarely in Deng’s camp, although he was not made a standing member of the CMC until March of the following year. Wei Guoqing was head of the GPD, but for an unclear reason did not ascend to the post until a few days after the Party Congress. Wei proved to be a decisive ally for Deng.

Su Yu was solidly in Deng’s camp. According to his chronology, beginning in 1977, a leading figure at the Academy of Military Science suggested that a book be published under the Academy’s name that portrayed Hua from a historical perspective as the fully deserving commander of the PLA. Su disagreed, saying: “If we create such an article, how can we face the old comrades? Haven’t we eaten enough of the bitter fruit of not seeking truth from facts? Besides, the Academy of Military Science is at a lower level, for it to go evaluate a leader would be bad.” Many meetings of the Academy’s party committee were held on this subject, and some individuals tried to go around Su straight to Ye. When Ye asked Su about this, Su said there was no need for such an article.<sup>58</sup>

Yang Yong, whose behavior in the days immediately following the destruction of the Gang of Four was discussed above, had better relations with Deng Xiaoping than any other top leader. Unsurprisingly, Yang became first vice commander of the general staff. This was despite opposition from Ye Jianying, who wanted Yang to go do civilian work in Guangzhou. Yang refused this offer, saying he wanted command of the Fuzhou Military Region. Wang Dongxing also met with Yang twice to encourage him to go to Guangzhou, to no avail.<sup>59</sup>

Luo Ruiqing’s situation was somewhat more complicated. Originally, it was proposed that Luo become head of the General Political Department, but this proposal was blocked. Luo did, however,

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<sup>57</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]* (Hong Kong: Quanqiu faxing zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2008), 388.

<sup>58</sup> Zhu Ying and Wen Jinghu, *Su Yu Nianpu [Chronology of Su Yu]* (2012: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, n.d.), 484.

<sup>59</sup> Shu Yun, *Yang Yong Shangjiang [General Yang Yong]*, 367.

become secretary of the CMC. This was almost certainly despite the opposition of Ye Jianying and Nie Rongzhen, who felt in the mid-1960s that Luo did not respect the older marshals.<sup>60</sup> Zhang Aiping's son surmises that Luo becoming secretary of the CMC was a compromise that resulted from Luo's failure to become head of the GPD. Yet he also suggests that this was less a compromise than successful political maneuvering by someone with a deeper understanding of the nature of the CMC secretary position. Zhang points out that the secretary position was extremely flexible in terms of how much power it entailed at different times, which might cause some to underestimate the importance of the position.<sup>61</sup> But instead, in Luo's case, he would play an absolutely critical role.

In one sense, then, the standing committee looked like a tie, with Wang Dongxing, Chen Xilian, and Su leaning towards Hua, while Wei Guoqing, Zhang Tingfa, and Su Yu supported Deng. This balance looks weaker, however, given the following considerations. First, the positions Deng's supporters occupied were significant. Wei Guoqing would be placed in the GPD and Luo Ruiqing would be CMC secretary. As will be shown, these were two absolutely critical positions in the military in terms of the political machinations to come. In February, Zhang Zhen, another major Deng ally, would become head of the General Logistics Department. Second, the three non-voting members were clearly Deng supporters from the general staff. Third, although Wang Dongxing was also a vice chairman of the party, his connections in the military were limited. Fourth, the fact that Luo became CMC Secretary and Yang went to the general staff, both despite opposition from Ye, shows Deng could get what he wanted. Fifth, Wang Zhen's ascension to the standing committee in March would have made Deng's dominance of the CMC even clearer. To sum up, then, while the presence of individuals like Ye Jianying, Wang Dongxing, Chen Xilian, and Su Zhenhua precluded complete Deng hegemony, he clearly had the upper hand. As for

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<sup>60</sup> Qiu Huizuo, *Qiu Huizuo Huiyilu [Memoir of Qiu Huizuo]* (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chuban jichuanmei youxian gongsi, 2011), 377–88.

<sup>61</sup> Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zoulai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]*, 414–15.

military officers in the Politburo, Han concludes that “almost all of them were in Deng’s camp [几乎都是邓的班底].”<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, Ye appears to have given Deng great leeway over military affairs. On August 25, the same day that the new CMC was announced, Ye heard a report that Deng at a CMC discussion meeting had said that in terms of CMC daily affairs he would be assisting Ye [军委日常工作由他辅助叶帅]. Ye then wrote a notification that documents submitted to the CMC for approval could be sent to Deng first.<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, on August 11, Yang Chengwu wrote a report to Ye and Deng about how rumors were spreading that Ye was too sick to work.<sup>64</sup> In any case, Ye would in name be the top leader in charge of daily affairs, but in practice Deng would take the lead.

#### *The Naval Military Exercise*

If Hua and Deng had no real policy differences, what specifically led to their falling out? In Vogel’s biography of Deng, he provides no suggestions for why Deng decided to begin weakening Hua’s authority. Hypothesis 3a would certainly not predict that the struggle was over control of the military. Yet the evidence clearly shows that the contest between Hua and Deng revolved to a decisive extent around the PLA, and therefore supports hypothesis 3b. As a leading historian of this era, Han Gang, argued in a lecture posted on YouTube:

... after the smashing of the Gang of Four, these two men Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping, generally speaking, cooperated, largely their relationship was positive. Then why was it that later there was a transition in power? In 1978, there were many incidents, and these incidents, in my opinion, were an extremely important factor for why Deng developed suspicions about Hua, they are crucial point [关节点].<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Han Gang, “Quanli de Zhuanyi: Guanyu Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [A Shift in Power: About the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress],” *Lingdao zhe [Leaders]*, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>63</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986) [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2007), 1130.

<sup>64</sup> Yang Chengwu nianpu bianxiezu, *Yang Chengwu nianpu 1914 nian- 2004 nian [Yang Chengwu Chronology 1914-2004]*, 525.

<sup>65</sup> Han Gang, *Cong Hua Guofeng Zhuzheng Dao Deng Xiaoping Hexin Quanli Shijiao de Jiedu [Interpretation from the Perspective of the Leadership of Hua Guofeng to Deng Xiaoping as the Core Authority]* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHkukZ2\\_4Vo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHkukZ2_4Vo), 2013).

The three factors identified by Han are a navy leader complaining to Hua after being criticized by Deng, Hua's decision to visit the navy without telling the Central Military Commission, and criticism of Deng's comments by a member of the PLA's General Political Department. The fact that the PLA played such a prominent role can only be explained by a lack of institutionalization that would make the potential use of coercion a serious threat to all sides. Because the PLA had played such a critical role in helping to start the Cultural Revolution, the question of who controlled the gun was an extremely serious matter. This evidence clearly supports hypothesis 3b.

On March 9, 1978, an explosion occurred on ship "160" at 8:40 pm in Zhanjiang Harbor in Guangdong Province.<sup>66</sup> The ship, an elite missile destroyer, sank at 10:55 pm, killing 134 and wounding 28. The explosion was caused by an electrician who was upset that he had been punished for an illicit sexual relationship.<sup>67</sup> This explosion would lead to one of the clearest direct contests over military dominance between Hua and Deng - a contest Deng would win by essentially flouting the chain of command and which showed the extent to which Deng saw political power as revolving around military control.

At this point, we have a number of very different narratives about the events following the explosion, but in fact the nature of the sources and even the way they differ both support this analysis. According to the official *Biography of Luo Ruiqing*, Deng criticized navy commissar Su Zhenhua for the "160" Incident, but Su ignored him, instead going to meet Hua Guofeng on April 12 to complain about Deng. Hua allegedly expressed support for Su and told him that he would go to Dalian for a naval inspection after a trip to North Korea. Su then went to tell the navy high command that Hua supported them, not to be nervous, and that they would not be purged. Su told a few naval vice commanders to prepare 120 ships and 80 planes and demanded complete secrecy. When Yang Guoyu, head of the navy

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<sup>66</sup> Vogel mentions this incident, but provides no footnotes and does not identify it as an important mechanism for the fall-out between Deng and Hua. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 229.

<sup>67</sup> Haijun zhengzhibu bianyanshi, *Haijun Zhengzhi Gongzuo Dashiji [Chronicle of Major Developments in Navy Political Work]* (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 1993), 386.

general staff, suggested navy commander Xiao Jinguang should know about this, Su agreed. But when Yang suggested telling Deng's general staff as well, Su said that there was no need since Hua had already given his approval. When on April 13 Yang reported this to Xiao, Xiao told him to report to Luo Ruiqing.

On April 15, Yang supposedly again told Su it was necessary to report to the CMC and general staff, and that otherwise it would be impossible to move the ships. Su finally approved. When Luo met Yang on April 17, Luo allegedly asked why it was necessary at this time to have such a large military maneuver and what kind of effect this would "have on the international and domestic situation." Luo also expressed puzzlement as to why this was only being reported now if the decision had been made on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Luo said: "I will report this to vice chairman Deng, whether or not this is ok, I will contact you by phone later." According to Luo's biography, Luo expressed personal opposition to Su's plans to Deng, who agreed.<sup>68</sup> The Luo biography also claims that Deng said in July 1979 that the matter was "managed" by Luo.

An addendum to the decision that stripped Hua's position as party chairman and CMC chairman distributed in July 1981 contained the following account:

When a navy ship exploded and sank, Comrade Xiaoping criticized Comrade Su Zhenhua, but Su was unhappy so he went to Comrade Hua Guofeng to complain. They spoke for five hours, and Hua Guofeng said to Su: 'The navy only had a '160 Incident', what are you afraid of, you won't be knocked down.' In order to express his support for Su, he also decided that when he returned from a visit to North Korea, he would go to Dalian to inspect the navy. Su manipulated Hua's support, did not care about the serious influence and political implications domestically or internationally, did not get permission from the operations department of the navy, did not get permission from the general staff and the CMC, but still prepared to move 120 destroyers and 80 airplanes for a training exercise. This matter was blocked by Comrade Luo Ruiqing. Before Su returned to Beijing from Shanghai he told people that chairman Hua wanted him to return to Beijing so he could help chairman Hua control the military.<sup>69</sup>

Yet strong evidence indicates that many of the charges against Su are libelous. Qiao Ya, a secretary who had worked for both Su Zhenhua and Xiao Jinguang, provides evidence that suggests

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<sup>68</sup> *Luo Ruiqing Zhuan [Biography of Luo Ruiqing]* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 608.

<sup>69</sup> "Liu Zhong Quanhui Chuanda Tigang Fulu: Hua Guofeng Tongzhi de Zhuyao Cuowu [Addendum to the Distributed Outline of the Third Plenum: The Major Mistakes of Comrade Hua Guofeng]" (Chinese University Press, July 7, 1981), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

Xiao played a role in a smear campaign against his own commissar. According to Qiao's account, Xiao was a politically astute man who held long grudges and liked to exact vengeance upon those who crossed him, and Su and Xiao had crossed swords multiple times throughout the history of the PLA navy. Because Su had used especially harsh words to criticize Deng after his second purge in 1976 and had failed to actively combat the "two whatevers" in the navy, he was criticized by Deng Xiaoping. Xiao used this opportunity to write a twenty-thousand character document stating that Su was close to both the Gang of Four and Hua Guofeng, and that Su opposed Deng returning to work. He presented this report at a PLA meeting in late 1978. Upon hearing the report, Deng told a general named Du Yide that he was unhappy with Su's criticisms of him. Du said that at the time many people were forced to criticize Deng, including Xiao Jingguang. Deng said: "rumors mean nothing, bring some evidence [空口无证, 你拿材料来]." When Du went to look for the documents, they had been removed, probably by Xiao himself.<sup>70</sup>

Chou Yunzhou, Su Zhenhua's former secretary, saw Xiao Jingguang's report on December 30, 1978, and reported the matter to his boss, who was in the hospital. Chou warned Su that this was a serious matter and that he should defend himself. Su told Chou to find Navy Chief of Staff Yang Guoyu and have him write an explanation addressing Xiao's charges. Marshal Xu Xiangqian promised to publish this explanation as a newsletter from the meeting, but Su never received it, raising the question as to whether it was ever released.<sup>71</sup>

This explanation appears in a biography of Su that defends his behavior in the wake of the navy accident. Su had been focusing most of his time on managing political affairs in Shanghai since October 1976.\* When he heard of the naval disaster, he immediately took a number of active steps to rectify the

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<sup>70</sup> Qiao Ya, "Luetan Xiao Jingguang, Su Zhenhua zhijian de shifei enyuan [A Brief Discussion of the Rights and Wrongs between Xiao Jingguang and Su Zhenhua]," "Jinian kaiguo shangjiang Su Zhenhua danchen 100 zhou nian huodong." Special thanks to Warren Sun for sharing this document.

<sup>71</sup> Chou Yunzhou, "Chongxin gongzuo hou de Su Zhenhua." 20. Special thanks to Warren Sun for sharing this document.

\* Su was part of the work group sent to take control of Shanghai after the fall of the Gang of Four- an especially delicate mission, as Shanghai was a base of the Gang's power.

situation. Su immediately went to the navy operations room and entered into night-long discussions with the navy's party standing committee. He sent assistant commissar Lu Rencan and Yang Guoyu to investigate. Su also requested that he be allowed to resume his primary focus on navy affairs. On March 26, Su chaired an enlarged session of the navy party standing committee that discussed the explosion and suggested a mass campaign of investigation, rectification, and reform [大查，大整，大改的群众运动]. Su then personally lead an inspection committee to Lushun.<sup>72</sup>

According to Yang Guoyu, Su told Yang on April 12 that Hua wanted to inspect the navy around May 10. Su also told Yang to make the preparations, but told him to maintain secrecy and not use the telephone – but also to talk to commander Xiao the next day and ask his advice. On May 13, Yang went to visit Xiao. Xiao expressed support for Hua's visit, noting that Mao had never inspected the navy.

On April 15, Yang suggested to Su that they inform the general staff so that people like Xu Xiangqian, Yang Yong, and Wang Shangrong could attend. Su told Yang to return to Beijing and inform Deng personally. When Yang pointed out that the chain of command meant it should be the general staff that informed Deng, not Yang personally, Su told him to visit Luo instead of Deng, which he did on April 17. According to Yang's account, Luo did not immediately express opposition to the exercise. A notification was later released saying Hua was too "busy" to make the trip.<sup>73</sup>

In 1998, Su's wife asked Hua about the incident. In response, Hua made some fascinating and revealing comments not just about the incident itself but his relationship with the military more broadly. Hua revealed that after the fall of the Gang of Four, he was too busy and did not have time to pay much attention to the military. At the beginning of 1978, Ye and standing committee members of the CMC told Hua to familiarize himself more with military affairs. Therefore, he, along with most of the CMC

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<sup>72</sup> Yang Zhaolin, Chou Yunzhou, and Qiao Ya, *Cong Gaoshan Dao Dahai: Gongheguo Shangjiang Su Zhenhua [From the High Mountains to the Great Seas: General of the Republic Su Zhenhua]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2001), 423–425.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 432–33.

leadership, first watched an Air Force demonstration in Yangcun. Hua began to consider a naval inspection. This created an opportunity when Su Zhenhua came to report to Hua before Su made an especially long trip to inspect the navy. At the time it was a habit that when Politburo members were going to leave Beijing for a long period of time, they would make a report. After Su's report, Hua used the opportunity to tell him he wanted to inspect the navy.

Hua then made two interesting comments. First, he argued that he ended up not having time to attend the inspection. But he also said: "At the time, I was chairman of the CMC, going to take a look at naval units was absolutely acceptable. When people say that Su Zhenhua came to me to complain [about Deng], that is simply not true."<sup>74</sup>

What are we to make of these differing accounts? Su's reaction to the explosion does seem to have honestly upset Deng. Evidence for this hypothesis can be seen in comments by Deng on April 11<sup>th</sup>, days before he would have heard about the exercise from Luo: "last year I wanted the air force to do two big investigations and the air force did it. Other units probably heard me, but they didn't do it. They always think they don't have that type of problem, actually they are self-satisfied, but what service arm shouldn't do it! Not investigating a few things, not raising one's sense of responsibility, no restrictions is no good, relying on one's credentials to eat is unacceptable."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it seems accurate to argue that Su was honestly unhappy about Deng's criticisms, both because he had been focusing on Shanghai and because he had taken steps to rectify the matter. Another piece of evidence shows that Hua and Deng had different ideas on the cause of the explosion. At a meeting dedicated to criticizing Hua held years later in June 1981, Deng said: "In April and May of 1978 in that navy incident, Hua said it was a technical problem, but it cannot be seen that way."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 434–35.

<sup>75</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Ba Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo de Diwei Huifu Qilai [Restore the Status of Military Political Work]" (Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2004), 99, Deng Xiaoping junshi wenji [Selections of Deng Xiaoping's Military Writings], Vol 3.

<sup>76</sup> "Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhuanfa de Zhongyang Changwei Zai Shiyi Jie Liu Zhong Quanhui Qijian Zhaokai Gezu Zhaojiren Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group



Historian Yu Ruxin asks some revealing questions. Yu notes how strange it is that the Luo biography only describes Deng's reaction to the explosion, not any other military leaders. Yu also points out that the navy commander, Xiao Jingguang, should have taken primary responsibility, especially because at the time Su's main bailiwick was Shanghai. Although Yu does not point this out, the obvious reason was Xiao's close alliance with Chen Yun and other old revolutionaries. Xiao had been part of the discussions among Wang Zhen, Geng Biao, Wang Jing, and Chen Yun about their dissatisfaction over Deng's treatment and the verdict on the Tiananmen Incident before the 1977 March work conference.<sup>77</sup>

Yu suspects foul play:

Was it Luo's report that blocked Hua's inspection, or was it Hua taking the initiative not to go? Both of these arguments are suspicious. Let's hypothesize another possibility: Luo reported to Deng, without expressing his own opposition, but Deng Xiaoping did not want to give Hua this opportunity, using the excuse that Luo was opposed, and then he went to persuade Hua not to go. Of course, we emphasize that this is only a hypothesis, there is no direct evidence, but it fits the historical background and personality of the characters.<sup>78</sup>

Although we do not have the full story, the most likely interpretation of the facts discussed above is the following: that Deng was unhappy Su did not take his criticisms seriously, and that Deng connected such insolence to Hua's decision to visit the navy so soon afterwards. Deng, as chief of the general staff, would have felt that not knowing about the exercise until so late was a challenge to his military bailiwick as chief of the general staff. The most interesting question, albeit unanswerable at this point, is whether Su (more likely) or Hua (less likely) had any sort of ulterior motive. In any case, Deng's interpretation of the incident is unmistakable.

Xiao Jingguang's memoirs reveal another possible clue. According to Xiao, Su used the "check-rectify-reform" campaign started in March to purge those who disagreed with him. In March, Su allegedly

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Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress Distributed by the Party Center]" (Chinese University Press, n.d.), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

<sup>77</sup> Xiao Jingguang, *Xiao Jingguang Huiyilu (Xuji) [Memoirs of Xiao Jingguang, Continued]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1992), 356–57.

<sup>78</sup> Yu Ruxin, "'Junwei Zhuxi Weishenme Bu Neng Jianyue haijun?' [Why Can't the Chairman of the CMC Inspect the Navy?]," *Fenghuayuan [Chinese News and Culture Magazine]* 429 (2003).

also blocked discussion of the “practice” idea. If true, these facts hint that the navy was the front line in the battle between Hua and Deng for influence in the military. Hua might have picked Su as his partner partly because of the explosion, but also because Su was one of the “survivors” of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>79</sup> It is also possible Su did not see anything special in his relationship with Hua: after all, Hua was the official leader of the party, state, and military. But the lessons for others were clear: no matter how long of a history an officer had in Deng’s mountaintop, a relationship with Hua was now unforgivable.

Historian Yu remarks: “Hua Guofeng was correct: as CMC Chairman, why couldn’t he inspect the navy?” He only hints at the answer. But the answer is clearly that Deng considered the military his turf. Hua’s attempt to manage military affairs not only drew Deng’s ire, almost certainly sparking his intention to unseat Hua (Deng’s critical speech at the military political work meeting was only two months later), but also thoroughly demonstrating Hua’s impotence in military affairs.

Su Zhenhua’s role in the explosion was also raised at a CMC meeting in January 1979.<sup>80</sup> Navy commander Xiao complained that after the destroyer explosion, Su had tried to purge his opponents in the navy in the “inspect-rectify-reform” campaign and later tried to prevent discussion of “practice” in the military. Wang Zhen was particularly vicious in his attacks. Su said that given his position in the party, democratic centralism made such criticism inappropriate. But Marshal Xu Xiangqian, who was running the meeting, told him to remember the nature of his problem.<sup>81</sup>

The available evidence points to a strong possibility that Hua’s attempt to organize a naval inspection, as well as the other trips to military installations he was making around the same time, were the trigger for Deng’s decision to step up his campaign to unseat Hua. Ye’s suggestion to Hua that he pay

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<sup>79</sup> Xiao Jingguang, *Xiao Jingguang Huiyilu (Xuji)* [Memoirs of Xiao Jingguang, Continued], 360–62.

<sup>80</sup> Yang Zhaolin, Chou Yunzhou, and Qiao Ya, *Cong Gaoshan Dao Dahai: Gongheguo Shangjiang Su Zhenhua* [From the High Mountains to the Great Seas: General of the Republic Su Zhenhua], 431.

<sup>81</sup> Xiao Jingguang, *Xiao Jingguang Huiyilu (Xuji)* [Memoirs of Xiao Jingguang, Continued], 362.

more attention to military issues may have crossed a line in Deng's mind.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Gao Xin, Yang Jisheng, and Han Gang are probably correct to point to the navy incident as the turning point at which Deng decided to remove Hua as soon as possible.<sup>83</sup>

Soon after the navy incident, yet another event, again related to the military, infuriated Deng. This was a crucial incident for two reasons related to the theory of this dissertation. First, it demonstrated the intense sensitivity related to civil-military relations in Deng's mind. Second, the incident reveals another element of hypothesis 3b: the ability of an individual to manipulate his personal prestige and weakly enforced and ambiguous rules to use the military to improve his political position.

A sharp dispute erupted while documents were being drafted for a meeting on political work in the military. In a meeting with the GPD leadership on March 20, Deng argued that the official document for the meeting should include more about the nature of political work "under the new historical conditions [现在处在新的历史条件下]."<sup>84</sup> Although no one seems to have opposed Deng's terminology during a GDP party committee meeting, some members of the group in charge of creating the draft refused to use that language as they wrote the official "Decision."<sup>85</sup>

According to his *Chronology*, Deng wrote a note on April 22 saying that although the CMC standing committee should discuss the relevant documents before the conference, there was no time. Instead, the CMC standing committee would approve and take into account any discussion or revisions after the meeting was over.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> According to independent analyst Gao Xin, Ye Jianying also did not take the explosion seriously, telling the navy to review the incident and prevent it from happening again, but he provides no source for this. Gao Xin, *Wen Jiabao Zhuan [Biography of Wen Jiabao]* (Carle Place: Mingjing chubanshe, 2004), 140.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 141; Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]* (Hong Kong: Excellent Culture Press, 2004), 94.

<sup>84</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1997), 121.

<sup>85</sup> Lu Zengyan, "Wei Guoqing Zai Dang de Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou," *Bainianchao [The Hundred Year Tide]*, no. 12 (December 2015): 4–12.

<sup>86</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:300.

On April 24, the GPD released a notification containing several old documents on political work and which pointed out that the PLA had different experiences in different historical periods.<sup>87</sup> On April 27, vice head of the GPD Liang Biye announced, according to the position of the GPD party committee, that the “Decision” would have to be edited according to the spirit of Deng Xiaoping’s instructions. However, those opposing the new terminology refused to obey. After the meeting opened was opened, Wei Guoqing gave a report that included Deng’s language on May 2. On May 2 the draft “Decision” was submitted to the various working committees for discussion. At this time, the differences between Wei’s report, which hewed to Deng’s position, and the draft “Decision” became obvious to the committee, especially because the “Decision” did not include any of the elements in Wei’s report on “new historical conditions.” Every work committee suggested that the “Decision” should be reformed to better adhere to Wei’s report.

In order to overcome opposition to this change, Wei had the GPD create an editing group made up of military leaders at the Military Region and army level to work with the group who had written the draft “Decision”. When Wei left on May 16 for Guangzhou, he told Liang to finish this process as quickly as possible. On May 17, Liang summoned the new editing group, the group in charge of writing Wei’s report, and the group in charge of writing the “Decision.” Even then, although some changes had been made to the “Decision,” it still had not been changed enough. Finally, however, the two men on the “Decision” draft committee explained why they were being stubborn.<sup>88</sup> They argued it would be better to use Hua’s expression “new historical period [新的历史时期]” than Deng’s “new historical conditions.” They also criticized the expression “The People’s Liberation Army has a proletarian nature.” According to them, Mao had just said the PLA was “the people’s army.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Kang Yuetian, *Xin Zhongguo Junshi Dashi Jiyao [Record of Major Events in the Military Affairs of New China]* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1998), 326.

<sup>88</sup> Lu Zengyan, “Wei Guoqing Zai Dang de Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou.”

<sup>89</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 121. At least one of those two men was Li Mancun, head of the Propaganda Department of the GPD.

That afternoon, Liang called Wei in Guangzhou. Wei told him that the phrase “new historical condition” could not be changed. Two more meetings were held on the evening of May 17 and afternoon of May 18, but the men on the “Decision” draft committee still refused to make changes. They made three demands: to ask Deng Xiaoping what should be done, to have the entire political work conference discuss, and ask the GPD party committee to discuss the issue again. The man in charge of the committee even said that “he was being responsible to history, being responsible to the entire military.” When the discussions failed to move forward, the vice head of the GPD mass work department, Peng Fei, who was a member of the draft group, agreed to write a new version.

When Wei returned from Guangzhou on the 19<sup>th</sup>, he said such a situation should have never been allowed to happen: “this is not a coincidence, it should raise serious attention.” He agreed to the head of the “Decision” draft committee’s demand to go to Deng on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Deng of course supported Wei. Also on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Wei chaired a meeting with the heads of all the discussion groups at the political work meeting, members of the GPD party committee, and heads of the GPD departments. Liang explained the nature of the debate and everyone agreed that the “Decision” should be re-written to accord with Wei’s report.<sup>90</sup>

On May 29, Deng met with officers from the GPD and Hu Qiaomu. Deng told them about the debate on the two different expressions, concluding the following about those who opposed his wording:

In summary, the opinion is this: as long as the words you speak are different from Chairman Mao, and different from Chairman Hua, it is not alright. What Chairman Mao did not say, what Chairman Hua did not say, if you say it, that is also not alright. How can this be acceptable? Copying what Chairman Mao said, copying what Chairman Hua said, you must copy completely. This is not an isolated phenomenon, this is a reflection of a type of contemporary present thinking.<sup>91</sup>

The above information not only indicates the extent to which control over the PLA was a decisive element in Chinese politics, as predicted in hypothesis 3b. They also explain Deng’s motivation for using the military for political purposes, which is another element of that hypothesis. It was precisely these

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<sup>90</sup> Lu Zengyan, “Wei Guoqing Zai Dang de Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou.”

<sup>91</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:319.

incidents together that explain why Deng decided not only to support the “practice” position, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also to turn it into a discussion that would weaken the authority of Hua Guofeng and Wang Dongxing. Moreover, he clearly did it in a way that violated the spirit of civilian control over the military - a possibility excluded by hypothesis 3a. As Han Gang concluded, “these three incidents [Su complaining to Hua, the navy inspection, and criticisms of the political work “Decision”] happened in exactly one month, so Deng Xiaoping supported ‘practice.’”<sup>92</sup>

Deng very obviously, and inappropriately, used the military to move the “practice” debate forward. After the *Guangming* piece (discussed in the last chapter) appeared, Chi Haotian, a vice commander of the general staff, read the piece twice and brought it to Yang Yong, the first vice commander of the general staff. When Chi arrived in Yang’s office, the article was already on his desk. Yang and Chi decided that the general staff and all the units associated with it should study the article, but they were also aware that this entailed a certain level of danger. Normally the General Political Department (GPD) should take the lead in taking such a decision, but they decided to bypass the GPD and take the lead instead. \* Yang said: “If there is a problem, I will take responsibility!”<sup>93</sup>

Chi brought the outline of the study program to Deng. After reading it, Deng called Chi on the phone to say: “I have read your plan, it is very good! In the past we often said that theory is the compass for action, this is not enough, it is also necessary to emphasize that practice is the criterion of truth, you must think a bit about connecting with practice.” According to Chi’s biography, “the general staff being the first to start the big discussion of ‘practice is the sole criterion of truth’ had immense influence both

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<sup>92</sup> Han further emphasizes that Su Zhenhua’s status as a member of the ‘took the stage’ group made concerns over the military connect to larger questions of authority. Han Gang, *Cong Hua Guofeng Zhuzheng Dao Deng Xiaoping Hexin Quanli Shijiao de Jiedu [Interpretation from the Perspective of the Leadership of Hua Guofeng to Deng Xiaoping as the Core Authority]*.

\* Perhaps unknown to Yang and Chi, the GPD apparently was already involved. Immediately after the *Guangming* article came out in May, head of the GPD Wei Guoqing, asked Deng if he wanted to release a notification calling on the entire military to discuss ‘practice.’ Deng’s Machiavellian response was to: “First start, but release the notification later.” See Shen, pg 240.

<sup>93</sup> Kong Fanjun, *Chi Haotian Zhuan [Biography of Chi Haotian]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), 229-230.

inside and outside the military, it played a role as model and promoter in other military units and in each province, city, and autonomous region.” Chi and Yang’s behavior is not surprising. Deng had been giving them the heads up about his dissatisfaction with the “two whatevers,” on one occasion calling the “two whatevers” “bullshit [屁话].”<sup>94</sup>

Deng gave a major speech to the political work meeting on June 2. Although he did not use the exact terms “practice is the sole criterion of truth,” it was clearly intended to give a boost to that debate. He defined Maoism not as the dogmatic continuation of Mao’s policies, but instead argued that the very core of Mao Zedong Thought was practicality. In this way, Deng was able to apply Mao’s legitimacy and prestige to justify essentially any policy. Deng said: “There are other comrades, however, who talk about Mao Zedong Thought every day, but who often forget, abandon or even oppose Comrade Mao’s fundamental Marxist viewpoint and his method of seeking truth from facts, of always proceeding from reality and of integrating theory with practice.” Deng also took a not-so-subtle swipe at the “two whatevers”: “In essence, their view is that one need only parrot what was said by Marx, Lenin, and Comrade Mao Zedong—that it is enough to reproduce their words mechanically.”<sup>95</sup> Some parts of the speech were so inflammatory that they were not included in collections of Deng’s official works but can be read in the Hubei provincial archives: “At this military-wide political work meeting, certain individual comrades did not support us discussing “new historical conditions,” saying that this is different from “new era of development”, and they do not support discussing “maintaining the proletariat nature of our military,” saying this is different from “maintaining the nature of the people’s army. And therefore caused a debate.”<sup>96</sup> Deng Liqun in one of his speeches on party history identifies this speech as “the most important.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 230–31.

<sup>95</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Speech at the All-Army Conference on Political Work,” in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 128.

<sup>96</sup> SZ1-4-501-19

<sup>97</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun’s Lectures on National History]*, 2000, 3:349.

The next day, *People's Daily*, *Liberation Army Daily*, and other regional papers made Deng's speech their cover story. On June 6, *People's Daily* and *Liberation Army Daily* printed Deng's speech (but with important cuts). In late June, the center released a directive that called for all "party members, cadres, soldiers, and workers" to study the speeches given at the military political work conference by Hua, Ye, and Deng, but remarkably said that the unedited version of Deng's speech should only be seen to the more powerful cadres at the county level and higher-ranking officers. This was a remarkable occurrence given the differences between Hua and Deng's speeches. Historian Shen Baoxiang writes: "having these speeches with different keynotes (基调) serve as the content for a single central document and requiring everyone to read and execute was a strange phenomenon in the two years of oscillation [徘徊, an official term for Hua's two years in power]." Shen describes the release of these speeches as a way of communicating to many cadres that the debate between the "two whatevers" and "practice is the sole criterion of truth" was actually a contest between Deng and Hua.<sup>98</sup> Remarkably, however, Hua did use Deng's formulation of "new historical conditions," showing both that Hua was willing to address some of Deng's concerns (just like when he adopted Deng's language on the "correct and comprehensive understanding" of Mao Zedong Thought), but also Deng's unwillingness to stop his attacks despite Hua's concessions.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, the report given on May 2 by Wei Guoqing, head of the GPD, followed Deng's formulations. This report was published in *People's Liberation Army Daily* on June 8. The report included the phrase "under the new historical conditions" and the "proletarian nature" of the PLA. The official "Decision" of the meeting, distributed to the entire party and military on July 18, used terms evocative of the "practice" debate like the "comprehensive and accurate understanding" of Mao, "seeking

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<sup>98</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 124–25.

<sup>99</sup> *Hua Zhuxi Ye Fu Zhuxi Deng Fu Zhuxi Zai Quanjun Zhengzhi Gongzuo Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Speeches by Chairman Hua, Vice Chairman Ye, and Vice Chairman Deng at the Military-Wide Political Work Meeting]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe. Document available at University of Pittsburgh Library, 1978), 2.



truth from facts” and the strategic significance of training.<sup>100</sup> Deng’s speech at the PLA political work meeting was particularly important because when Zhang Pinghua at the 1978 November work conference defended himself for not supporting the “practice” position by pointing out that an official notification on the question had never been released, the response was that Deng’s speech to the military was an official document.<sup>101</sup>

Despite Deng’s speech on June 15, Wang Dongxing escalated his criticisms at a meeting of the top leaders in the propaganda ministry and news agencies directly subordinate to the top of the party. Wang criticized using “specially invited commentators” (which was how the *Guangming* article was signed). Wang even told the group that he had personally warned Hu Yaobang. As Hu’s direct superior in the areas of propaganda and cadre rehabilitation and a vice chairman of the party, Wang’s dissatisfaction was a major problem for Hu.

But the most interesting comments Wang made at this meeting were on coverage of Deng’s speech at the PLA political work meeting:

The *People’s Daily’s* news coverage of the military political work meeting also has problems, it was correct to headline that Deng insightfully elaborated on Mao Zedong Thought. But why weren’t the speeches by chairman Hua and vice chairman Ye headlined as ‘insightful elaboration’? Can it be that the speeches by chairman Hua and vice chairman Ye did not insightfully elaborate on Mao Zedong Thought? Doesn’t this mean there is some significance to the headline?

Wang also said that he had spoken to Hua on the matter of the “specially invited commentators,” thus implying that this was not just his opinion.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> The document did however still affirm the Cultural Revolution and use the phrase ‘class struggle as the key link.’ Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo Qishi Nian Shi: Zai “Wenhua Dageming” Zhong Shou Sunhai, Zai Gaige Kaifang Zhong Chuangzao Xin Jumian [70 Year History of the Communist Party’s Military Political Work: Suffering Damage During the “Cultural Revolution”, Creating a New Situation in the Reform and Opening Up]*, vol. 6 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1991), 41–48.

<sup>101</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Cong Hua Guofeng Xiatai Dao Hu Yaobang Xiatai [From the Fall of Hua Guofeng to the Fall of Hu Yaobang]* (Brampton: Mingjing chubanshe, 1997), 50–51.

<sup>102</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 116–17.

But Deng now had the momentum. On July 22, he met with Hu Yaobang. The following day Hu gave an account of his conversation with Deng at a meeting with members of the party school journal. Deng told Hu that at first he did not pay any attention to the *Guangming* article but only took a closer look when he heard that people were opposing it. Deng decided that a debate against the “two whatevers” was necessary. According to Deng, the Politburo had determined a specific division of labor: that Ye and Deng would together help Hua manage the entire situation (conspicuously leaving out Wang Dongxing). Deng also told Hu not to tell others about this division of labor. Hu responded by saying that he now he would act more bravely and that in the future, in terms of propaganda, he would distinguish more clearly between the three in the triumvirate. Deng also explicitly told Hu that his call for a “comprehensive and correct” understanding of Mao was an attack on the “two whatevers.” Deng furthermore said that he had criticized Wu Lengxi, Hu Sheng, and Li Xin for describing the collective leadership as a single person. Hu interpreted these comments as encouragement to continue the campaign to study “practice,” despite the opposition of Wang Dongxing.<sup>103</sup>

The theoretical debate was turning into a political struggle. At a meeting of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Hu Qiaomu said that there was no difference of opinions on the “practice” debate and that anyone who said differently was spreading rumors with the intention of splitting the party. The audience was baffled by Hu’s comments. At a meeting of high-ranking cadres [中央机关司局长以上干部], Hu again said that rumors of a difference of opinion on the theory question were just an attempt to split the party. Yet Hu Qiaomu “doth protest too much.” According to historian Shen Baoxiang, Hu “wholeheartedly protected the party center lead by Hua Guofeng and was very worried that the discussion of the criterion of truth problem would cause a difference of opinion within the party center and thus cause a split...”<sup>104</sup> Hu’s comments prove that the debate was no longer a matter of simple theoretical dispute.

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 126–27.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of the debate between the “two whatevers” and “practice” position is that Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping had completely different understandings of its significance. Hu saw the “two whatevers” as a type of thinking that needed to be resisted, not a group of people, and therefore resisted using the expression “whateverist faction.” As Shen Baoxiang points out, “on the matter of the ‘two whatevers’, Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping were different. Deng Xiaoping was very sensitive to the ‘two whatevers’. He was the earliest to express opposition to it. Because of his own special situation, Deng Xiaoping not only criticized the ‘two whatevers’ from a theoretical and political perspective, he very naturally associated the ‘two whatevers’ with his own return to work.” Shen argues that the way Deng talks about his return to work demonstrates that he associated the “two whatevers” with a group of people.<sup>105</sup> Deng, then, was to an extent manipulating Hu’s naivety about the implications of attacking the “two whatevers.”

Deng’s speech was not the only way he used the military to move the “practice” debate forward. We have yet another example of Deng using his special authority in the military to shape the political atmosphere to his liking. Around May 20, Hua Nan\*, editor of the *People’s Liberation Army Daily*, and Yao Yuanfang, the assistant editor, went to Luo to discuss the upcoming political work meeting. Luo told them that he heard some *xiucai* [秀才: party workers involved in speech writing and theoretical issues] opposed the *Guangming* article and that it was necessary to convince them otherwise. Luo told them clearly that the military-wide political work meeting was intended to spread the “thinking line [思想路线]” of seeking truth from facts. Luo also told them that *People’s Liberation Army Daily* should

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<sup>105</sup> Shen Baoxiang, “Hu Yaobang Yu Hua Guofeng (Xia) [Hu Yaobang and Hua Guofeng- a Few Situations I Know (Part 2)],” *Tongzhou Gongjin*, no. 44 (2009): 45–46.

\* Hua Nan had already played an important role by telling Deng Liqun that when the *People’s Daily* refused to print articles from the State Council Research Office, they could be published in the *People’s Liberation Army Daily*. At least three articles were published in this way. See Deng Liqun zishu, pg 105.

propagate this message, as this was part of “an important struggle” to eliminate the influence of the “two whatevers” from the military.<sup>106</sup>

Immediately after Deng’s speech to the political work meeting, Luo told *People’s Liberation Army Daily* to quickly write an editorial to affirm Deng’s message. On June 7 or 8, Yao Yuanfang told Luo about an article written by Wu Jiang, a member of Hu Yaobang’s group at the party school. Luo began discussing this piece on a daily basis with Hua Nan. On June 10, Luo said that he approved the article but that it needed to be strengthened, especially by using Mao’s own words and quotes from Deng’s speech to the military political work meeting.<sup>107</sup>

Without this support from the military, Hu Yaobang would have been unable to push the discussion of “practice” forward. The propaganda apparatus had already refused to allow the party school newsletter to continue discussion, and *Guangming Daily* and *People’s Daily* had also been put on notice. In his memoirs, Wu Jiang writes that he decided to go to the military for help after realizing that Deng’s speech at the military political work conference was opposed to the “two whatevers,” knowing that no other media organ would dare publish it. Wu even suggested using “specially invited *People’s Liberation Army Daily* commentator” to increase the importance of the article. This was the first time the newspaper ever used such a byline.<sup>108</sup>

Hu Yaobang understood the importance of this decision. Hu said to Liang Jinquan, his confidential secretary: “There’s a way, going to [找] a senior general [大将], going to Senior General Luo [Ruiqing].” Liang asked why. Hu said: “Senior General Luo says he wants to publish. If it is published there [*People’s Liberation Army Daily*], the weight is very different. Senior General Luo’s prestige in the party is high, he has a lot of influence, he is strong in theoretical terms, and it is impossible

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<sup>106</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 138.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Wu Jiang, *Shinian de Lu-He Hu Yaobang Xiangchu de Rizhi [Ten Year Road- The Days I Associated with Hu Yaobang]* (Hong Kong: Jingbao wenhua qiye youxian gongsi, n.d.), 40.

to use our own publication [the party school journal] now.” The obvious implication also of course was Luo’s position in the military.<sup>109</sup>

In total, Luo discussed the article with both Hua Nan and Yao Yuanfang five times and with Hua Nan alone three times. Luo read the document three times and personally looked up certain Mao quotes. He even worked in close conjunction with *People’s Daily* to ensure that the article was published there on the same day.<sup>110</sup> The normal method was for other papers to reprint important articles the next day, but this strategy avoided the possibility that someone would prevent *People’s Daily* from also printing the article after discovering the nature of the military newspaper article.

The key was the byline: “a *People’s Liberation Army Daily* specially invited commentator.” Wang Dongxing had criticized the use of “specially invited commentators,” leading Luo to make the sarcastic comment: “Isn’t there someone who despises ‘specially invited commentators’? That’s why *People’s Liberation Army Daily* will publish this article under the name of a ‘specially invited commentator.’”<sup>111</sup> But this byline did more than make the article especially annoying to Wang: it allowed the *People’s Daily* editorial board to avoid asking for permission to print the article, as they had not participated in its creation and could instead blame the military newspaper. Just as importantly, it broadened the readership, as *People’s Liberation Army Daily* was normally restricted only to members of the military. Readers would also certainly notice the PLA imprimatur in the byline. *Guangming Ribao* also ended up publishing the article on the same day. Luo had executed a brilliant Machiavellian maneuver. The article was published with the title “A Most Fundamental Principle of Marxism” on June 24, covering half the front page, the entirety of the second page, and a part of the third page.

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<sup>109</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 136.

<sup>110</sup> Wu Jiang, *Shinian de Lu-He Hu Yaobang Xiangchu de Rizi [Ten Year Road- The Days I Associated with Hu Yaobang]*, 39–40; Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 139–40.

<sup>111</sup> Man Mei, *Sinian Yiran Wujin: Huiyi Fuqin Hu Yaobang [Longing Still Never Ends: Remembering My Father Hu Yaobang]* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2005), 294.

Yet Luo was fully aware of how dangerous his behavior was. On July 18, as Luo was getting on a plane to undergo surgery in East Germany, he told the heads of the *People Liberation Army Daily*: “It is possible that some people will oppose that article, I take responsibility, if someone is to be flogged, flog me [打板子 打我].” Before leaving, Luo also called Hu Jiwei to tell him that if someone was to be punished for the article, he was willing to be caned five times.<sup>112</sup> These were almost Luo’s last words - the surgery did not go well and Luo died in East Germany.\* Yet he had accomplished his mission: despite continuing opposition from individuals like Wang Dongxing, Zhang Pinghua, and Wu Lengxi, debate could no longer be controlled. Over the next few months, both the provincial leaders and the Main Military Regions [大军区] would begin expressing support for the “practice” viewpoint.

Deng’s speech and the *People’s Liberation Army Daily* article were critical for communicating the nature of the struggle between Deng and Hua more broadly. Deng had artificially manufactured an ideological debate he could turn into a political debate. General Chen Heqiao reminisces:

When the great debate on the issue of the criterion of truth first started, a few of us in the military could not immediately figure out the political and thought significance of this great theory, we were all still thinking, and we did not dare express an opinion. But as the debate grew deeper, and our theoretical understanding was increasingly raised, we started to think that practice as the sole criterion of truth was right, it accorded with the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. After Deng Xiaoping’s speech to the military-wide political work meeting, and chief of staff [sic] Luo Ruiqing’s personal involvement in organizing an article to support the discussion of the criterion of truth, all of the big units throughout the military also expressed support.<sup>113</sup>

Wu Jiang similarly remarks that the reason the article had so much import was that people linked it to Deng’s speech to the military in June.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 141.

\* Wang Dongxing argued that Luo’s position on the CMC standing committee should not be announced in the media reports on Luo’s death. Deng over-ruled him. See pg 352 of vol 1 of Deng’s 1975-1997 chronology.

<sup>113</sup> Chen Heqiao, *Chen Heqiao Huiyi Wenji [Collection of Chen Heqiao’s Memories]* (Beijing: Guofang gongye chubanshe, 2000), 604.

<sup>114</sup> Wu Jiang, *Shinian de Lu-He Hu Yaobang Xiangchu de Rizi [Ten Year Road- The Days I Associated with Hu Yaobang]*, 41.

But some still resisted the “practice” position. At the end of July, Hu Jiwei went to visit Wu Lengxi in the hospital. Wu said: “After reading that article by the special *People’s Liberation Army Daily* commentator, I feel even more that the opinion I expressed to you on that night was correct.” When Hu suggested that Wu write an article to refute the position, Wu said no: “I believe this is a political issue, this issue simply should not be raised, this issue should simply not be discussed.”<sup>115</sup>

As the second highest ranking figure in the party and standing committee member in charge of military affairs, Ye Jianying’s attitude during this time period was critical. While Ye’s difficulty in early 1977 was how to support Deng returning to work while ensuring that Hua maintained his authority, his position became even more complicated after the appearance of the “practice” debate. Ye personally supported the values of the “practice” position. As a powerful military officer, Ye understood the danger of extreme leftism better than anyone. In a speech on July 31, 1977, Ye described in detail the damaging effects of pure voluntarism, anarchism, and the use of political labels to continue constant rolling purges.<sup>116</sup> On October 9, as discussed above, he gave an even more important speech to the party school where he emphasized the importance of connecting theory to reality [理论密切联系实际].<sup>117</sup>

But these comments were before the “practice” debate had erupted. Soon, Ye found himself under pressure to state his position. When Wang Zhen heard about resistance to the “practice” viewpoint, he flew into a rage and went to Ye to express his unhappiness. Wang told Ye he thought the *Guangming* article was a good one and suggested that Ye express support. After the debate broadened, Ye asked his sons and daughters, as well as his work assistants, to go out and bring back information on the nature of the debate and how people were reacting.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 145.

<sup>116</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986) [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)]*, 2:1128.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:1132.

<sup>118</sup> Cheng Guanjun, “Ye Xuanji Jiangshu Fensui ‘Sirenbang’ Yu Deng Xiaoping Fuchu [Ye Xuanji Discusses Smashing the ‘Gang of Four’ and the Return of Deng Xiaoping],” *Tongzhou Gongjin*, no. 2 (2012).

Realizing the danger, Ye tried to persuade Hua to take the initiative and prevent the debate from becoming a political struggle that would threaten Hua. According to historian Yan Ruping, Ye on many occasions told Hua he had to pay more attention to the discussion over “practice,” and at a Politburo meeting in July even said that “I do not support the attitude of suppressing discussion.” In August, Ye met Hu Yaobang in a movie theater in Zhongnanhai, during which time Hu explained the practical importance of the “practice” position to post-Cultural Revolution rectification. Ye told Hu that he agreed with him.<sup>119</sup>

But Ye understood that the “practice” debate was threatening to spin entirely out of control. Some party members were saying that the “practice” position meant de-Maoification. The party journal *Red Flag*, supported by Wang Dongxing, wrote an article that opposed the “practice” viewpoint. On September 19, the article, which argued that Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought should have a guiding role towards practice, was sent to be reviewed by the Politburo Standing Committee. But Ye rejected the article, leading Wang to acquiesce: “since Marshal Ye opposes, it won’t be published.”<sup>120</sup> Meanwhile, a magazine called *China Youth* was restarting, but it was attacked by Wang Dongxing for ideological reasons. When the editor wrote a letter of complaint to the central leadership, Ye strongly supported the publication of the magazine.<sup>121</sup>

Realizing the dispute was intensifying with the potential for dramatic political repercussions for Hua, at the same Politburo standing committee meeting in September that Wang agreed not to publish the *Red Flag* article Ye called for a special meeting on theory to smooth out differences to resolve the contest between the “two whatevers” and “practice.”<sup>122</sup> Ye argued that “we’d might as well discuss this in the open in order to avoid talking behind each other’s backs, in order to unify thinking [索性摆开来讲，免

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<sup>119</sup> Yan Ruping, “Ye Shuai Zai Nijing Zhong Fuzhu Hu Yaobang [Marshal Ye Helps Hu Yaobang in Difficult Situations],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 11 (2003).

<sup>120</sup> Cheng Guanjun, “Ye Xuanji Jiangshu Fensui ‘Sirenbang’ Yu Deng Xiaoping Fuchu [Ye Xuanji Discusses Smashing the ‘Gang of Four’ and the Return of Deng Xiaoping],” 25.

<sup>121</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986) [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)]*, 2:1150–51.

<sup>122</sup> Cheng Guanjun, “Ye Xuanji Jiangshu Fensui ‘Sirenbang’ Yu Deng Xiaoping Fuchu [Ye Xuanji Discusses Smashing the ‘Gang of Four’ and the Return of Deng Xiaoping],” 25.



得背后讲，以统一思想。”<sup>123</sup> Around this time, Ye was apparently also calling for the first “practice” article to be published throughout the entire country.<sup>124</sup>

Ye’s priority was to stop the dispute by bringing it into the open (and thus ending any conspiratorial activity or rumors of splits at the top). Furthermore, by resolving the issue at a theory conference, Ye likely hoped the political implications of the outcome could be firewalled from the broader political struggle. Possibly it would provide an opportunity for Hua to disassociate himself from the “two whatevers” without paying a major political price.

Evidence supporting this argument can be seen in the reaction to Ye’s suggestion. Wang Dongxing went to meet with Li Xin and others to tell them that the Politburo standing committee had discussed the debate over “practice” and decided to have a theoretical meeting. Li Xin said that practice as the sole criterion of truth was common sense in Marxism and that none of them opposed this idea. But Li said having such a meeting at this point would be a mistake, his reasoning being it was now impossible to “unify thinking” on the issue since the debate had already erupted in the press and provincial party secretaries had taken a position.<sup>125</sup> This reasoning may sound strange, but I interpret Li’s comments to have two meanings. First, Li knew that this was no longer a simple theoretical dispute and therefore was skeptical about whether it could be solved at a simple theory meeting. Second, Li likely knew that the “practice” group had the initiative and would likely dominate the meeting. Ye perhaps was underestimating Hua’s ability, or inclination, to manage the dispute over “practice.”

In other words, Deng had successfully used the military to push the debate forward in such a way that it was no longer controllable by the party center - a tactic that hypothesis 3a would not predict. On August 1, *People’s Liberation Army Daily* published an editorial that explicitly supported Deng on the

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<sup>123</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986) [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)]*, 2:1145.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:1152.

<sup>125</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 315.

importance of “seeking truth.” This opened the floodgates for a series of articles published by party and military leaders using Deng’s language.<sup>126</sup> The first case was on August 4, when the *People’s Daily* published an article that described how an enlarged session of the Heilongjiang Politburo Standing Committee had discussed the “criterion of truth.”\* This essentially was a statement of support for Deng’s position. The first secretary of the provincial committee, Yang Yichen, later said that he had not taken this position because he had received any guidance from anyone at the center (clearly implying Deng Xiaoping). Rather, Heilongjiang’s local concerns shaped the decision, as members of the provincial committee that had been overthrown at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution wanted to return to power and thus needed legitimacy. Yet there are signs that the debate at the center was a necessary precondition. The *People’s Daily* article that reported on the Heilongjiang decision explicitly stated that the provincial party was studying a speech by Mao, the speeches at the military political work meeting, and the “practice” articles discussed above. Historian Shen Baoxiang emphasizes that although the *People’s Daily* article said that the province was studying the speeches by Hua, Ye, and Deng, this expression was only a formality: only Deng’s speech was really studied.<sup>127</sup>

After Heilongjiang broke the ice, other provinces followed suit. By the beginning of the November 1978 work conference, 20 provinces, cities, and autonomous area party committees had expressed support for “practice.” Twenty-seven (of twenty-nine) expressed support before the subsequent 3rd plenum. Wang Dongxing was not happy. In October, Wang asked Tie Ying, first secretary of the Zhejiang province party committee, whether the article reporting on Zhejiang’s study of “practice” had been “arranged,” implying that he suspected foul play by Deng. Although Tie claimed that he made his

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<sup>126</sup> Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 60.

\* Gansu was actually the first province to discuss ‘practice,’ but because Song Ping, who was head of the province, also spoke of continuing the ‘continuous revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat,’ it did not get much attention. See Shen, pg 222.

<sup>127</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 217.

decision without the knowledge of the situation at the center, this is difficult to believe. Even if he did not know, adopting such a position would have been impossible without the space created by Deng.<sup>128</sup>

Around the same time that Ye called for a theory conference, Deng, just returning from North Korea, began traveling throughout the northeast talking about the importance of practice as the sole criterion of truth.<sup>129</sup> Throughout his trip he was escorted by the commander of the Shenyang Military Region, Li Desheng.<sup>130</sup> In Deng's own words to the Shenyang Military Region, he was "running about lighting fires [到处点火]." <sup>131</sup> Historian Long Pingping identifies this as the moment that Deng started to turn the debate into a struggle over the political line.<sup>132</sup> Deng himself admitted in June 1981:

That navy incident in April and May 1978, it happened one and a half years after the smashing of the Gang of Four, Comrade Guofeng said this was a technical issue, it cannot be seen that way. Later I went to the northeast, the whole time I spoke of the ideological line [思想路线], practice is the sole criterion of truth, it was precisely because these problems happened.<sup>133</sup>

Ultimately the theory meeting was put off until January of the next year, which meant it was put off until after Hua's defeat at the 3rd plenum.

Pressure grew on those who had taken a "wait and see" attitude. Hua Nan, editor of the *People's Liberation Army Daily*, admitted to asking provincial party secretaries concerned with the political

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>129</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 247.

<sup>130</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Gaibian Zhongguo Mingyun de 41 Tian: Zhongyang Gongzuo Huiyi, Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qinliji [The 41 Days That Changed the Fate of China: Personal Record of the Central Work Conference and the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress]* (Shenzhen: Haitian chubanshe, 1998), 232.

<sup>131</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:382.

<sup>132</sup> Long Pingping, "Deng Xiaoping Shi Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Da Taolun de Fadongzhe Yu Lingdao zhe [Deng Xiaoping Was the Initiator and Leader of the Discussion of the Criterion of Truth]," *Beijing Dangshi [Beijing Party History]*, no. 3 (2008).

<sup>133</sup> "Li Xiannian: Fensui Sirenbang Yihou, Mei You Ji Ci Huiyi, Ye Shuai Jiu Tichu Qing Xiaoping Tongzhi Chulai, Wo Zancheng [Li Xiannian: After Destroying the Gang of Four, Hardly Any Meetings Took Place before Marshal Ye Suggested Comrade Xiaoping Come Out, I Supported Him]," June 1981.

sensitivity of the issue why they had not yet taken a side. These secretaries had to have wondered who had given the head of the military newspaper permission to ask such a leading question.<sup>134</sup>

Beginning in October, the *People's Liberation Army Daily* started reporting on the Great Military Regions expressing support for the “practice” position. On October 14, Wei Guoqing reported to Deng that the GPD had ordered the entire military to study the “practice” article.<sup>135</sup> By the end of November, all eleven Great Military Regions, five combat arms, the General Staff Department, General Logistics Department, and General Political Department had expressed support for the “practice” position. Xinhua and *People's Daily* dutifully reported on these developments. That this was a victory for Deng was obvious. For example, on September 27, when the Shenyang Military Region started discussion of the “practice” viewpoint, commander Li Desheng said: “Currently, thinking must keep up with the situation, [so] a fundamental issue is understanding vice chairman Deng’s suggestion of truly raising the great banner of Mao Zedong Thought and maintaining seeking truth from facts at the military-wide political work conference and recently in the Northeast.”<sup>136</sup>

Ye’s opposition, however, led Deng to restrain himself. Deng told Hu Qiaomu, Deng Liqun, and Yu Guangyuan on October 3 that “now many articles [on practice] have been published, articles written by provincial party committees are also numerous, although the problem is not yet solved, but this kind of problem must be dealt with slowly, it is possible to come to an end [告一段落].”<sup>137</sup> Deng also agreed to Ye’s proposal for a theory conference. But on October 14, when Wei Guoqing asked Deng whether his

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<sup>134</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*, 237.

<sup>135</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Wo Yi Deng Xiaoping [Recalling Deng Xiaoping]* (Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chuban youxian gongsi, 2005), 204.

<sup>136</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Gaibian Zhongguo Mingyun de 41 Tian: Zhongyang Gongzuo Huiyi, Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qinliji [The 41 Days That Changed the Fate of China: Personal Record of the Central Work Conference and the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress]*, 234.

<sup>137</sup> Zhu Jiamu, *Wo Suo Zhidao de Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui [What I Know about the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), 41–42.

speeches in the northeast should be disseminated in the military, Deng told Wei to tell the officers that they should speak up at the theory conference.<sup>138</sup>

Deng did not, however, succeed in using the navy to move the debate along. Some evidence points to the possibility that Deng was trying to tie the navy explosion to the debate over the “key link.” As discussed above, on April 11<sup>th</sup> Deng made comments comparing the air force positively to other armed services, clearly implying problems in the navy as led by Su Zhenhua. On April 24 and May 13, Deng again praised the air force, arguing that the air force model showed the possibility for rectifying the military sooner than expected.<sup>139</sup> Deng’s intention might have been to show that the air force, obeying him, had created an opportunity to more quickly move away from Hua’s less practical “two whatevers.”

Su apparently tried to firewall the navy from the “practice” debate as well. When the *Guangming* article appeared on May 12, some in the navy counseled caution, while others supported it. When some teachers in the academies asked whether they could write an article to support the “practice” position, the navy political department refused, saying that this was a matter for the civilian theoretical world, not the military. During this time period, the sickly and generally inactive navy commander, Xiao Jingguang, called for supporting “practice,” to no effect.<sup>140</sup>

On July 29, Deng tried to move discussion along by speaking to an enlarged session of the navy party standing committee. Deng said: “in terms of the nation as a whole, in terms of large regions [就大的地方来说], through the debate between ‘practice is the sole criterion of truth’ and the ‘two whatevers’ [we have] already relatively clearly solved our thought line.” However, “this dispute has not ended” and “we must be aware that there are still many people who oppose the political and thought line of the party.

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<sup>138</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Wo Yi Deng Xiaoping [Recalling Deng Xiaoping]*, 2005.

<sup>139</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:301, 311.

<sup>140</sup> Wu Dianqing, “Haijun Kaizhan Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Da Taolun Shimo [The Beginning and End of the Navy’s Opening of the Great Discussion of the Truth Criterion],” *Dangshi Bolan [General Review of the Communist Party of China]*, no. 10 (2009).

They are fundamentally part of the thinking structure of Lin Biao and the ‘Gang of Four,’ they believe that the party center is moving backward and engaging in rightist opportunism.”<sup>141</sup>

On September 21, the navy held a political work conference in Beijing. Although the intention of the meeting was to study the political work conference at which Deng had given his important speech, 21 days into the meeting there had still been no discussion of the “practice” position. Some officers began to point out that *People’s Liberation Army Daily* had already published numerous articles, Deng clearly supported it, and the commander of the Shenyang Military Region, Li Desheng, expressed support. At this point, the top navy leadership, who had tried to avoid debate, flatly stated that the navy was not to participate in the debate.

During the navy political work meeting, a base in Lushun began to discuss “practice” without permission from the top navy leadership, even writing an article with the intention of publishing it in the local newspaper. But two days before the article was to be published, officers from the base who attended the meeting in Beijing returned and said that the navy was not to participate in the debate. The next day, the base’s propaganda department sent people to the newspaper to get the draft back. The navy’s failure to take an active role would lead Deng to pay particularly close attention to reasserting his dominance after Hua’s fall at the end of 1978.<sup>142</sup>

### *Deng “Offends” the Military*

Why did the military choose to help Deng? This chapter already supplied evidence that showed Deng had strong personal prestige, thereby indicating support for hypothesis 1b. This section provides evidence that weakens hypothesis 1a by showing the military did *not* support Deng for institutional reasons. After being reinstated as chief of the general staff, Deng took major steps that strongly affected

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<sup>141</sup> Zheng Zhongbing, ed., *Hu Yaobang Nianpu Ziliao Changbian [Materials for a Chronological Record of Hu Yaobang Life (Sic)]*, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chuban you xian gongsi, 2005), 319.

<sup>142</sup> Wu Dianqing, “Haijun Kaizhan Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Da Taolun Shimo [The Beginning and End of the Navy’s Opening of the Great Discussion of the Truth Criterion].”

military interests. These policies included addressing the damaging legacy of military dominance at the local levels during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, as well as cutting deeply into the ranks of top-ranking officers. These policies were important for several reasons. First, they showed that Deng, not Hua, was powerful enough to drag the military through rough changes. Second, the outcome of Deng's actions would help stabilize his position by bringing the military to heel. Third, they show that Deng's authority over the military stemmed less from pandering to military interests than the legacy of authority he achieved as a major military figure during the civil war. In Deng's own words, he chose to "offend" the military.

The turmoil of the Cultural Revolution led the military to fill the power vacuum by becoming involved in local governance.<sup>143</sup> This newfound power, although not sought out by the military, led in many cases to corruption and involvement in local factional politics. This history damaged the image of the PLA in the eyes of local officials and regular citizens.

Deng addressed this problem immediately after returning to work in 1977. In a speech on August 23, Deng said:

Because of a period of chaos in the past, a significant segment of the military suffers from poor discipline, bad style of work, and its prestige among the people has fallen...Us in the PLA must have self-knowledge and rely on ourselves to restore our honor.<sup>144</sup>

Deng also clearly affirmed his intent to "offend" the military:

Officers in the military must follow orders. When officers are transferred somewhere, they must obey or be fired. This begins with old comrades. This is a problem especially in Beijing, provincial capitals, and big cities. With regards to the problem of military units running factories, the finance problem, and the housing for officers problem, the General Logistics Department should do an investigation, write a report, and a CMC enlarged session should pass it. No matter who they are, if they do not obey they will be treated with military discipline. Many comrades say they want me to manage the military, but if I run the military I will offend people [好多同志说希望我管军队，我管军队就要得罪人。]<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Li Ke and Hao Shengzhang, *Wenhua Dageming Zhong de Renmin Jiefangjun* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1989).

<sup>144</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Jundui Yao Ba Jiaoyu Xunlian Tigao Dao Zhanlue Diwei [The Military Must Raise Education and Training to a Strategic Position]" (Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2004), 56, Deng Xiaoping junshi wenji [Selections of Deng Xiaoping's Military Writings], Vol 3.

<sup>145</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Ba Jundui Zhengdun Hao Jianshe Hao [Rectify and Construct the Military Well]" (Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2004), 65, Deng Xiaoping junshi wenji [Selections of Deng Xiaoping's Military Writings], Vol 3.

Deng returned to this theme but at a much higher temperature in a speech to the CMC plenary session in December. Deng said:

Now there are some officers who do not execute notifications and do not obey orders. This means not respecting discipline!... For those who do not execute orders, if you don't move when ordered, get out! Some must be expelled from the military, or decreased in rank, but they must be disciplined. If the military cannot even do this, how can it still be called a military!... There are some officers who live in big cities, especially Beijing, their work is changed, there are repeated orders, but they still do not move. How is this possible?<sup>146</sup>

The most opaque story of this time period is the personnel changes that took place. After the fall of the Gang of Four, major decisions about rectifying the leadership core of military units and organizations were made at three important meetings: the March 1977 CMC discussion meeting, the full plenum of the CMC in December, and the political work meeting that started in April 1978. The intention of these meetings was to purge officers who had made particularly egregious leftist mistakes during the Cultural Revolution. The first campaign used a variety of media (big character posters, radio, cartoons, etc), as well as mass criticism rallies, to reveal the crimes of the Gang of Four. The second campaign was apparently an extension of this basic model. The third phase of the campaign focused on explaining why the Gang of Four was evil from a theory-based perspective.<sup>147</sup>

By 1978, the “ferret out” phase had begun and large purges of the military started to heat up. Four categories were determined: die-hard followers (who would be expelled from the party), core members (those who were contrite would be treated leniently, while those with major mistakes or who refused to express contrition were expelled from the party), those who made political mistakes (who might be demoted or sent to do other work) and finally those who had made simpler mistakes (who would just receive more education). Although accounts of this rectification emphasize delineating between more and

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<sup>146</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Zai Zhongyang Junwei Quanti Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Speech at the CMC Plenary Session]” (Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2004), 84–85, Deng Xiaoping junshi wenji [Selections of Deng Xiaoping’s Military Writings], Vol 3.

<sup>147</sup> Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo Qishi Nian Shi: Zai “Wenhua Dageming” Zhong Shou Sunhai, Zai Gaige Kaifang Zhong Chuangzao Xin Jumian [70 Year History of the Communist Party’s Military Political Work: Suffering Damage During the “Cultural Revolution”, Creating a New Situation in the Reform and Opening Up]*, 6:32–34.



less serious crimes and emphasizing education over punishment,<sup>148</sup> the numbers speak differently. In 1978, 53.2% of the leadership at the army group and army level [集团级和军级] was changed [调整]. 46.7% of division level commanders and commissars affiliated with the military regions was also modified.<sup>149</sup> The environment seems to have been so tense that one officer who had strong credentials opposing the Gang of Four and was even a member of Deng's Second Field Army in the revolutionary war, commander of the second artillery Xiang Shouzhi, was moved to a less sensitive post simply because he had once met Wang Hongwen, a member of the Gang of Four.<sup>150</sup> Huang Jing argues that "the officers whom Deng accused of 'engaging in factional activities' were those who did not belong to his mountaintop... all the positions of commanders and commissars at the army level and above had been rearranged by April 1978."<sup>151</sup>

Deng cut particularly deeply into the general staff. The general staff had already undergone three campaigns to expose and criticize the Gang of Four in 1977. At the beginning of 1978, the general staff decided to copy a "three investigations and three rectifications (below just "three-three")" campaign that the air force had executed and that had been affirmed by the CMC.\* Yang and Chi Haotian sent the assistant head of the general staff's political department, Lu Hong, to the air force to study their model.\* After two weeks of being tested out in the general staff's political department, the campaign spread to the rest of the general staff.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 6:38.

<sup>149</sup> *Dangdai Zhongguo Jundui de Zhengzhi Gongzuo (Shang) [Political Work in the Modern Chinese Military (Part One)]* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1994), 479.

<sup>150</sup> Xiang Shouzhi, *Xiang Shouzhi Huiyilu [Memoir of Xiang Shouzhi]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2006), 351–52.

<sup>151</sup> Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 357.

\* Investigate fighting spirit, discipline, and work style, rectify weakness, disorganization, and laziness, rectify bureaucratism, and rectify the style of writing [查斗志, 查纪律, 查作风, 整顿软散懒, 整顿官僚主义, 整顿文风]

\* On July 27 1977, Deng had strongly criticized the air force for the growing number of accidents and told Zhang Tingfa to stop and execute a major investigation. The contrast with the outcome of his criticism of Su Zhenhua is striking. See *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junshi [Military History of the Chinese People's Liberation Army]*, pg 312

<sup>152</sup> Shu Yun, *Yang Yong Shangjiang [General Yang Yong]*, 371.

Lu Hong decided that the general staff was different from the air force: the problems were not only bloatedness and factionalism, but Lin Biao and the Gang of Four had wreaked even more havoc. Lu said the general staff needed more time to ensure a thorough job. On April 20, the party committee of the general staff released an official notification on the new “three-three” campaign. The beginning of the campaign focused on discipline in the ranks, and would then move to the “ferreting-out” stage. Opposition to this second phase was so powerful that Yang became discouraged. Deng told him to stand firm.<sup>153</sup>

On April 26, Su Yu, a standing committee member of the CMC, came to participate in a giant mobilization meeting to increase momentum. On May 13, Deng met with Luo Ruiqing and the vice commanders of the general staff: Yang Yong, Zhang Aiping, Zhang Caiqian, Wang Shangrong, Peng Shaohui, He Zhengwen, Wu Xiuquan, and Chi Haotian. Deng and Luo emphasized that important questions of principle left over from the Cultural Revolution had to be solved and all crimes had to be exposed and criticized. Factionalism had to end and the leadership had to be rectified. Moreover, the general staff was intensely bloated and needed to be cut as quickly as possible. Deng threatened apocalyptic repercussions if his warnings went unheeded: “I can confirm that with such an immense command structure we would lose a war [我可以肯定，这么庞大的指挥机构，指挥战争是要打败仗的].”<sup>154</sup>

Luo tried to turn up the heat, telling the general staff to be aware of a type of individual who pretended to support the recent changes but who would revert to his evil ways when given the chance. This allowed for purges of those who had done self-criticisms, thus making a broader area of attack. Luo also criticized Yang for saying that those who had died, been transferred, were not presently in their

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>154</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:310.

position, or had a serious sickness should not be targeted. Luo complained that by leaving those people would make it impossible to fully investigate Cultural Revolution-era crimes.<sup>155</sup>

Chi Haotian met with Lu Hong and decided that to better execute Deng and Luo's wishes they should open an enlarged session of the general staff party committee. A new supplementary notification on the 'three-three' was also released on May 30. At the enlarged party session, Yang apologized for saying on April 26 that four sorts of people would not be targeted in the campaign. Instead, they would obey the commands of Deng and Luo and undertake a more thorough rectification.

On August 3, Deng again complained that leadership of the "three-three" campaign was not strong enough. In response, a department-head party secretary meeting was held. At this meeting, some individuals expressed opposition to the general objectives of the campaign. The debate became so bad that Yang, saying nothing, ended the meeting. At a standing committee meeting, Yang suggested that Wu Xiuquan give a speech explaining the spirit of Deng's orders. Yang also told Lu not to argue with people about whether the campaign was a good idea, implying that these people were not only the minority, but dead-enders. On August 20, another department-head party secretary meeting was held. Units at the division level and above from outside Beijing also sent representatives.

The campaign was not easy. Deng told Yang: "when clearing up the difference between right and wrong, it is no good not to be brave, it is even necessary to offend some people, it is no good not to offend people." Some officers started writing anonymous letters to complain or spread rumors. Some of these letters were even printed on the CMC office newsletter. These letters reached their highest point in the winter of 1978: right when the CMC was planning changes to the leadership at top military units. The timing showed that those writing the letters had access to top information. Deng paid particular attention

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<sup>155</sup> Shu Yun, *Yang Yong Shangjiang [General Yang Yong]*, 372–73.

to three letters, which argued that Yang and Chi were unfairly targeting a particular individual and attacked them by bringing up their histories on previous positions.<sup>156</sup>

Immediately after the 3rd plenum was held, a disastrous CMC discussion meeting took place. The general staff, navy, air force, Fuzhou Military Region, and Lanzhou Military Region fell into vicious debates and brought up old grudges. General Zhang Aiping spoke out: “The past is over, can you solve problems by arguing? How about everyone do a self-criticism!” Xu Xiangqian, who was running the meeting, lost control and Deng had to be brought in. Deng walked onstage and said two words: “meeting’s over!” Zhang Aiping’s son says that if the war against Vietnam had not started they would have kept arguing.<sup>157</sup>

On January 2, Deng made the following biting comments at a session of the meeting:

Because of the wind [stirred up] by the work conference and the 3rd plenum, this meeting has been relatively lively, I read some of the newsletters and heard some of the opinions, and it cannot be said that our meeting was very successful. Everyone is an old fellow, they dare to speak, but they are not necessarily correct, sometimes they are good at mouthing off [有些炮放得好], but whether they are accurate needs some research to be determined. Some reflect the spirit of the work conference and 3rd plenum, and some have too much subjectivism. The older someone is the bigger their position, and the more right they have to mouth off [放炮]. If you speak of old marshals, I also count as an old marshal, I certainly do not believe every word I say, that everything I do is accurate, all matters and men must be treated this way.

By December 1982, Chi Haotian had received so many letters of accusation because of his role in the purges that he was removed from his position as one of the vice chiefs of the general staff. After his removal, Chi remained without a job for two and a half years. The same month Chi was fired, he went to visit his comrade-in-arms Yang Yong in the hospital. Yang said: “When everyone accused you, actually their spears were pointed at someone else, you must remain steadfast.” According to Chi’s biography, “Those who understand the inside situation all know that when some in the general staff accused Yang Yong and Chi Haotian, actually they were unhappy with all of Deng Xiaoping’s policies of reform and

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 376–78.

<sup>157</sup> Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zoulai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]*, 415.

rectification. When Deng Xiaoping was chief of the general staff and reversed a great number of verdicts, when he rectified a chaotic situation, he was forced to offend some people. These people primarily targeted Yang Yong, who managed the daily affairs of the general staff, and Chi Haotian, who managed political work.”<sup>158</sup>

A final issue must be addressed, although not enough material has been released to fully understand its origins and significance. That issue is Deng’s decision to link the campaign to criticize and expose the Gang of Four to Lin Biao. On December 1, 1977, Zhang Zhen, head of the General Logistics Department, wrote Deng a letter saying that when investigating the Gang of Four, it would be better to simultaneously solve the historical problems left behind by the Lin Biao clique. Deng agreed the very next day, and sent Zhang’s letter to Hua Guofeng, Ye Jianying, Li Xiannian, and Wang Dongxing.<sup>159</sup> Deng was also fully aware that such a policy upset many in the military, as they thought that making such a connection over-expanded the area of attack.<sup>160</sup> The memoirs later written by Lin Biao’s purged generals all say they were flabbergasted when the fall of the Gang did not mean their immediate liberation from jail but instead a trial in court along with their old nemeses.<sup>161</sup> When GDP head Wei Guoqing asked Deng about this issue, Deng said that it was agreed to by the Politburo and that he knew “there really are people that disagree, are afraid that the scale of the attacks are too broad.”<sup>162</sup>

Two possible reasons exist for why Deng made his decision. First, linking Lin Biao to the Gang of Four made it easier to reject the Cultural Revolution as a whole and eased the wheels of verdict reversal and rehabilitation. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it made it easier to control Lin’s

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<sup>158</sup> Kong Fanjun, *Chi Haotian Zhuan [Biography of Chi Haotian]*, 258–61.

<sup>159</sup> Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Huiyilu [Memoir of Zhang Zhen]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2003), 132–33.

<sup>160</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Wo Yi Deng Xiaoping [Recalling Deng Xiaoping]*, 2005, 205.

<sup>161</sup> Qiu Huizuo, *Qiu Huizuo Huiyilu [Memoir of Qiu Huizuo]*; Li Zuopeng, *Li Zuopeng Huiyilu [Memoir of Li Zuopeng]* (Hong Kong: Beixing chubanshe, 2011); Wu Faxian, *Wu Faxian Huiyilu [Memoir of Wu Faxian]* (Hong Kong: Xianggang beixing chubanshe, 2006).

<sup>162</sup> Yu Guangyuan, *Wo Yi Deng Xiaoping [Recalling Deng Xiaoping]* (Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chuban youxian gongsi, 2005), 205.

“double one [双—]” mountaintop\* of military officers with whom he fought during the revolutionary war.<sup>163</sup> This latter point is conjecture, but it is striking that Deng would continue to persecute Lin’s “mountaintop” after it had already been the subject of so much persecution since 1971.

Despite the great difficulty of this rectification campaign, it was a major victory for Deng. It showed he could drive through major changes in the military despite significant opposition, while in the meantime removing any who might oppose him. Moreover, it demonstrates that the support for Deng in the military was not rooted entirely in material or policy interests.

### *The War in Vietnam*

A crucial issue inside the military surrounded the decision to fight a war against Vietnam. Much about this issue remains mysterious. However, the deliberations on the decision to attack clearly had implications for the broader political environment. Hypothesis 3a would predict both that the military obeyed a consensus political decision within the elite, and that the deliberations would not be connected to the relative authority within the elite over personal control over the military. However, the evidence clearly demonstrates that the elite was split very deeply on this issue, as Deng was isolated in his support. The ultimate decision to attack Vietnam was therefore a key signal of his authority in the PLA, and this outsized effect on the political situation is evidence for hypothesis 3b. This is also the *opposite* of what hypothesis 1a would predict: Deng’s adopting of an unpopular position *helped* him by showing the strength of his authority.

Three interpretations of the evidence are possible. First, Deng had strategic reasons for wanting to attack Vietnam, and the political benefits, which showed the military followed his wishes, was a side benefit. Second, Deng had both international and domestic reasons for engineering the attack on Vietnam.

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\* The First Army Group of the First Front Army.

<sup>163</sup> A puzzling sidenote is that in September 1977 Deng’s partner Chen Yun was making positive statements about Lin Biao’s mountaintop, arguing that “Lin Biao was Lin Biao, the Fourth Field Army is the Fourth Field Army.” I am not entirely sure what to make of Chen’s comments. *Chen Yun Nianpu [Chronology of Chen Yun]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2000), 214.

Third, Deng chose an issue on which he knew others in the elite would differ from him in order to assert his dominance and demonstrate that the military obeyed his wishes. As this section shows, we cannot decisively identify one of the three. However, all three of them, albeit to a greater or lesser extent, are supportive of hypothesis 3b, which suggests demonstrations of dominance over the military are of critical importance for political maneuvering in Leninist regimes.

Deng was clearly one of the few in the top leadership who supported the attack. In the words of Teiwes, “it is difficult to find any areas of significant policy differences between Hua and Deng, with the possible exception of the invasion of Vietnam where Hua, as well as many civil and military leaders, apparently initially doubted Deng’s venture.”<sup>164</sup> China’s decision to invade, therefore, demonstrated even more fully that the military listened to Deng and not anyone else, even when they disagreed with his policies.

Deng Liqun’s account is the following:

At the time I did not hear Marshal Ye or Wang Zhen say anything. Was there anyone else in the military who also held a contrary position? It is difficult to say. At the time Comrade Xiaoping’s position on this issue was very difficult [在这个问题上处境难], so he went to seek out Chen Yun’s help.

Chen Yun sought out many generals to discuss the issue and then told Deng that the most dangerous outcome of a war against Vietnam was Soviet involvement. Chen explained that if the Soviets decided to intervene, there were three possibilities: a small war, a medium sized war, and a big war. Chen argued that the Soviets would not have time to start a big war [大打] if the fight wrapped up in less than half a year, and that even a medium war [中打] would be easily managed. Chen expressed support for the war.<sup>165</sup> Chen’s chronology confirms that Deng asked him to consider the advantages and disadvantages of an attack, and that Chen supported the war and made suggestions, but the account provides no extra

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<sup>164</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes, “The Study of Elite Political Conflict in the PRC: Politics inside the ‘Black Box,’” in *Handbook of the Politics of China* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2015), 32.

<sup>165</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Guoshi Jiangtanlu [Record of Deng Liqun’s Lectures on National History]*, 2000, 3:354.

details.<sup>166</sup> This information is extremely curious. Chen had an extremely consistent record of opposing any actions that would drain the budget.<sup>167</sup> He also never had an especially close relationship with the military.<sup>168</sup> However, we do know Chen was extremely upset with Hua during this time. This suggests that if Deng's decision to attack Vietnam was connected to weakening Hua's position, Chen's curious behavior might have been the result of a tactical alliance with Deng. Chen and Deng would enter such an alliance on economic policy, despite somewhat differing preferences, to undermine Hua later.<sup>169</sup>

Beyond Deng Liqun's account, other evidence hits at broad skepticism within the military about an attack on the scale that Deng was suggesting. On March 16, 1979, at a conference reviewing reports on the war in Vietnam, Deng himself admitted to the broad opposition to the war:

Everyone knows that it was difficult for the party center and the CMC to make this decision. Only after repeated considerations, about two months worth, was this decision made. Among our party and among our people many people worried about this issue, whether it could be done well, how big the chain reaction would be, whether it would influence our four modernizations, whether it would be fought well. These worries were correct, it was a serious issue. The Central Committee and CMC after repeated considerations made this decision. Reflecting now, making this decision was correct. At the time, when making the decision, the biggest worry was whether in the North the Soviet revisionists would have a strong reaction.<sup>170</sup>

We have reason to believe that several high-ranking generals were skeptical about the war. In June 1977, Ye Jianying had argued that it did not make sense to continue struggling with the Vietnamese [斗争要适可而止].<sup>171</sup> According to interviews conducted by Xiaoming Zhang, Ye opposed the war

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<sup>166</sup> *Chen Yun Nianpu [Chronology of Chen Yun]*, 236.

<sup>167</sup> Wang Jie and Li Lilin, "Suowei 'Chen Yun Yiguan Youqing' Kaobian [An Investigation into the So-Called 'Chen Yun Always Was a Rightist']," *Dang de Wenxian [The Party's Documents]*, no. 3 (2015): 81–86; Zhu Jiamu, "Chen Yun de Gaige Kaifang Sixiang- Jinian Chen Yun Tongzhi Danchen 110 Zhou Nian [Chen Yun's Thought on Reform and Opening- In Remembrance of Chen Yun's 100 Birthday]," *Dangdai Zhongguo Shi Yanjiu* 22, no. 3 (May 2015): 4–29.

<sup>168</sup> Zhang Jincai, "Chen Yun Danren Guo de Lingdao Zhiwu [The Leadership Positions Held by Chen Yun]," *Dangshi Bolan [General Review of the Communist Party of China]*, no. 6 (2015): 16–19; Zhuo Tang and Yang Gao, *Chen Yun shengping yanjiu ziliao [Research Material on the Life of Chen Yun]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 3–38.

<sup>169</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, "China's Economic Reorientation After the Third Plenum: Conflict Surrounding 'Chen Yun's' Readjustment Program, 1979–80," *The China Journal* 70 (July 2013): 163–87.

<sup>170</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Deng Xiaoping Zai Zhong Yue Bianjing Zuozhan Qingkuang Baogao Hui Shang de Jianghua [Deng Xiaoping's Speech at a Report Meeting on the Border War Between China and Vietnam]" (Chinese University Press, March 16, 1979), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

<sup>171</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986) [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)]*, 2:1127.



against Vietnam for some reason related to a family member. He also points out that Ye did not attend an important expanded Politburo meeting on New Year's Eve.<sup>172</sup> Sun was told in his own interviews that Ye's position was ambiguous, as opposed to Marshals Xu Xiangqian and Nie Rongzhen, who opposed fighting and spoke out.<sup>173</sup> The likelihood that Xu opposed the war is supported by evidence that he opposed allying with the United States to oppose the Soviets.<sup>174</sup> Taiwanese historian Zhong Yanlin was told by a mainland party historian that Su Yu also opposed attacking Vietnam.<sup>175</sup> According to a speech made later by Geng Biao, the party center also rejected two different proposals made by Su Zhenhua and Xu Shiyou, respectively. Su allegedly called for a battalion of ships to be sent to Cambodia instead. Although the veracity of this document is not as reliable as other materials used in this chapter, its contents make sense given the broader struggle between Deng and Su.<sup>176</sup>

Lower-level generals also expressed pessimism about a large-scale attack on Vietnam. At a meeting of the Guangzhou Military Region, a number of officers expressed concern that the Soviet Union would take advantage of an attack on Vietnam, putting China in the difficult situation of having to fight a two-front war. Some generals even feared that a world war would erupt, or that it would be a waste of resources better spent on the economic development.<sup>177</sup> In September in Beijing, a meeting run by the general staff saw a consensus on the need to respond to the Vietnamese threat, but a difference of opinion on the appropriate size of the response. Some argued that if the war was fought on a low scale, then less resources would be spent and the economy would not be as badly affected.<sup>178</sup> At a December 7 meeting in

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<sup>172</sup> Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 53–54.

<sup>173</sup> Warren Sun interview notes.

<sup>174</sup> 'Dangdai Zhongguo renwu zhuanji' congshu bianji bu, *Xu Xiangqian Zhuan [Biography of Xu Xiangqian]* (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1991).

<sup>175</sup> Zhong, *Wenge qian de Deng Xiaoping*, 163.

<sup>176</sup> Geng Biao, "Guanyu Yinzhi Banda Xingshi Baogao [Report on the Situation in the Indochina Peninsula]," *Studies on Chinese Communism* 14, no. 10 (October 15, 1980). This journal was a Taiwanese government publication that sometimes published documents from the mainland.

<sup>177</sup> Li Min, *Zhong Yue Zhanzheng Shinian [Ten Years of War Between China and Vietnam]* (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1993), 12–13.

<sup>178</sup> Zhou Deli, *Yi Ge Gaoji Canmouzhang de Zishu [Self-Account of a High Ranking Staff Officer]* (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 1992), 242–43.

Beijing, generals once again raised the possibility of pressure from both north and south, one general even pointing out that the Soviets and Vietnamese had just signed a treaty on November 3.<sup>179</sup>

The timing of the decision-making also hints at the importance of the broader political struggle. In September 1978, a meeting was held in Beijing to discuss how to manage the Vietnam situation. When the meeting started, vice commander of the general staff Zhang Caiqian told the participants that they were to come up with a response and make a suggestion to the party center. The participants were then given a day to read reports on Vietnam and help them understand the necessity of responding. The next day, after some initial discussion, the Operations Department of the general staff submitted a preliminary draft for discussion. No final decision was made.<sup>180</sup>

The final decision to attack was made on November 23, placing the decision sometime right in the middle of the pre-plenum work conference - a key moment in Hua's shifting political fortunes. According to Zhou Deli, a staff officer from the Guangzhou Military Region, Deng (described in the memoir simply as head of the general staff) had already determined the plan of attack, and moreover this new plan was much larger in scale than the draft he had seen at the meeting in September. The decision was made. Zhou writes: "Because this was an issue decided by the head of the general staff, none of our opinions were raised again, and we did not reveal them to others."<sup>181</sup> Also striking is that the CMC apparently decided that war was necessary before the Politburo had reached the decision.<sup>182</sup> The timing of the decision, especially in the context of broad opposition, are both strong pieces of evidence that Deng was connecting the choice of whether to attack Vietnam to the power struggle with Hua.

At the December 7 meeting discussed above, after four hours of debate, the decision that the center had already made a decision to attack Vietnam was announced to what seems to have been a

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<sup>179</sup> Li Min, *Zhong Yue Zhanzheng Shinian [Ten Years of War Between China and Vietnam]*, 16–17.

<sup>180</sup> Zhou Deli, *Yi Ge Gaoji Canmouzhang de Zishu [Self-Account of a High Ranking Staff Officer]*, 243.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>182</sup> Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Huiyilu [Memoir of Zhang Zhen]*, 2:165–66.

broader audience of military figures. Why the generals were given time to debate before the decision was announced remains unclear. But the rationale given was the justification as devised by Chen Yun: that the Soviets would be no threat.<sup>183</sup> Within a few short months, the PLA would invade Vietnam. Deng's decision to enlist the unlikely ally of Chen Yun to rally support, evidence that Hua did not strongly support the war, the timing of the decision soon after the spat over the navy military exercise, and the collapse of Hua's authority around the time of the final decision raise the strong possibility that the war was intended at least in part to have an effect on the domestic political system at home. As Pantsov and Levine point out, "some observers in China believed that Deng, who was then the chief of the General Staff of the PLA, insisted on war and then directed the entire operation only so he could establish his own total control over the military in order to gain unlimited power."<sup>184</sup>

Interestingly, the war in Vietnam is also mentioned in a secret report disseminated on July 4, 1981. This document included eleven examples intended to show that it was "old comrades," and especially Deng Xiaoping, who were most responsible for positive changes since the death of Mao, *not* Hua Guofeng. According to point 8:

Between October 1978 and January 1979, Comrade Xiaoping visited Japan, American, and again Japan, began to open the foreign policy general pattern [总格局] of united opposition to hegemony, at the same time made a decision for a defensive counterattack against Vietnam. This matter is extremely important, without any boldness, without any strategic thinking, [one would] not dare to start the defensive counterattack.<sup>185</sup>

The understanding that Deng used Vietnam for domestic political purposes appears to be widespread in the Chinese elite. According to China scholar Lampton:

Some 'supreme' leaders, at the start of their terms, use external conflicts to shore up their positions with both the military and the populace, exerting more control over the PLA and external relations once they have consolidated power. As one knowledgeable senior person explained, it is like Deng Xiaoping

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<sup>183</sup> Li Min, *Zhong Yue Zhanzheng Shinian [Ten Years of War Between China and Vietnam]*, 16–17.

<sup>184</sup> Pantsov and Levine, *Deng Xiaoping*, 350.

<sup>185</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shiyi jie liu zhong quanwei de juemi chuanda wenjian [CC Confidential Document on the 11th Congress 6 Party Plenum], 65, July 4, 1981, Internal Report 1981.07.04, Box 1, Zhongguo gong chan dang, Hoover Institution Archives.

coming back and then in 1979 pursuing a strike against Vietnam. ‘Do something to control the army, and indeed Jiang Zemin did this in 1995-1996 regarding Taiwan...’<sup>186</sup>

The results of the war in Vietnam also have some relevance for the economic and authority models, although the theoretical implications are somewhat ambiguous. The fact that the PLA fought so poorly had an effect on Deng’s political position. On the one hand, this could be explained by hypothesis 1a as a case of “retrospective” voting: Deng was being punished for choosing a policy that failed.<sup>187</sup> But at the same time, the matter was connected to his prestige as a military leader, which is emphasized by hypothesis 1b. In any case, the “audience costs” of fighting a losing war did not ultimately hurt Deng in the long run, which suggests that his prestige was easily strong enough to overcome such a setback - although the war in Vietnam was hardly the only important political issue at the time.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, we see clear evidence for hypothesis 3b: the war in Vietnam threatened to affect the relationships Deng and Hua had with the military, and this obvious concern for who dominated among the armed forces went far beyond what we would expect in a highly institutionalized environment.

In early 1979, Hua was recovering somewhat from his recent defeat in late 1978. After the war in Vietnam, Hua went on an inspection tour of military garrisons in the northeast and east. Military units were preparing extensive welcoming ceremonies for Hua, which upset Deng.<sup>189</sup> As O’Dowd shows decisively in his study of China’s invasion of Vietnam, the PLA had embarrassed itself by how poorly it fought.<sup>190</sup> The war went so poorly that one of the two main leaders, Xu Shiyou, had a heart attack.<sup>191</sup> The other main general, Yang Dezhi, almost died from a health complication, but is unclear whether it was

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<sup>186</sup> David M. Lampton, *Following the Leader: Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 185.

<sup>187</sup> Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>188</sup> For an investigation into audience costs and foreign policy in authoritarian regimes, see Jessica L. P. Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>189</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]*, 2004, 94.

<sup>190</sup> Edward C. O’Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>191</sup> Ji Pomin, “Ting Fuqin Ji Dengkui Tan Wangshi [Listening to My Father Ji Dengkui Talk about the Past],” *Nanfang Zhoumo [Southern Weekly]*, November 6, 2003.

stress related or a result of Deng's decision to send such old men to fight his war.<sup>192</sup> Such an obviously poor display threatened to have political implications. According to one former party school cadre: "Combined with the fact that the Vietnam war had revealed problems in the military, pictures of the troops welcoming Hua obviously cut [Deng] to the quick. But the most important thing without question was to prevent the military from rallying behind Hua Guofeng."<sup>193</sup>

The question of how to evaluate the war in Vietnam threatened to give more firepower to Deng's critics who believed his so-called de-Maoification was destabilizing the country. According to Xiao Donglian, "On a certain level, it was precisely this war that transformed China's political situation." At the Xidan Democracy Wall, anti-Deng content began to appear. Meanwhile, the situation at the theory meeting Ye Jianying had called for the previous year and which had finally started in January was growing increasingly delicate. Those opposed to the 3rd plenum were now expressing their views openly. Hu Yaobang had to take a step back: on March 18 Hu gave a speech that said it was inappropriate to randomly label people part of the "two whatevers" faction. The next day, a small character poster appeared that accused Hu Yaobang and Hu Qiaomu of opposing Chairman Mao and Chairman Hua. At this point the top leadership in the party had lost patience: they felt that attacks on Mao at the theory meeting threatened to destabilize the country.<sup>194</sup> Deng's military failure in Vietnam had damaged his martial prestige, and Deng had to react, especially given widespread skepticism about the pace of domestic change.

On March 16, Deng attended a review meeting of the war in Vietnam. As discussed above, Deng began by recognizing that many in the party and military opposed the war. Deng then made a forceful case for why the war was both necessary and ultimately a victory. The first reason Deng gave was to

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<sup>192</sup> Xu was born in 1905 and Yang was born in 1911. Xie Hainan, Yang Zufa, and Yang Jianhua, *Yang Dezhi Yi Sheng [The Life of Yang Dezhi]* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2011), 304–5.

<sup>193</sup> Ming Ruan, *Deng Xiaoping: Chronicle of an Empire* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 58–59.

<sup>194</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 69–71.

resist Soviet hegemony in Asia. The second reason was to create a stable environment in the South for the four modernizations. The third reason is the most interesting. Deng argued that the military had not fought for thirty years so it was unclear whether it still knew how to fight. Deng described the war as “a good opportunity in this regard... To be honest, after the last ten years, the honor of the military has been sullied, but through this war, its honor has returned a bit...” Deng described the training the PLA got from the experience “as the number one major achievement, an extraordinary achievement [第一件大事, 了不起的大事].” Deng also admitted that there was a fear the military would fight poorly, and admitted that “of course many problems were revealed.” But Deng affirmed that no matter how many casualties there were, the military had not embarrassed itself. In a sense, then, Deng was justifying a poorly fought war by arguing that it needed to be fought just so the problems could be revealed.

But perhaps the most interesting part of this speech was its remarkably leftist and conservative conclusion. The inclusion of this section in a speech on Vietnam is powerful evidence that the poor fighting and the broad dissatisfaction among conservatives about the anti-Mao trends at the theory conference were combining to pose a powerful political threat. Deng said: “Now there is a huge amount of thought work that needs to be done. Recently we developed democracy, we managed several historical problems, but this also brought many problems, after smashing the Gang of Four, our nation achieved unity and solidarity. Internationally, China’s name was relatively good, but after really looking more closely, factors of disunity and strife are extremely numerous, the phenomenon of people causing trouble is growing by the day and is not decreasing... Rejecting Chairman Mao is a rejection of New China, is a rejection of the People’s Republic of China, is a rejection of history in its entirety, the consequences are even more serious than Khrushchev, and moreover it damages China’s image.”

Most ominously, however, Deng explicitly linked liberal tendencies like criticizing Mao, “sent down youth” trying to return to the cities, and Beijing citizens writing letters to US President Jimmy Carter about human rights in China to criticizing the war in Vietnam: “Someone fled to the Vietnamese embassy. Has this man been arrested? Opposing the self-defense counterattack against Vietnam, how can

it not be investigated?”<sup>195</sup> The whole tone of the speech is defensive and angry. It is powerful evidence that Deng’s extremely conservative turn in March 1979 was to a large extent the result of doubts about his military credentials because of the war in Vietnam, as well as concerns of conservatives, many of whom are certainly in the military, worried about the hugely destabilizing effects the liberal trends were having on public security. On the same day, the center released a directive labeling the war in Vietnam a “major success” that went “better than expected” because of its “deep considerations” in terms of preparation.<sup>196</sup> Deng’s comments were distributed to commanders at the division level in the military.<sup>197</sup>

### *Leftism in the Military and the Denouement of Hua Guofeng’s Leadership*

In the previous chapter, I provided evidence that Hua was stripped of all meaningful formal positions in the leadership because of concerns leftist forces would rally to him. In this section, I demonstrate that while this was partly about the presence of leftists in the party, the main concern was about the situation in the military. In other words, the armed forces had an outsized effect on the overall political struggle precisely because low levels of institutionalization could not sufficiently guarantee that men with guns would slip out of control. This out-sized importance for the military is clear support for hypothesis 3b. To an extent unpredicted by hypothesis 3a, the final denouement of the political relationship between Hua and Deng revolved to a significant extent around the PLA.

Younger officers, indoctrinated with the leftist ideals of the Cultural Revolution, were concerned that Deng was leading China on a path of de-Maoification.<sup>198</sup> These officers were also concerned about

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<sup>195</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Deng Xiaoping Zai Zhong Yue Bianjing Zuozhan Qingkuang Baogao Hui Shang de Jianghua [Deng Xiaoping’s Speech at a Report Meeting on the Border War Between China and Vietnam].”

<sup>196</sup> “Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Shengli Jieshu Dui Yue Ziwei Fanji, Baowei Bianjiang Zhandou de Tongzhi [Central Committee Notification on Victoriously Ending the Counterattack against Vietnam and Struggle to Defend the Border],” in *San Zhong Quanhui Yilai Zhongyao Wenxian Hui Bian [Collection of Important Documents Since the Third Plenum]*, vol. 1 (Renmin chubanshe, 1982), 116–18.

<sup>197</sup> It is unclear whether these comments were made in the same speech. *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:492–93.

<sup>198</sup> ‘Left’ and ‘right’ have different meanings at different times in Chinese history. In this period, leftism refers to strong, dogmatic commitment to Mao’s status and certain old ways of running society, especially the political organization of the countryside. Generally, however, it does not include the taste for anarchy the ‘left’ had during

the implications that rehabilitating older cadres and downsizing the military had for their career prospects. Deng himself recognized the difficulties inherent to this younger generation: “The situation of the military being influenced by the “left” cannot be ignored, especially officers in their thirties or forties.”<sup>199</sup> High-ranking officers who realized the disastrous nature of the Cultural Revolution were fully aware that the new winds of reform were undermining their ability to discipline these young leftist officers. One book on political work in the military is remarkably honest:

...some officers, especially commanding officers, because they had been affected by the extreme leftist poison of Lin Biao and the ‘Gang of Four,’ their thinking was not liberated, and they existed in a situation of full or partial ossification, they were suspicious that the line, guideline, and policies of the 3rd plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress were a violation of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought, and therefore were not persistent enough in executing some policies determined by the party center.<sup>200</sup>

The obvious threat was that someone would manipulate these tensions for political gain. And although the 3rd plenum was a hugely important landmark, Hua’s appropriate role in the new order was still not determined. A huge shift had occurred and large swathes of the party were uncertain about what had happened. Hua had been essentially right: turning too quickly in terms of broad ideological justification for party policy was inherently destabilizing.

So although Deng still enjoyed dominance in the military, instability within the PLA was growing among younger officers who had suffered the brunt of leftist extremism during the Cultural Revolution and who had less experience, or no experience at all, serving under Deng’s military leadership before 1949. As a professional revolutionary who understood that political power came out of the barrel of a gun, and who himself had leveraged military support into a political victory, Deng knew that lack of control over the armed forces was unacceptable at any level.

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the Cultural Revolution. Now, the ‘left’ was in fact profoundly conservative. The threat from the ‘right’, on the other hand, referred to the opposite problem: a lack of faith in Mao and communism as a whole.

<sup>199</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 727.

<sup>200</sup> Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo Qishi Nian Shi: Zai “Wenhua Dageming” Zhong Shou Sunhai, Zai Gaige Kaifang Zhong Chuangzao Xin Jumian [70 Year History of the Communist Party’s Military Political Work: Suffering Damage During the “Cultural Revolution”, Creating a New Situation in the Reform and Opening Up]*, 6:51.



These dynamics are critical for understanding why the Cultural Revolution beneficiaries, especially Hua Guofeng, were not only removed from any remaining positions of real authority but saw their crimes written into official history. Hua's continuing presence at the top of the party hierarchy threatened to serve as a rallying point for forces opposed to the reforms even if Hua himself played no personal role in such conspiracies. The single greatest danger, of course, was that forces in the military would rally to Hua's banner, which they would in fact do in a chilling incident in late 1980.

Therefore, the best hypothesis given presently available evidence is that Deng made the final push to unseat Hua after signs that the latter had attempted to manipulate the military's suspicions of reform to his own benefit. The topic of this last section, then, is to demonstrate the sense of crisis among the military, Deng's concern that large parts of the military were not subservient to his authority, and the connection of such concerns to the ultimate fate of Hua Guofeng.

On January 7, the GPD, recognizing the 3rd plenum was not being understood or supported by broad swathes of the military, released a document called "An opinion regarding the political work of executing the party-wide change in work emphasis. However, its execution was limited because of the distraction of the war in Vietnam."<sup>201</sup> On January 29, *People's Daily* revealed the decision that those who had been labeled as bad class elements in the countryside would have their "hats removed," or in other words, would no longer suffer poor treatment because of their past. Soldiers in the PLA with peasant backgrounds were particularly incensed. For a period of time, *People's Liberation Army Daily* published reports on study groups that educated soldiers on the necessity of this change.<sup>202</sup>

Meanwhile, the process of rehabilitating old cadres purged during the Cultural Revolution was running into obstacles. On February 7, the GPD released a document complaining about such difficulties, claiming that the most important reason for delay was that units were not taking the problem seriously

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:52.

<sup>202</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 129.

enough.<sup>203</sup> This was a major issue: during the Cultural Revolution, a full third of all officers at the Major Military Region level and combat arm level had been persecuted. Throughout the military as a whole, 80,000 officers had been persecuted, of whom 1,600 had died. According to one account on verdict reversals in the military, those officers in the central military office devoted to the reversals described their job as harder than fighting in a war [“落实政策比打仗还难!”]. The problem was that many officers who had been purged during the Cultural Revolution had also purged others. Often officers in command at the end of the Cultural Revolution were unhappy with those who had purged them a few years earlier. And in some cases where the verdict was severe, some crimes really had been committed. The delays became so severe that in one case an officer who had joined the military in the Red Army period hung himself at the office of the petition bureau of a major military unit.<sup>204</sup> Ultimately, between 1979 and 1981, 80,000 members of the PLA would be rehabilitated.<sup>205</sup> The question of verdicts, meanwhile, touched upon the broader struggle between the Cultural Revolutionary beneficiaries and those who had been sidelined for much of its ten-year span. When considered in context with Deng’s broader goals to decrease the size of the military, a huge segment of the officer population must have been concerned about its career prospects.

Broader political issues in society exacerbated the situation. Many in the military believed that the household responsibility system was “going backwards”; that removing the “landlord” or “rich peasant” labels would cause those individuals to “become pretentious [翘尾巴]” and seek vengeance; that collective markets would lead to capitalism; and that the responsibility system would harm military families because they had less available labor, thus leading to inequalities in income.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> PLA GPD, “Renzhen Guanche Zhongfa [1978] 78 Hao Wenjian, Zhuajin Fucha Jizheng Yuan, Jiu, Cuo’an de Tongzhi [Notification on Diligently Executing Central Document [1978] 78, Grasp the Review and Correction of Unjust, False, and Incorrect Cases]” (Service Center for Chinese Publications, n.d.), 2, Series 26, Volume 4.

<sup>204</sup> Hao Zaijin, “Shi Jinqian Jiangjun He Quanjun Luoshi Zhengce Gongzuo [General Shi Jinqian and Military-Wide Execution of Policy],” *Dadi [The World]*, no. 22 (2002).

<sup>205</sup> Lu Zengyan, “Wei Guoqing Zai Dang de Shiyi Jie San Zhong Quanhui Qianhou.”

<sup>206</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 198.

For example, in April, the Nanjing Military Region ran a theory training course in which 200 officers participated. The meeting did not run smoothly. Some officers disputed that either “leftism” or “rightism” as described by Deng existed. Others complained about propaganda directives that they felt were leading people to criticize Mao. With young people returning to the cities from the countryside and class labels being removed, officers questioned whether class struggle had really ceased to exist. Some officers worried that “liberating thinking” was a mistake and that the real problem was executing the four cardinal principles properly. The 3rd plenum was explicitly criticized for adopting wrong policies.<sup>207</sup>

In the spring of 1979, a student at the PLA Political Academy claimed at a small meeting that one third of the people at the school opposed the 3rd plenum. Afterwards, a reporter from the military newspaper agency wrote a confidential report based on the words of this student.<sup>208</sup> On July 9, Deng wrote comments on an internal newsletter saying: “this material is very important, please ask the Central Committee Office for a few copies to be sent to standing committee members of the Politburo and CMC for them to take a look, everyone should consider this matter a bit.”<sup>209</sup> Deng would later raise this example on private occasions a number of times.<sup>210</sup>

A document in the Cultural Revolution database recounts one instance. On July 12, Deng Xiaoping told Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun that “in the [PLA] Political Academy one third of the people do not understand, doubt, or are dissatisfied with the 3rd plenum and the policies determined by the party center since the 3rd plenum. This is only a school. Recently, a comrade at the united work department said that everywhere is like this.” Hu Qiaomu remarked that someone at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences also said everywhere there was a problem of one third of the cadres opposing the 3rd plenum.

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<sup>207</sup> Liao Hansheng, *Liao Hansheng Huiyilu [Memoir of Liao Hansheng]*, 587–88.

<sup>208</sup> Xiao Ke, *Xiao Ke Huiyilu [Memoir of Xiao Ke]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1997), 537. Xiao Ke, who ran the school, was upset by the accusation and organized a meeting in September 1979 at which he determined that only eight comrades had doubted the new line, with only five of these eight having serious problems (of whom four were students).

<sup>209</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:534.

<sup>210</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 199.

But Deng did not care about these other units nearly as much as he cared about the military: “after investigating the situation, I learned that this one third of the Political Academy had all supported the left\* during the Cultural Revolution and benefited. A soldier supporting the left is simply disastrous [可不得了], some use their power to commit all sorts of crimes. They were influenced by the poison of Lin Biao’s ‘having power means having everything.’” Hu Qiaomu cut in again: “At the time some people changed ‘remember difficulty and think about sweetness’ to ‘remember difficulty and think about power. Why ‘bitter’? Because power had been stolen by the ‘capitalist roaders.’” Deng continued: “Even now they do not understand, the problem was created precisely because of this kind of influence. This is a huge problem, it is necessary to remind comrades to pay attention.”<sup>211</sup> Deng, then, was connecting military arrogance and opposition to the 3rd plenum to the lack of civil control over the military during the Cultural Revolution.

The leftist resurgence needed to be addressed, and unsurprisingly, Deng began in the military. On May 20, the GPD released a document “An opinion regarding deepening the study of the 3rd plenum and work conference spirit” that called for thinking to unify around the 3rd plenum.<sup>212</sup> The first salvo in public was an article in *People’s Liberation Army Daily* on May 21 complaining that in many units the study of “practice” had not really been executed and many [许多] comrades had not truly understood its importance. The article called for a “review [补课]” of practice as the sole criterion of truth, and

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\* “Supporting the left” is the term used to refer to the military taking leadership over vast swathes of the country when civilian cadres were being purged or fighting factional battles. The term is confusing because the military more often opposed the leftist rebels.

<sup>211</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Deng Xiaoping Yu Hu Qiaomu Deng Liqun Tanhua Yaodian [Key Points from Deng Xiaoping’s Discussion with Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun]” (Chinese University Press, September 12, 1979), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

<sup>212</sup> Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo Qishi Nian Shi: Zai “Wenhua Dageming” Zhong Shou Sunhai, Zai Gaige Kaifang Zhong Chuangzao Xin Jumian [70 Year History of the Communist Party’s Military Political Work: Suffering Damage During the “Cultural Revolution”, Creating a New Situation in the Reform and Opening Up]*, 6:52.

demanded that the military more closely study the documents from the 3rd plenum. By the end of November, 2,600 “review” study groups had been created throughout the military.<sup>213</sup>

The attitude of some-high ranking cadres to the “review” campaign was that it could only exacerbate a chaotic situation [还要补什么颗，还嫌乱的不够啊].<sup>214</sup> One book on political work in the military is remarkably frank that “some officers, including old cadres... still did not really understand the line, guideline, and policy of the 3rd plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.”<sup>215</sup> Deng turned up the heat by giving an important speech to an enlarged session of the navy party committee on July 29.

It was no coincidence that Deng chose to give his speech to the navy. Deng’s difficult relationship with Su Zhenhua, the navy commissar, was already discussed above. After Su’s death in February 1979, Deng had chosen a man named Ye Fei to replace him. Deng told Ye he was selected because as an outsider he would be able to better manage the legacy of factionalism among the ranks.<sup>216</sup> Starting in May, Ye had spent two months leading an investigation into the navy. The results were not encouraging. A number of officers, including some in leading positions, “did not understand” a whole set of policies established after the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum. These individuals felt that the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum was “too rightist,” that the “two whatevers” was “necessary to stabilize the broader situation,” and that the “practice” position was a violation of Mao Zedong thought.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Shen Baoxiang, *Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Taolun Shimo [The Debate on the Criterion of Truth Issue from Beginning to End]*.

<sup>215</sup> Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo Qishi Nian Shi: Zai “Wenhua Dageming” Zhong Shou Sunhai, Zai Gaige Kaifang Zhong Chuangzao Xin Jumian [70 Year History of the Communist Party’s Military Political Work: Suffering Damage During the “Cultural Revolution”, Creating a New Situation in the Reform and Opening Up]*, 6:53.

<sup>216</sup> Ye’s job was not easy: rectification caused dissatisfaction similar to that in the general staff. In June 1980, a few months after Ye had switched from commissar to commander, members of the navy suggested that Ye resign for health reasons. The CMC had to assert Ye’s control and remind his underlings that it was inappropriate to suggest a higher ranking officer resign. Wu Dianqing, “Deng Xiaoping Yu Haijun Silingyuan Ye Fei [Deng Xiaoping and Navy Commander Ye Fei],” *Fujian Dangshi Yuekan [Fujian Monthly Journal of Party History]*, no. 7 (2004): 20.

<sup>217</sup> Wu Dianqing, “Haijun Kaizhan Zhenli Biaozhun Wenti Da Taolun Shimo [The Beginning and End of the Navy’s Opening of the Great Discussion of the Truth Criterion],” 26.

Deng's speech therefore recognized the resistance to the new line by saying that "we must take note of the fact that a fair number of people are still opposed to the Party's current political and ideological lines." He also stirred up antagonism towards those who had been promoted during the Cultural Revolution: "most of them were promoted during the 'Cultural Revolution' and they have their own interests. They yearn for the past, because the present policies do not yield much advantage to them. Through effort on our part, some of them may change their attitudes, but perhaps not all can do so."

One important section of this speech was cut from the official *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*. Deng's redacted words again showed his concern that a third of the military was not completely under his control: "Using the mistakes of Chairman Mao and upholding the 'two whatevers' is the same as still upholding that business of Lin Biao and 'the Gang of Four' but just changing your face, this kind of person makes up about a third of all units [单位]. This is a reflection of the entire country."<sup>218</sup> Deng also made a reminder about what happened to those who supposedly resisted him by making a disparaging remark about Su Zhenhua, saying that last year he had to "embarrass a general [将了一军]" for not addressing problems as earnestly as the air force.<sup>219</sup>

In September 1979, the GPD held a meeting [干部部长会议] that called for a top-to-bottom change in the leadership of the military. The objective was to promote at every level those officers who supported the political line of the 3rd plenum positions. In 1980, there were mass changes at the army-level. Those changes were so extensive that the average age went from 56 to 54.1.<sup>220</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the "review" education activities was that Deng's speeches on the matter were not publicized or distributed officially through party channels. Instead, in September and October, Deng's words were communicated through confidential Xinhua reports. Because it was

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<sup>218</sup> This section was cut from Deng's official *Selected Works*. Wu Jiang, *Shinian de Lu-He Hu Yaobang Xiangchu de Rizi [Ten Year Road- The Days I Associated with Hu Yaobang]*, 90-91.

<sup>219</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 1:541.

<sup>220</sup> *Dangdai Zhongguo Jundui de Zhengzhi Gongzuo (Shang) [Political Work in the Modern Chinese Military (Part One)]*, 481.

done in this manner, some people started to doubt whether they actually had to participate. Historian Xiao writes: “This shows that whether or not the ‘review’ should be executed throughout the entire party, whether the debate against the ‘two whatevers’ should be brought up again, was debated both at the center and in the provinces.” Yet before the September Xinhua report, the “review” had already started in the military. In August and September, the Jinan, Shenyang Nanjing, Guangzhou, Beijing, Chengdu, Lanzhou, and Urumqi Military Regions, as well as the air force, navy, and second artillery, had all already conducted “review” sessions.<sup>221</sup> Deng was repeating an old trick: using the military, his natural place of dominance, to expand a broader campaign intended to strengthen his own position.

Deng’s authority in the military had helped him undermine Hua, but the new institutional dynamics were undermining Deng’s control over the armed forces. Historian Xiao Donglian summarizes the dynamics of the situation:

These facts show that changing the thinking among military officers and soldiers was a serious problem, making them accept the guidelines and policies of the 3rd plenum still faced significant trouble; it also shows that Hua Guofeng still had significant support in the military, especially at the lower levels, and that this was not because he had any historical relationship with the military but because he was the successor picked by Mao Zedong. In the military, Deng Xiaoping’s prestige was not absolute. This caused Deng Xiaoping to decide to solve the problem in the military, and the topic he picked was to review practice as the sole criterion of truth in the military. *At a fundamental level, this was a matter of solving whose commands the military would obey, and whom it would follow* [italics added].<sup>222</sup>

Deng also executed one of the largest reshuffles of commanders in the Main Military Regions in Chinese history. In June, Deng had placed Marshal Nie Rongzhen in charge of planning for the next leadership in the general departments, armed services, and Main Military Regions.<sup>223</sup> The changes were approved by Ye Jianying on July 13.<sup>224</sup> Deng apparently did not discuss these changes with Hua, as

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<sup>221</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang* [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening], 201–2.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>223</sup> Nie Li, *Shan Gao Shui Chang: Huiyi Fuqin Nie Rongzhen* [High Mountains and Long Water: Remembering My Father Nie Rongzhen] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 368.

<sup>224</sup> *Ye Jianying Nianpu (1897-1986)* [Chronology of Ye Jianying (1897-1986)], 2:1173.

evidenced by his absence at a meeting on the topic on October 16 because of being on a trip overseas.<sup>225</sup> Between October 1979 and February 1980, the top leadership (commander, commissar, or both) in the Beijing, Kunming, Wuhan, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Jinan, Shenyang, Xinjiang, and Nanjing were changed.<sup>226</sup> In April, the commanders of the Lanzhou and Nanjing Military Regions changed as well.<sup>227</sup> Around this time Deng also cut the PLA's 1980 budget by 13 percent and changed "military" modernization from third to fourth place in the "four modernizations."<sup>228</sup>

Meanwhile, Hua was apparently trying to reestablish a relationship with the PLA. In a January 1980 New Year's speech to the Beijing Military Garrison, Hua expressed deep respect for the revolutionary history of the units, gave advice on the importance of military training, praised the military's role in the Cultural Revolution, defended the Second Artillery against student protests over housing, remarked on how many in the military did not wish to return to civilian life, argued that as the economy improved, the daily lives of soldiers should improve accordingly, and even summarized the tactical lessons the PLA should learn from the war against Vietnam. Hua made the trip to the garrison along with the head of the GPD. Curiously, this speech was not distributed until February 4.<sup>229</sup>

Yet also in February, Hua suffered a major defeat at the 5<sup>th</sup> plenum. During the second half of 1979, despite his protection of Wang Dongxing from corruption charges in June, Deng started to travel around the country emphasizing the importance of changing leadership at every level.<sup>230</sup> This suggests Deng had realized that, for purposes of maintaining stability while pursuing further reforms, the semblance of unity created by not removing any top-ranking cadres was not as effective as eliminating any possible signs of cleavages at the top by removing the defeated party entirely. This issue likely

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<sup>225</sup> Zheng Zhongbing, *Hu Yaobang Nianpu Ziliao Changbian [Materials for a Chronological Record of Hu Yaobang Life (Sic)]*, 1:422–25.

<sup>226</sup> "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation (January-March 1980)," *China Quarterly* 1980 (1980): 381–82.

<sup>227</sup> "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation (April-June 1980)," *China Quarterly* 1980 (1980): 616.

<sup>228</sup> Baum, *Burying Mao*, 88.

<sup>229</sup> Hubei archives. SZ1-8-185

<sup>230</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 345.



became more problematic after the 5<sup>th</sup> plenum, at which Liu Shaoqi's rehabilitation deeply upset those who believed such a decision meant that Mao Zedong Thought was wrong.<sup>231</sup> Deng's decision was likely based to a significant extent on his realization of just how deeply skeptical the military, especially at lower ranks, had become. This argument is supported by the close proximity of Deng's final assault on the Cultural Revolution beneficiaries and the beginning of the "review" campaign in the military discussed above.

Between April 18 and 30, a military-wide political work meeting was held in Beijing. At this meeting Hua gave a speech in which he used a Cultural Revolution era slogan: "supporting the proleterians and annihilating the capitalists."<sup>232</sup> The appearance was especially remarkable because that phrase had already appeared numerous times in the media in the first half of 1979 only later to be criticized beginning in June.<sup>233</sup> In his speech, Hua said that he "hoped the military in terms of 'supporting the proleterians and annihilating the capitalists' and changing the atmosphere in society would lead as a good example." Wei Guoqing agreed that the military should "actively expand the education and struggle of 'supporting the proleterians and annihilating the capitalists.'"<sup>234</sup>

Some observers reached the conclusion that Hua was attempting to rally leftist forces in the military to his side.<sup>235</sup> According to Ruan Ming, the use of this leftist phrase was a direct rejection of the "review": "...dogmatists in the military dug in behind the 'Four Cardinal Principles' in order to shut the door on this debate. In the spring of 1980, these dogmatists in the military got together with like-minded

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<sup>231</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng* [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party], 1981, 16.

<sup>232</sup> Chen Donglin and Du Pu, *Zhonghuarenmingongheguo Shilu: Gaige Yu Jubian- Kaichuang Xiandaihua Jianshe Xin Jimian* [True Record of the PRC: Reform and Change- Beginning A New Situation of Modernization], vol. 4, n.d., 312.

<sup>233</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang* [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening], 358.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Roderick Macfarquhar, "The Succession to Mao and the End of Maoism, 1969-1982," in *The Politics of China*, 3 ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 323.

allies in the Party to launch an attack on the wave of reforms that were not approaching the cities... The principle performers in this campaign were Hu Qiaomu and Wei Guoqing [head of the GPD].”<sup>236</sup>

When Deng Liqun saw that the phrase “supporting the proletarians and annihilating the capitalists” had reappeared, he criticized it at a number of venues, believing it to be a Cultural Revolution era slogan. When Wei Guoqing, head of the PLA General Political Department, heard about this, he became angry. Wei told members of the military that the report on using this slogan had been approved by Deng Xiaoping himself. Wei personally complained to Deng Xiaoping about Deng Liqun.<sup>237</sup>

Another old party comrade named Li Weihan complained to Deng about Hua’s comments to the military. This discussion was a major reason for Deng’s speech on August 18, which will be discussed below.<sup>238</sup> Deng told Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun on May 31: “In my opinion, this slogan has some drawbacks, and it is not complete. I myself am not involved with this meeting of the PLA’s General Political Department. I have asked Comrade Deng Liqun to tell Comrade Hua Nan of the General Political Department not to over-propagandize this slogan. It’s important to interpret its contents correctly and apply it accordingly.”<sup>239</sup>

Meanwhile, at a political work meeting of the Guangzhou Military Region between May 21 and June 2, Xi Zhongxun, first secretary of Guangdong province but also commissar of the military region, expressed opposition to the phrase. Other standing committee members of the military region, who would have been full-time officers, rejected his complaints, pointing out that as the province bordering capitalist Macao and Hong Kong such slogans were particularly necessary. On June 25, the Guangzhou Military Region called the GPD for clarification. The GPD responded by saying that recently Wei Guoqing had

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<sup>236</sup> Ruan, *Deng Xiaoping*, 76.

<sup>237</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun’s Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]*, 2006, 181.

<sup>238</sup> Wu Wei, “Deng Xiaoping Yu ‘Dang He Guojia Lingdao Zhidu de Gaige’ [Deng Xiaoping and ‘Reform of the Party and State Leadership System],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 2014 (10): 19.

<sup>239</sup> Ruan, *Deng Xiaoping*, 79. This section was cut from the official *Selected Works*.

spoken with Deng, during which time Deng said that the slogan was “not perfect.” Deng said that the military newspaper could continue to propagate the message, but that the slogan had to be contextualized and explained. At the same time, no non-military newspapers would be allowed to use the phrase.<sup>240</sup>

It was precisely in this context that Deng made one of the most remarkable speeches in the history of the PRC. On August 18, Deng stated: “Not long ago, in order to educate people in the revolutionary outlook, the People’s Liberation Army again raised the slogan, ‘foster proletarian ideology and eliminate bourgeois ideology.’ I read the relevant documents of the General Political Department and didn’t find anything wrong at the time. As I see it now, however, this slogan is neither comprehensive nor precise enough.”<sup>241</sup>

Yet Deng’s speech is famous for another reason. It also included strong calls for a more fully institutionalized political system and criticized “feudal” practices. According to veteran China watcher Miller, “the rules channel competition within institutionalized constraints. This motivation was central among Deng Xiaoping’s goals in political reform, as was explicit in his landmark August 1980 Politburo speech, “On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership,” a text that bears continual re-study and so merits placement on analysts’ bedside tables.”<sup>242</sup> This is a fundamental misreading of the origins and implications of this document. Criticisms of feudalism and calls for political reform were not a real platform but an ideological justification for Hua’s removal from the leadership. As Deng Liqun freely admitted, “this speech by Comrade Xiaoping in actuality was directed against Hua Guofeng, it was

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<sup>240</sup> Jia Juchuan, “Xi Zhongxun Zhiyi ‘Xingwu Miezi’ [Xi Zhongxun Doubts ‘Supporting the Proletariat and Annihilating the Capitalists’],” *Bainian Chao* [Hundred Year Tide], no. 11 (2001).

<sup>241</sup> In both the Chinese and English versions of Deng’s *Selected Works*, Deng does not refer to the PLA but ‘certain localities’ and does not mention that the documents were written by the GPD (前些时候有的地方为了进行革命思想的教育, 重提“兴无灭资”的口号。有关文件我是看过的). Although Xiao Donglian footnotes Deng’s speech to the *Selected Works*, his version of the quote refers to both the PLA and the GPD (前些时候解放军为了进行革命思想的教育, 重提“兴无灭资”的口号, 总政治部文件我是看过的). Because Xiao is an exceptionally well-placed historian at the National Defense University, I have used his version. Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang* [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening].

<sup>242</sup> Alice Miller, “Projecting the Next Politburo Standing Committee,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 49 (March 2016): 49.

preparation for Hua to leave his position, to find a theoretical justification.”<sup>243</sup> When a friend pointed out this speech was a reason many people believed that Deng supported real inner-party democracy and institutionalization, Zhao discounted this analysis, saying: “at this time Deng was primarily addressing Hua Guofeng, he was struggling against Hua Guofeng.”<sup>244</sup> To make his intention clear, Deng himself tied “feudal” practices to Hua Guofeng in an interview with an Italian journalist: “A leader that picks his own successor on his own is an extension of a type of feudal practice.”<sup>245</sup> In the meantime, Hu Yaobang also gave a speech against “feudal influences” and major articles appeared in the press that criticized personality cults and feudalist thought. Deng was raising the temperature.<sup>246</sup>

Therefore, party historian and former Zhao assistant Wu Wei concluded that “the speech that Deng Xiaoping gave at this time, its goal, even its main goal, was not mobilizing people for a party-wide political reform, but to resolve a personnel issue at the party center, to a significant extent [在一定意义上说], it was targeted against Hua Guofeng, to put pressure on Hua Guofeng.” In other words, the speech that has often been identified as proof of Deng’s reformist inclinations was in fact yet another tool in a decidedly *un*-institutionalized process of expelling the formally elected leader of the party that happened in the wake of Hua’s controversial speech to the PLA. Moreover, as early as September, little more than a month after Deng’s speech, Hu Qiaomu started stressing the danger that something similar to the Solidarity-related instability in Poland would happen in China. In October, a decision was made to no longer distribute Deng’s August speech because of the “Polish experience and lesson.”<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun’s Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]* (Hong Kong: Dafeng chubanshe, 2006), 183.

<sup>244</sup> Li Lun, *Zhuanfang Zhao Ziyang: 1992-2004 Yu Youren de Tanhua [Special Interviews with Zhao Ziyang: Conversations with Friends 1992-2004]* (Hong Kong: Jingcheng wenhua shiye gongsi, 2006), 44.

<sup>245</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan [Collected Works of Deng Xiaoping]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), 347.

<sup>246</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, *Dilemmas of Reform in China* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 103.

<sup>247</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]* (Hong Kong: Tian di tu shu you xian gong si, 2010), 204.

In the midst of the dispute over Hua's slogan, the secretariat took steps to protect the military from being charged for crimes it committed during the Cultural Revolution. This was a clear sign that Deng was responding to military interests for political reasons, as privately he had expressed disapproval for the military's behavior during this time (see above). On July 11<sup>th</sup>, a notification was released to address the problem of seventy-plus officers who had not been allowed to return to the military because they were under suspicion of crimes. The secretariat decided that: "Under the historical conditions of the Cultural Revolution, that some in the military committed some mistakes in the 'three supports and two militaries'\* was unavoidable." The notification argued that any evaluation must take into account historical conditions and called for a swift and lenient end to the investigations.<sup>248</sup>

On August 10, Hua made a speech in which he offered his resignation. Also in August, "several Politburo standing committee members" argued at an enlarged Politburo session that Hua should no longer be head of the CMC.<sup>249</sup> The close chronological proximity of these events hints strongly that the calls for Hua's removal were linked to Deng's attack on Hua's behavior towards the military. Although Teiwes and Sun believe that Deng made the decision to remove Hua as early as July 1979 during a summer holiday to Huangshan<sup>250</sup>, it is significant that these events happened so soon after Hua expressed spoke to the military. In any case, Hua did not seem to have made any other serious mistakes that would explain the move against him at this time.

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\* The three supports and two militaries was a term used to refer to military involvement in local politics during the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>248</sup> "Zhonggong Zongyang Jilv Jiancha Weiyuanhui, Zhongguo Renminjiefangjun Zong Zhengzhi Bu, Zhonggong Zhongyang Zuzhibu Guanyu Renzhen Guanche Zhongyang Shuji Chu Dui Zai Sanzhi Liangjun Zhong Fan Cuowu Ganbu Chuli Wenti de Zhongyao Zhishi de Tongzhi [Central Discipline and Inspection Committee, PLA General Political Department, and Organization Department's Notification on Diligently Executing the Secretariat's Important Directive on Managing Cadres Who Committed Mistakes in the Three Supports and Two Militaries]" (Chinese University Press, n.d.), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

<sup>249</sup> Cheng Zhongyuan, Wang Yuxiang, and Li Zhenghua, *Zhuanzhe Niandai- 1976-1981 de Zhongguo [Era of Change-China in 1976-1981]*, 449.

<sup>250</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *Paradoxes of Post-Mao Rural Reform: Initial Steps toward a New Chinese Countryside, 1976-1981* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 118.

Like Deng, the CIA also believed that Hua was seeking support from the military: “Faced with an emerging and unfriendly majority in both the party and the government, Hua turned to the military for support. The PLA had its own reservations about Deng’s reform policies.” Most interestingly, the CIA concluded that “In any case, we believe Hua’s turn to the PLA was the last straw insofar as Deng was concerned.”<sup>251</sup>

Why would Deng change his mind on the phrase? My best hypothesis is derived from a clue given by Ruan Ming. Ruan argues that Wei had gotten permission by Deng to use the expression but then inserted it into Hua’s speech. By having Hua make these comments, instead of them just appearing in the report associated with the meeting, it appeared as if Hua was trying to make inroads into the military by using leftist phraseology. For Deng, as usual the problem was not primarily ideological: it was about the practical implications for political power that ideological formulations had.\*

One question that remains to be answered is whether Hua actually intended to use the slogan to rally military support. Just like in the navy incident, we cannot flat out deny that there was either a misunderstanding or Deng simply “supersized” an opportunity. But we do have other evidence that Hua was trying to strengthen his position, and this must have concerned Deng. For example, when Hua returned from Japan in June 1980, a major celebration was put together in Nanjing. For his personal safety, six companies from the PLA were deployed to stand guard. In July, Hua took a trip to Dalian where he was also received with great fanfare. Both events showed Hua still commanded significant support at the local levels.<sup>252</sup>

Wei Guoqing’s support for more leftist-sounding rhetoric is not surprising given the state of moral crisis the military had found itself in. In one month during the spring of 1980, the Shenyang

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<sup>251</sup> The report also believed that Hua was seeking support from Li Desheng, the commander of the Shenyang Military Region. Directorate of Intelligence, “Leadership Politics in Post-Mao China: The Fall of Hua Guofeng,” August 1982, CIA Crest database, College Park.

\* In fact, Deng was the person who came up with the phrase in the first place, back in 1956.

<sup>252</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 386.

Military Region saw two murders for selfish personal reasons. One investigation into two companies showed that of 69 soldiers with peasant backgrounds from five provinces, only 17 of them were in support of contracting plots to individual households, a key element of the agricultural reforms. In July, the Shenyang Military Region conducted an investigation into the leadership of twelve infantry divisions, which showed that a significant number of officers did not “understand” the party line. *The Biography of Liao Hansheng* makes the remarkable admission that even “in the high ranks of the armies and military region, those who did not understand and doubted the line, guideline, and policies of the party were not in the minority.” Some soldiers were even writing documents opposing the line or breaking weapons. Deng was unhappy. In September or October, Deng gave a speech to heads of the major military regions in which he said: “there are many in the military who resist, complaints are numerous, it is necessary to do thought political work, so many people in the military not supporting is unacceptable.”<sup>253</sup>

Beyond the devastating repercussions that discussion of the history decision had on Hua’s prospects, the other most important political implication was the vociferous debate over the status of Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought. During the discussions among the 4,000 party members, Mao came under severe criticism, with some party members claiming that Mao was worse than Stalin and should be counted among the worst leaders in world history. As a result of this input, the next draft was much more negative on Mao. The new draft also emphasized the “serious mistakes” and “negative repercussions” of the military’s role in the Cultural Revolution before noting that it did have some positive effects. In Chinese political language, referring to a policy’s mistakes before its accomplishments is a severe criticism.

During these discussions, top ranking military officers split on the question of Mao. Figures like Liang Biye and Su Yu emphasized the importance of describing him in positive terms, while Chi Haotian explicitly pointed out that the evaluation of Mao would have an important effect on internal stability.

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<sup>253</sup> Liao Hansheng, *Liao Hansheng Huiyilu [Memoir of Liao Hansheng]*, 600–610.

Zhang Zhen, on the other hand, described Mao as a vengeful and suspicious figure. Zhang Aiping called for a more negative appraisal of Mao's responsibility for the Cultural Revolution.<sup>254</sup> Zhang shocked people by describing Mao as a man who had said and done a number of great things but was deficient in moral character for his constant leftist campaigns and dictatorial style.<sup>255</sup>

The newly released *Biography of Huang Kecheng* provides some interesting insights into this time period. In 1959, Huang, then chief of staff of the PLA, was purged along with Defense Minister Peng Dehuai. In November 1976, Huang Kecheng needed eye surgery, and Chen Yun wrote a letter on his behalf. Chen, praising Huang, wrote that "military cadres are relatively familiar with him."<sup>256</sup> Later, Huang became head of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, a civilian position, but remained an advisor to the CMC and enjoyed close relations with top military officials.

During the discussions on the party history decision among the 4,000 party officials, a number of high-ranking military officials went to visit Huang and complain about Mao. Some of them said: "Chairman Mao's mistakes are serious, other than some achievements in the democratic revolutionary era, he did not have any other achievements, now Mao Zedong Thought now longer has any value." One figure even said: "Even without Chairman Mao there would be a Red Army, when we started up the Red Army I did not know there was a Chairman Mao." Huang was concerned that even though Deng had spoken out on the Mao issue a number of times already, people were not listening.<sup>257</sup>

On November 27, Huang gave an important speech to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection in which he emphasized the importance of Mao to the revolution. In his speech, Huang reflected that it was natural for people who had suffered during the political campaigns to be angry. But

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<sup>254</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti De Jueyi De Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 135, 142, 167-168, 179-180.

<sup>255</sup> Fan Minruo, *Zhang Aiping Yu Liangdan Yixing [Zhang Aiping and the Strategic Weapons and Space Programs]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2011), 421.

<sup>256</sup> *Chen Yun Nianpu [Chronology of Chen Yun]*, 205.

<sup>257</sup> *Huang Kecheng Zhuan [Biography of Huang Kecheng]* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2012), 587.



he argued that such an attitude was “disadvantageous for our party and our nation.” As one of the first important officials to be purged in the Mao era, and as a famous revolutionary commander, for some these words carried special weight. Others wondered whether Huang had gone senile.<sup>258</sup>

Meanwhile, as discussed in the previous chapter, the official decision to remove Hua from the leadership was being made at a series of Politburo meetings. A December 5 circular included the humiliating phrase: “That he [Hua Guofeng] was too incompetent to manage the CMC chairmanship is something everyone knows [他对军委主席的不能胜任是大家知道的].” It also contained Deng’s comments asserting himself as the only option for CMC chairman: “As for chairmanship of the CMC, at the time there is no other appropriate choice, he [I] can take the position for a time period in order to facilitate the succession of relatively young comrades.” In order to “prepare the thinking of high ranking cadres in the party and military,” the contents of the circular were to be restricted to standing committee members at the province and army [军] level.<sup>259</sup>

The deliberations on Mao at the history discussions and the final move against Hua caused unhappiness within the military to reach white-hot new levels. In November, a temporary worker at a People’s Armed Forces Department in Hebei’s Jize County named Gao Huaiming stole a gun and went to an artillery regiment in the 66 Army near Tianjin to declare himself “a special emissary from the new Central Committee.” Gao said it was time to “establish a new People’s Republic of China.” Most troublesome were Gao’s claims that some in the party wanted to overthrow Hua and that the officers needed to declare support for him. The commissar of the regiment, Zhu Fuxiang, believed Gao and

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., Chapter 33.

<sup>259</sup> “Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhengzhiju Huiyi Tongbao [Central Committee Politburo Meeting Circular],” in *San Zhong Quanhui Yilai Zhongyao Wenxian Hui Bian [Collection of Important Documents Since the Third Plenum]*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), 787–89.

opened two meetings for regimental and battalion leaders to listen to his propaganda. Shockingly, all but one of the officers in the regiment and battalions did not express support for Hua.<sup>260</sup>

Deng was furious. After listening to a report of the event on January 17, Deng said: “The problem of the artillery regiment is a serious trend in the Beijing Military Region, and is also a serious trend in the entire military, it is imperative that it raises serious attention, it cannot be treated lightly.” Deng called for a special investigation to determine the reason this could happen. On the report on how the affair had been managed, Deng wrote “This is an extremely serious incident that has happened in the military, it is a blatant counter-revolutionary political incident, and it is a sparrow that should be dissected carefully.”<sup>261</sup> On March 4 during a discussion with leaders from the Beijing Military Region, Deng said: “This is not a problem with a single regiment, but is a problem with universal characteristics. The whole military has underappreciated this phenomenon.”<sup>262</sup>

Meanwhile, those opposed to Deng were creating rumors about his relationship with top military officials. During the deliberations on the historical decision, a rumor spread that during a meeting of the Politburo in the Great Hall of the People, General Xu Shiyou brought a gun to settle scores with those who criticized Mao. When the 8341 Unit arrived and asked Xu to put down his weapon, Xu allegedly shot one of the guards. The result was two deaths and one injury. This rumor became very widespread and it was difficult for a period of time to tell whether it was true or not. Ultimately, CMC Secretary Geng Biao\*

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<sup>260</sup> Jiang Siyi, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo Qishi Nian Shi: Zai “Wenhua Dageming” Zhong Shou Sunhai, Zai Gaige Kaifang Zhong Chuangzao Xin Jumian [70 Year History of the Communist Party’s Military Political Work: Suffering Damage During the “Cultural Revolution”, Creating a New Situation in the Reform and Opening Up]*, 6:462–63; Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997], 2004, 2:707–8; Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening]*, 393–94.

<sup>261</sup> Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997], 2004, 2:707–8.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 2:717–18.

\* Geng replaced Luo after his death in Germany. The extremely long delay before Geng was named as the replacement speaks to the intense political maneuverings over the military during this time period. Geng was a Ye ally.

asked Xu to fly on a civilian plane, instead of a special military plane, so word would spread that Xu was still alive.<sup>263</sup>

Deng started taking steps to ensure lower ranks in the military that he would not repudiate Mao. Wei Guoqing collected two sets of documents that were distributed in two editions of the GPD's internally circulated political work newsletter. These documents contained statements by Deng showing that he supported a prominent status for Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought and emphasizing the four cardinal principles.<sup>264</sup>

But even high-ranking officers were speaking out against the reforms. At one meeting, Zhang Aiping directly criticized Deng Xiaoping's argument that "some people should be allowed to get rich first." Zhang criticized Chen Yun for saying that cadres should become "younger, smarter, and more professional" without saying they should become "more revolutionary." He also complained about the economic reforms, making remarks like "when opening the window it is necessary to close the screen door and screen, it is necessary to oppose the style of opening that includes opening even the roof", "I support importing foreign capital and technology to develop our equipment but I oppose worshipping the west and allowing blind investment" and "I support emphasizing the economy in key points but oppose neglecting national defense construction."<sup>265</sup>

On January 19, 1981, Wei gave an important speech to a military-wide political work meeting. Wei's reference to studying how to avoid "political incidents" and "strengthen political work at the grassroots" hints strongly that the artillery regiment incident was on the mind of the participants. Wei, using leftist language, noted that difficulties associated with economic change in the localities was being

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<sup>263</sup> Fu Xuezheng, "Ji Luo Ruiqing, Xu Shiyou de Ji Jian Wangshi [Remembering a Few Past Events of Luo Ruiqing and Xu Shiyou," *Bainian Chao* [Hundred Year Tide], no. 2 (2005): 39.

<sup>264</sup> Liang Biye, *Wo Zai Renmin Jundui [Me in the People's Army]* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1997), 408. In fact, Deng's most common criticism of every draft of the history decision was that more emphasis needed to be placed on Mao's status and contributions.

<sup>265</sup> Fan Minruo, *Zhang Aiping Yu Liangdan Yixing [Zhang Aiping and the Strategic Weapons and Space Programs]*, 421-22.

reflected in the thinking of the units: “class struggle and incorrect thinking in society influences the military, and the military itself also has some unstable factors.” Wei recognized that some in the military “were even violating the cardinal principles in language and action. Some have shaken their belief in socialism, Marxism, and Mao Zedong Thought; some have connected with illegal publications and illegal organizations in society, supporting and participating in these activities; some openly oppose and attack the leadership at the party center and the party’s current policies.”

Wei toed the line and recognized that the main priority in terms of education was to liberate officers and soldiers from from the confines of leftism, which Wei described as the “primary block in terms of thinking [主要思想障碍].” Yet he not so subtly hinted at the effects that the reforms were having on the military: “Currently, in the ranks some people have decadent thinking, their spirit is hollow, they have lost the anchor of spiritual civilization. Some worship the west and seek out the lifestyle of bourgeois corruption, and they have no respect for themselves or nation; some like the new and hate the old, and are not moral in terms of marriage and love; some reach for higher position, and when they do not reach their goal they complain, spreading rumors, and they attack their leaders and comrades; some use immoral methods to seek out their interests, acting corruptly and stealing, speculate, and so on... In recent years, political incidents among and ranks and all types of bad tendencies have increased, and the reasons are multi-faceted, it is necessary to use all kinds of methods to solve these problems, and the most fundamental task is to educate officers and soldiers and thereby create a spiritual civilization.”

Wei pointed out that crimes of all sorts were multiplying: murder, robberies, damaging of weapons, speculation, the organization of counter-revolutionary organizations, treason, liaising with the enemy, setting fires, explosions, drug-use, and stealing classified information. Wei called for an end to the

military participating in strikes, class walkouts, or marching, and forbid military figures from joining illegal groups or publications or interacting with foreigners without permission.<sup>266</sup>

This PLA political work conference also discussed the movie *Sunshine and Man*. Originally a novel written by Bai Hua called *Unrequited Love*, the film had been completed in 1980. On May 21, 1980, members of the secretariat had watched the movie and suggested that it not be published unless it was revised. But at a showing to the association of Chinese movie directors in January 1981 it was received to great acclaim. Most workers at the party school disliked it, but some supported it. All the participants at the PLA meeting, however, hated the movie and strongly criticizing it for its deeply pessimistic portrayal of China and the Communist Party.<sup>267</sup> In February, one party cadre doing cultural work was told that “cultural thought among the units is more chaotic than in the civilian organs, they simply are not taking study of the 3rd plenum seriously... they say that “*Sunshine and Man* is a poisonous weed, they are preparing to criticize it.”<sup>268</sup>

Around the same time, another cadre involved in cultural work wrote a letter to Zhou Yang, an important figure in the government apparatus managing culture. The letter said that Wei Guoqing and Hua Nan had made the following comments:

Now civilians are using *Tonight the Stars are Bright* [今夜星光灿烂] to repeatedly encircle the GPD, to demonize the GDP. Now the situation is terrible, people are telling the Japanese about the situation, they are calling us out in front of foreigners, they say we want to remove Bai Hua, execute *Sunshine and Man*.

The letter also told Zhou that a man from the PLA movie production company relayed the following message from the GPD to a group writing an article attacking Bai Hua:

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<sup>266</sup> Wei Guoqing, “Guanche Zhongyang Gongzuo Huiyi Jingshen, Jiaqiang Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo [Execute the Spirit of the Central Work Meeting, Strengthen Military Political Work],” in *San Zhong Quanhui Yilai Zhongyao Wenxian Hui Bian* [Collection of Important Documents Since the Third Plenum], vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982).

<sup>267</sup> Chen Dengke, “Cheng Dengke Wenji [Collected Works of Chen Dengke],” vol. 8 (Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe, 2003), 527.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

Now there are people in extremely powerful positions that are still raising ‘criticize the left,’ ‘criticize feudalism,’ we must unequivocally struggle against this. We must prepare for the civilians to counter-attack, we must prepare for a war of attrition [要准备地方上反击，要准备持久地斗争].<sup>269</sup>

The “people in extremely powerful positions” almost certainly refers to Hu Yaobang, which makes this an astounding attack from military officers on a high-ranking civilian.

The military’s wading into a debate over a cultural production was a reaction to broader trends that threatened the military’s prestige. A play named *What if I Were Real* provided a fictional account of a true story of a professional con artist in Liaoning province who pretended to be the son of a general. Simply by dropping his supposed father’s name, this man was treated like a VIP until he was ultimately caught.<sup>270</sup> Works like this were upsetting military conservatives who saw the effect the moral vacuum was having on military stability.

A loosening of political and literary freedoms was dangerous in an environment in which the military was widely disliked. Richard Baum used Foreign Information Broadcast Service materials to make the following summary of the PLA’s image during this time period:

Specific criticisms- sometimes naming the units and individuals were involved- were directed at military commanders who had engaged in such activities as appropriating lavish housing for themselves and their families; illegally occupying public facilities, including university campuses; freely spending public funds on private automobiles and entertainment; demanding reduced prices on ‘special orders’ from factories; bending the law for the benefit of relatives and friends; and otherwise harming the army’s work style, morale, and confidence. In these and numerous other contemporaneous examples, the PLA officer corps was portrayed more as the privileged master of society than its humble servant.<sup>271</sup>

Immediately after the January military-wide political work meeting, steps were taken to improve discipline and better explain the 3rd plenum. Commanders at the regiment level and above started to participate in training rotations on the correct nature of the party’s line.<sup>272</sup> Chi Haotian made a speech on March 5 at a general staff political work meeting in which he warned: “before the party’s decision has

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<sup>269</sup> Xu Qingquan, *Fengyu Song Chungui: Xin Shiqi Wentan Sixiang Jiefang Yundong Jishi [The Winds and Rain Return to Spring: Record of the Cultural Thought and Liberation Movement in the New Era]* (Kaifeng: Henan Daxue chubanshe, 2005), 342.

<sup>270</sup> Baum, *Burying Mao*, 125.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 124–25.

<sup>272</sup> Liang Biye, *Wo Zai Renmin Jundui [Me in the People’s Army]*, 409.

changed it is necessary to diligently execute the party line, it is intolerable to spread lack of trust, dissatisfaction, and opposition in the party's line, guideline, and policies among the masses. It is necessary to engage in diligent struggle against those who openly oppose or complain in private against the party's line, guideline, and policies."<sup>273</sup>

Continuing events made it increasingly clear that not all groups had conservative sensibilities like the military. On February 28, *People's Daily* finally published Huang Kecheng's speech from the previous fall but removed the section on evaluating Mao. The reason given was that the matter was still being discussed and it was inappropriate to give an opinion before the party center had made a decision. Upset about the decision, Huang had his secretary bring his speech to Hua Nan in March. The secretary explained to Hua that parts two and three had been published, but that the first part, the one about Mao, had not. Huang wanted to know whether the military newspaper could print the speech in its entirety. Wei Guoqing and Liang Biye agreed to publish the speech, but Huang told Hua to first get Deng's permission.

In March, *People's Daily* published an article that said the 3rd plenum had determined that the main focus should be on opposing leftism (as opposed to rightism).<sup>274</sup> The article caused a powerful reaction in the military, with many units pointing out that the spirit of the article was not in line with the center. On March 20, Wei Guoqing wrote a letter to Deng that acknowledged the most important task was to resist leftist opposition to the 3rd plenum, but also emphasized the importance of fighting "rightist" tendencies.<sup>275</sup> In response, Deng met with Wei and Hua Nan on March 27.

This meeting was important and further shows Deng's concern with leftism in the military. In this meeting, Deng expressed support for the military conservatives who emphasized both resisting the right and the left and agreed with the need to maintain Mao's prestige:

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<sup>273</sup> Chi Haotian, "Yong Dang de Luxian Fangzhen Zhengce Tongyi Sixiang Tongyi Xingdong [Use the Party's Line, Guideline, and Policy to Unite Thinking and Unite Action]," in *Chi Haotian Junshi Wenxuan [Collected Works of Chi Haotian's Military Writings]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), 34–35.

<sup>274</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Hu Zhao Xin Zheng Qishilu [The Beginnings of Reform Under Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang]*, n.d., 159.

<sup>275</sup> Liang Biye, *Wo Zai Renmin Jundui [Me in the People's Army]*, 409–10.

Stress should be put on rectifying any 'Left' tendency in our guiding ideology, but that is not enough. We must at the same time correct the Right tendency. Comrade Huang Kecheng said that we should oppose 'Left' ideology wherever it exists and also oppose Right ideology. I agree... *Jiefangjun Bao (Liberation Army Daily)* is run quite well, and I hope the comrades concerned will continue their efforts... Comrade Mao Zedong should not be held solely responsible for everything; we ourselves should share the responsibility...

Deng also expressed opposition to holding the military accountable to possible crimes committed during the Cultural Revolution:

We must say two things. First, that at the time it was correct for the army to go to the civilian units and deal with the situations there, which were otherwise uncontrollable. So the 'three supports and the two military's' did prove useful. But second, they also did great harm to the army, for in their wake they brought many bad things that greatly detracted from the army's prestige. Among other things, they were responsible for much of the factionalism and some 'Left' notions and practices.<sup>276</sup>

Deng also explicitly stated:

...the leftist influence in the military cannot be ignored. Some officers in their thirties and forties were influenced by 'leftism,' those who look at problems from the 'leftist' perspective are relatively numerous. Some officers, including old officers in the military, do not understand the policies since the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum, some believe they are capitalist, this is primarily from 'leftist' influence.<sup>277</sup>

On April 20, *People's Liberation Army Daily* published an extremely leftist-sounding editorial criticizing *Bitter Love*. The long and prominently placed editorial accused the piece of opposing the party and socialism and labeled it a result of "bourgeois liberalization." The article was so strident in its language that many people thought that Cultural Revolution style criticisms were going to reappear, causing terror among some in the intellectual community. On April 30 Deng had the entire Politburo and secretariat read a GPD report on criticizing the book and movie.<sup>278</sup> On May 12, Deng had the second part of this report read by the Politburo and secretariat.<sup>279</sup> The PLA was enraged that someone had leaked the impending attack to Japanese reporters, believing that this was an attempt to use foreign opinion to shape

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<sup>276</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "On Opposing Wrong Ideological Tendencies," in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984).

<sup>277</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "Guanyu Fandui Cuowu Sixiang Qingxiang Wenti. Deng Xiaoping. [With Regards to Opposing Incorrect Thought Tendencies. Deng Xiaoping]," March 27, 1981.

<sup>278</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 2:736.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:740.



the situation. Even worse, the Japanese article said the attack on *Unrequited Love* was an attempt by the military to block Hu Yaobang from becoming party chairman.<sup>280</sup>

After *People's Liberation Army Daily* published their article, *People's Daily* not only refused to publish the article, but instead published a speech by Zhou Yang that had a completely different tone the next day. It was clear that the two newspapers had taken completely different positions.<sup>281</sup> Just like earlier when it tried to refuse publishing Huang Kecheng's speech in full, *People's Daily* was resisting pressure from the military to adopt more conservative positions.

Also at the March 27 meeting, Deng gave permission for Huang Kecheng's pro-Mao speech to be published, which finally happened on April 10 in *People's Liberation Army Daily*. *People's Daily* published the speech in its entirety the following day. According to Hua Nan: "Old Huang's speech had an extremely important effect on everyone's correct appraisal of Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought and on unifying party thinking, and it also had a guiding effect on the smooth roll-out of the [historical decision], it had a very powerful guiding force and deep historical significance."<sup>282</sup> Huang's words were particularly well-received by grassroots cadres and among workers and peasants.<sup>283</sup>

Deng's movement to the left is striking given that the fourth draft of the document party history, the one which was shaped by the opinions of 4,000 party members and therefore perhaps the most "democratic," was more critical of both Mao and the military than the drafts before or after it. Deng was annoyed by the outcome of that draft, and the next one, released in February 1981, would be more positive on Mao. Deng, in essence, was imposing a more conservative, pro-military party history document than the party really wanted.

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<sup>280</sup> Xu Qingquan, *Fengyu Song Chungui: Xin Shiqi Wentan Sixiang Jiefang Yundong Jishi* [The Winds and Rain Return to Spring: Record of the Cultural Thought and Liberation Movement in the New Era], 354, 360.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>282</sup> *Huang Kecheng Zhuan* [Biography of Huang Kecheng], Chapter 33.

<sup>283</sup> Xiao Donglian, *Lishi de Zhuanzhe- Cong Boluan Fanzheng Dao Gaige Kaifang* [Historical Change- From Setting Things Right to the Reform and Opening], 116.

In the next draft the military was also portrayed in a more positive light. The positive effects of its role in the Cultural Revolution were emphasized before noting that “unavoidably numerous mistakes were produced.”<sup>284</sup> Deng’s formulation on the military made the military happy: when discussing a draft of the history decision finished on March 31, Generals Li Desheng and Wei Guoqing expressed support for Deng’s evaluation of the PLA’s role in the Cultural Revolution.<sup>285</sup>

Deng’s decision to defend the military from accusations was not broadly popular. As discussed above, Deng himself said privately on one occasion that he blamed the military’s role in running local civilian affairs for the dissatisfaction among many cadres with his reforms, and, in July 1980, the secretariat had to intervene to support the seventy-plus military officers who were not allowed to return to the ranks because they were under investigation. Other pieces of evidence include the more negative appraisal of the military in the most “democratic” version of the history draft and the broad sense of dissatisfaction with the abuse of military privileges in general. A speech by Hu Yaobang on October 15, 1980, also hints at broader antipathy towards the military:

For example, with regards to the case of comrades in the military supporting the left, some people say that central organs and some party organizations and committees want to investigate those who supported the left, which puts them in a difficult position. Some people say that people in the military believe that the discussions of their role in supporting the left are unfair... In the past we determined that those comrades who already returned to the military would not be touchable by the local governments, the military itself would investigate.<sup>286</sup>

This new draft also criticized Hua Guofeng by name for the first time.<sup>287</sup> Deng was growing impatient. On March 9, while discussing this draft with Deng Liqun, Deng complained: “now people scold me mostly for two things, the first is my treatment of the old man [Mao], and the second is my

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<sup>284</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>286</sup> Hu Yaobang, “Guanyu Sixiang Zhengzhi Gongzuo de Ruogan Wenti [Regarding a Few Problems on Thought and Political Work]” (Service Center for Chinese Publications, October 15, 1980), 29, Series 26, Volume 7.

<sup>287</sup> (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti De Jueyi De Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 57, 63-65, 129-130.

treatment of Hua, it is best that the 6th plenum be held in April, if April is impossible, then it should not be delayed too long.”<sup>288</sup>

Beyond catering to the military’s affinity for leftist principles and ensuring that the history decision went light on Mao and the military, Deng also organized a major campaign-level military exercise in the Beijing Military Region to showcase his military experience. In late February, the CMC office listened to a report by the Beijing Military Region on plans to execute a military exercise, which had been called for by the general staff to better understand how to execute principles discussed at an earlier meeting on military doctrine. Some generals at the CMC Office meeting were concerned that having an exercise of this size would have a negative influence “internationally,” that it would cost too much money, and because they did not feel comfortable commanding such a huge number of troops. Because of these disagreements, three different plans were drawn up: large, medium, and small.<sup>289</sup>

In a meeting with Yang Dezhi and Zhang Zhen on March 10, Deng said that he wanted this exercise to be the biggest in many years and large-scale enough to improve morale in the military and the military’s image in society. Deng also made clear that he wanted to inspect the troops as part of the exercise.<sup>290</sup> Deng did not wait for Zhang Zhen, who was in charge of preparations, to ask him about which of the three plans he supported: Deng had summoned Zhang to his presence even before he had time to request Deng’s opinion. Of the three plans, Deng selected the largest, which included thirteen divisions, twelve regiments, and five battalions, totaling 105,000 soldiers, plus 850 tanks, 386 armored personnel vehicles, 1,764 artillery cannons, and 178 airplanes. Amusingly, Deng emphasized that this was different from a naval exercise - a lame excuse for his earlier torpedoing of Hua’s plans in the late spring of 1978 and perhaps responding to concerns among the ranks that they would get in trouble like Su.<sup>291</sup> Deng emphasized that no military exercise had ever taken place on this scale and money should not be a

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<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>289</sup> Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Huiyilu [Memoir of Zhang Zhen]*, 2:203–4.

<sup>290</sup> Deng Xiaoping *Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 2:719–20.

<sup>291</sup> Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Huiyilu [Memoir of Zhang Zhen]*, 2:205.

primary consideration: “this sum must be spent, this must be done well, morale must be improved and military training must be serious.”<sup>292</sup>

The stage was set for Hua’s official removal from the party and CMC chairmanships. On June 22 at a preparatory meeting for the plenum, Deng justified criticizing Hua in the special document on party history by emphasizing that leftist forces were rallying behind Hua, whether Hua had any such intentions to lead them or not. Deng said: “If he is not named, then there is no reason to change comrade Hua Guofeng’s work... Everyone knows that the remains of the ‘Gang of Four’ and some people with ulterior motives, whose flag are they waving [sic]? In the past it was the flag of the ‘Gang of Four,’ whose flag are they waving now? It is the flag of Hua Guofeng, they defend Hua Guofeng... Comrade Hua Guofeng is not responsible for these matters, he himself is not engaged in any activities. But this societal trend deserves attention. Therefore, by writing Comrade Hua Guofeng’s name in this ‘decision’ pointing out his mistakes, this is beneficial for the entire party, for the people, there is an advantage, there is also a huge advantage for Comrade Hua Guofeng himself.”<sup>293</sup>

On June 23, Deng was even clearer about the military factor in a meeting with top party officials. Deng said (again about directly criticizing Hua in the historical decision): “Logically now according to the Politburo situation, it is also necessary. The remnants of the ‘Gang of Four’ and dissidents, whose flag do they wave? The two incidents in the 66 Artillery regiment and [the navy] in Dalian, in both cases the name of another center was used to send people to start activities. And this center is Hua Guofeng’s center... Of course, there is another center, we count as another center.” Wang Renzhong responded: “Reactionary posters in Xinjiang say ‘return Hua Guofeng to us.’” Deng continued: “It’s not only officers in the regiment, there are commanders at the army level, they truly believe there is such a center. [General] Qin Jiwei, is this not correct? Why did they not dare to immediately stop this?... if the center is

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 2:201–13.

<sup>293</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Deng Xiaoping Zai Shiyi Jie Liu Zhong Quanhui Yubei Hui Qijian de Jianghua [Deng Xiaoping’s Speech at a Preparatory Meeting for the Sixth Plenum of the 11th Party Congress]” (Chinese University Press, 2002), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

not united, if matters are dealt with poorly, we will burn ourselves. There are some slogans, including those that want to overthrow me, also [slogans like] the ‘new Gang of Four [Deng, Zhao Ziyang, Hu Yaobang, and Chen Yun],’ these people all support Hua Guofeng.” General Qin Jiwei, head of the Beijing Military Region then said: “The officers [at the very top] of the 66<sup>th</sup> Army are also guilty, he [the commander] knew that those words were false, but he did not dare deny it, why? He believed it was like when the Gang of Four was captured, that you were all taken, that’s why he believed it. [66 军炮团那个事，并不是完全没有是非，他也知道那些话是不对的，但是他就不敢反驳，为什么呢？他以为跟捉四人帮一样，把你们捉起来了，所以他才相信].”<sup>294</sup>

Further evidence can be provided that the military factor was important in the decision to fully remove Hua and sully his name. On June 30, Marshal Nie Rongzhen wrote a letter to Deng, Hu Yaobang, and Chen Yun. Nie blamed the recent public security crises throughout the country on Hua not being strong enough in his purge of the Gang of Four remnants. Nie wrote: “These people while opposing the current center and leading comrades also all bring out [use] comrade Hua Guofeng, this is a unique point of the current struggle.” Therefore, it was necessary to “clarify the muddled thinking towards Hua Guofeng.”<sup>295</sup> This shows that even the very top of the military hierarchy was worried about the implications that any perception of a difference between Deng and Hua would have on stability at lower

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<sup>294</sup> Two slightly different versions of this conversation are available in the Cultural Revolution Database. One is meant for distribution, the other is not. I have used the version not for distribution, but my understanding of some statements is shaped by the clearer distributed version. “Zhongyang Changwei Zai Liu Zhong Quanhui Yubei Hui Ge Xiaozu Zhaoji Ren Pengtou Hui Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress],” June 22, 1981; “Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhuanfa de Zhongyang Changwei Zai Shiyi Jie Liu Zhong Quanhui Qijian Zhaokai Gezu Zhaojiren Huiyi Shang de Jianghua [Speeches of the Members of the Standing Committee at the Meeting of Group Conveners During the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Party Congress Distributed by the Party Center],” n.d.

<sup>295</sup> Nie Rongzhen, “Nie Rongzhen Gei Deng Xiaoping Hu Yaobang Chen Yun de Xin [A Letter from Nie Rongzhen to Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang, and Chen Yun]” (Chinese University Press, June 30, 1980), Chinese Cultural Revolution Database CD-ROM.

levels, especially in a situation as tense as that following the Cultural Revolution.<sup>296</sup> Deng had this speech distributed to every participant in an ongoing work conference.<sup>297</sup>

Ji Dengkui's comments to his son also show the importance of the military factor, especially the incident in late 1980, in how Hua was treated. Ji told his son: "If some [of your subordinates in the military] get a little excited and do things sloppy, soldiers carry weapons, if God forbid there is some trouble, you will be the one held responsible. Hua Guofeng simply did not understand the seriousness of this issue, later there was a '3<sup>rd</sup> Artillery Regiment Incident,' when things like that blow up, it will only make your punishment worse."<sup>298</sup>

On July 7 and 8, Deng Liqun gave a speech to officers in Beijing at the division level in which he explained the outcome of the plenum. Deng emphasized that throughout the writing of the history decision Deng Xiaoping stressed that honoring Mao's status was the most important element to the whole process. Deng Liqun also again made the case that the remnants of the Gang of Four and political dissidents were trying to rally around Hua, even though Hua was not personally involved. Although this problem was mostly solved among high-ranking cadres, at the middle and lower ranks this problem had yet to be solved in a satisfactory fashion. Deng referred to Chen Yun's interpretation of the situation, which is that people thought Hua had made contributions, was humble, and that if he did not have enough experience the old comrades could help him, leaving no reason for him to resign. To refute this viewpoint, Deng spent a great deal of time listening to all of Hua's supposed crimes, which included blocking Deng

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<sup>296</sup> However, Huang Kecheng, Han Xianchu, and Xu Xiangqian opposed criticizing Hua by name when discussing the historical decision draft of March 31. (Xerox Copy), *Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi de Qicao Guocheng [Regarding the Writing Process of the Decision on History Since the Founding of the Party]*, 1981, 116.

<sup>297</sup> Nie's letter and Deng's distribution of the letter apparently happened after the personnel changes were executed, but they do show Nie's position and did impute military approval to the decision. *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2004, 2:753.

<sup>298</sup> Ji Pomin, "Ting Fuqin Ji Dengkui Tan Wangshi [Listening to My Father Ji Dengkui Talk about the Past]," November 6, 2003.

Xiaoping's return to work, the "two whatevers," creating his own personality cult, economic mistakes, and so on.<sup>299</sup>

Whether or not these officers accepted all of Deng Liqun's arguments, Hua Guofeng was finished. In September, the giant military exercise and parade Deng Xiaoping had been planning was ready. Deng attended all five days of the exercise, which lasted from September 14-19. During the exercises, Deng wore his military uniform - a rare occurrence. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, Deng inspected the troops in a parade and gave a major speech. Zhang Zhen writes of the occasion: "In late June, the party center held the 6th plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, and Comrade Xiaoping became chairman of the CMC. This was the desire of the party and the military, it was the hope of all, so everyone was very happy. Comrade Xiaoping's attendance of the exercise and inspection of the troops as chairman of the CMC I felt was extremely significant [意义非同寻常], so it was necessary to do all aspects of preparation well."<sup>300</sup> Indeed, Deng's wearing of a military uniform at one of the largest military exercises in the PRC's history a short few months after replacing Hua as chairman of the CMC sent an unmistakable message.

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

Had Chinese elite politics been more clearly defined by robust institutionalization, power dynamics would not nearly have been so deeply affected by the situation in the military, nor would it have been possible for Deng to have been so successful at using the military to improve his own political position. However, the evidence provided in the previously chapter indicated that the political dynamics of the time did not revolve entirely around the armed forces. Moreover, it is absolutely clear that this was not a case of a purely military figure marching into a Politburo meeting to simply arrest the head of the party. This was not a case of naked aggression by the power ministries against the party leadership.

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<sup>299</sup> Deng Liqun, "'Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Dang de Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi' Qicao Guocheng He Zhuyao Neirong de Jieshao [Introduction to the Writing Process and Main Content of the 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China']," July 7, 1981, Document available in Harvard Fung Library.

<sup>300</sup> Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Huiyilu [Memoir of Zhang Zhen]*.

The story of the military in Hua Guofeng's ultimate defeat is much more subtle. Deng did not command the military to physically isolate Hua or even to help him to maneuver during a moment of intense politics crisis. Instead, he took steps that made his personal authority in the PLA obvious and used the PLA to direct political discussions in directions that benefited him politically. Deng did not need to execute a coup for others in the party, especially Hua, to appreciate that he controlled the most powerful coercive organization in politics.

Had Deng wanted to simply arrest Hua, he probably could have persuaded the military to do so. But as predicted in the theory chapter, leaders have no reason to violate rules any more obviously than is necessary. Deng's decision to only very slowly remove Hua's supporters (Wang Dongxing, Chen Xilian, and Ji Dengkui were not removed until February 1980) and Hua himself were a result of his fear that moving too quickly would damage the party.

## **Conclusion**

Although Deng Xiaoping did not use the military to execute a traditional *coup d'etat*, its importance during this time period is unmistakable. Concerns over who controlled the military inspired Deng to make his first move against Hua Guofeng by supporting the "practice" debate, and the danger of disaffected leftists within the military was an important reason for why Hua had to be removed from the top leadership entirely. Deng showed his dominance over the military by introducing wrenching reforms and leading the PLA to war against Vietnam - acts that had important political significance. Deng's use of "practice" to weaken Hua and Wang was orchestrated inside the military structures. To sum up, then, Deng's decisions to weaken Hua politically were inextricably tied to concern about the latter's influence over the military, and Deng went to great efforts to show that the military listened only to him.

At the conclusion of the Hua era, Deng chose not to assume the top formal positions in the party. He did not even rank first on the PSC. Yet he did decide to accept the position of chairman of the CMC. This chapter helps explain why: Deng's behavior during the Hua era clearly demonstrated the extent to



which he understood political power to flow out of the barrel of a gun. In the words of a former *People's*

*Daily* editor:

Deng Xiaoping inherited the key of Mao Zedong's control over power: to closely guard control over the military, to definitely hold the position of CMC chairman... Deng Xiaoping could let Hu Yaobang or Zhao Ziyang serve as general secretary, but Deng closely guarded control over the position of CMC chairman, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang in actuality were only 'big secretaries,' they could not move a single unit. Thereby, Deng Xiaoping using his position as CMC chairman as shield [后盾] could use a group of cohesive elders raised by Mao Zedong, a few elders could have a meeting and Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang would be fired.<sup>301</sup>

This chapter, then, serves as a prequel for the tragedy discussed in the next two chapters: the June 4 incident on Tiananmen Square. By 1981, Deng had already laid the political framework that made such an event possible: an under-institutionalized system that allowed for the manipulation and breaking of rules and personal control over the specialists in violence.

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<sup>301</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Hu Zhao Xin Zheng Qishilu [The Beginnings of Reform Under Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang]* (Hong Kong: New Century Media & Consulting Co. Ltd., n.d.), 140.

## Chapter 8: Tiananmen Square (First Two Hypotheses)

The first time I saw [former secretary general of the Chinese Communist Party Zhao Ziyang] I asked him a question... was June 4 a coup? He said: "I cannot say that it was." When he became very sick and Zong Fengming went to see him at the hospital, he told Zong Fengming: Yao Jianfu asked me whether June 4 was a coup, and my answer was "I cannot say that it was." Now my sickness is more serious, go tell Yao Jianfu he can go investigate this question. In other words, in his heart he thought my question was right, who really was plotting behind the scenes?

—Yao Jianfu, intellectual<sup>1</sup>

When managing "June 4," we should look it squarely in the face, research it, and not fear it.

—Liu Yazhou, commissar of the National Defense University<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction: Not Just a Massacre

In early June 1989, the People's Liberation Army violently ended protests centered in Tiananmen Square. A full account of these events will require years of disentangling the specific questions that need answering, collecting new evidence and carefully evaluating it to address those questions, and then building on those answers to draw broader conclusions about what kind of politics makes it possible for such tragedies to occur. This is necessarily an iterative and collaborative project that is periodically updated when documents or interviews become available or new questions are raised. A slew of critical memoirs, documents, interviews, and reflections have made it possible to once again return to 1989.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> "Jiemi Shike: Zhao Ziyang Zuihou de Suiyue [Moment of Declassification: The Last Years of Zhao Ziyang]," *Voice of America*, July 2, 2012, <http://www.voachinese.com/content/zhao-ziyang-20120701/1352483.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Liu Yazhou, "Chutan 'Liusi' [An Initial Discussion of 'June 4'] August 1989," Series 27, Volume 24 (Service Center for Chinese Publications, 2004), 75.

<sup>3</sup> Most subsequent treatments of Tiananmen rely heavily on the *Tiananmen Papers*, a collection of allegedly authentic documents related to June 4. Liang Zhang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, Paperback edition (New York: Public Affairs, 2002). Scholars such as Alfred Chan have pointed to the problematic nature of these documents, emphasizing that most information is available in more trustworthy sources and that the crucial minutes of meetings of high-ranking leaders are constructions based on other, possibly questionable evidence. Chan already noticed errors in those accounts, and the new evidence presented here contain more challenges to their authenticity. In this chapter the *Tiananmen Papers* are used very sparingly, and only then as a hypothesis for what happened or as circumstantial evidence. Liang Zhang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, Paper back edition (New York: Public Affairs, 2002); Ezra F Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); Andrew J. Nathan, "The Tiananmen Papers: An Editor's Reflections," *The China Quarterly*, no. 167 (September 1, 2001): 724–37; Peter R. Moody, "Tiananmen: The Papers and the Story," *The Review of Politics* 64, no. 1 (December 2002): 149–165; Richard Baum, "Tiananmen: The Inside Story?," *The China Journal*, no. 46 (July, 2001): 119–34; Lowell Dittmer, "The Tiananmen Papers, Compiled by Zhang Liang, Edited by

material allows us to both reject certain hypotheses about what happened and support others with much more persuasive evidence.

Dingxin Zhao's book remains the best theoretical investigation to date of the Tiananmen Square Incident in the spring of 1989.<sup>4</sup> His theoretical conclusions have strong similarities to the economic model. Dingxin Zhao argued that the decision to use force was based on a consensus within the elite. According to Zhao, "it was almost impossible for them, 'reformers' and 'hardliners' alike, to give up the power for which millions of their revolutionary comrades had died. Thus, military repression became their only choice." Only one man, the general secretary, wanted peace: "the conflicts were less between two factions than almost exclusively between Zhao Ziyang and the rest of the top elites. Therefore, Zhao was easily defeated."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the massacre occurred because the party as a whole wanted it.

If Dingxin Zhao and the economic model are accurate, then we should see the following evidence in the historical record. First, violence was used because that is what a consensus in the elite wanted. Second, that decision was based on the decision of a clearly defined, enfranchised group of elites conducting deliberations according to established rules. Third, special attention does not need to be paid to the military, as implementation of the final decision to use violence was the outcome of a single legitimate order.

Although we cannot yet answer all the mysteries of Tiananmen, evidence unavailable to Dingxin Zhao in 2001 now shows that June 4 was not just a massacre: it was also the result of an intense struggle within the regime itself. The economic model cannot explain the bloody outcome that occurred on the streets on Beijing. Instead, we see clear support for the authority model. First, the party and Chinese state

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Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, with an Afterword by Orville Schell (New York: Public Affairs, 2001)., " *The China Quarterly* 166 (June 2001): 476–483; Alfred L. Chan and Andrew J. Nathan, "The Tiananmen Papers Revisited," *The China Quarterly*, no. 177 (March 1, 2004): 190–214; Alfred Chan, "Fabricated Secrets and Phantom Documents: the 'Tiananmen Papers' and 'China's Leadership Files,' A Rejoinder," June 19, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 7.

legislature opposed the use of violence against the students. The party elders as a group were ambivalent, and the military hierarchy strongly resisted the use of force. Therefore, policy preferences do *not* explain the outcome, as hypothesis 1a would predict. Instead we see the greater importance of the sociological factors in hypothesis 1b. To justify Zhao's marginalization, he was framed with false accusations about his attitude towards the protest. *Kompromat*, in other words, was present at Tiananmen as well.

Understanding why a violent solution ultimately happened requires special attention to the nature of Deng Xiaoping's authority and will therefore be discussed in a special section. Deng's informal status and prestige was clearly important, which suggests the significance of hypothesis 1b. Deng also had significant formal authority because of a special decision made in 1987, but the extent of that authority was extremely ambiguous for multiple reasons. The ambiguity of that authority, especially when considered in relation to the PSC, Politburo, Central Committee, or National People's Congress, created a situation in which the interpretation of ambiguous rules was extremely important (hypothesis 2b). Accusations that Zhao attempted to split with Deng by acknowledging publicly the 1987 decision on Deng's status in a meeting with Gorbachev must be understood as *kompromat*. Instead, that incident is best understood as the result of difficulties in managing the ambiguity of Deng's formal position.

Finally, the violent outcome was only possible because the most important bureaucratic decision-making bodies within the party and state were marginalized. If institutions were working more closely to how they were designed to operate, June 4 would not have happened. As will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, Deng's personal control over the military allowed him to direct events despite a lack of support from within the party.

The account below not only challenges the theoretical conclusions of Dingxin Zhao's book, but also brings to attention several crucial facts not present in the latest most empirical treatment of the event by Ezra Vogel.<sup>6</sup> Vogel fails to bring attention to or adequately emphasize a Politburo Standing Committee

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<sup>6</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*.

(PSC) meeting on May 8 and Politburo meeting on May 10 that generally supported Zhao's more peaceful tactics; serious doubts about a the use of violence even among the elders; major opposition to violence among the top leadership of the National People's Congress; the ambiguity of the crucial May 17 meeting; the extent of opposition within the military<sup>7</sup>; the false nature of the accusations against Zhao used to justify his political marginalization; the greater culpability for the deteriorating situation on men other than Zhao; the narrowness of the decision-making circle and illegality of those decisions after martial law was declared; the ambiguity of Deng's formal authority; and the importance of Deng's personal relationship with the military.<sup>8</sup>

The sources introduced in these chapters including the following: primary documents from the Service Center for Chinese Publications; memoirs written by participants; secondary source material written by professional historians and journalists based on interviews with participants; CIA and National Security Council documents; interviews conducted by the *New York Times* for an article on Tiananmen Square; press reports; and official Chinese publications from the mainland. No unsubstantiated publications from Hong Kong are used. The *Tiananmen Papers* are only used to raise possible hypotheses.

### **Brief Chronology**

Hu Yaobang, who had been removed from his position as head of the party in 1987, died on April 15, 1989. His death inspired student protests in the heart of Beijing. Hu's replacement, Zhao Ziyang, supported a moderate reaction to the students. However, while Zhao was on a trip to North Korea the *People's Daily* published an editorial on April 26 that condemned the students in exceptionally strong

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<sup>7</sup> Vogel does mention a letter written by top generals who opposed violence but only references the unreliable *Tiananmen Papers*, and although he acknowledges General Xu Qinxian's refusal to follow orders, he provides no footnote at all.

<sup>8</sup> Suettinger does pay more attention to the support for dialogue within the Politburo, unhappiness within the military, and the fabricated nature of the charges against Zhao. However, he relies primarily on the problematic *Tiananmen Papers* and media reports. Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of US-China Relations 1989-2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

language. The students were both incensed and frightened, as the editorial suggested that if they stopped protesting they might be held accountable for their actions later. Even before Zhao returned from North Korea, the leadership began softening its position. When Zhao returned, he slowly tried to moderate the government's position even further. On May 3 and 4, he gave speeches in which he made conciliatory gestures to the students. On May 8 and 10, the Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo, respectively, supported Zhao's tactic of resolving the crisis with peaceful means.

However, on May 17 at a meeting at Deng's house a decision was made to introduce martial law. Because of Zhao's opposition, he was subsequently sidelined from all future decisions. More troops were brought to the capital, but they were initially rebuffed by well-organized students and supporters among the citizenry of Beijing. On the night of June 3, the PLA finally marched to the center of the city based on an order that was approved only by an exceptionally small segment of the top leadership.

### **Section 1: Policy Differences vs. Sociological Forms of Authority**

Hypothesis 1a would predict that if a majority within the elite had a given policy preference, then that preference would be the outcome. The following evidence shows that within the party and state legislature a significant majority supported a peaceful outcome, while even key revolutionary elders were either passive or personally supported a peaceful solution. If hypothesis 1a were accurate, in other words, we should have not seen a violent solution to the Tiananmen Square protests.

This evidence is important for another theoretical reason. The illegal political marginalization of the Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang and the clearly tendentious interpretation of party rules were partly justified during the crisis with personal attacks against Zhao. According to this narrative, Zhao went far beyond the party line by seeking a peaceful solution unsupported by his colleagues in the party, and he deliberately bucked Deng.<sup>9</sup> However, the evidence provided below shows decisively that these

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<sup>9</sup> Chen Xitong stated in his speech to the NPC on July 6 that "Comrade Zhao Ziyang committed the serious mistake of supporting the turmoil and splitting the party, and had the unshirkable responsibility for the shaping up and

characterizations can only be understood as *kompromat*: Zhao meticulously sought official party approval for his positions and took great pains to not offend Deng. Despite accusations to the contrary, Zhao did not urge the students to greater levels of radicalism for his own political purposes. Yet the effectiveness of the *kompromat* is a clear demonstration of the explanatory power of hypothesis 1b. Just like Hua Guofeng, Zhao's fall was made easier with outright lies and mischaracterizations.

### *The Party*

Zhao's policy of seeking to resolve the crisis with "democratic and legal" means was supported at multiple levels of the party. Strong evidence from even before the crisis began indicates that Zhao was strongly supported by members of the party in the Central Committee (CC). Zhang Wanshu, a journalist for the official Chinese news agency Xinhua, writes that conservative premier Li Peng was exceedingly unpopular because it was thought he had "helicoptered" to the top because of support from the old conservatives.<sup>10</sup> Chen Xiaoya in her history of June 4 points out that at the middle and lower levels of the party Zhao was extremely popular because his reforms meant giving them more power.<sup>11</sup>

Concrete evidence for liberal tendencies in the party were especially apparent in the crucial votes at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1987, the last such meeting before the protests. Although former general secretary Hu Yaobang (whose death later sparked the protests) had already been purged from the leadership, when electing members of the Central Committee (CC) he won 1,800 votes: an exceptionally high number. He also received 166 out of 173 votes on the CC to join the Politburo. These votes show that although the elders had removed him from power, the liberal leader was still widely popular.<sup>12</sup>

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development of the turmoil." Michel Oksenberg and Lawrence R. Sullivan, eds., *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict : The Basic Documents* (Armonk: MESHARPE, 1990), 56.

<sup>10</sup> Zhang Wanshu, *Gaige de niandai: 1977-1989 nian hongse de dalu [The Era of Reform: The Red Mainland 1977-1989]*, Zhongguo hang chuan ; 1 (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 2013), 465–69, 482.

<sup>11</sup> Xiaoya Chen, *Tian'anmen zhi bian: bajiu minyun shi [Change at Tiananmen: History of the 1989 Democracy Movement]*, Feng yun li shi jing dian xi lie ; 02 (Taipei: Fengyun shidai, 1996), 209. One CIA document supports this evaluation: "Zhao is reputed to have a strong base in the provinces, because of his support for the decentralization of authority and promotion of a high-growth, loose-credit policy." CIA Directorate of Intelligence Report, China: Potential for Political Crisis, February 9, 1989, CONFIDENTIAL, National Security Archive.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang, *Gaige de niandai*, 484.

During these votes, Deng Xiaoping wanted the leftist politician Deng Liqun to become a candidate member of the Politburo, but he failed to gain enough votes: “the significance of this incident is to symbolize the vote of the popular will of the party, which for the first time defeated the authority of old person politics.”<sup>13</sup> One party intellectual commented that “this fact shows that even at the top levels of the party a majority was sick of the left line that Deng Liqun represented.”<sup>14</sup> Although we cannot assume that everyone who opposed Deng Liqun would have supported a peaceful solution to the Tiananmen Crisis, there was probably a high correlation. Deng Liqun himself believed: “Those whose opinions were different from mine performed poorly during the turbulence [meaning June 4].”<sup>15</sup> During the actual protests, Chen Yizi, a top research advisor, estimated that at the level of department [司局] and below, 80 percent supported the students. At the level of minister and vice minister [正, 副部长中], 70 percent supported them.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the protests had not ended, Zhao left to visit North Korea on April 23 after agreeing with other members of the leadership that the protests would not be ended with repression. Yet almost immediately after he left, the party newspaper *People's Daily* published an article that described the protests as “turmoil.” This language inflamed the situation, as it provided an excuse for the government to arrest the students. A massive protest was held the next day as a response. When Zhao returned from a trip to North Korea on April 29, he was given a report on reactions among Shenyang officials to Deng’s remarks that showed doubts about the appropriateness of a hard line. On the train, the Liaoning party secretary, Liaoning provincial head, and Shenyang Military Region commander met with Zhao.

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<sup>13</sup> Fan Hong, *Dangnei Juexingzhe: Li Chang Zai Zhongguo Gaige Niandai. Xia [An Awakened Person in the Party: Li Chang in China's Era of Reform. Part 2]* (Hong Kong: Mingbao, 2008), 91–92.

<sup>14</sup> Li Honglin, *Zhongguo Sixiang Yundong Shi: 1949-1989 [A History of China's Thought Movement: 1949-1989]* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1999), 87.

<sup>15</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun's Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]* (Hong Kong: Dafeng chubanshe, 2006), 88.

<sup>16</sup> Chen Yizi, *Zhongguo, shinian gaige yu baji minyun: Beijing liusi tusha de beihou [China, Ten Years of Reform and the 1989 Democracy Movement: Behind the Beijing June 4 Massacre]* (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1990), 163.



According to Zhao's secretary Li Shuqiao, his boss was shocked to learn that they already knew about Deng's tough comments on the student protesters (to be discussed below): Zhao apparently thought that only the April 26 editorial was widely available. When he asked how people reacted to Deng's words, the provincial party secretary answered "everyone is cursing him."<sup>17</sup> Zhao decided to try to solve the crisis using democratic and legal methods and to move away from the wording of the April 26 editorial "by indicating that only a tiny minority was actually anti-Party, anti-socialist, and pushing for chaos."<sup>18</sup>

On May 3, Zhao met with Xu Jiatusun, the head of Xinhua news in Hong Kong. Xu told him that support for the students was broad, including within the party and state.<sup>19</sup> Zhao also met Wan Li, the head of the Chinese state legislature (National People's Congress - later NPC) on the same day. According to Li Shuqiao, Zhao decided after meeting with Wan that he could start "lowering the volume" of the April 26 editorial.<sup>20</sup> On May 4, he gave a major speech to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) that praised the students and downplayed the trouble they were causing. In this speech, Zhao said there "will be no big riots in China" and that "reasonable demands from the students should be met through democratic and legal means." He admitted that some people wanted to take advantage of the demonstrations for "ulterior motives," but he expressed confidence that the situation would calm down.<sup>21</sup>

Along with Zhao, two other voting members of the five-person PSC, Hu Qili and Qiao Shi, supported the new tactic, as well as the two non-voting attendants of PSC meetings: Yang Shangkun, the president of the PRC and secretary of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and Wan Li.<sup>22</sup> That meant a clear majority in support of Zhao on the formal PSC, but an even greater majority among all those who

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<sup>17</sup> Wu Wei, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]* (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2013), 457.

<sup>18</sup> Zhao Ziyang, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang*, trans. Pu Bao, Renee Chiang, and Adi Ignatius, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 16–17.

<sup>19</sup> Xu Jiatusun, *Xu Jiatusun Xianggang Huiyilu [Xu Jiatusun's Hong Kong Memoirs]*, vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Xianggang lian he bao you xian gong si, 1993), 371.

<sup>20</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 465.

<sup>21</sup> Oksenberg and Sullivan, *Beijing Spring, 1989*, 254–56.

<sup>22</sup> Xu, *Xu Jiatusun Xianggang Huiyilu [Xu Jiatusun's Hong Kong Memoirs]*, 2:373.

attended PSC meetings. Even the notoriously hardline premier, Li Peng, held an ambiguous position. He both told Zhao that he liked the ADB speech, and his own speech to the organization was in the same spirit. At the 4th plenum of the CC in late June, Zhao defended himself against attacks that this speech split the party by pointing out that even before he returned from North Korea, the leadership had already taken a softer line in a new April 29 editorial.<sup>23</sup>

Zhao concluded that it was still too early to change the April 26 editorial, so he hoped to solve the problem by addressing the students' broader concerns on social problems.<sup>24</sup> On May 6, Zhao submitted a letter to the Politburo that argued the social conditions causing the instability needed to be resolved. Zhao listed seven possible options, including investigations into corruption, transparency about the income of the top leadership, and reform of media and protest laws. Zhao also provided a possible way to get past the roadblock of whether to acknowledge the illegal student organizations: participating with the student "campus democracy" movement to create better mechanisms for students to express their will than the official organizations that had been discredited.<sup>25</sup>

The PSC meeting on May 8 gave Zhao's attempts more legitimacy. According to one of Zhao's assistants, Zhao raised all of the issues in his letter to the Politburo except for the issue of "campus democracy," but also added a proposal to end special treatment in goods for high-ranking cadres. Zhao wanted these plans to be published the very next day in *People's Daily*. Wan Li was the first to express his "full support." Qiao Shi said "I raise both my hands in support of Zhao's opinion." Li Peng complained that the Politburo had yet to discuss the issue, while Yao Yilin, the fifth full-member of the PSC, was silent. Hu Qili said he agreed with everyone.<sup>26</sup> Zhang Wanshu, the former Xinhua employee, claimed that Zhao argued at this meeting that in order to avoid the difficult question of how the April 26

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<sup>23</sup> Wang Ding, *Liusi Qianhou*, vol. 2 (Taipei: Yuan jing chu ban you xian gong si, 1995), 128.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:129.

<sup>25</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 482–83.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 483–84.

editorial characterized the protests it would be better to focus on the societal problems that upset people in the first place and that the best place to manage these issues was inside the National People's Congress (NPC).<sup>27</sup>

Li Peng's memoir claims that Zhao expressed support for entering into discussions with the unofficial student organizations, but that this proposal was rejected. However, he does write that the May 8 meeting decided that members of the leadership would go to the grassroots and work with the masses, "actively engaging in dialogue with students, workers, and society at all levels."<sup>28</sup> An official account states that Zhao's ADB speech was accused at this meeting of being different from the spirit of the April 26 editorial, to which Zhao responded "If I spoke incorrectly I will take responsibility."<sup>29</sup> However, Zhao claims not to have heard a criticism of this speech until May 17.<sup>30</sup>

Two public Xinhua news reports from the night of May 8 confirm that a softer line was selected at this meeting. One reported that Zhao told a Turkish visitor that the crisis would be solved with democracy and law, and that this process would contribute to better democracy and legal development as a whole. Zhao expressed confidence that the protests were not dangerous and pointed out most students had already returned to class. The second Xinhua article reported that the party and State Council would conduct broad dialogue with workers, peasants, intellectuals, students, teachers, and non-members of the CCP, and expressed confidence in dialogue with students.<sup>31</sup> Lu Chaoqi, who worked for *People's Daily*, says that day he was informed that Hu Qili had called to say that everyone should sincerely execute the

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<sup>27</sup> Zhang Wanshu, *Lishi de da baozha : "Liusi " shijian quanjing shilu [The Big Historical Explosion: The Entire Record of June 4]* (Hong Kong: Tiandi, 2009), 138.

<sup>28</sup> Li Peng, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, Online Version, n.d., May 8.

<sup>29</sup> Guojia jiaowei shehui kexue yanjiu yu yishu jiaoyu si, Guojia jiaowei sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo si, Beijing shiwei gaodeng xuexiao gongzuo weiyuanhui, *Wushi Tian de Huigu Yu Fansi [Reviewing and Reflecting on the 50 Days]* (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 137–38.

spirit of Zhao Ziyang's speech. Lu concluded that a majority of the leadership had decided to support Zhao.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of a full Politburo meeting on May 10 after discussing Gorbachev's upcoming visit, Zhao provided four opinions on how to manage the crisis: "first, that illegal student organizations should not be recognized, but re-election of [official] student organizations was unavoidable, that student self-management should be strengthened; two, it is necessary to reform media; third, combatting corruption: investigate the five big corporations, have the NPC discuss; end special supply [the opportunity for high ranking cadres to get special goods]." Zhao admitted that these were his own opinions. Wan Li supported Zhao, saying that the NPC should organize a committee on clean government. At this same meeting, Qiao Shi said that Zhao had told him "when Zhao went to report to Comrade Xiaoping, whatever Zhao said, Comrade Xiaoping supported him."<sup>33</sup>

Li claims to have emphasized to the other participants that these were Zhao's personal opinions, not those of the PSC, and personally concluded that Zhao wanted to use media reform to worsen the crisis and use the NPC Standing Committee to steal power. Yet Li's account may hint that the meeting did in fact endorse Zhao's approach: "This was Zhao Ziyang's consistent technique. With regards to major questions, at the end of the meeting he would address matters not on the official PSC agenda, he would express his own opinion, people would be unprepared, and there would be no time for discussion. In this way, if he encountered difficulties later, he could say, wasn't this passed on a certain day at a certain PSC meeting? Why didn't anyone oppose my opinion?"<sup>34</sup>

Li's account of this meeting is intended to discredit Zhao, but in fact it reveals a major secret: the full Politburo on May 10 did not reject Zhao's four points. Even if Zhao did spring on the Politburo his own opinions without having full PSC approval, that does not mean he had no right to discuss his position

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<sup>32</sup> Lu Chaoqi, *Liusi neibu riji [Internal Diary of June 4]* (Hong Kong: Zhuoyue wenhua chubanshe, 2006), 60.

<sup>33</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, May 10.

at a Politburo meeting. Li also admits that the meeting did not reject his proposals, instead noting that Zhao would have the right to ask “why didn’t anyone oppose my opinion?” Moreover, Li admits there was some discussion: Wan supported using the NPC to further Zhao’s agenda, and Li admitted that the PSC had not approved Zhao’s comments. The most likely reason for Li’s dissatisfaction is that Zhao broke tradition, if not party rules, by using the Politburo to settle a question on which the PSC was somewhat split. In any case, the May 8 PSC meeting and May 10 Politburo meeting both gave greater formal legitimacy to Zhao’s position. The party had shown its support for Zhao. The Politburo would not meet again until after June 4. These two meetings have crucial theoretical importance. They show that a majority of the two most important political decision making bodies in the PRC wanted a peaceful solution. Hypothesis 1a and 2a would therefore incorrectly predict that the protests would *not* be solved with violence.

Moreover, the available evidence now reveals that even those who are traditionally seen as implacable opponents of dialogue with the students in fact had a much more complicated position. First, Li could have supported Zhao’s softer approach and hoped for a peaceful outcome but differed in the extent to which he believed the government should concede, perhaps fearing the students would become too powerful and not be sated. Strong evidence indicates Li was not implacably opposed to all dialogue. As early as April 26 Li Peng had Bao Pu, one of Zhao’s men, draft a *People’s Daily* editorial. Bao wrote the editorial with the intention to calm down the students [疏导] by emphasizing the consequences of chaos for positive change as opposed to any inherently bad intentions on the part of the protesters. Li told Bao personally that the editorial was well written.<sup>35</sup>

At a PSC brief meeting on April 28, a decision was made to affirm the April 26 editorial but also seek support from the “middle-of-the-road masses” [争取中间群众] and do “dissuasion work.” According to Chen Yizi, the PSC’s decision to start dialogue on multiple levels and in many forms with

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<sup>35</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China’s Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 456.

students, teachers, and workers was based on the suggestion of Yang Shangkun. On April 30, the leadership sent representatives to many universities to pursue dialogue (but only with official student organizations).<sup>36</sup> While Zhao was still in North Korea, Yuan Mu did have a meeting with official student bodies, although it was seen by many students as outrageous.<sup>37</sup> Still, Yuan did make somewhat conciliatory remarks, beginning the session by saying that the explosive verdict in the April 26 editorial was pointed at “an extreme minority [极少数]” and not “the masses of students [广大同学].”<sup>38</sup> Future Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo, unlike the students, thought the meeting was a step in the right direction.<sup>39</sup> In any case, the evidence shows that steps towards conciliation began even *before* Zhao returned from North Korea.\*

Li even told Zhao that he liked his ADB speech,<sup>40</sup> and his own speech to the organization the next day sounded quite similar to Zhao’s.<sup>41</sup> The Beijing’s Student Autonomous Union even announced on May 12 that they welcomed the “recent moderation” seen in “the government’s position (the May 4 speech by Zhao Ziyang, the May 5 speech by Li Peng.)”!<sup>42</sup> These facts strongly contradict Li’s own claims at the 4th

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<sup>36</sup> Zhonggong Beijing shiwei bangongting, *1989 Beijing Zhizhi Dongluan Pingxi Fangeming Baoluan Jishi [1989 Record of Beijing Ending the Turmoil and Quelling the Counterrevolutionary Chaos]* (Beijing: Beijing ribao chubanshe, 1989), 55.

<sup>37</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, April 29.

<sup>38</sup> Zhizhou He, *Xuewo Zhonghua: 89 nian Beijing xuechao ziliao ji [Blood Fertile China: Collection of Material from the 1989 Beijing Student Movement]* (Hong Kong: Xianggang xin yi dia wen hua xie hui, 1989), 13.

<sup>39</sup> Xiaobo Liu, *Mori xingcunzhe de dubai: guanyu wo he “liu, si” [Monologue of a Survivor of Doomsday: About me and June 4, 初版..]*, Chu (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1992), 89.

\* However, Li explicitly says that “the PSC was very clear about the dialogue being a struggle, it is impossible to place hope on ending the turmoil on dialogue, each side is using dialogue to seek support from the middle-of-the-road masses.” Was the PSC using tough words to protect a soft policy? Or did Li have little hope in the dialogue, seeing at best an opportunity to feel away support from the students?

<sup>40</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 20.

<sup>41</sup> According to a Xinhua report, Li said “With our positions basically identical, mutual understanding can certainly be improved through more dialogues... I can tell you responsibly that the political situation in China is stable.” “Li Peng Meets ADB Heads,” Xinhua in English, May 5, 1989, FBIS.

<sup>42</sup> Suzanne Ogden et al, eds., *China’s Search for Democracy: The Student and Mass Movement of 1989* (Armonk: MESHARPE, 1992), 203.

plenum in late June in which he condemned Zhao's ADB speech for publicizing disputes within the party and serving as a turning point in the protests towards greater chaos.<sup>43</sup>

This evidence suggests that the break between Zhao and Li came later than previously appreciated. Li's attitude to Zhao might have changed over time. Li writes that on May 4, Yao Yilin told him that he suspected Zhao was behind the turmoil and intended to use it to "attack Deng, overthrow Li, and protect Zhao." Li writes that "*at this point* [italics added by author] I did not clearly support his opinion."<sup>44</sup>

Were the denials that Zhao's ADB speech represented the official line an attempt to create political cover? If the new line collapsed, Li Peng and the others would be able to place the responsibility on Zhao. This is only speculation, but it would help explain why Li told Zhao he liked his ADB speech, gave a similar speech to the same group, and then proceeded to say that Zhao's ADB speech represented his opinion alone. If Li was playing a double game to hedge his bets on the situation going either way, then the culpability for undermining a coherent policy falls more on Li's head than Zhao's. In any case, the evidence is clear: with regard to the top of the party, a clear majority did not support a violent solution, thus showing the weak predictive capacity of hypothesis 1a.

One final point on the party should be mentioned. Zhao's official political work report to the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, the last such meeting before June 4, included a segment on the importance of consultation and dialogue with society. Zhao stated: "The work of leading organs at every level must be established on the basis of listening intently to the ideas of the masses in order to act in a practical fashion and avoid mistakes... it is necessary to make consultation and dialogue become a system to promptly, unimpededly, and accurately reflect information from bottom to top, top to bottom, mutual communication, and mutual understanding." Even after Zhao was removed from the leadership, Deng said it would be inappropriate to

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<sup>43</sup> Han Shanbi, *Lishi de chuanshang : 1989 Zhongguo minyun shiliao huibian [The Wound of History: Collection of Historical Materials of China's 1989 Democratic Movement]* (Hong Kong: Dong xi wen hua shi ye gong si, 1989), 396–98.

<sup>44</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 4.

change a single word from this document.<sup>45</sup> A case could therefore be made that if the party leadership was executing the party line as established at this conference it should have pursued the road of consultation and dialogue.

### *The State Legislature*

These attitudes were not only confined to the party. The state legislature also supported Zhao. As discussed above, the leader of the Chinese state legislature and another party elder, Wan Li, fully supported the general secretary. Wan not only had a history of liberal positions, but also had on occasion resisted other party elders. During the student protests in late 1986 that played a role in the fall of Hu Yaobang, Wan Li said that “democracy was a worldwide trend, this is truly the case. Taiwan now allows opposition parties, martial law was cancelled. Democratic development in the Philippines and South Korea will have an effect on China... How to engage in dialogue with society is an important question.” Wan thought protests were neither threatening nor avoidable: “First, there will be no great chaos; second, do not hope that there will not be any problems; third, we must learn how to enter into dialogue with society.”<sup>46</sup>

At the 6th plenum of the 12<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in September 1986, Wan Li was one of two people who spoke in favor of removing the phrase “bourgeois liberalization” from the meeting report, leading Deng to rebuke him: “opposing bourgeois liberalization was suggested by me.”<sup>47</sup> In 1987, Wan was considered for a position on the PSC but turned down because of opposition from a group of elders. Deng even told him to visit old revolutionaries and do a self-criticism to smooth relations. Even more revealing was a comment by Yao Yilin that “Wan Li was the kind of person who would jump on the

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<sup>45</sup> Zhao Ziyang wenji bianxiezu, *Zhao Ziyang Wenji (1980-1989): Di Si Juan (1987-1989) [Writings of Zhao Ziyang (1980-1989) Volume 4 (1987-1989)]* (Hong Kong: Xianggang zhongwen daxue, 2016), 217, 242–43.

<sup>46</sup> Wu Jiexiang, *Zhongnanhai riji [Journal from Zhongnanhai]* (Carle Place: Mirror Books, 2002), December 8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, September 28. Lu Dingyi was the other who spoke in favor of removing the phrase. They were applauded by members of the Central Committee. The first two to speak against the proposal were Yang Shangkun and Yu Qiuli, Deng’s most important allies in the military.



bandwagon in a crisis.”<sup>48</sup> Zhao claims that “Among senior leaders of the Central Committee, [Wan] was the one who most ardently supported reform.”<sup>49</sup> Wan therefore had a strong reputation for supporting dialogue with students, bucking elders, and supporting reform.

When Zhao told Wan at the latter’s home on May 3 that the leadership was overreacting to the student demonstrations because of an outdated mentality based on class struggle, Wan agreed.<sup>50</sup> Wan also agreed at either the PSC meeting on May 8 or Politburo meeting of May 10 that China should follow worldwide trends of democracy and address the concerns of the students.<sup>51</sup>

On May 9, Wan shared Zhao’s suggestions presented at the May 8 Politburo meeting with those members of the NPC leadership that were members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Those individuals all supported publishing those proposals even if both the Central Committee and State Council refused. Li Peng immediately called Wan Li to tell him that this was inappropriate, as the Central Committee had not yet discussed Zhao’s proposals.<sup>52</sup>

After the May 10 Politburo meeting, Li Peng concluded that Zhao Ziyang wanted to move the responsibility for managing the crisis away from the party to the NPC Standing Committee. In the afternoon of that same day, Wan held a meeting of the NPC Standing Committee Special Committee Heads. The meeting decided that on June 20 the NPC Standing Committee would meet to listen to a State Council report on the student protests and class boycotts, as well as discuss a law on protesting and report on rectifying corrupt companies. According to Li, normally the agenda for a NPC Standing Committee meeting would first be discussed by the CCP party committee inside the NPC Standing Committee. The NPC Standing Committee CCP party committee proposal would then be sent for approval by the PSC.

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<sup>48</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 210.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China’s Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 484.

As discussed above, Li believed the basis for this NPC Standing Committee agenda was flimsy, as it was based simply on Zhao's concluding comments at a Politburo meeting. Yet he also admits that PSC approval for the NPC Standing Committee's agenda was only the typical way of managing the party's relationship with the NPC [正常的运作秩序], not a law.<sup>53</sup>

When NPC vice chairman and secretary Peng Chong visited him on May 11, Li expressed disapproval of the planned June 20 agenda and labeling the protests a "student movement." Li called Zhao to express his opposition. Zhao said he would discuss with Wan Li the possibility of changing the agenda. Later Zhao called back to say that the decision was already made and could not be reversed.<sup>54</sup> On May 17, the same day the decision on martial law was made, 24 members of the NPC Standing Committee wrote a letter to the Central Committee calling for an emergency meeting.<sup>55</sup> Together, this evidence presents a clear picture that the Chinese state legislature leadership was opposed to a violent crackdown.

### *The Elders*

If the party base and state legislature did not want a violent solution, what was the position of the old men of the party? Many accounts of the crackdown emphasized the role of these party elders, who allegedly provided a united front against the students. However, the evidence provides a much more complicated picture: many crucial old revolutionaries did not support violence. This yet again weakens the value of hypothesis 1a, which would suggest that political decisions would be based on a consensus within the elite.

As discussed above, PRC President Yang Shangkun supported Zhao's tactics until Deng clearly expressed his opinion. Zhao later said while under house arrest that Yang "was basically a good person...

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<sup>53</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, May 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, May 17.

During “June 4” he wavered, wanted to do things better [他是动摇的，想办好的]”<sup>56</sup> According to Zhao’s own memoirs, another major old revolutionary, Peng Zhen, shared this position. Peng told Yang Shangkun “if in the future Deng looks to blame someone, Ziyang should not be blamed alone [for adopting a softer line], there is also you and me [Yang and Peng], you count and I count.”<sup>57</sup>

According to Peng Zhen’s own official biography, on May 10 he wrote, not for publication apparently, a document called “An Essay on Re-Reading Das Kapital”. Peng emphasized proceeding deliberately and the importance of the law: “With regards to issues of practical concern, it is necessary to do the practical analysis of seeking truths from facts, when considering major issues, it is necessary to be aware of the law of “negation of negation [否定之否定, a Hegelian idea].”... The law has a resistant effect against bad situations.” The official biography also reveals that on May 17, Peng had his daughter bring his opinion to Deng: “The National People’s Congress, State Council, Central Committee, and students all must work within the confines of the constitution and law. The painful lesson of the lawless [和尚打伞，无法无天] Cultural Revolution is still remembered throughout the country, the memory is fresh.” Peng also “in detail spelled out the criminal law and relevant provisions that could serve as a legal basis for resolving the situation [平息事态的法律依据].” After Deng decided to introduce martial law, Peng’s “basic attitude was that it was necessary to obey the party center, emphasized that everyone has to operate according to the law.” Finally, the biography claims that Peng was *ordered* by the party center [受中共中央委托] to meet with members of the NPC leadership on May 25 and 26 (this will be described in more detail below). Peng’s official biography, in other words, provides no evidence that Zhao was wrong, and even hints strongly that his characterization might have been accurate.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Du Daozheng, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuoguo shenme?: Du Daozheng riji [What Else Did Zhao Ziyang Say? Diary of Du Daozheng]* (Hong Kong: Tiandi, 2010), 174.

<sup>57</sup> Zhao Ziyang, *Gaige Licheng [The Course of Reform]* (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>58</sup> “Peng Zhen zhuan” bienxiezhu, *Peng Zhen zhuan [Biography of Peng Zhen]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 1640–41.

Yang and Peng were especially important, but support for a peaceful solution was shared by other elders as well. When Zhao returned to Beijing from North Korea, he learned that “[m]any senior cadres... were afraid that the escalating confrontation would result in bloodshed.”<sup>59</sup> Zhao received phone calls and letters from “famous figures and old comrades within the party” who wanted a peaceful solution.<sup>60</sup> Zhang Wanshu wrote that many old cadres believed that Deng had gone senile and was behaving like Mao Zedong in his later years.<sup>61</sup>

Many important members of the Central Advisory Commission (CAC), a party organ created by Deng as a transitional holding ground for old revolutionaries, supported Zhao. The CAC was hardly a den of reactionaries: after Deng Liqun failed to get elected to the CC, he subsequently also failed to get elected to the CAC Standing Committee after he only won 85 of the body’s 200 possible votes.

On April 22, several members of the CAC (Du Runsheng, Li Rui, Qin Chuan, Hu Jiwei, Hu Keshi, Lin Zixin, and Li Chang) met to discuss the student protests at Zhao’s request, although Zhao did not attend. Zhao had told Du Runsheng he was unsure about the position of other members of the PSC and therefore wanted to get the opinions of some of the old men of the party. The meeting concluded that the government should not deal with the protests through repression. On May 3, a second meeting was held with two more elders: Li Zehou and Yu Guangyuan. Again, the elders supported Zhao’s position. On May 17, Li Chang met with Han Tianyou, who used to run the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, and wrote a letter calling for peaceful dialogue with the students. Fifteen members of the CAC signed the letter. Li Rui, another elder, also drafted a letter, which ultimately was never submitted because General Xiao Ke told Li that Marshals Nie Rongzhen and Xu Xiangqian had already expressed their

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<sup>59</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 13–14.

<sup>60</sup> Zhao would forward these letters to Deng on May 18. Who these figures were remains a mystery: in his memoirs he only names Li Yimang as one of the old comrades who affirmed the patriotism of the students. Zhao, *Gaige Licheng [The Course of Reform]*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Zhang could not think of any other examples in which a speech by a leader had been so openly and brazenly criticized by party members. Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 72, 79.

opposition to using force in a letter (this will be discussed more in the following chapter).<sup>62</sup> Another member of the CAC, former foreign minister Huang Hua, allegedly refused to attend the meeting on May 26 that expressed support for Deng (along with General Zhang Aiping and three others).<sup>63</sup>

On May 16, Zhao met with Li Chang and asked him: “What is the attitude of the old comrades on the CAC with regards to how to manage the movement?” Li responded: “A few days ago a few of us [小组] held a meeting, I believe that most people will support the change in the center’s policy [meaning Zhao’s platform of using democratic and peaceful means.]”<sup>64</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, this was the same day that Zhao directly raised the importance of revising the April 26 editorial. In any case, he had reason to believe he could count on the support of some crucial old revolutionaries.

The available, albeit inconclusive, evidence on Chen Yun, the second most important old revolutionary leader after Deng, indicates that he was passive until late in the crisis. Deng Liqun in his memoirs wrote that Chen Yun returned to Beijing from Hangzhou the day after he read Deng’s comments that shaped the April 26 editorial.<sup>65</sup> According to Chen’s official *Chronology*, Chen arrived in Beijing only on May 7. Even more revealing is a phrase from Li Xiannian’s *Chronology*: “May 19: [Li] at the behest of Deng Xiaoping went with Yang Shangkun to Chen Yun’s residence to inform him of the situation and the center’s decision with regards to martial law.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore Chen apparently only learned

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<sup>62</sup> Fan, *Dangnei Juexingzhe: Li Chang Zai Zhongguo Gaige Niandai. Xia [An Awakened Person in the Party: Li Chang in China’s Era of Reform. Part 2]*, 135–51. In an interview with journalist and author Gao Xin, Li Rui said that he, Huo Shilian, Li Chang and other old cadres from the CAC prepared a letter after the generals had finished theirs, but that it was never formally submitted because “the situation developed too quickly.” Gao Xin, “Li Rui Xiansheng Yixitan [A Talk with Mr. Li Rui],” *Radio Free Asia*, April 14, 2016, <http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/zhuannan/yehuazhongnanhai/gx-04142016133952.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Dai Qing, “Ye Jianying Yang Nv Dai Qing: Liu Si Shi Jian Quancheng Shilu [Ye Jianying’s Adopted Daughter: True Record of the June 4 Incident],” *New York Times Chinese Language*, June 4, 2014, sec. <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140604/cc04daiqing/>.

<sup>64</sup> Fan, *Dangnei Juexingzhe: Li Chang Zai Zhongguo Gaige Niandai. Xia [An Awakened Person in the Party: Li Chang in China’s Era of Reform. Part 2]*, 94, 135–51, 187.

<sup>65</sup> Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun Zishu: Shierge Chunqiu (1975-1987) [Deng Liqun’s Self-Statement: 12 Years, 1975-1987]*, 500–501.

<sup>66</sup> “Li Xiannian zhuan” bianxiezu, *Li Xiannian nianpu [Chronology of Li Xiannian]*, vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2011), 480.

about the decision to impose martial law two days afterwards. According to Chen Yun's former secretary, on the afternoon of May 25, Bo Yibo, who was in charge of the daily affairs of the CAC, suggested to Chen that he attend the next day's meeting of the CAC. Chen said no, only changing his mind the next morning. Although he did speak in favor of Deng's decision at that meeting, his speech in favor of martial law does seem to have been somewhat reluctant.<sup>67</sup>

Chen's attitude towards the treatment of the CAC members who tried to prevent a violent solution is also interesting. In a letter to the CAC leadership on May 25, 1990, Chen wrote: "At the time the PSC had two different voices, moreover the center and some newspapers were engaged in incorrect propaganda, therefore many leading comrades in the center and the regions did not understand the true situation." He suggested that the offending members be treated leniently.<sup>68</sup> According to Chen, if they were punished "in the future they will have to be rehabilitated."<sup>69</sup> Party elder Li Rui explained Chen's behavior in the following way:

Primarily it was because Chen Yun himself had a very complicated attitude towards opening fire on "June 4," on one hand he supported Li Peng, Yao Yilin, and others in stubbornly maintaining the strong attitude of not retreating before the "turmoil" of the students, but on the other hand he also believed that the military entering the city and opening fire would destroy the image of the CCP.<sup>70</sup>

Zhao identifies only Li Xiannian (chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) and Wang Zhen (Chinese vice president, a sinecure) as the exceptions among the "senior cadres" who supported a violent solution. Zhao did admit, however, that he could not "attest to the accuracy" or nature of Li's position.<sup>71</sup> According to Li's son-in-law, Li from an early date pressured

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<sup>67</sup> Xu Yongyue, "Yuan Chen Yun Mishu Xu Yongyue: Wannian Chen Yun Yu Deng Xiaoping [Chen Yun's Former Secretary Xu Yongyue: Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping in Their Late Years]," *Bainianchao [The Hundred Year Tide]*, March 2006. Interestingly, Chen referred to Deng in his speech as *touzi* [头子], a term perhaps translated best as *capo*. In the public version of his remarks, that phrase was turned to 'core' [核心].

<sup>68</sup> Yang Mingwei, *Chen Yun wannian suiye [The Later Years of Chen Yun]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005), 253.

<sup>69</sup> Fan, *Dangnei Juexingzhe: Li Chang Zai Zhongguo Gaige Niandai. Xia [An Awakened Person in the Party: Li Chang in China's Era of Reform. Part 2]*, 181.

<sup>70</sup> Gao Xin, "Li Rui Xiansheng Yixitan [A Talk with Mr. Li Rui]."

<sup>71</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 13.

Deng to attack Zhao's attempts to negotiate with the students.<sup>72</sup> Li told the CCP party committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in July 1990 that "at a Politburo meeting I interrupted to say a few words, I said this is a struggle between two headquarters, one is the capitalist headquarters, one is the proletariat headquarters. Some comrades said I was exaggerating the issue, I said no, there is no exaggeration."<sup>73</sup>

Interestingly, Wang Zhen's official biography claims that "some people with good intentions" tried to convince Wang not to pay so much attention to the protests: "You are old, and your health is not good, if you rest that will be best, don't pay attention to this matter that has nothing to do with you [您老岁数大了, 身体不好, 好好休息就行了, 不要管这闲事了!]" But Wang "opened his eyes widely and shouted" that he would "certainly pay attention to this matter that has nothing to do with him." His interlocutors apparently "became tense and serious."<sup>74</sup>

#### *Zhao and Kompromat*

One of the major charges against Zhao was that he encouraged the protesters to improve his position. If he did in fact encourage the students deliberately, and this was opposed by a majority of the elite, it would be legitimate to punish him politically for it (hypothesis 1a). But the evidence shows that this was just another case of *kompromat* (hypothesis 1b). Weak institutionalization made it impossible for Zhao to have a chance to defend his own side of the story.

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<sup>72</sup> Li's son-in-law provides the following colorful account: "Li Xiannian went to see Deng Xiaoping and tried to goad him into acting: 'Are you going to surrender or not[你到底退还是不退]? If you surrender, I will support Zhao Ziyang, support him to the end! If you do not surrender, I will support you, support you to the end.' Deng Xiaoping quietly looked at Li Xiannian for a moment and said: 'Retreat to where? Retreat to the coffin?' Deng then said: 'We have been together for forty years, do you still not understand me? **At most we'll go back to the mountains and fight a guerrilla war** [bold added by author].'" Liu Yazhou, "Chutan 'Liusi' [An Initial Discussion of 'June 4'] August 1989," 86–87.

<sup>73</sup> "Li Xiannian zhuan" bianxiezu, *Li Xiannian nianpu* [Chronology of Li Xiannian], 6:519.

<sup>74</sup> "Wang Zhen zhuan" bianxiezu, *Wang Zhen zhuan* [Biography of Wang Zhen] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 2008), 651.

At a meeting in Europe of former student movement leaders, Liang Er said that on May 10 student leader Wuer Kaixi “went to Tian Jiyun’s office”, he discussed matters with Tian Jiyun and a secretary of Zhao Ziyang. He [Wuer Kaixi] said that the secretary just stood in back and said nothing, and Tian Jiyun repeatedly turned his head and quietly discussed issues with him. Kaixi himself believed that the leadership [中央] had a cooperative attitude, if we exert more pressure, then they will answer the demands made earlier [早期提出的要求].”<sup>75</sup> At this same meeting in Europe, Wang Chaohua claimed that on May 11 at a Standing Committee meeting of the Beijing Students Autonomous Federation Ma Shaofang said: “In actuality the reformist faction wants us to create trouble, the more trouble the better.” Ma claimed to have special inside information.<sup>76</sup>

These two pieces of information raise many questions. In his own writings, Ma claims to have not spoken at the May 11 meeting and to have opposed the hunger strike at the time (although he supported it later).<sup>77</sup> But if he did make a statement, could it have been related to Tian’s meeting with Wuer Kaixi? Was Kaixi told explicitly that causing more trouble would help, or was he drawing his own conclusions based on whatever information he was receiving? Wuer Kaixi told Liu Xiaobo on May 13 that the hunger strike was not even his idea and he in fact had opposed it until too many people supported.<sup>78</sup>

Why would members of the reformist faction tell students to cause more problems, given all the evidence provided above that Zhao was desperate to calm the students down? Zhao’s new line was exceptionally fragile. Moreover, another student says he *opposed* a hunger strike at first precisely because

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\* Tian was a liberal Politburo member serving as vice minister of the State Council.

<sup>75</sup> *Huigu yu fansi: Bajiu xueyun lishi huigu yu fansi yantaohui jilu [Review and Reflect: The 1989 Student Movement Review and Reflection Discussion Meeting Record]* (Germany: Deguo Laiyin bi hui. The record of this conversation among many of the major student leaders is also available online: <http://www.64memo.com/b5/1.htm>, 1993), 2.7.6, Liang Er.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.5.2, Wang Chaohua.

<sup>77</sup> Shaofang Ma, “Mao Shaofang: Lishi Zai Bianda Xianshi [Mao Shaofang: History Is Lashing Reality],” *Epoch Times*, accessed July 6, 2015, <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/4/15/n511047.htm>. According to Eddie Cheng, Ma at one point also explicitly denied saying he had information that reformists wanted the students to cause more trouble. Author’s personal communication with Eddie Cheng.

<sup>78</sup> Liu, *Mori xingcunzhe de dubai*, 99.



he had inside information that Zhao's position had been under threat in 1988.<sup>79</sup> Feng Congde writes that the Beijing Students Autonomous Federation did not support the hunger strike because inside information lead them to believe that a "low key student movement" was beneficial for the "enlightened faction within the party."<sup>80</sup>

The head of the United Front Department Yan Mingfu clearly communicated information about the situation within the government for a political effect on the student movement. Yet instead of using this information to worsen the protests he was clearly trying to convince the students to compromise. At the May 13 meeting with students, Yan said: "Many of you believe that there is a distinction between reformers and conservatives in the government. You are in fact wrong about this, but if you believe it, then you are hurting the reformers by being stubborn."<sup>81</sup> Tiananmen analyst Eddie Cheng writes that Yan "was giving the impression that Zhao Ziyang himself would be in danger should the students hold to their stubborn ways."<sup>82</sup> On May 16, Yan personally went to the square where he cried and begged: "Students, you should give the reformist faction time."<sup>83</sup> Zhao himself also tried to persuade the students that calming down would help the reformers: "In my meeting with the workers I called on the students not to do something that made their supporters feel pain and their opponents feel happy [亲者痛，仇者快]. The students did not understand my words. My meaning was that the more extreme you become, the happier certain people become." Zhao also argues that the criminal investigation into Bao Tong's behavior after June 4 was about finding evidence of a secret relationship with the students, and points out no real evidence was found.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.7.6, Liang Er.

<sup>80</sup> Congde Feng, *Liusi rijì: guangchang shang de gongheguo [Diary of June 4: Republic on the Square]*, Guo qing jiao yu. Gong min jiao yu shu xi (Hong Kong: Suyuan shushe, 2013), 306.

<sup>81</sup> Shen Tong, *Almost a Revolution*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 242; George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement* (New York: John Wiley, 1993), 173.

<sup>82</sup> Eddie Cheng, *Standoff at Tiananmen* (Highlands Ranch: Sensys Corp, 2009), 148.

<sup>83</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 3.1.4, Zhang Boli.

<sup>84</sup> Zhang and Shi, *Zhao Ziyang Zhongnanhai shinian jishi, 1980-1989 [Record of Zhao Ziyang's Ten Years at Zhongnanhai 1980-1989]*, 1045, 1059.

To what extent were the students even aware of the nature of the struggle among elites? The Beijing Students Autonomous Federation explicitly stated that they opposed the April 26 editorial and supported Zhao's ADB speech.<sup>85</sup> According to student leader Shen Tong, when the students first met with Yan Mingfu on May 13 many thought the hunger strike would end before Gorbachev's arrival because "no one wanted to see the events of early 1987 repeat, when because of a democratic movement the reform faction left the stage, someone like Hu Yaobang would be the scapegoat, [we] did not hope to see this sort of thing happen again to Zhao Ziyang."<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, many students, especially Li Lu, found the idea of becoming involved in political disputes within the party distasteful. The student leader later said that "based on what I understood of the situation I thought that the reformist faction was meddling in this movement, but without a doubt, they did not have any sincerity in having real dialogue with the students. As soon as there was no democratic organization left behind and recognized, then it was unavoidable that the authorities would take revenge after the fact [秋后算账]."<sup>87</sup>

This had major implications for any possibility the students would be able to work with reformists in the party. Feng Congde writes of Zhao's ADB speech:

Zhao's speech was clearly a signal, but at the time I did not realize it, otherwise it might have influenced my analysis of the situation. I also could not imagine that Deng Xiaoping would discard Zhao Ziyang. Many students, including me and Chai Ling, up until Zhao Ziyang was removed from power did not feel especially positive towards him. At the time I thought he was an opportunist, him going to North Korea to avoid the troubles was an example. This impression always influenced my evaluation of him during the student movement. Later it was shown that this evaluation was problematic.<sup>88</sup>

The same problems plagued Zhao's May 17 written statement. Li Lu acknowledges that "the statement was significant, though this was lost on the students at the time and only became clearer much later. It was the last chance to stand with Zhao, which might have saved him and might have protected the

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<sup>85</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.5.2, Wang Chaohua.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.4, Shen Tong.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.1.1, Li Lu.

<sup>88</sup> Feng, *Liusi Riji*, 233.

movement. But the signal was not clear, and the students mistrusted Zhao and involvement with Party politics.”<sup>89</sup> The weight of evidence therefore shows that a major reason the protests were not settled peacefully was because Zhao did not have strong enough connections with the student protesters, as opposed to him using those connections to inspire the students to more radical positions.

At the same time, however, if anyone should be accused of inciting greater radicalism among the protesters and violating party procedures, it is Zhao’s opponents. Others in the leadership very obviously, either deliberately or because of incompetence, took steps that exacerbated the situation. In other words, if hypothesis 1a was accurate and leaders could be punished retrospectively for policy failures, then Zhao would have won, not the others in the leadership.

While Zhao was still in North Korea, Li ally Yuan Mu, the spokesperson of the State Council, addressed students from the official student organizations. His paternal tone and refusal to enter into dialogue with the new illegal student organizations deeply upset the student protesters.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, one student asked why certain leaders played golf if they were supposed to be close to the masses and said he heard that one game of golf cost several hundred dollars. The video of the dialogue, which was shown multiple times, showed the student holding a magazine with a picture of Zhao playing golf while asking this question. The implication was clearly that Zhao wasted state funds on golf. Zhao’s think tank supporters and employees of Xinhua were both furious, seeing this maneuver as a base attempt to direct the protesters at Zhao.<sup>91</sup>

Zhao claims that Li Peng, Yao Yilin, and Li Ximing (Beijing party secretary) told the State Education Commission Vice Minister He Dongchang to inform university party heads at a meeting with the State Council that Zhao’s speeches only represented his own personal opinion. These statements

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<sup>89</sup> Lu Li, *Moving the Mountain: My Life in China from the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 155.

<sup>90</sup> Minzhu Han and Sheng Hua, eds., *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches From the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 112–14.

<sup>91</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China’s Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 457–58; Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 92.

quickly spread to the student body.<sup>92</sup> This charge is corroborated by Zhang Wanshu, who was told by a *People's Daily* reporter that the Beijing city party organizations and Education Ministry [教委部] had sent people to spread a rumor that Zhao's ADB speech did not represent the party line and was instead just for foreigners. Within China, the April 26 editorial was still key.<sup>93</sup> Chen Yizi claims that on May 6 even Li Peng himself told the leadership of six universities that the April 26 editorial was written according to Deng's wishes and that Zhao's speech only represented his personal viewpoint.<sup>94</sup>

At the PSC meeting on May 8 that moved the party line closer towards accommodation, Li Peng and Yao Yilin refused to support direct dialogue with illegal student organizations: in so doing, they essentially made it difficult to satisfy the concerns and fears of the students.<sup>95</sup> On May 12, Zhao told Li Peng and Qiao Shi that in order to avoid any incidents during Gorbachev's trip, Li Tieying should meet with the student dialogue group. Li Peng opposed this approach, believing that it meant approval of the illegal student organizations. Zhao was forced to agree to have Li Tieying instead meet with the official student organizations.<sup>96</sup>

Why was delaying the process of getting the gears of dialogue moving so dangerous? After Zhao's ADB speech, the student movement was shaped by two dynamics. On the one hand, many students could tell that the government was beginning to react to their demands of dialogue. Shen Tong writes that before the hunger strike on May 13 "we believed that dialogue was moving forward both publicly and behind the scenes."<sup>97</sup> Li Lu also admits that "most of the students did not see any danger ahead; they were still hoping for the promised dialogue."<sup>98</sup> This, along with exhaustion and a sense of

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<sup>92</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 138.

<sup>94</sup> Chen Yizi, *Chen Yizi huiyilu [Memoirs of Chen Yizi: China's reform in the 1980s]* (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chubanshe, 2013), 582.

<sup>95</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 8; Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 476.

<sup>96</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 12.

<sup>97</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.3.3, Shen Tong.

<sup>98</sup> Li, *Moving the Mountain*, 130.

victory after successful major protests, contributed to the more relaxed situation. On the other hand, these same factors were causing the student movement to lose momentum. The government had yet to give a concrete answer to the students' request for dialogue.<sup>99</sup> Chai Ling later said she was afraid that the student leadership was out of touch with the student body, students were increasingly not taking the class boycott seriously, the movement towards dialogue with the government was extremely slow, and there was fear that the government would take revenge after the protests died. One Peking University teacher who claimed to have special inside information warned Chai not to be tricked by Zhao's words and be arrested after calming down.<sup>100</sup> It was under these circumstances that some students independently began a hunger strike on May 13, which helped fracture the leadership of the student movement and worsen the relationship with the government.

On the night of May 12, hours after students had decided to start a hunger strike the next day, a message was finally sent to the students: dialogue would begin. On May 13 Yan Mingfu met with the leadership of the illegal student organizations.<sup>101</sup> However, he felt highly constricted as Li Peng told him that under no conditions was he allowed to say the protests were not "turmoil." Suddenly Yan thought of a solution: what if the government acknowledged that the April 26 editorial referred to what happened before the 26th, and praised the students for being better behaved afterwards? The students reacted

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<sup>99</sup> According to one account, the government finally gave an answer on the evening of May 12 (after the decision to start a hunger strike had been made but before it started). However, the government's conditions were that the meeting with students not be until May 15, that it be an informal discussion meeting and not a dialogue, the number of student representatives would be limited to twenty, only a partial news report would be permitted, and the students would have to deliver a list of representatives by 10:00 am on May 13. It was seen as a "repetition of their cheap tricks." This was after the government had already put off dialogue multiple times: "On May 5 the Beijing Students' Federation [sic] submitted a petition [with conditions for a dialogue]. The government declared that it would give an "answer" by May 8; subsequently, declaring that it "needed to continue thinking over the mater," it pushed the date for its "answer" up to May 11. But then last week there was no such answer. It was not until yesterday, May 12, that it concocted the above so-called 'answer'." Han and Hua, *Cries for Democracy*, 193–94.

<sup>100</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.4.1, Chai Ling. According to Chai, on May 10 student activists were expelled from the Academy of Art and Design [北京工艺美术学院].

<sup>101</sup> Representatives from three groups attended: the Beijing Students Autonomous Federation, the hunger strikers, and an organizationally independent dialogue group that was created to negotiate with the government without forcing a recognition of the illegal student organizations. For the best account of the dialogue group, see Shen, *Almost a Revolution*.

positively to this suggestion.<sup>102</sup> Yan impressed the students by affirming that their demands about reform were entirely in line with the government and therefore “received resonance and support from the people of the entire nation.” Yan even allowed that the government was at least partially at fault: “the students doubt sincerity in dialogue, the responsibility is in the party center, a self-criticism should be done.” He suggested to the students that if they ended the hunger strike it would prove that the April 26 editorial was incorrect: “immediately reversing the April 26 editorial is very difficult... if the students leave the square on the 15<sup>th</sup>, it will provide a justification for reversing or revising the April 26 editorial.”<sup>103</sup>

The next day, a PSC meeting decided this might work: after all, nothing like the smashing and stealing in Xi’an and Changsha had happened since the April 26 editorial. However, some evidence indicates the hard-liners attempted to turn this dialogue into a farce as well. Li Tieying, an ally of Li Peng, formulated the new policy as “let experience prove matters [让实践来检验],” which went nowhere.<sup>104</sup> Yan Mingfu stepped up to more clearly explain the extent to which the government was willing to concede, leading the students to express interest. But when Yan went to the bathroom, Li immediately said that Yan’s position did not represent the party-line.<sup>105</sup>

Yan did not have time to fix the situation, possibly because of another attempt to derail the negotiations. On the morning of May 14, the students demanded that the dialogue later that day be broadcast live. Yan said this was technologically impossible because all the equipment was set up for Gorbachev’s visit. But Yan proposed that as the dialogue went on recordings would be brought one by one to be continuously broadcast on television. Yan also suggested the students make their own recordings to bring to the students on the square.<sup>106</sup> The broadcast had critical importance: radical student leader Chai Ling said that if the hunger strike declaration could be televised, then even if the government

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<sup>102</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 169.

<sup>103</sup> Liu, *Mori xingcunzhe de dubai*, 105–9.

<sup>104</sup> Lu Chaoqi describes Li Tieying as “listening to the orders of Li Peng.” Lu, *Liusi neibu riji [Internal Diary of June 4]*, 73.

<sup>105</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 170.

<sup>106</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.5.6, Wang Chaohua; Shen, *Almost a Revolution*, 245.

continued to lie people would know the truth: “at the least it would be impossible for 1987 to be repeated, when people were arrested as soon as the student movement was over.”<sup>107</sup>

The dialogue was not shown on television. When students on the square learned about the negotiations and that they were not being broadcast, they went to the meeting. When the student representatives learned what was happening, they demanded an explanation. Yan asked an assistant: “Why was it not directly broadcast? I thought it was.”<sup>108</sup> When Yan was told by the students that the dialogue could not continue without a broadcast, he said, “If we can’t go on, then we can’t” and then left the room.<sup>109</sup>

What happened? Shen Tong writes of the government delegation: “They all thought that it should be being broadcasted. Therefore, this showed that within the government there were people that were blocking the broadcast.”<sup>110</sup> One official tried to explain that a van with the videotape had been blocked by students. One student responded: “That’s not true! The van with the first tape made it out, because we saw a few scenes on television. It was on for thirty seconds, but that’s all. It didn’t even say it was a student-government dialogue!” Shen thought Yan’s departure just signified a temporary break. But then it became clear that Yan could not achieve a public broadcast: he finally returned to say “It’s a shame that we can’t go on because of technical reasons. I hope you understand.” Shen says “Some journalists told us that they had heard that Hu Qili, the Central Committee member in charge of the press, had ordered CCTV to broadcast the meeting live, but someone higher up, maybe from the Central Political Bureau, had instructed the TV station to say it was impossible.”<sup>111</sup> Student leader Xiang Xiaoji claims he was told the jeeps carrying the tapes were blocked from leaving by students surrounding the United Front

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<sup>107</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.6.2, Chai Ling.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.3.4, Shen Tong; Ling Chai, *A Heart for Freedom*, International trade paper ed. (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 142–43.

<sup>109</sup> Shen, *Almost a Revolution*, 248.

<sup>110</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.3.4, Shen Tong.

<sup>111</sup> Shen, *Almost a Revolution*, 248–50.

Department.<sup>112</sup> But other accounts say the students only came to surround the building after they learned the tapes were not being broadcast. We cannot say for sure, but this does appear to be another case of high-level interference that exacerbated the situation even further.

At PSC meeting on May 14, Zhao accused He Dongchang of saying that his speeches represented his position alone, demanding that even if this was not the case He should still step out and reject the rumor.<sup>113</sup> Li Peng defended He: “now there are many rumors spreading in society, people say that a certain propaganda outlet says that according to the orders of one leader the students are only apparently fighting corruption, at a deeper level they want to overthrow the conservative faction, make Li Peng step down, who will clear up these rumors?” The meeting went silent. Li’s intervention ensured that the matter with He was never clarified.<sup>114</sup> On May 15, Yan Mingfu and Hu Qili went to persuade Li Peng that the only way to solve the crisis was to revise the April 26 editorial. Li said the only option was for the party to unite and defeat the turmoil.<sup>115</sup>

One exceptionally powerful piece of evidence that Li might have tried to undermine a condominium with the students is that Yan Mingfu, head of the United Work Department, told Zhao that Li Peng “told him that if, upon my return, I [Zhao] did not support the April 26 editorial, Li would have no choice but to resign.”<sup>116</sup> Zhao also says that Li told him “Don’t you support using soft means to end the student protests? It has already been so many days, it has had no effect!” Zhao concluded that these words “completely revealed his hidden evil intent. The reason that he resisted and damaged [Zhao’s tactics] and caused the use of democratic and legal measures to solve the student protest problem to lose

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<sup>112</sup> Ya Yi, “Xiang Xiaoji: Weile Zhongguo Shehui Zhi Gongzheng [For a Fair Society in China],” *Beijing Zhi Chun* 27 (August 1995).

<sup>113</sup> Lu Chaoqi confirms that the Beijing city party committee and the education ministry were sending people to the universities to say that Zhao’s speech only represented his opinion alone. Lu, *Liusi neibu riji [Internal Diary of June 4]*, 60. He Dongchang was vice minister of the State Education Commission when Li Peng was its head, so they had a previous relationship.

<sup>114</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 14.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, May 15. That night, Zhao told Li that if the party did not recognize its mistake, there was nothing he could do [也没有什么办法了].

<sup>116</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 16.



effect was to find an excuse to use violent suppression against the protests.”<sup>117</sup> Although we have no decisive evidence that Li did indeed want a violent solution (in fact, he probably did not), Zhao’s statement hints at the frustration he felt that Li was not completely supporting his tactics.

Before concluding this section, one final issue must be flagged because of its importance for future research: were conservative forces using secret contacts with the students to push them in certain directions, perhaps even using the secret police? Liang Er, Wuer Kaixi, and Cheng Zhen believed that conservative forces within the leadership were giving them inaccurate and conflicting pieces of information from multiple different sources in order to fracture the student movement.<sup>118</sup> The idea that the public security ministries would use underhand tricks to shape the protests does not go beyond the realm of possibility.<sup>119</sup> Shen Tong provides strong evidence that secret police were putting up big character posters to compromise student leaders like Wang Dan.<sup>120</sup>

The most serious charge is made by Feng Congde, who believes that the secret police may have played a role in the decision to start a hunger strike. He writes:

Chai in her book writes that after the failure on May 2 to find Deng Xiaoping failed, two public security ministry special agents drove her back to Beijing University. The agents told Chai Ling, “if you really want to act, then you need to go all the way [那就干脆彻底一点],” and mocked a student who had a banner that said “hunger strike protest” who was “frightened away like a rabbit” when a police officer came, sarcastically saying that “if your resistance is a laughable game like that, no one will take you seriously.” It was very important to Chai Ling that people took her seriously, it is possible the public security ministry very early on understood this about her. Chai Ling then also wondered whether this was “a suggestion from the enemy.” In any case, later the hunger strike started by Chai Ling fit this suggestion perfectly.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Zhao, *Gaige Licheng [The Course of Reform]*, 42–43.

<sup>118</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 4.8.1, Liang Er.

<sup>119</sup> Wu Jiaxiang provides a list of alleged tricks the police used in the student protests in late 1986/early 1987. According to this account, the police sprayed Tiananmen Square with water to turn it into a giant skating rink, brought young children to the square to place flowers as an excuse to block it off, deliberately caused traffic jams, and placed female police officers in front so that any attempt to pass them would look like sexual harassment. Wu, *Zhongnanhai ri ji*, January 16.

<sup>120</sup> Shen, *Almost a Revolution*, 175.

<sup>121</sup> Feng, *Liusi Riji*, 628.

At another time, an undercover officer frightened Chai by telling her that counter-revolutionaries were punished with seventeen years in jail and that “those in our business climb up on the carcasses of other men.”<sup>122</sup> As discussed above, Ma Shaofang also might have claimed that he received inside information indicating that the “reformist faction” wanted the students to cause more trouble. These pieces of evidence led Feng to believe that “it looks like there is a strong possibility that some people were executing a giant chess move.”<sup>123</sup>

This charge requires several heroic assumptions, including that the conservatives did really want to make the situation worse. Qiao Shi was the PSC member in charge of the secret police: if he was sympathetic to Zhao, why would he use his resources to make the situation worse? Evidence on attitudes within the Ministry of Public Security is spotty. Sarotte reveals that one Stasi agent reported “even some people working for the MPS condemn the actions of Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng.”<sup>124</sup> Yet Wang Fang, the head of the Ministry of Public Security at the time, wrote in his memoirs that “although it was not the case that there were no problems whatsoever in our ranks... they were minor.” On May 12, the MPS released a notification that stated the protests were manipulated by those who wanted to overrun the CCP. Yet they also used Zhao’s language about the importance of solving the crisis with democratic and legal means. By May 17 their attitude had changed dramatically. The party committee of the MPS demanded a major meeting of party leaders be held to unify thinking on the extremely dangerous nature of the turmoil. Most striking, it also called for martial law: the same day that the decision for martial law was made higher up in the party. When their plan was sent to Li Peng, he said: “great minds think alike.” Whether the timing was a coincidence based on similar inclinations or the MPS had received some sort of signal is a mystery.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 628.

<sup>124</sup> Mary Sarotte revealed that one Stasi agent reported “even some people working for the MPS condemn the actions of Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng.” M. E. Sarotte, “China’s Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example,” *International Security* 37, no. 2 (2012): 156–82.

<sup>125</sup> Fang Wang, *Wang Fang huiyilu* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2006), 367–68, 377.

The role of the MPS is therefore inconclusive. Could the conservatives have been using their own men, nonprofessionals, to give students certain pieces of information intended to push them in certain directions? Were these men working directly for their benefactors, or were they doing only what they thought men in the leadership wanted? What was the role of the Ministry of State Security, which was charged with counterintelligence and the security of the regime itself? None of these questions can be answered: they are flagged here simply because of their relevance and potential importance.

In any case, the effect that secret contacts had on the students was probably small. The students' fear of infiltrators and moles bordered on the paranoid.<sup>126</sup> Shen Tong remarks that he was able to immediately identify secret police. Moreover, the sheer amount of rumors and hearsay that was reaching the student leadership was incredible: it would have been difficult for any one piece of information to have a decisive effect.<sup>127</sup> And finally, the student leadership was diverse and they were constrained in their behavior by the broader masses.

## **Section 2: The Authority of Deng Xiaoping**

The support for a peaceful solution described above obviously did not have a decisive effect on the outcome of the crisis: a clear rejection of hypothesis 1a. This begs the question: why then did we see a violent solution? Answering this question demands an investigation into the special role of Deng Xiaoping. The evidence strongly indicates that Deng's authority is theoretically significant for two reasons. First, Deng's *formal* authority was in fact highly equivocal. He did not have an unambiguous right to simply over-ride a united front against him. This complete lack of clarity on what types of decisions should be completely out-sourced to Deng created an odd system of authority relations. This

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<sup>126</sup> A major student leader, Li Lu, was accused by many of being a spy because he lacked a student identification card. He explained this absence by saying he did not bring one to Beijing because he snuck onto the train and did not need it. At the review meeting in Europe, one student said he could confirm Li was not a spy because he knew Li's teacher from Nanjing who could vouch for him. *Huigu yu fansi*, 3.6.3, Zhang Lun.

<sup>127</sup> At one point, several hundred people were coming to the square every day with information. To handle the incoming intelligence, Li Lu even hired someone to organize all the information and give him the equivalent of the Presidential Daily Brief. *Ibid.*, 5.2.2, Li Lu.

system put a premium on which interpretation of the rules was selected out of a potentially wide variety of such interpretations (hypothesis 2b). Second, his authority primarily rested in his prestige as a revolutionary elder, not as the representative of a particularly popular policy platform. This suggests support for hypothesis 1b. However, because both of these sources of power, personal prestige and formal authority, were problematic for Deng in 1989, they therefore suggest more importance for hypothesis 3b, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Deng's only formal party position was head of the CMC. The other most important source for institutionally-imposed legitimacy was a secret decision made at the first Central Committee plenum after the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1987. When the session opened, Zhao said that although the old comrades Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, and Peng Zhen had already retired, their deep experience in revolutionary struggle was a treasure of the party. Zhao declared the following:

Indeed, the role and function of Comrade Xiaoping as the decider of major issues of our party and nation has passed the test of history and is universally acknowledged both inside and outside the party and domestically and internationally. Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, even though Comrade Xiaoping has not taken the position of party chairman or general secretary, in actuality it is Comrade Xiaoping taking the helm. Although now Comrade Xiaoping has left the Central Committee and Politburo Standing Committee, Comrade Xiaoping's status and function as the decider of major issues in the party and nation has not changed, we still need Comrade Xiaoping to continue to take the helm at key junctures. The Politburo Standing Committee believes: in the future when faced with major issues the standing committee still must ask Comrade Xiaoping for advice, Comrade Xiaoping can still summon us to have a meeting. We sincerely raise this request to the plenum and Comrade Xiaoping, because this is the need for the affair of our party, I believe that the plenum will definitely agree to our demand (enthusiastic applause). Alright! Our request received the enthusiastic approval of the plenum, we see it as support with a special meaning to the Politburo Standing Committee.<sup>128</sup>

Even though the decision was passed with applause, not secret vote, and non-voting members of the Central Committee were present, even Zhao supporters like Bao Tong believe that it was “formal, legal, and in effect.” But how significant was this decision in practice? The highly problematic nature of such a decision speaks to its fundamental weaknesses. Bao pointed out that the decision was inappropriate

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<sup>128</sup> Zhao Ziyang wenji bianxiezu, *Zhao Ziyang Wenji (1980-1989): Di Si Juan (1987-1989) [Writings of Zhao Ziyang (1980-1989) Volume 4 (1987-1989)]*, 255–56.

because “giving the party and even the entire country to one man to ‘take the helm’ clearly is a violation of Article 2 of the Constitution, violates a scientific historical outlook, and violates the decision on organization made in the party constitution of the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.”<sup>129</sup> Article 2 of the Constitution states that “All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people. The National People's Congress and the local people's congresses at various levels are the organs through which the people exercise state power.” As for the party constitution, Bao is probably referring to Article 16: “No Party member, whatever his position, is allowed to make decisions on major issues on his own. In an emergency, when a decision by an individual is unavoidable, the matter must be reported to the Party organization immediately afterwards. No leader is allowed to decide matters arbitrarily on his own or to place himself above the Party organization.” If the extent of Deng’s authority was restricted by the language in the party and state constitutions, then he in fact should not have been able to act like a dictator.

Moreover, the 1987 CC plenum decision also failed to answer how Deng’s role related to other sources of power. According to the state constitution’s Article 57, “The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China is the highest organ of state power. Its permanent body is the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress.” A party plenum decision cannot change the state constitution.

The decision also did not clearly answer the nature of Deng’s relationship to party decision making bodies. According to Article 10 Clause 3 of the party constitution, “the highest leading body of the Party is the National Congress and the Central Committee elected by it.” Article 15 states that “Only the Central Committee of the Party has the power to make decisions on major policies of a nationwide character” and Article 21 affirms that “When the Central Committee is not in session, the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee exercise the functions and powers of the Central Committee.” Does this mean

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<sup>129</sup> Weiguo Zhang, “Bao Tong Da Zhang Weiguo Liushi Wen [Bao Tong Answers Zhang Weiguo’s Sixty Questions (Part 2 of 2)],” *Epoch Times*, accessed July 8, 2015, <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/1/4/30/n82902.htm>.

that regardless of the plenum decision, Deng's writ did not extend to "major policies of a nationwide character?" Legally speaking, a plenum decision could not override the party constitution.

Could Deng really contravene decisions made by the PSC, the Politburo, or National People's Congress? Zhao believed that despite the 1st plenum of the Central Committee's decision, "as long as the PSC made a collective decision, [Deng] always supported it."<sup>130</sup> Zhao thought this habit should have worked with regards to the Tiananmen crisis as well: "If [at the time] I had gone to report that the student movement was calming down, he would have assented."<sup>131</sup> Zhao therefore apparently believed that although Deng had been granted special authority, there was an understanding, at least on his part, that Deng would allow the PSC to take the lead.

Much more obvious was the importance of Deng's *informal* authority. Zhao himself put the matter succinctly in 1995, "authority is formed under many historical conditions, it is not possible to confer authority and have it suddenly appear."<sup>132</sup> This was discussed in greater detail in the previous chapters. However, by 1989 this form of authority was more questionable. One party official in the youth bureau of the Organization Department wrote in his private journal later during the crisis: "It is already difficult for Deng to again rely on his personal authority to select actions that do not accord with regulation [非程序化], otherwise it will be not only Deng's tragedy, but a tragedy for the nation and the system."<sup>133</sup> Student protesters often likened him to the infamous Dowager Cixi who ruled from "behind a screen": "it has been 76 years since the demise of the Qing government. But China still has an emperor without a crown on his head."<sup>134</sup> The Chinese were not immune to the impatient sentiments toward older revolutionaries that we saw in the Soviet chapters. Manion pointed to "the overwhelming majority of

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<sup>130</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 26–27.

<sup>131</sup> Zhang Xianyang and Shi Yijun, *Zhao Ziyang Zhongnanhai shinian jishi, 1980-1989 [Record of Zhao Ziyang's Ten Years at Zhongnanhai 1980-1989]* (Hong Kong: Shijie kexue jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 1042–44.

<sup>132</sup> Du, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuo guo shen me?*

<sup>133</sup> Cui Wunian, *Wo de 83 Ge Yue [My 83 Months]* (Hong Kong: Gaowen chubanshe, 2003), 610.

<sup>134</sup> Ernest P. Young, "Imagining the Ancien Regime in the Deng Era," in *Popular Protest & Political Culture in Modern China*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, 2 ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 27.

younger cadres reporting that young and middle-aged co-workers do indeed resent (again, *you yijian*) older cadres who stay on to work past the stipulated age of retirement.”<sup>135</sup> In January 1987, the Propaganda Ministry even distributed a notification criticizing the newspaper *Yangzi Wanbao* for supporting another paper’s publishing of an article called “I Support Comrade Deng Xiaoping Retiring.” Especially because a previous telegram had been sent in November of 1986 warning against publishing articles on the positions in the leadership, this was described as “a serious political mistake.”<sup>136</sup>

Significantly, the evidence clearly shows that Deng himself understood the problematic nature of his authority and did not like to be seen as in charge. For example, strong evidence now indicates that Deng in fact was giving directions to Li Peng much earlier than previously appreciated and may even have played a role in the notorious April 26 editorial. This incident reveals the extent to which Deng understood the direct use of his authority to be politically questionable and in contravention with typical political practices.

When the protests started, Zhao believed that only those individuals involved in beating, smashing, looting, burning, or trespassing should be punished. His strategy consisted of three points: persuading students to return to classes, establishing dialogue to reduce tensions, and avoiding bloodshed no matter what. These three points were accepted by every member of the PSC, and later Zhao heard that when Premier Li Peng reported these points to Deng, even he expressed support. On April 19, Deng had personally told Zhao that he supported his policy for handling the student protests. When Zhao left for North Korea in the afternoon of April 23, Li told Peng at the train station that he still supported those three points.<sup>137</sup> Yang Shangkun also appears not to have been especially concerned about the protests,

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<sup>135</sup> Melanie Manion, *Retirement of Revolutionaries in China: Public Policies, Social Norms, Private Interests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 121.

<sup>136</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu guanyu ‘Yangzi wanbao’ kanzai cuowu wenzhang ‘wo zancheng Deng Xiaoping tuixiu’ yiwen de tongbao [Notification of the CC Propaganda Ministry on Yangzi Wanbao Publishing the Incorrect Article “I Support Comrade Deng Xiaoping Retiring”, January 9, 1987, Internal Report 1981.07.07-1987. Box 1, Zhongguo gong chan dang, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>137</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 5–6, 9.

telling Li Peng on April 18 that in order to “smoothen contradictions” it was possible to allow the students to have a few legal commemorative activities.<sup>138</sup> A few hours before Zhao left for North Korea at 4:20 pm, Li Peng and fellow PSC member Qiao Shi decided that the *People’s Daily* should publish an article based on Zhao’s three points.<sup>139</sup>

Li in his own memoirs writes that on the morning of the next day, he spoke with Yao Yilin, Wan Li, and Song Ping (an old revolutionary leading the Organization Department) about the developing situation. Li admits that they still all agreed with yesterday’s three points. Wan Li offered to speak to the Beijing city leadership. At 5 pm, Wan said the Beijing city leadership concluded the situation was extremely serious and that the party center had yet to give clear directions. Wan suggested opening a PSC meeting, and Li accepted this decision.<sup>140</sup>

The meeting held at 8 pm that night included PSC members Li Peng, Qiao Shi, Hu Qili, and Yao Yilin, PSC meeting regular attendees Yang Shangkun and Wan Li, secretariat members Rui Xingwen, Yan Mingfu, and Wen Jiabao, and Politburo members Tian Jiyun, Li Ximing, Song Ping, and Ding Guan’gen. According to Li’s memoirs and all available official sources, the entire meeting agreed that the situation was extremely serious. Behind the student protests were manipulators: this was an organized, planned political struggle against the leadership of the CCP. The meeting decided to publish a major

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<sup>138</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, April 18.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, April 23.

<sup>140</sup> An official account, Zhao Ziyang, and Li Peng all differ on Wan Li’s role. According to an official account published, Li Peng ordered Wan Li [受李鹏总理委托] to listen to a report by the Beijing city party committee. Wan then suggested to Li that he hold a PSC meeting because he thought the situation was so serious. Zhao believed that the Beijing Party committee asked Wan to “call a meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee to listen to their report.” According to Li Peng, however, “Li used to be vice secretary of the Beijing city party organization and vice mayor in charge of daily affairs. He on his own initiative expressed willingness to go work on the Beijing city leadership and make them less worried so as to bravely work on the students.” Gongqingtuan Beijing Shiwei, *70 tian dashiji : Hu Yaobang bingshi dao Zhao Ziyang jiezhi [Record of Major Events of 70 Days: From Hu Yaobang’s Death to Zhao Ziyang’s Removal From Office]* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1990), 12–13. Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 9. Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, April 24. Zhao believes that Wan was tricked. Zhang and Shi, *Zhao Ziyang Zhongnanhai shinian jishi, 1980-1989 [Record of Zhao Ziyang’s Ten Years at Zhongnanhai 1980-1989]*, 1068.



editorial in the *People's Daily* communicating this conclusion. That night Deng's secretary called Li and asked him and Yang Shangkun to visit Deng at his house at 10 am the following morning.<sup>141</sup>

According to Li and the *Chronology of Deng Xiaoping*, Deng gave a speech on the morning of April 25 after Li's report on the meeting the day before.<sup>142</sup> Deng agreed with their conclusions and described the protests as "turmoil." Deng described the balance of power: "the many workers, peasants, and intellectuals protect us the cadres protect us, and the democratic parties are also good. We also have millions in the People's Liberation Army. What do we have to fear?" Deng's words were so hard-line that head of the General Office, Wen Jiabao, called Li Peng to ask if some parts could be cut from the report on Deng's comments so as not to upset too many people. Li agreed.<sup>143</sup>

The usual explanation for Deng's behavior is that the Beijing city mayor and party head had used tendentious accounts of the protests to trick Deng [谎报军情].<sup>144</sup> However, some parts of Li Peng's account are problematic, leading some former key Zhao colleagues to ask: did Deng really wait until the 25 to express his position on the student protests? If the answer is no, then Deng was both usurping the PSC's prerogative to make decisions and going to great pains to hide his behavior. This would speak to the weakness of party institutions and the strength of his own personal authority (hypothesis 1b), but, because he also hid his role, the weakness of his *formal* authority. Deng knew he was playing with the rules (hypothesis 2b).

The following points suggest that Deng made his viewpoint known much earlier than previously assumed. First, how is it possible that the PSC changed its mind so soon after a consensus based on Zhao's position was established? Second, how could the meeting have taken such a hard line given the

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<sup>141</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, April 24.

<sup>142</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 1272.

<sup>143</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, April 25.

<sup>144</sup> On April 29, Hu Qili strongly hinted that the April 26 editorial was based on tendentious accounts. Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 57-58, 90.

presence of so many figures with reformist inclinations and proponents of dialogue with the students? How could Wan Li, one of the least likely individuals to want a hard line against the students, have been the one to summon a meeting based on alarmist reports?<sup>145</sup> Third, would Li Peng, who as premier was outranked by Zhao, dare to attack the three points so soon after they had been approved not only by the PSC but Deng himself?<sup>146</sup> Fourth, according to Zhang Wanshu and Lu Chaoqi, who both worked for official media organizations at the time, the April 26 editorial was already being written on the morning of April 25: the moment when Deng was allegedly making those comments.<sup>147</sup> Yet the April 26 editorial was supposed to be based on both the spirit of Deng's comments and the PSC meeting.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, in the account of the April 24 meeting that Hu Qili gave representatives from Xinhua, *People's Daily*, and the television stations at 10 am on April 25, neither the terms "turmoil" nor "a planned plot" [一场又计划的阴谋] appeared. They did appear, however, in Deng's comments to Li Peng and Yang Shangkun that were allegedly made on the morning of the 25. Those comments appeared in the editorial itself.<sup>149</sup>

These facts point to another strong possibility: that it was Deng who changed his mind and communicated his intention to the PSC. In other words, Deng did not approve the contents of the PSC meeting: the PSC meeting was enacting Deng's will. In Li's memoirs, he writes that on April 23 at 8:30 pm, Yang Shangkun encouraged him to go see Deng Xiaoping.<sup>150</sup> Could this meeting have taken place

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<sup>145</sup> Zhao believes Wan was tricked into calling the meeting, noting that "Wan Li and I had been in total agreement in our view of the student protests." Zhao met with Wan individually in May, which would have given Wan an opportunity to explain what happened. Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 9.

<sup>146</sup> Wu Guoguang, "Zhengzhi Quanli, Xianzhang Zhidu Yu Lishi beiju 'Li Peng [Liusi] Riji' chudu [Political Authority, Constitutional System and Historical Tragedy: First Reading of 'Li Peng's [June 4] Diary]," *CND*, accessed July 10, 2015, <http://hx.cnd.org/2010/06/18/%E5%90%B4%E5%9B%BD%E5%85%89%EF%BC%9A%E6%94%BF%E6%B2%BB%E6%9D%83%E5%8A%9B%E3%80%81%E5%AE%AA%E7%AB%A0%E5%88%B6%E5%BA%A6%E4%B8%8E%E5%8E%86%E5%8F%B2%E6%82%B2%E5%89%A7%E2%80%95%E2%80%95%E3%80%8A%E6%9D%8E/>; Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 452.

<sup>147</sup> Lu, *Liusi neibu riji [Internal Diary of June 4]*, 32; Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 57–59.

<sup>148</sup> Li Peng said explicitly in a speech to the 4<sup>th</sup> plenum that the April 26 editorial was based on both the PSC decision and Deng's comments. Han, *Lishi de chuangshang*, 396.

<sup>149</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 57–59.

<sup>150</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, April 23.

before the enlarged PSC meeting in the evening of the next day? Perhaps even that night?<sup>151</sup> Former Zhao assistant Wu Guoguang concludes that Deng's role in suggesting the April 26 editorial was hidden because it "did not accord with the party's legal procedures [不合乎中共的合法程序]."<sup>152</sup>

In fact, Deng did not even want his comments and their relationship to the editorial to be distributed *at all*, nor did he want to take credit for martial law a couple weeks later. Zhao related in his memoirs: "Deng was not happy about how Li Peng had made his remarks public... Later, on May 17, at the meeting at Deng's home at which the decision was made to impose martial law, Deng demanded of Li Peng, 'Don't repeat what you did before; don't reveal that that it was I who made the decision to impose martial law!'"<sup>153</sup> After all, Zhao was supported by the Politburo, so Deng's actions would have been clearly seen as dictatorial.<sup>154</sup> Even after the crackdown, Deng was concerned about being seen as too powerful, telling the new PSC that "My weight is too great, it is not good for the nation or the party, one day it will be very dangerous."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Vogel writes that Li and Yang met with Deng on April 23 and "Deng agreed that the demonstrators should be warned of the gravity of their actions... Li Peng wrote in his diary that by April 23 Deng had already decided that a firm warning is needed." However, neither the electronic edition, Xidian edition, nor Ao Ya edition of Li Peng's memoirs say that Deng communicated his intentions on April 23. Vogel writes that his version is from the Fung Library, but these are the only versions in that library, and the author has discovered none other elsewhere. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 604; Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*; Li Peng, *Li Peng "Liusi Riji" [Li Peng's "June 4 Diary"]* (El Monte: Xidian, 2010); Zhang Ganghua and Li Peng, *Li Li Pengu si ri ji zhen xiang : fu lu Li Li Pengu si ri ji yuan wen [The True Story of Li Peng's June 4 Diary]* (Hong Kong: Ao Ya, 2010).

<sup>152</sup> Guoguang Wu, *Zhao Ziyang yu zhengzhi gaige [Zhao Ziyang and Political Reform]*, Yuan jing cong shu ; 53 (Taipei: Yuanjing, 1997).

<sup>153</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 11. Actually, Li sent a draft of Deng's comments for approval on the 26<sup>th</sup>, but this was for the version to be more broadly disseminated. The day before his comments had already been sent to members of the top leadership. Deng made some changes to the version sent to him on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>154</sup> The untrustworthy Tiananmen Papers even claim Zhao explicitly told Deng on May 13 that "the consensus in the Politburo has been to use the policies of guiding and dividing, winning over the great majority of students and intellectuals while isolating the tiny minority of anticommunist troublemakers, thereby stilling the movement through democratic and legal means." Zhang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, 149.

<sup>155</sup> "Deng Xiaoping tongzhi tong Yang Shangkun, Wan Li, Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Qiao Shi, Yao Yilin, Song Ping, Li Ruihuan tongzhi tanhua yaodian [Key Points from comrade Deng Xiaoping's Conversation with Comrades Yang Shangkun, Wan Li, Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Qiao Shi, Yao Yilin, Song Ping, Li Ruihuan", *Guanyu zhizhi dongluan pingxi fangeming baoluan wending jushi de youguan cailiao xuanbian* (3). Zhonggong Shenyang shiwei xuanchuanbu 1989-7 (Service Center for Chinese Publications), Special Topic Series [teji] Volume 28.

The issue of Deng's authority is intrinsically tied to another issue: the charge that Zhao was an opponent of Deng. When Zhao publicly announced the decision about Deng's authority after the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in a meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in the midst of the crisis, Zhao was accused of selling out Deng. This is a crucial issue, as this was one of the key charges leveled against Zhao to justify his political marginalization. The newly available evidence indicates that Deng's angry reaction to Zhao's revelation suggests he understood the politically disastrous implication that he was a dictator and that the 1987 decision was politically dubious. Authority relations and rules were therefore highly ambiguous, which, as mentioned above, made interpretation of the rules exceptionally important (hypothesis 2b). Second, characterizing Zhao's behavior as a challenge to Deng is wrong, and should therefore be considered another case of *kompromat* (hypothesis 1b).

The suggestion that Zhao's statement indicated opposition to Deng flounders on many points. First, although Zhao was trying to rally support for a peaceful solution inside the party apparatus, he was exceedingly careful not to damage Deng's authority. Zhao realized that Deng's position was critical. He hoped that eventually Deng would say something like, "It seems that when Li Peng gave his report on April 25, we overreacted to the situation. It now appears that the student demonstrations are not such an overwhelming problem."<sup>156</sup> Some evidence even hints that Deng did not actively oppose the new tactic. Deng's secretary Wang Ruilin told Zhao that Deng was not feeling well and wanted to be well-rested for Gorbachev's visit. But on May 3, Zhao went to Yang Shangkun's home, where Yang told him that Wang Ruilin and Deng's children "believed it would be difficult to reverse the position taken in the April 26 editorial, but thought it could be downplayed by not mentioning it again while gradually turning away from it. They said that if I were to talk to Deng then, only to have him reaffirm his stand, it would make it even more difficult to turn things around gradually." Yang also said "Those of you who are in the front lines can turn things around gradually" and promised to appeal to other members of the PSC. On the same day, head of the United Front Department Yan Mingfu told Zhao that Wang and Deng's children thought

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<sup>156</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 18.

the leadership should manage the situation as they saw best.<sup>157</sup> \* When Zhao was preparing his speech to commemorate May 4, Deng's daughter Maomao asked Zhao's assistant Bao Tong to include remarks about "how much Deng loved and protected young people."<sup>158</sup> After the ADB speech, Yang said to Xu Jiaturun: "If I go see the old man [Deng] you know his temper, it's possible he would listen, and also possible he wouldn't listen. Go tell Ziyang, have him go ahead, if someone has to be responsible, I'll be first in line."<sup>159</sup> Yang Shangkun also personally told Zhao that Peng Zhen told him "if in the future Deng looks to blame someone, Ziyang should not be blamed alone, there is also you and me [Yang and Peng], you count and I count."<sup>160</sup>

Zhao went out of his way to make sure his tactics did not look like a violation of Deng's comments. Zhao believed that protecting Deng's prestige was crucial. He strongly emphasized to Xu Jiaturun on May 3 that "We definitely must defend the authority of Comrade Xiaoping. I am willing to take

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 18–19. Li Peng provides a different account in his memoirs: he writes that on May 2 Zhao asked Yan Mingfu to find Yang Shangkun so they could all go meet Deng. Yang refused, saying that Deng's position on the turmoil was set and could not be changed.

\* The role of Deng's family is another great mystery of June 4. On the morning of April 27 an unidentified individual came to PU and said Deng Lin, Deng's daughter, was worried about her father's health and wanted to know what exactly the students wanted. The students explained that they had no personal animosity towards Deng because of his accomplishments in the reform and were in fact very grateful. This figure said that "Deng and the other leaders like young people very much... But right now they are having a difficult time and hope the students will give them some time before pushing the movement further and bringing harm to everyone." Chai was surprised, as this was very different from the April 26 editorial verdict. Chai thought this meant Deng might have been misinformed about the student movement and truly believed that these informal connections could clear up the situation for him. Before the big protest on May 4, Chai Ling wanted to find this person again to explain the intentions of the movement. After several hours of searching, the man explained that he grew close to the Deng family because he was sent to jail because of his support for him in 1976. He informed the students that Deng's family had left the city. After the meeting Chai and another student leader were driven home by two large men who Chai suspected to be public security. Chai writes: "Later we learned that Deng's family had become alarmed by the mass reaction from the people on April 27. They felt Deng had been misled by Li Peng's exaggeration of the situation. Deng's family had all suffered from his banishments during the Cultural Revolution, but in many situations they had been helped, protected, protected, and loved by the goodness of the common people. They had a tender spot in their hearts for the Chinese people and the Beijing citizens who had led them back to power. Two of Deng's children went to Beida to try to build a bridge of communication with the students, but when they came to the South Gate of campus, they were met with talk of revenge and retribution by some students and other bystanders, none of whom were part of the official student leadership. Deng's son and daughter had cut short their diplomatic mission, and Deng Xiaoping soon left Beijing for his summer residence in Beidaihe, an ocean resort a few hours north of the capital." *Huigu yu fansi*, 2.7.2, *Chai Ling*; Chai, *A Heart For Freedom*, 117, 120-121.

<sup>158</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 11.

<sup>159</sup> Xu, *Xu Jiaturun Xianggang Huiyilu [Xu Jiaturun's Hong Kong Memoirs]*, 2:374.

<sup>160</sup> Zhao, *Gaige Licheng [The Course of Reform]*, 38.

responsibility. We must explain the situation to Comrade Xiaoping and change the characterization of the movement.”<sup>161</sup> On May 6, Zhao told Hu Qili and Rui Xingwen (a member of the secretariat) that it was necessary to solve the crisis using democracy and law [在民主和法制的轨道上]. But he claimed this was in line with Deng: “Comrade Xiaoping said the overriding priority is stability, this guideline is completely correct. For stability, it is necessary to solve contradictions, intensifying contradictions is not beneficial for achieving the goal of stability.”<sup>162</sup>

Zhao wrote in his memoirs that when he finally met Deng personally on May 13, Deng expressed support for Zhao’s tactics of “open dialogue, tackling corruption, and transparency.”<sup>163</sup> The head of Xinhua told Zhang Wanshu on the night of the 13<sup>th</sup> that “this morning Comrades Ziyang and Shangkun went to Xiaoping’s home, they reported their recent thinking, and Xiaoping supported them and even wanted him to grasp the opportunity to solve the problem of corruption, that it was necessary to increase transparency.”<sup>164</sup> The official *Chronology of Deng Xiaoping* confirms that Deng told Zhao that “with regards to the matter of combatting corruption, I have already spoken about this multiple times, but it has not been diligently executed, using this opportunity to clean up our own ranks is advantageous.” Not all signs were positive, however. The *Chronology* claims that although Deng supported transparency, he qualified this by saying that what kind of transparency “should be researched.” He also stated that illegal student organizations should not be recognized.<sup>165</sup> According to Li’s memoirs, Deng inexplicably also told Zhao: “I am very tired right now, my brain is inadequate, my tinnitus is terrible, I cannot hear clearly what you are saying.”<sup>166</sup> The *Tiananmen Papers* provide an alleged account of this meeting that showed

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<sup>161</sup> Xu, *Xu Jiatur Xianggang Huiyilu [Xu Jiatur’s Hong Kong Memoirs]*, 2:371.

<sup>162</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 134.

<sup>163</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 21.

<sup>164</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 162.

<sup>165</sup> *Deng Xiaoping Nianpu (1975-1997) [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1997]*, 2:1275.

<sup>166</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 13. According to Li’s memoirs, however, although Deng told Zhao that he supported transparency, he qualified this by saying that what kind of transparency “should be researched” and that illegal organizations should not be recognized. Deng’s intentions at that meeting are further obscured by these rather strange remarks: “I am very tired right now, my brain is inadequate, my tinnitus is

Deng willing to support Zhao but growing impatient.<sup>167</sup> In any case, the evidence indicates that Deng had an opportunity to directly tell Zhao that his new tactics were wrong but did not do so. Rightly or wrongly, Zhao seems to have interpreted the May 13 meeting with Deng as a further sign of encouragement.\*

These facts show that Zhao at an early stage actively sought out Deng's advice, the only response he received was an encouraging one from Deng's family, and he always did his best to protect Deng's prestige.<sup>168</sup> Claims that Zhao was establishing a 'second headquarters' in the party, which were later used to justify the crackdown, are therefore highly tendentious. If anyone should be accused of poor communication, it is Deng. Deng apparently made his position clear on May 11, when his secretary Wang Ruilin called Li Peng to communicate Deng's position: "without the April 26 editorial, the situation would not be as relaxed as it is today, Li Peng should tenaciously resist pressure from the inside and outside." Li interpreted this to mean that Deng opposed Zhao's four points and wanted him to undermine Qiao's claim that Deng supported Zhao in all his behavior.<sup>169</sup>

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terrible, I cannot hear clearly what you are saying." Moreover, two days earlier it appears that Deng was calling on Li to resist Zhao's new plan. See below.

<sup>167</sup> Deng stated: "Dialogue is fine, but the point is to solve the problem. We can't be led around by the nose." Deng accepted that "it was obvious from the start that a tiny majority was stirring up the majority" but also said "the opposition is not just some students but a bunch of rebels and a lot of riffraff... These people want to overthrow our Party and state." Deng accepted the opportunity should be used to combat corruption. Zhang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, 147–52. The document is labeled an "excerpt from memoranda of conversations supplied by a friend of Yang Shangkun who cannot be further identified."

\* At the time, Zhao believed the problem of whether or not to recognize illegal student groups could be avoided by reconstructing the official student unions in such a way as to better reflect the will of the students. Moreover, the students had already constructed a special dialogue group in order to negotiate with the government without forcing it to recognize organizations it believed were illegal, like the Beijing Students Autonomous Federation.

<sup>168</sup> Only one piece of evidence strongly contradicts this evaluation. Lu Chaoqi, who worked for *People's Daily*, wrote that on May 4 "after coming to work old Tan told me that Hu Qili revealed to Qin Chuan that Zhao Ziyang had already lay his cards on the table to Deng Xiaoping, saying that he would prefer to resign from the general secretary position before suppressing the student movement. It is said [据说] that Deng Xiaoping already compromised, it looks like the situation is changing." This is so different from all other evidence that the author believes it to be a rumor or someone's analysis of the situation. Lu, *Liusi neibu riji [Internal Diary of June 4]*, 53.

<sup>169</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 11.

Zhao's behavior up to this point helps contextualize the major charge that he "used the May 16 meeting with Gorbachev to deliberately make the target of the struggle move towards Comrade Deng Xiaoping."<sup>170</sup> Zhao was accused of such an act because of the following comments:

You probably know that Deng Xiaoping, beginning from the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenum of CC CCP, which took place in December 1978, has been leader of our party, generally recognized as such inside the country and beyond its borders. In spite of the fact that at the 13th Congress in 1986-1987 he, at his own wish, left the ranks of the CC [Central Committee] and the Standing Committee of the Politburo CC CCP [Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party], all our party comrades know that they cannot do without his leadership, wisdom and experience. At the 1st plenum, elected by the 13th Congress, a fairly important decision was made—that in all big questions we should turn to him as to a leader. This decision was not published but I am informing you about it today.<sup>171</sup>

Did Zhao really intend to place the responsibility for the crisis on Deng? Many Zhao supporters have pointed out that the leadership as a matter of habit told foreign delegations about Deng's continued special role in the party. Yet this misses the obvious point: Zhao was revealing Deng's role for the first time *publicly*, and in the midst of a major political emergency.

However, Zhao's former assistant Wu Wei provides extremely strong evidence that refutes the accusation Zhao was using this revelation to attack Deng. On May 13 in a meeting with workers, one of them asked Zhao "why is it that the PSC reports to Deng Xiaoping, who is not a member of the PSC?" Zhao reacted by saying that the first 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee plenum made a decision to "ask for Deng's advice" on major issues. The workers reacted positively to Zhao's explanation.<sup>172</sup> Based on this experience, Zhao told his secretary Bao Tong on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> that:

among the masses there are some words that do not sound pleasant [很难听], they say that Deng Xiaoping is 'ruling from behind the curtain,' this type of expression is inaccurate, only we can make this matter clear, we must lovingly defend the image of Comrade Xiaoping, in the next two days I plan to open a meeting of Beijing media and propaganda outlets and report on the decision of the 1st plenum of

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<sup>170</sup> Guojia jiaowei shehui kexue yanjiu yu yishu jiaoyu si, Guojia jiaowei sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo si, Beijing shiwei gaodeng xuexiao gongzuo weiyuanhui, *Wushi Tian de Huigu Yu Fansi [Reviewing and Reflecting on the 50 Days]*, 24.

<sup>171</sup> "Excerpts from Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Zhao Ziyang," May 16, 1989. Wilson Center Digital Archive

<sup>172</sup> Du, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuo guo shen me?*, 27.



the 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee... The students don't know that we have asked Comrade Xiaoping to take the helm on major issues.

Most interestingly, Zhao emphasized that

there has never been a matter on which Comrade Xiaoping rejected [our position], whatever we suggested Comrade Xiaoping supported. Including the April 26 editorial, it was the PSC that reported to him, Li Peng that reported, Xiaoping only agreed to the PSC's position. Therefore, we on the PSC should take responsibility.

This explanation therefore would not only justify Deng's position but provide an excuse to revise the April 26 editorial that did not hurt his image.<sup>173</sup>

On May 15, Bao Tong assigned a number of individuals the task of turning Zhao's comments into a speech. It was essentially finished on the afternoon of the 16 and the plan was to give it to Zhao the next day. One of the authors provided the draft of the speech, which was never given, to Wu Wei. This speech explicitly stated that as general secretary Zhao should take responsibility for the April 26 editorial. It also attempted to separate Deng's comments from the editorial itself, claiming that "the true spirit of Deng's words is that we must have stability and not chaos. These words were, are, and will be correct in the future."

Perhaps the most amazing revelation, however, is that Bao Tong first wanted to send the draft of this speech to a member of Deng's family: "after I wrote the speech, I did not send it to Ziyang immediately, but I said to Chen Xiaolu: 'Do me a favor and call Deng Maomao [Deng's daughter, also known as Deng Rong], I will either go to her or she will come here, I have something I want her to read.' I wanted a member of Deng's family to provide their opinion on this document to see whether it was appropriate or not, and only then send it to Ziyang." Chen Xiaolu was a childhood friend of Deng Maomao. Later, Chen told Bao Tong that Deng's daughter said she was busy and refused to read the document. Ultimately, Zhao never made the speech: on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the decision to start martial law was made. However, its contents clearly show that Zhao's intentions toward Deng were still positive.

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<sup>173</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 495.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Bao was assigned the task of editing Zhao's comments for the Gorbachev meeting. Bao took parts of the draft speech and put them into the comments for Gorbachev, knowing that the other speech would not happen for at least another couple days.<sup>174</sup> In his comments to Gorbachev, Zhao did mention the 1st plenum's decision that Deng would "take the helm" and that Deng "always fully supports our work." However, it did not include anything about the April 26 editorial: therefore Deng's responsibility was emphasized, but not his innocence, as it would have been in the original draft being prepared by Zhao for a different occasion. But Zhao deliberately did not reveal that Deng had the right to summon meetings on his own and make final decisions [可以召集会议和由他拍板的话]. Zhao believed that this formulation would not lead people to believe that Deng made the decision on every issue.<sup>175</sup>

In his speech to the 4th plenum defending his actions in late June, Zhao made another revelation that supports this interpretation of his actions. Zhao revealed that even before his meeting with the workers, Beijing mayor Chen Xitong told those doing university work [大专院校工作的同志] about the decision of the 1st plenum of the 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee and that the reaction was positive. Chen had reported this to the PSC on April 28.<sup>176</sup>

Zhao had another reason to include a line about Deng's special role in the party. When Zhao met Deng on May 13, Deng explicitly stated that *his* meeting with Gorbachev would signify the restoration of normal relations. This was different from how the meetings were described in the Foreign Ministry's plan. Zhao "very strongly noticed [非常注意]" Deng's comment and felt he had to go out of his way to make sure Gorbachev understood that his meeting with Deng was more important. Zhao therefore felt it was natural to include a statement about the 1st plenum's decision.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, after Deng's earlier meeting with Gorbachev, Bao called to make sure that it was explained clearly that Deng's meeting, not

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 495–97.

<sup>175</sup> Ding, *Liusi Qianhou*, 2:130–31.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Zhao, *Gaige Licheng [The Course of Reform]*, 67.

Zhao's, signified the restoration of relations. He learned that Gorbachev was only told the "meeting between the two party leaders" meant the restoration. Fearing that Gorbachev would misunderstand Deng's meaning, Bao felt it was even more important for Zhao to explain the situation clearly. In fact, Gorbachev even said at the meeting that he believed his meeting with Zhao, as his fellow secretary general, meant relations were restored. Zhao was therefore in a difficult situation, facing the possibility of either emphasizing Deng's leadership too much or not enough.<sup>178</sup>

Whatever Zhao's intentions, the results were immediate and tragic. Anti-Deng slogans immediately appeared among the protesters at a level never before seen.<sup>179</sup> Even foreign observers concluded that Zhao had leveled an attack on Deng.<sup>180</sup> Bao Tong tried desperately to explain to Deng's family the nature of Zhao's intention. When one of Bao's assistants got Deng's daughter Deng Rong on the phone, she said: "please tell Comrade Bao Tong that there is no longer anything to discuss... The old man in our family has already made preparations to be overthrown a fourth time." On the morning of May 17, Deng Nan told Zhao over the telephone that he "had no conscience. The old man in our family always strongly supported your work, how could you do this?" and then hung up the phone on him.<sup>181</sup>

In a conversation with friends in 1993, Zhao explicitly tied Deng's angry response to the problematic and confusing nature of the elder revolutionary's status, thus showing the extent to which rules and authority relations were ambiguous (hypothesis 2b):

Deng was an authoritarian, he previously stated that China could only have one mother-in-law, but he also always portrayed himself as "not being hungry for power," expressed that he was enlightened. Therefore,

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<sup>178</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 501. According to the Diary of Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze, Li Peng told Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze in February 1989 that "the meeting with Zhao Ziyang will mean the restoration of party-to-party ties." February, 1989. "Excerpts from the Diary of Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze, February 1989". Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>179</sup> Liu, *Mori xingcunzhe de dubai*, 139.

<sup>180</sup> Cable, American Embassy Beijing to Secretary of State Re: Zhao Remark Seen as Green Light to Criticize Deng, May 18, 1989, ID# CF01722-001, Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, China Part 1 of 5 Tiananmen Square Crisis (1989), George Bush Presidential Library.

<sup>181</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 505–6; Wenbin Cai et al, *Zhao Ziyang de daolu [The Road of Zhao Ziyang]* (Hong Kong: Chen zhong shu ju, 2011), 105.

Deng was most allergic to other people saying he “ruled from behind the curtain.” So my conversation with Gorbachev, in Deng’s mind, stabbed him right in the heart. This caused my relationship with Deng to move towards a split.<sup>182</sup>

Did Zhao have a motive to attack Deng? From a strategic perspective, it made little sense for Zhao to antagonize his elder, at least before a final and irrevocable split. Deng was clearly the top leader, controlled the military, and had defended Zhao on multiple occasions. In January 1989, Li Peng and Yao Yilin criticized Zhao and the reform process at a Politburo “party life” meeting, which upset Deng and lead him to tell Li that Zhao would serve as general secretary for two more terms. After the Spring Holiday in 1989, Deng said he wanted to resign as head of the CMC and give the position to Zhao, claiming that his full retirement would lead the other elders to stop interfering in politics. Zhao urged him to reconsider, as even if Deng retired the elders would continue to intervene. Zhao therefore believed that “[t]hough [conservative forces] were aggressive in their opposition, utilizing all sorts of tactics, without Deng Xiaoping’s support they were unable to succeed.”<sup>183</sup> If Zhao saw Deng as his key supporter, why would he make a final break with him on May 16? Zhao pointed out to friends in 1993 that his speech did not include the statement that Deng could make final decisions, but did expressly state that Deng had always supported the work of the collective leadership.<sup>184</sup> Zhao was truly loyal to Deng and was emotionally troubled that Deng reached such a negative conclusion about him: “suffering from such an impression was truly unbearable to me.”<sup>185</sup>

### **Section 3: Selectorate Theory vs. Rule Manipulation**

Hypothesis 2a would predict that the decision to use violence would be the result of a process of deliberation among a defined group of individuals. Hypothesis 2b, on the other hand, would emphasize the decisive nature of which political decision making bodies were allowed to meet and when. The Tiananmen Crisis is a textbook example of the explanatory power of hypothesis 2b. The violent solution

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<sup>182</sup> Li Lun, *Zhuanfang Zhao Ziyang: 1992-2004 Yu Youren de Tanhua [Special Interviews with Zhao Ziyang: Conversations with Friends 1992-2004]* (Hong Kong: Jingcheng wenhua shiye gongsi, 2006), 23–24.

<sup>183</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 209, 242.

<sup>184</sup> Li Lun, *Zhuanfang Zhao Ziyang*, 23.

<sup>185</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 48.

was not the result of a formal decision made through proper party channels, but by sidelining more representative institutions and relying on groups of obviously dubious legal authority.

*The National People's Congress*

One example of hypothesis 2b in action was the prevention of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, the PRC's state legislature, from overriding the martial law decision. On May 9, NPC chairman Wan Li shared Zhao's suggestions presented at the May 8 PSC with those members of the NPC leadership that were members of the CCP. Those individuals all supported publishing those proposals even if both the Central Committee and State Council refused. Li Peng immediately called Wan Li to tell him that this was inappropriate, as the Central Committee had not yet discussed Zhao's proposals.<sup>186</sup>

After the May 10 Politburo meeting, Li Peng concluded that Zhao Ziyang wanted to move the responsibility for managing the crisis away from the party to the NPC Standing Committee. In the afternoon of that same day, Wan held a meeting of the NPC Standing Committee Special Committee Heads [全国人大常委会委员长会议]. The meeting decided that on June 20 the NPC Standing Committee would meet to listen to a State Council report on the student protests and class boycotts, and discuss a law on citizens' rights of demonstration, and report on rectifying corrupt companies. According to Li, normally the agenda for a NPC Standing Committee meeting would first be discussed by the CCP party committee inside the NPC Standing Committee. The NPC Standing Committee CCP party committee proposal would then be sent for approval by the PSC. As discussed above, Li believed the basis for this NPC Standing Committee agenda was flimsy, as it was based simply on Zhao's concluding comments at a Politburo meeting. Yet he also admits that PSC approval for the NPC Standing

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<sup>186</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 484.

Committee's agenda was merely the typical way of managing the party's relationship with the NPC [正常的运作秩序], not a law.<sup>187</sup>

When NPC vice chairman and secretary Peng Chong visited him on May 11, Li Peng expressed disapproval of the planned June 20 agenda and labeling the protests a "student movement." Li called Zhao to express his opposition. Zhao said he would discuss with Wan Li the possibility of changing the agenda. Later Zhao called back to say that the decision was already made and could not be reversed.<sup>188</sup>

On May 17, the same day the decision on martial law was made, 24 members of the NPC Standing Committee wrote a letter to the Central Committee calling for an emergency meeting.<sup>189</sup> On May 19, the *People's Daily* published a suggestion signed by 12 members of the NPC Standing Committee calling for an emergency session.

After Qiao Shi communicated his skepticism towards the use of force at Zhao's home on May 21, Zhao decided that a possible solution to the crisis was opening the NPC Standing Committee meeting ahead of schedule to use dialogue to resolve the situation. Zhao had already been approached by NPC vice chairman Peng Chong, who in Wan's absence had conducted an emotional meeting with the NPC leadership [委员长会议] that concluded a NPC Standing Committee Meeting should be held. Even Peng Zhen supported this tactic.<sup>190</sup>

The most crucial flaw in this strategy was the absence of NPC Chairman Wan Li, who was on a trip to Canada and the United States. The NPC leadership therefore requested the Central Committee ask Wan to return ahead of schedule. On the same day Qiao visited Zhao, Hu Qili also came to tell Zhao that this request was being ignored. Zhao told Hu Qili to have Peng Chong telegram Wan Li directly. Zhao

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<sup>187</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 10.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, May 11.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, May 17.

<sup>190</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 33–34; Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 22.

also asked vice premier Wu Xueqian to send a telegram.<sup>191</sup> Li himself admits to sending another telegram telling Wan *not* to return: “I believed that it was not appropriate for Comrade Wan Li to immediately return, otherwise it would certainly be used by those who support the turmoil or oppose martial law, or those people whose true nature is unclear.”<sup>192</sup>

On the night of May 22, Li Peng, Qiao Shi, Yao Yilin, and Yang Shangkun met some of the CCP members of the NPC leadership [人大常委副委员长中党组成员] (Peng Chong, Liao Hansheng, Ye Fei, Ni Zhifu, Chen Muhua, and Wang Hanbin). These communist leaders of the NPC communicated the demands of the vice chairmen of the legislature: first, no bloodshed and the military should not enter the city; second, the students should negotiate with the NPC Standing Committee and the students should be recognized as a patriotic movement; third, Wan Li should return to China to chair an NPC Standing Committee meeting and listen to a report by the State Council on martial law. In response, Li emphasized Zhao’s role in allowing the protests to get out of hand. He claimed that because of the crisis, normal democratic norms were no longer in force: “if it was a typical issue, even if there were differences in terms of tactics, it would be possible to reach consensus through dialogue. But this is different.” Li emphasized the personal authority of Deng: “who represents reform and opening up, is it Comrade Zhao Ziyang, or Comrade Deng Xiaoping?” Qiao essentially argued the train had already left the station: “we do not want to see blood spilled, but it is impossible for the military not to enter the city.... It is simply not the case that [the military] will suppresses the masses... Now, on the one hand the military will have a deterring effect, on the other we will find a good opportunity to clear the square... the reason for the delay is the desire to not use force or spill blood. But too much of a delay is bad. We are trying to solve the problem without spilling blood.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 32–33.

<sup>192</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 26.

<sup>193</sup> He, *Xue wo Zhonghua*, 89.

In response to the pleading of Li, Qiao, and Yang, Chen Muhua, and Wang Hanbin expressed support for martial law. Liao Hansheng “did not know about the details, he complained a little, but his attitude was clear.” Not knowing the details and complaining hardly speaks to a full-throated endorsement. Ye Fei’s attitude was “rather excited” and Peng Chong “apparently” still supported the students.<sup>194</sup>

According to Li Peng’s memoirs, on May 23, Qiao Shi met with the NPC leadership [人大常委会委员长会议]. Some of the vice chairmen were extremely emotional, saying that the Central Committee had not accepted a single one of their recommendations. Li writes that Qiao Shi “explained the decision of the PSC, made an explanation carefully and with detail, and pointed out the necessity of martial law.” Most of the leadership allegedly accepted this explanation, but a minority were still in opposition.<sup>195</sup>

What Qiao Shi told them, why they changed their mind, and the size of “most” of the leadership remains a major puzzle given what we know about this group of individuals. The vice chairmen of the NPC at this time included Xi Zhongxun, Peng Chong, Wei Guoqing, Zhu Xuefan, Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, the 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, Saifuddin Azizi, Zhou Gucheng, Yan Jici, Rong Yiren, Ye Fei, Liao Hansheng, Ni Zhifu, Chen Muhua, Fei Xiaotong, Sun Qimeng, Lei Jieqiong, and Wang Hanbin.<sup>196</sup> Xi Zhongxun, the father of the current Chinese leader, is rumored to have opposed a violent solution to the crisis.<sup>197</sup> Perhaps significantly, Li Peng does not list Xi as one of the attendants at the May 22 meeting, which he should have attended as a vice chairman with CCP membership, although other sources indicate that Xi did attend another meeting with other NPC vice chairmen with CCP membership at Peng Zhen’s

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<sup>194</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 22.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, May 26.

<sup>196</sup> The vice chairmen of the NPC at this time included Xi Zhongxun, Peng Chong, Wei Guoqing, Zhu Xuefan, Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, the 10 Panchen Lama, Saifuddin Azizi, Zhou Gucheng, Yan Jici, Song Yiren, Ye Fei, Liao Hansheng, Ni Zhifu, Chen Muhua, Fei Xiaotong, Sun Qimeng, Lei Jieqiong, and Wang Hanbin. *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui Wenxian Ziliao Huibian* (Beijing: Zhongguo min zhu fa zhi chu ban she, 1991), 809.

<sup>197</sup> Zhang Jie, “Zhang Jie: Jianjue Zhan Zai Hu Yaobang Yibian de Xi Zhongxun [Zhang Jie: The Xi Zhongxun Who Resolutely Stood on the Side of Hu Yaobang],” *21ccom.net* (Originally Published in *Caijing Wenzhai*), December 11, 2012. Li Peng does not list Xi as one of the attendants at the May 22 meeting, which he should have attended as a vice chairman with CCP membership.



home on May 25.<sup>198</sup> What we know about Xi strongly suggests he would have supported a role for the NPC in the crisis. Xi was heard saying to Peng Zhen in the early 1980s “the problem is if in the future there is another strongman like Chairman Mao, what is to be done?” He suggested it was necessary to create a system to prevent such an outcome. His behavior at a NPC Standing Committee Meeting in October 1990 is also suggestive. He complained that the NPC Standing Committee was never serious in its discussion of proposals and suggested changing this habit and extending the meeting by a day. Later that day, when the meeting was supposed to be over, Xi stood up to give a speech on party history, meant to convey the importance of protecting those with different opinions and not casting them as counter-revolutionaries. The next day the session was informed that Xi was sick and had returned to the south. He never attended another NPC Standing Committee meeting, even though his term did not officially end until March 1993.<sup>199</sup>

Chen Yizi believes that the first to express opposition to using the military to violently end the crackdown were the three NPC vice chairmen with military backgrounds, which would be Wei Guoqing, Ye Fei, and Liao Hansheng.<sup>200</sup> Liao strongly implies his opposition to the use of force in his memoirs by publishing a poem he wrote in late May or early June that praised principles, the constitution, democracy, and rule by law.<sup>201</sup> According to the May 22 entry of Li’s memoirs, the eleven vice ministers who were either members of other parties or independents supported an earlier opening of the NPC Standing Committee meeting planned for June 20.<sup>202</sup> Fei Xiaotong and Sun Qimeng, along with representatives of two other “democratic parties,” wrote a letter to Zhao Ziyang saying the actions of the students were a

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<sup>198</sup> Liao Hansheng, *Liao Hansheng Huiyilu [Memoir of Liao Hansheng]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2012), 665; Peng Zhen zhuan bianxiezhu, *Peng Zhen nianpu 1979-1997 [Chronology of Peng Zhen 1979-1997]*, vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2002), 448.

<sup>199</sup> Gao Kai, “Xi Zhongxun Jianyi Zhiding ‘Butong Yijian Baohufa’ [Xi Zhongxun Suggested Establishing a ‘Different Viewpoint Protection Law’],” *Yanhuang Chunqiu [Chinese Annals]*, no. 12 (2013).

<sup>200</sup> Like Xi, Li Peng also inexplicably does not list Wei as a participant at the May 22 meeting. Chen, *Zhongguo, shinian gaige yu bajiu minyun*, 163.

<sup>201</sup> Liao Hansheng, *Liao Hansheng Huiyilu [Memoir of Liao Hansheng]*, 666.

<sup>202</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 22.

“patriotic movement” and that a dialogue should be started immediately.<sup>203</sup> Rong Yiren also allegedly wrote a letter supporting the students.<sup>204</sup> All of this evidence strongly suggests an overwhelming majority of support for a peaceful solution among the NPC vice chairmen. Therefore, how Qiao achieved a majority at the May 23 meeting is a rather large mystery.

On May 26, Peng Zhen met with the non-CPC leadership of the NPC Standing Committee [党外副委员长]. As Xinhua journalist Zhang Wanshu points out, this was highly irregular. First, Peng Zhen no longer had any official positions within the party or government. Second, this was four days after Li, Yang, and Qiao had met with the CCP members of the NPC leadership. Third, this meeting was not publicized until May 29.<sup>205</sup> In his speech, Peng claimed that the PLA was not going to be used against the students and that if the protests were recognized as a patriotic movement then they would spread throughout the country.

Most interestingly, Peng also addressed the question of whether martial law was legal.

Some people say that the State Council does not have this right, the NPC Standing Committee should cancel the martial law order of the State Council. Some people are not familiar with the constitution or misunderstand it, others have ulterior motives. According to Article 89 Clause 16 of the Constitution, the State Council has the right to decide on the enforcement of martial law in *parts* [italics added by author] of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the Central Government. The city of Beijing is about 16-17,000 square kilometers, but the area covered by martial law only covers about one thousand square kilometers.... According to Article 67 Clause 7 of the Constitution the NPC Standing Committee has the right to annul those administrative rules and regulations, decisions or orders of the State Council that contravene the Constitution or the law. Please take care to notice that this only applies to administrative rules and regulations, decisions or orders that “contravene” the Constitution or law, nothing else.<sup>206</sup>

Peng is right to state that the constitution expressly allows the State Council to introduce martial law in *parts* of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the Central Government.

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<sup>203</sup> Han and Hua, *Cries for Democracy*, 240.

<sup>204</sup> Athar Hussain, “Obituary: Rong Yiren,” *The Guardian*, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/nov/18/guardianobituaries.china>.

<sup>205</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de da baozha*, 312–13.

<sup>206</sup> Peng Zhen zhuan bianxiezhu, *Peng Zhen nianpu 1979-1997 [Chronology of Peng Zhen 1979-1997]*.

According to Article 67 Clause 20, for martial law “*throughout* the country or in particular provinces, autonomous regions or municipalities directly under the Central Government” the NPC Standing Committee is required. He is also correct to say that the NPC Standing Committee has “the right to annul those administrative rules and regulations, decisions or orders of the State Council that contravene the Constitution or the law.”

However, Peng’s argument can be challenged on several grounds. First, according to Article 57 of the Chinese constitution, the NPC is “the highest organ of state power. Its permanent body is the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress.” How could the “highest organ of state power” not be able to reverse a decision by the State Council? Second, according to Article 67 Clause 1, whether or not any decision by the State Council is constitutional or not should be decided by the NPC Standing Committee. The NPC Standing Committee might have found the use of the military against the protesters as unconstitutional, for example, as Article 29 does not explicitly provide a role for the PLA to be used against civilians.\* Third, Article 67 Clause 6 states that the NPC Standing Committee has the right “to supervise the work of the State Council, the Central Military Commission, the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate.” Fourth, Article 73 states that “Deputies to the National People’s Congress and members of its Standing Committee have the right, during the sessions of Congress and the meetings of the Committee, to address questions, in accordance with procedures prescribed by law, to the State Council or the ministries and commissions under the State Council, which must answer the questions in a responsible manner.” Fifth, according to Article 92 “The State Council is responsible, and reports on its work, to the National People’s Congress or, when the National People’s Congress is not in session, to its Standing Committee.” Given these sections of the constitution, how would the legitimacy of martial law be seen if the NPC Standing Committee declared its opposition, even if Peng was right in the narrow sense? Moreover, according to Article 71, “The National People’s Congress and its Standing

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\* “Their tasks are to strengthen national defence, resist aggression, defend the motherland, safeguard the people’s peaceful labour, participate in national reconstruction and do their best to serve the people.”

Committee, when they deem necessary, appoint committees of inquiry into special questions and adopt relevant resolutions in the light of their reports.” What if such a report declared that Peng’s assertion that martial law was needed to end the conflict was incorrect? And even if the NPC Standing Committee could not end martial law it certainly had the right to declare the student movement “patriotic” or address the specific societal and political concerns that the students raised.

While overseas, Wan Li, the head of the NPC, at times signaled that he strongly supported the students. On May 17, he told the Canadian prime minister that China had not sufficiently democratized and the masses did not have a big enough role in supervising the government. His private comments to American leaders, however, present a more mixed picture. Wan told Secretary of State James Baker that he wanted to avoid bloodshed, “but it might not be possible given that a tiny handful of people wanted to overthrow Deng Xiaoping and the leadership of the Communist Party.” Wan even said that “[u]nder the Chinese constitution, the State Council had the right to declare martial law” and that calling for the removal of Li Peng, Deng, or Yang Shangkun was “subversive.” He did, however, say that “all kinds of means should be utilized to prevent bloodshed.”<sup>207</sup> In his conversation with Dan Quayle, Wan made similar comments about the possibility of violence, but also admitted that some had urged him to go home early to help resolve the crisis and that “before his departure from China the National People’s Congress/state leadership consensus was that no force would be used against the students.”<sup>208</sup> On May 23, Wan told President George Bush at the White House that “there are people instigating turmoil,” including “Taiwan agents.” However, he also blamed the protests on economic difficulties and the failure of political reform to keep up with economic reforms, and he promised that the NPC would “strengthen the democratic and legal systems” and that he would “oversee the development of democracy and free expression by the people.” Wan admitted that the NPC Standing Committee wanted him to return as

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<sup>207</sup> Cable, Secretary of State to American Embassy Beijing Re: Secretary’s Meeting with Wan Li, May 26, 1989, ID# CF01722-007, Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, China Part 2 of 5 Tiananmen Square Crisis (1989) (2), George Bush Presidential Library.

<sup>208</sup> Vice President’s Meeting with Wan Li, May 23, 1989, ID#CF00318, Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Doug Paal Files, China- Wan Li Visit 1989, George Bush Presidential Library

quickly as possible, but that the CC and State Council believed he should first go to the United States to “brief their old friend President Bush.”<sup>209</sup>

Wan told Bush he would have to return to China early, but did not provide an explanation. According to party historian Yang Jisheng, Wan wanted to return earlier because it was clear Zhao was in trouble politically, making it difficult for him to go through the diplomatic formality of expressing greetings from Zhao.<sup>210</sup> Wan’s intentions upon return are therefore mysterious. Was Wan expressing support for the martial law decision to Americans simply because he was in the presence of foreigners? Did he return because he could not effectively execute diplomatic formalities, or to attempt an opening of the NPC Standing Committee?

Li Peng in his memoirs writes that the Central Propaganda Small Group drafted a speech for Wan Li, which was sent to him through Jiang Zemin in Shanghai. Yang Jisheng, however, believes Wan received the draft while on the plane back to China.<sup>211</sup> Li Peng claims that the supporters of martial law were concerned that as soon as Wan got off the plane students would surround him and “force” him to express his position. Jiang Zemin and Ding Guang’en decided that as soon as Wan disembarked he would be taken out a side door of the airport and then brought to a hotel somewhere in the city, not the usual Xijiao Hotel. One car, without Wan, would still go to Xijiao to throw off any possible pursuers. Was the intention to prevent Wan from being “forced” to express his position? Or was he essentially thrown into house arrest? The next day, a written speech, allegedly by Wan Li, was released to the public. Wan claimed that he had returned home early for “health” reasons.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Wan Li, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress and Member of the Politburo, People’s Republic of China, Bush Memcon, George Bush Presidential Library website.

<sup>210</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]* (Hong Kong: Tian di tu shu you xian gong si, 2010), 379.

<sup>211</sup> Yang Jisheng also writes that Wan was surprised to find that his plane had arrived in Shanghai and not Beijing. Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 27.

Not only high-ranking elites like Zhao were pushing for an emergency NPC Standing Committee meeting. Cao Siyuan, an intellectual who worked for the Stone Computer Corp, wrote a letter and started collecting signatures to push for such a meeting: “As members of the highest organ of state power, elected by the people, we bear great responsibility toward the People’s Republic in this time of emergency. It is necessary that we immediately reflect the will of the people through legal procedures.” Supported by Stone’s owner Wan Runnan, the corporation’s Research on Societal Development Institute [四通社会发展研究所] set out to find as many supporters as possible. Cao first sought out NPC Standing Committee member Hu Jiwei. Hu added one line: “Should the convocation of the entire Standing Committee prove impossible on such short notice, we propose the calling of a special emergency meeting of those members who are in Beijing.” Hu gave his permission for the Stone group to seek out more signatures. Ultimately 57 NPC Standing Committee members expressed support for an emergency session. According to Yang Jisheng, this number was enough for a meeting to be held immediately since this passed the one third threshold. On the morning of May 24, Stone’s Research on Societal Development Institute gave the letter to Hu Jiwei. Hu also wrote letters to Wan Li, Xi Zhongxun, and Peng Chong. On the afternoon of the 24, all the collected material was officially given to the NPC Standing Committee receiving and dispatch office [收发室]. Li Peng started an investigation. On May 30, six people renounced their signatures. Soon afterwards, Cao was secretly arrested outside of his home.<sup>213</sup>

The NPC Standing Committee was the students’ last hope. The students were still on the square because they had decided to wait until the planned NPC Standing Committee on June 20, “on the

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<sup>213</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]*, 377–78; Han and Hua, *Cries for Democracy*, 290.

assumption that Li Peng's government would be overruled and martial law lifted."<sup>214</sup> If the students were no longer on the square, "The National People's Congress would be held under bayonets."<sup>215</sup>

Yet the intense pressure made this outcome less and less likely. On May 29, the CCP party group of the NPC Standing Committee [全国人大常委会党组] expressed support for the martial law decision.\* At 6:30 am on June 3, an announcement was made that the planned June 20 meeting of the NPC Standing Committee would be delayed. The legislature failed to rally to stop the crackdown.<sup>216</sup>

### *The Politburo*

If not the NPC Standing Committee, would the Central Committee or Politburo have played a role in reversing martial law? According to hypothesis 2a, that body should have met to approve the decision to use violence. According to Zhao, "many prominent people and senior Party comrades" wrote to him and the Central Committee around the time of the martial law decision encouraging a more conciliatory stance.<sup>217</sup> When Zhao was officially removed from the Central Committee at its June 23-24 meeting, the typical secret voting was replaced by a show of hands. Zhao believes that this was because the leadership was not confident they could achieve the two-thirds majority needed. If true, this is remarkable given that the meeting occurred almost three weeks after Tiananmen Square and while the city was still under martial law.<sup>218</sup>

Zhao did in fact attempt to call a Politburo meeting, but the director of the Party's General Office, Wen Jiabao, informed him that the General Office had been marginalized as well: all decisions were

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<sup>214</sup> Chai, *A Heart for Freedom*, 166. At one point, Chai Ling accepted a decision by the Capital Joint Conference, an organization made up not only of students but also intellectuals and others in favor of the movement, to leave the square by May 30. However, Chai changed her mind after Li Lu accused her of listening to people who had not made any sacrifices on the square. The decision to stay until the NPC meeting remained.

<sup>215</sup> Li, *Moving the Mountain*, 180.

\* How and why this decision was made remains a mystery. Moreover, CCP members made up only a portion of the NPC.

<sup>216</sup> Gongqingtuan Beijing Shiwei, *70 tian dashiji*, 67, 77.

<sup>217</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 30.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

being made by Li Peng and Yang Shangkun.<sup>219</sup> Zhao does not state explicitly when this occurred, but according to Wu Wei on the morning of May 22 he was given a document and asked to make two copies. The document was a draft that Zhao Ziyang wanted to give to a Politburo meeting. In the speech, Zhao wanted to call an emergency meeting of both the Central Committee and the PSC Standing Committee. Zhao argued that although he was no longer managing affairs [不再主持的工作], he was still not only a member of the PSC but the general secretary, who according to party regulations had the right to summon a Politburo meeting. Zhao expressed his continued support for using peaceful, democratic, and legal measures to solve the crisis and explicitly spelled out the rules and procedures for summoning top-level meetings [哪一个层次，哪一个人提出，哪一层次决定和召集].<sup>220</sup>

The supporters of martial law were in a quandary: by leaving him in power, Zhao was fully in his rights to demand a Politburo meeting. At the same time, they were too concerned about the intentions of the Politburo or Central Committee to try to officially remove Zhao before the crackdown, and in any case such a removal might only exacerbate the situation by showing a split at the top leadership.\* Deng might have considered firing Zhao without going through the proper procedures, but the impression that Deng illegally removed Hu Yaobang was a major reason for Deng's loss in prestige and was seen by many even among the elite as a violation of acceptable procedure.<sup>221</sup> When Jiang Zemin was being installed as Zhao's replacement he told Li Peng repeatedly that "absolutely could not accept the way that Comrade Hu Yaobang was criticized in early 1987 and Zhao Ziyang took the stage, neither the removal nor the elevation to the position of general secretary was done according to party regulations."<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>220</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 533–35.

\* Article 40 of the party constitution: "Any decision to remove a member or alternate member of the Central Committee or a local committee at any level from posts within the Party, to place such a person on probation within the Party or expel him from the Party must be taken by a two-thirds majority vote at a plenary meeting of the Party committee to which he belongs." Zhao should have been untouchable until a full CC plenum.

<sup>221</sup> Wu, *Zhongnanhai ri ji*, January 9; Cui Wunian, *Wo de 83 Ge Yue [My 83 Months]*, 317–18.

<sup>222</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, June 15.



On May 19, Deng himself called for an enlarged session of the Politburo meeting to “solve the leadership problem in the Central Committee.” Deng was not interested in a CC meeting: “in a period of emergency, opening a meeting with more than 300 people (meaning the CC) is not convenient.” Deng also planned that any such meeting would have the cards stacked in his favor, including not just Politburo members but other “old comrades” and military officers: “only the most trustworthy [宁缺毋滥], no individuals who consort with the enemy are allowed to attend.”<sup>223</sup>

On May 21, however, Deng was saying that the meeting would not be held until after the crackdown, disagreeing with even Li Peng, who suggested that such a meeting be held to officially remove Zhao. Li’s account of Deng’s words are striking: “it is necessary to wait until after the military enters Beijing to open an enlarged session of the Politburo, in this way conflict and interference can be avoided, only then can the meeting be held with more certainty.”<sup>224</sup>

#### *Irregular Meetings with Deng*

If the state legislature and Politburo were not making decisions, then who was? The crucial May 17 PSC meeting will be discussed in the following chapter because of its direct relevance for hypotheses 3 and 6. The outcome of that meeting was the decision to introduce martial law, but as will be shown in the next chapter, the proceedings of the meeting were highly irregular and cannot be fully explained without examining the military element. Suffice it to say here that Zhao did not accept the decision for martial law, creating serious legitimacy problems for the decision.

Another key meeting on May 20 at Deng’s home was clearly an attempt to buttress the political legitimacy of the May 17 decision. The nature of that meeting has direct relevance for hypotheses 2a and 2b. Hypothesis 2a would predict that the meeting fully accorded with clear party rules, while hypothesis 2b would allow for the possibility that the meeting was instead the result of a rather tendentious

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, May 19.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, May 21.

interpretation or even flatly illegal. The extremely questionable legal basis for this meeting suggests the greater explanatory power of hypothesis 2b.

According to the official *Chronology of Li Xiannian*, this meeting was an “enlarged session of the PSC [中央政治局常委扩大会议]” attended by Deng, Chen Yun, Peng Zhen, Yang Shangkun, Wang Zhen, Li Peng, Qiao Shi, Yao Yilin, Song Ping, and others. The *Chronology* suggests that the meeting decided “unanimously” (despite Li’s own suggestion that people disagreed with him at a Politburo meeting during the crisis, as mentioned above) the following: the root of the crisis came from inside the party itself (or in other words, Zhao was to blame); the April 26 editorial was correct; and Jiang Zemin would become the next general secretary. The meeting is characterized as “an extremely important meeting held in an emergency situation” that unified thinking and determined a path to end the turmoil and stabilize the situation.<sup>225</sup>

According to Li Peng’s memoirs, however, the attendees were Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, Yao Yilin, Qiao Shi, and six military men: Chi Haotian, Zhao Nanqi, Yang Baibing, Qin Jiwei, Hong Xuezhi, and Liu Huaqing. At the meeting, Deng stated there were “two headquarters” within the party and that it was necessary to “spill a little blood,” and also nominated Jiang Zemin to be the next general secretary of the party. Li also claims the meeting was unanimous in supporting Deng.<sup>226</sup>

The first and most obvious point to make about this meeting is the absence of the general secretary of the party, as well as Hu Qili, another member of the PSC. In other words, this so-called “enlarged PSC meeting” was only attended by three of the five members who were actually members of the PSC. This state of affairs clearly violated many of the strictures from the “Several Principles on Inner-Party Political Life” passed by the 5th plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in an alleged attempt to prevent

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<sup>225</sup> “Li Xiannian zhuan” bianxiezu, *Li Xiannian nianpu [Chronology of Li Xiannian]*, 6:480.

<sup>226</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 19. Curiously, Li’s memoirs incorrectly put the date on May 19, not May 20.

another Cultural Revolution. According to this document, “Under no circumstances is it tolerable to use other organizational forms to replace the leadership of the party committee and the standing committee. Any organizations established by the party committee to research and manage any special question conduct its work under the leadership of the party committee, it cannot be replaced by the party committee, let alone lead the party committee.” Although the document accepts that the general secretary is “an equal member of the party committee”, at the same time it clearly states that “when dividing work, the party secretary or first secretary is responsible for the main task of organizing the activities of the party committee and managing daily affairs. It is inappropriate to use the excuse of collective leadership to lower or deny the important function of the party secretary or first secretary in the party committee.”<sup>227</sup> This “enlarged PSC session” was therefore an illegal meeting that denied Zhao his role as general secretary. As Zhao wrote in his memoirs about all martial law planning after May 17: “Through all these important arrangements, the Politburo did not hold a single meeting; nor did the Politburo Standing Committee make any decisions. The Standing Committee was made up of five members; with Hu Qili and me excluded, there could be no legitimate PSC meeting.”<sup>228</sup>

Second was the presence of old revolutionaries at the meeting. Deng’s own complicated position was already discussed above. Chen Yun and Li Xiannian were already considered to have “half-retired” at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1987. Chen was head of the CAC and Li was in charge of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Their presence arguably violated a party document from January 1986, according to which “those old comrades who have already resigned from leadership positions, if they have suggestions on personnel, they can use normal methods to raise them, but they cannot interfere in the regular work of the new leadership group.”<sup>229</sup> An emergency “enlarged PSC” meeting that named a

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<sup>227</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi, *Shiyi jie san zhong quanhui yilai zhongyao wenxian xuandu. Shang [Selected Readings of Important Documents Since the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress. Part 1]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1987), 167.

<sup>228</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 35–36.

<sup>229</sup> “Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Yan’ge Anzhao Dang de Yuanze Xuanba Renyong Ganbu de Tongzhi [CC Notification on Promoting and Using Cadres Strictly According to Party Principles ],” January 28, 1986, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/71380/71387/71591/4855033.html>.

new general secretary can hardly be considered a “normal method” or refraining from interfering in “regular work.”

Third was the obvious mischaracterization of Zhao’s role as a second headquarters. The “Several Principles on Inner-Party Political Life” explicitly stated that “So-called not grabbing by the queue, not putting on hats, and not beating means not allowing the exaggeration of one person’s mistakes, cooking up a crime in order to make political and organizational attacks or even persecution.” The document explicitly forbids “arbitrarily using the crimes of ‘anti-party,’ ‘anti-leadership,’ ‘vicious attack,’ and ‘made mistake in line.’”<sup>230</sup> Characterizing Zhao’s legal right to express a different opinion as the creation of a “second headquarters” was a very obvious violation of this party rule.

Fourth, if we accept Li Peng’s attendee list as legitimate, the presence of so many military leaders is striking. While seven members were civilian, *six* were from the PLA. This description of the meeting is also interesting because of how different it is from the official version. If Li is correct and the official version is wrong or misleading, this strongly hints that the writers of Li Xiannian’s *Chronology* felt the truth was somewhat problematic.

Sixth, we have reason to believe that at least some of those who attended the meeting had personal doubts about the use of violence (certainly Yang Shangkun and Peng Zhen, probably Qiao Shi, and possibly Chen Yun, Qin Jiwei, and Hong Xuezhi). According to the “Several Principles on Inner-Party Political Life,” they had a legal obligation to express their true beliefs at this meeting: “A member of the Communist Party must be sincere and honest, must not hide their own mistakes and their own thinking and viewpoints from the party organization... it is necessary to encourage comrades at lower levels to speak what they really think... it is necessary to strive to create and maintain an atmosphere that allows people to raise opinions, including sharp opinions, and engage in free discussion.”<sup>231</sup> Some of

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<sup>230</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi, *Shiyi jie san zhong quanhui yilai zhongyao wenxian xuandu. Shang* [Selected Readings of Important Documents Since the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress. Part 1], 173–74.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–73.

those who had spoken out against violence (like Zhao Ziyang and Hu Qili) were not even present at this meeting.

Fifth, this meeting was held *after* the public announcement that martial law was to be introduced. For the meeting to reject martial law would almost certainly have been unthinkable for those who attended the meeting because it would have been so destabilizing.

Sixth is the issue of Deng's role, which was already discussed above. But to refer once again to the to the "Several Principles on Inner-Party Political Life," "...special party members that are not subject to party discipline and national laws and who place themselves above the party organization are intolerable."<sup>232</sup> Deng's ability to violate this stricture speaks to the failure of the institutionalization project after the Cultural Revolution.

Ironically, years before the spring of 1989, Zhao had already begun thinking about how to truly create the type of institutions that would avoid this kind of power struggle and not allow individuals to abuse the system. At one meeting to discuss political reform, Zhao asked rhetorically whether it would be possible to determine what issues could be decided by the PSC and which should be given to the entire Politburo, suggesting a possible answer would be for the PSC to manage daily affairs while the Politburo decided major issues. Mao's former ghostwriter, the powerful leftist ideologue Hu Qiaomu, disagreed, arguing that it was impossible to set such rules and arguing that the role of the American vice president was set by habit, not law. But Zhao stood firm: "we are trying to institutionalize, without rules how can there be institutionalization? Many of our rules and regulations are only principles, I'm afraid that it is necessary to create specific guidelines... Here there is a problem of rule by people or rule by law, it is necessary to first have law, then people can manifest their potential [先有法，人再去发挥作用]." Zhao wanted a system in which the PSC would have to report decisions on major issues to the full Politburo.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>233</sup> Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 185–86.

Institutions, Zhao thought, could help avoid another Cultural Revolution: “Many old revolutionaries disagreed with Chairman Mao at the time, but they did not have a legitimate procedure to call a meeting and solve the problem.”<sup>234</sup> He also wanted to better delineate the roles and responsibilities of the NPC Standing Committee. Unfortunately for Zhao, this institution-building was not yet completed by June 4, 1989. At moments it seemed like Zhao foresaw this tragedy:

The Central Committee must truly operate according to laws, to manage affairs according to the party constitution. Now we always over-emphasize a “core,” this has turned into the Politburo leading the Central Committee and the PSC leading the Politburo and secretariat. This turns a fundamental relationship upside down, which is: the PSC should be monitored by the Politburo, and the Politburo should be monitored by the CC. This should be established as a guideline and turned into habit. With the current system, when there is no crisis [or, under regular circumstances] it is very good. But this system cannot guarantee there will be no crisis. Chinese people are disputatious behind the scenes but face to face they are polite. Therefore, Chinese politics is never predictable.<sup>235</sup>

Given Zhao’s attitude on these matters, documented even before his purge, we can assume that if his viewpoint had triumphed in the spring of 1989, China would have enjoyed an at least somewhat more liberal regime. However, as Minxin Pei points out, even Zhao was skeptical about how far he could have gone even in the absence of June 4. Years after the incident, Zhao remarked that he “did not have enough power... There was such a large government, there was such a huge number of cadres, and so many people’s interests were involved, I did not have the power.”<sup>236</sup> Zhao would have still faced the same defining political features as Khrushchev, and therefore the same crisis of authority.

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

Although this chapter very clearly spelled out the decisive implications for weak institutionalization, institutions still mattered in the ways predicted in the theory chapter. First, Deng did his best to cloak decisions with some legitimacy, as seen in the May 20 meeting at his home. Although he was comfortable with stretching the rules in order to get his way, he was much less comfortable about

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<sup>234</sup> Wu, *Zhao Ziyang yu zhengzhi gaige [Zhao Ziyang and Political Reform]*, 158–59.

<sup>235</sup> Chen, *Chen Yizi huiyilu*, 408.

<sup>236</sup> Minxin Pei, *China’s Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy*, Paperback (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 57.

being obvious about such violations. He covered his actions with enough legitimacy as possible without actually putting his decisions at risk. Second, loyalty to the party as an organization remained. Those who actively resisted martial law even after it was declared did not exit the party. The behavior of the elder revolutionaries whose personal inclinations differed from Deng but ultimately decided to side with him can probably be partly explained by a desire to avoid a fundamental split. As will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, Deng's control over the military made a violent solution essentially unavoidable if he wanted it, which meant that opposing his will would unnecessarily damage party unity while still failing to achieve a different outcome.

Yet in one very important way, the Tiananmen case stands out for one last major reason unpredicted by the theory chapter. Zhao did not accept martial law when he knew it was inevitable, nor did he accept the party's verdict on his behavior. Zhao while under house arrest in 1993 told a friend: "When our descendants look historically at what the CCP did right and wrong with "June 4," they will see that someone stood up, who did not just go along in a muddle-headed way. With regards to stripping me of my position, I don't care."<sup>237</sup>

Zhao therefore broke the habit of doing a self-criticism after losing his position. One visitor describes the following touching encounter with Zhao when the latter was under house arrest.

I said, I will tell you one last thing, Comrade Li Rui says that all the party secretaries of the CCP ended their careers and resigned with self-criticisms against their conscience and admitting their mistakes. Only two party secretaries did not do this, one is Chen Duxiu [the co-founder of the CCP], and one is you, Zhao Ziyang. After I finished speaking, he took out his oxygen tube, got up from bed, took two steps, walked up to me, and pointed his finger at my nose: "You said it was Chen Duxiu?" I said, "No, Comrade Li Rui said this." Then he turned around, behind the sofa there was an open space, with his back to us, he pointed his two hands at the ceiling, then loudly and very happily laughed: "Hahahahaha, Chen Duxiu, Chen Duxiu."<sup>238</sup>

This example of a loser not accepting a damning verdict in such a regime is a powerful and important one, and Zhao's behavior deserves recognition for its uniqueness.

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<sup>237</sup> Li Lun, *Zhuanfang Zhao Ziyang*, 21.

<sup>238</sup> "Jiemi Shike: Zhao Ziyang Zuihou de Suiyue [Moment of Declassification: The Last Years of Zhao Ziyang]."

## Conclusion

Whatever the reasons for Zhao's failure to resolve the crisis peacefully or remain in power, June 4 ended for decades the possibility for a freer, if not more democratic, People's Republic of China. As opposed to Deng, whose idea of political reform only encompassed greater efficiency, by 1989 Zhao envisioned a China in which "[t]he Party's ruling position would not change, but the way it governs had to. That is to say, under the basic framework of the Communist Party's leadership, we would allow more political participation from various social groups; 'rule of law' would gradually replace 'rule by men'; and many of the wonderful things defined in the constitution would be realized, one by one."<sup>239</sup> Ironically, the more rule-based, civil-society-tolerant country that Zhao envisioned while still in office failed to materialize precisely as power politics were used to crush, violently, the possibility for equal dialogue with independent political forces.

In December 2014, shortly after intellectual Cao Siyuan's death, former student leader Feng Congde posted an interview of him on YouTube. In this video, Cao revealed that, on May 17, the students signed a written pledge, negotiated by intellectuals inside the United Front Department that they would end the hunger strike if a) a member of the PSC was assigned to manage the students, b) the regime recognized that it was a patriotic, democratic movement, and c) the regime promised it would not take revenge after the crisis ended. Zhongnanhai rejected the proposal.<sup>240</sup> In a speech shortly after the crackdown, Yao Yilin recognized that many comrades did not believe that acknowledging the students as a patriotic movement and their organizations as legal would have been such a huge problem. He freely admitted that "of course, taking one step back did not mean the immediate collapse of the country, but would have been a step in the direction of a capitalist republic." He pointed to the situations in Poland and

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<sup>239</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 260; Wu, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou [On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s]*, 606–7; Guoguang Wu and Helen Lansdowne, eds., *Zhao Ziyang and China's Political Future*, China Policy Series ; 3 (New York: Routledge, 2008); Wu, *Zhao Ziyang yu zhengzhi gaige [Zhao Ziyang and Political Reform]*.

<sup>240</sup> Cao Siyuan: *Liu Si Koushu Shilu (1/2) [Cao Siyuan: June 4 Oral History (1/2)]* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DwiOlv-oNI>, n.d.).



Hungary as the result of a series of such steps. Li Peng later cut in to suggest that if the students were allowed to have their own organization, then the workers would later create something similar to Solidarity.<sup>241</sup>

Some scholars describe Tiananmen as a tragic event, perhaps not justified but at least contextualized by the remarkable growth and stability China has achieved in the subsequent decades.<sup>242</sup> Yet would meeting enough of the students' demands to clear the Square have signified the beginning of a series of events that would turn China into something like the Russian Federation of the 1990s, as the leftist general Wang Zhen concluded after the eastern bloc collapsed?<sup>243</sup> If China has been able to defy perennial expectations of collapse or democratization since 1989, why is it so impossible to imagine a more liberal authoritarianism with Chinese characteristics? Would this other China have been less corrupt, less environmentally damaged, less afraid of its own people, and more open about its own past? We will never know, but powerful forces within China in 1989 certainly believed that such an experiment was possible. Political reform has generally been stagnant since that fateful date.<sup>244</sup>

Deng did have the power to make such changes, but chose not to do so. Even though he supported stronger norms for retirement ages and leadership selection, he still believed that codified rules and any real restrictions on the autocrat would be a mistake. Deng repeatedly emphasized during discussions on political reform that he did not want even "a trace" of a separation of powers, arguing that "a tripartite separation of powers mean each is restricting the other" and "such a system is inefficient and cannot get

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<sup>241</sup> "Li Peng, Yao Yilin tongzhi zai zhonggong zhongyang, Guowuyuan zhaokai de ge bumen fuze tongzhi huiyi shang de jianghua [Speeches by Comrades Li Peng and Yao Yilin at a Meeting of Department Heads Held by the CC and State Council], June 13, 1989," *Guanyu zhizhi dongluan pingxi fan geming baoluan wending jushi de youguan cailiao xuanbian 2*, Special Series, Volume 27, Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1989, 17-19.

<sup>242</sup> Chinese dissident Fang Lizhi believed that no matter what China achieved in the future, nothing could justify the massacre by a government of its own people. Fang Lizhi, "The Real Deng," *The New York Review of Books*, November 10, 2011, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/nov/10/real-deng/>.

<sup>243</sup> *Wang Zhen zhuan [Biography of Wang Zhen]* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1999), 280.

<sup>244</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, *The Logic and Limits of Political Reform in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Pei, *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy*.

anything done.”<sup>245</sup> For Deng, strong leadership was a leadership unconstrained by institutions, not one fortified by “rational-legal” authority. Deng therefore failed to use his unique power as a revolutionary leader to bequeath real institutions. By guaranteeing a violent outcome on Tiananmen Square, he made any such change in the future even less likely.

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<sup>245</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 208.

## Chapter 9: Tiananmen Square (Third hypothesis)

### Introduction: The Barrel of the Gun

For those interested in understanding June 4, the last chapter might have raised more questions than it answered. How could a violent solution have ultimately been chosen if powerful constituents among the party, state, and elders opposed such a plan? Party and state rules were being manipulated and in some cases clearly broken. Why would the instruments of violence obey highly questionable orders in an environment in which those orders were based on highly questionable decision-making processes? As I show in the first section of this chapter, these questions are even more puzzling given the presence of significant opposition to a violent solution among both the PLA elders and the ranks. Two marshals and many generals with legendary reputations from the wars before 1949 vocally expressed opposition to violence, and at least one serving general refused orders to bring his troops to Beijing. These concerns were related both to opposition towards a violent solution, as well as the problematic decision-making process that was moving towards that solution. Therefore, the political position of another key group within the elite - the military - hoped along with their comrades in the party for a different outcome, thus again weakening hypothesis 1a. Moreover, the military was operating in an environment in which the relative legitimacy of different voices within the party was ambiguous, which is evidence for the explanatory power of hypothesis 3b.

The key to understanding the entire Tiananmen Incident lies in Deng Xiaoping's relationship with the PLA. As discussed in a previous chapter, Deng as a key military figure before 1949 had established credibility and connections with powerful generals. As I show here, throughout the 1980s Deng's continued dominance over military affairs made it impossible for others to make inroads towards meaningful relations with the high command. One can clearly distinguish the importance of Deng's status prestige and personal connections with the armed forces (hypothesis 1b).

The remainder of this chapter shows the extent to which these connections were crucial for the final outcome of the crisis itself. I provide strong evidence that at the key May 17 meeting that decided martial law, no formal vote was taken, the personal inclinations of a majority of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) were opposed to the decision, and that even if a majority did informally express support, the most likely reason was because Deng had already made a decision and they knew violence was inevitable anyways. The lack of a formal vote indicates strongly the greater value of hypothesis 2b over 2a. Moreover, the course of the meeting is exceptionally strong evidence for hypothesis 3b, as it demonstrates that the inevitable use of force by Deng had an outsized influence on what should have been a purely political deliberation.

The next section describes the efforts of Deng and his supporters to prepare the PLA to ultimately use violence. Deng relied on a handful of individuals with whom he enjoyed a close personal relationship. The PLA was reminded of Deng's personal authority as a revolutionary elder and presented with the false charges against Zhao discussed in the previous section. Zhao was unable to successfully defend himself because of his weak contacts with the military leadership and comparatively weaker personal authority with PLA leaders. The PLA was persuaded to act, in other words, by emphasizing the importance of Deng's personal prestige (hypothesis 1b), *kompromat* (hypothesis 1b), and a highly questionable interpretation of even ambiguous rules (hypothesis 2b).

I conclude the chapter by examining the question of how many individuals participated in the concrete, final decision to use force in the brutal fashion that ultimately ended the protests. To an extent previously unappreciated, the decision-making group was extremely narrow and did not even include the mayor of Beijing. Even within that group, up until the last moment key individuals still hoped for a plan of action that would not be especially violent. The actual order itself was deliberately formulated in an informal fashion that would maximize plausible deniability and minimize culpability. This last section is crucial for three reasons. First, it shows the extent to which leadership decision-making bodies with regards to the final decision on violence were extremely ad hoc and narrow (hypothesis 2b). Second, the

military was acting in an environment of high political ambiguity in terms of the legitimacy of the orders it was given (hypothesis 3b). Third, Deng's personal prestige and personal control over the military was absolutely crucial for ameliorating these two political problems (hypothesis 1b).

### *Opposition in the Military*

In this section, I show the following. First, the military did not want to use violence because they feared its repercussions for the PLA and the party. This first point is important because it demonstrates that another crucial part of the elite had a policy preference for a peaceful outcome (a further validation of hypothesis 1b and weakening of hypothesis 1a, which would predict the more popular policy platform carrying the day). Second, many in the military were clearly worried that orders were not legitimate according to party rules, which suggests, at least holding everything else equal, that the armed forces had at least some leeway to determine which orders they should obey (evidence for hypothesis 3b).

The military had reason to believe that the leadership was playing a dangerous game with the rules. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the military was already active long before an official decision on martial law. On May 18, an enlarged session of the CMC decided that 50,000 troops from the Beijing Military Region would enter Beijing before May 20 - 30,000 of which would enter on the night of May 19. The Shenyang Military Region was also given an order to prepare to send 20,000 more troops to Beijing.<sup>1</sup> Liu Huaqing, Chi Haotian, and Zhou Yibing, all military men, were put in charge of a martial law military command center [戒严部队指挥部]. This organ was under the direct control of the CMC.<sup>2</sup> This was two days *before* Li Peng signed the official State Council document declaring martial law. Zhang Wanshu, the Xinhua employee, writes that the sudden and secretive nature of these developments caused some to believe that this was “a surprise attack, in actuality it is a military coup.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 18.

<sup>2</sup> Zhang Wanshu, *Lishi de dabaozha: "Liusi" shijian quanjing shilu [The Big Historical Explosion: The Entire Record of June 4]* (Hong Kong: Tiandi, 2009), 283.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

Powerful segments of the military itself were profoundly skeptical about the idea of using force. The use of force against a civilian population was not merely shameful: the danger of being charged with using force against the civilian population in the future was real. On May 31, the head of the General Political Department, Yang Baibing, admitted that:

Some comrades still have all sorts of thoughts and doubts about ending the turmoil, they lack a deep understanding of the nature and danger of the turmoil, they do not understand why so many masses have joined the protests; some comrades are scared, they are frightened that by enacting the martial law mission they will commit the crime of ‘three supports, two militaries’\*; some comrades believe that when enacting martial law as soon as they came they were surrounded by the masses, some were attacked and did not dare to fight back, they feel a little angry; some comrades are impetuous, some officers want to visit home, some soldiers want to go to school, they want to ‘enter the city early so they can return to the barracks early,’ and so on.<sup>4</sup>

On June 23, after the crisis, the General Political Department submitted a collection of “reactionary” big and small character posters and flyers to army-level commanders and above in an attempt to show them that there had truly been a plot to overthrow the CCP.<sup>5</sup> CMC Vice Chairman Liu Huaqing admitted at a political work conference in December 1989 that “individual high-ranking officers in our military did not pass the test at the critical moment, they committed a serious political mistake...”<sup>6</sup>

Old, retired generals [上将] did their best to stop the bloodshed. Seven of them\* signed a letter at 10 am on May 21 opposing the use of force to end the protests.

Because of the seriousness of the present situation, as old military men we raise the following demands: the people’s army is the people itself [人民军队属于人民], it cannot be in opposition to the people, let alone suppress the people, they absolutely must not open fire, absolutely must not cause a bloody incident. In order to avoid the situation getting worse, the military should not enter Beijing.

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\* This phrase refers to the heavy involvement of the PLA in politics during the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>4</sup> Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, “Yang Baibing Tongzhi Zai Jieyan Budui Zhenggonghui Shang de Jianghua [Yang Baibing’s Speech at the Martial Law Units Political Work Meeting] May 31, 1989,” Series 27, Volume 37 (Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1989), 30.

<sup>5</sup> Zhonggong Jiefangjun zongzhengzhibu xuanchanbu yinfa gong jun yi shang lingdao cankao de “fangong daxiaozibao he chuandan zhuaibian” [CC People’s Liberation Army General Political Department Propaganda Department Printed for Army and Above Level Leadership for Perusal “Excerpts of Reactionary Big and Small Character Posters and Flyers”], June 23, 1989, Internal Report 1989-1991, Box 1, Zhongguo gong chan dang, Hoover Institution Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Junshi Wenxuan (xia)* [The Collected Military Works of Liu Huaqing Part 2] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2008), 67.

\* Zhang Aiping, Ye Fei, Xiao Ke, Yang Dezhi, Song Shilun, Chen Zaidao, and Li Jukui.

According to Lu Chaoqi, *People's Daily* learned of the letter because General Zhang Aiping's daughter had called a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who then told an "old comrade" at the newspaper.

That night several people suggested to Lu that they publish the letter. Lu was ecstatic, knowing how powerful the effect would be on the military to see such legends express their position in this way. Lu asked night shift employees at the editor's office [总编辑夜班] and some old reporters with connections in the military to help them confirm the authenticity of the letter and ask permission to publish it. After connecting with their secretaries, *People's Daily* confirmed the letter was genuine. However, only some of them supported it being published. Lu decided to call chief of the general staff Chi Haotian to hear his opinion. Chi said not to publish it, but was not decisive: "I suspect it would be bad [恐怕不好吧]." Chi told him to think carefully before deciding. But thirty minutes later, Chi called back: "absolutely do not publish it, the letter was written to the leadership, it is not a public letter." Given these circumstances, *People's Daily* decided not to publish it.<sup>7</sup>

After the letter was written, several more called and asked to add their names, but were told to write their own letter. Wang Ping did write his own letter. After the seven-man letter was written, Li Xiannian told Zhang Aiping that they had reached a "moment of life or death": Zhang responded that he did not feel like it was such a moment. Old revolutionary Wang Zhen criticized General Zhang Aiping for signing the letter. Zhang explained why he signed it: "I received the lessons of history. When the Northeast was being liberated, the common people were looting military materials the army had collected. We sent an emergency telegram and asked the Central Committee if we should open fire. Chairman Mao answered: by doing this you are asking the Central Committee to take responsibility for opening fire. This is impossible. Open fire? Decide on your own."<sup>8</sup> Zhang told Wang, "You are senile, did you understand

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<sup>7</sup> Lu Chaoqi, *Liusi neibu riji [Internal Diary of June 4]* (Hong Kong: Zhuo yue wen hua chu ban she, 2006), 97–99.

<sup>8</sup> Was Zhang praising Mao? Or was he afraid that the military would be put in a decision where it was forced to make a decision on violence without clear imprimatur from the party? For more on the latter possibility, see

what we wrote in that letter? The problem is that the people around you divulged the letter. There was nothing we could do.”<sup>9</sup> Li Xiannian asked another general what favor he received from Zhao Ziyang [赵紫阳给了你什么好处?]. The general smashed his fist and said: “what favor did the Communist Party give you?”<sup>10</sup>

It is possible that even more generals would have signed the letter given the opportunity. Zhang Gong, a former official in the State Council Economic System Reform Research Office who claims to have been involved with the petition, says he was told that the red phones used by the leaders internally were cut because the leadership was afraid word would spread. He also accepts the blame for spreading the message publicly, claiming to have used contacts with factory managers to have it printed and distributed.<sup>11</sup>

On May 26 at a meeting of the Central Advisory Commission Standing Committee\*, old military comrades split like their civilian counterparts on the question of martial law. Yu Qiuli, Chen Xilian, and Geng Biao used fiery language to support the decision. Others, however, even admitted to signing the “Seven Men Joint Letter.” Xiao Ke expressed support for Chen Yun’s keynote speech and affirmed Deng’s leadership.<sup>12</sup> However, he also said he believed that the police and People’s Armed Police could handle the situation: “therefore, I have reservations about the military entering Beijing, I worry that there

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below. Du Daozheng, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuoguo shenme?: Du Daozheng riji [What Else Did Zhao Ziyang Say? Diary of Du Daozheng]* (Hong Kong: Tiandi, 2010), 288.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 273; Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zoulai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]*, 420. Chinese journalist Liu Binyan claims that copies of the letter were dropped from a helicopter onto the top of the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall Binyan Liu, *Tell the World: What Happened in China and Why* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 47.

<sup>10</sup> Du, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuo guo shen me?*, 273.

<sup>11</sup> Zhang Gong, *New York Times* interview notes, author’s personal collection.

\* The CAC was created by Deng for retired old comrades so that they could continue to provide advice to the younger leadership.

<sup>12</sup> According to Li Rui, Chen also opposed using violence. However, it is not clear if his conclusion is based on anything more than Chen’s decision after June 4 to defend four members of the CAC who wrote a letter suggesting both the students and military retreat without any preconditions. Rui Li, *Li Rui koushu wangshi* (Hong Kong: Dashan wenhua chubanshe, 2013), 425.



will be a bloody incident, that is why I signed the Seven Men Joint Letter.”<sup>13</sup> Yang Dezhi explained the context for the letter: “the situation about the rumored seven men letter is this: during those days the situation was very tense, the military was blocked, as soon as there was a bloody incident it would be difficult to manage. Therefore, the seven of us together wrote a letter to the martial law forces and asked them to send it to the Central Committee.” Like Xiao, Wang Ping also expressed support for Deng Xiaoping, but qualified his remarks by saying: “I only worry that blood will be spilt and people will die.”<sup>14</sup>

Letter-writing was not the only way martial law was resisted in the ranks: in some cases, there was outright insubordination.<sup>15</sup> The story of Xu Qinxian, who refused to command his troops to attack students, was clearly both personally opposed to force and concerned about the legitimacy of the order itself.

Journalist and historian Yang Jisheng provides the following account based on his own interviews with the general, who was commander of the legendary 38 Group Army, after he was released from jail. Xu was in a hospital in Beijing treating his kidney stones during the protests, which he followed closely.<sup>16</sup> On May 17, he received an order from the Beijing Military Region to attend a meeting. Since his kidney stones had finally passed, he attended the meeting, which included several other generals [军长]. Vice commander of the Beijing Military Region Li Laizhu revealed the CMC’s order and asked the generals to express their positions. The other generals did not express opposition, but Xu said: “I cannot execute verbal orders, I need a written order.” Li Laizhu responded: “Today there is no written order, there will be

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<sup>13</sup> Xiao also told a *People’s Liberation Army Daily* reporter that “China must not see any bloody incidents, if there is a bloody incident, that is the shame of the CCP. If I saw such a situation 50 years ago, I would have protested too.” These comments were not published. Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]*, 369.

<sup>14</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 26.

<sup>15</sup> Chen Yizi writes that of the eight-hundred plus retired generals, five hundred-plus of them clearly expressed opposition to using the military to end the crisis. However, he provides no details. Chen, *Zhongguo, shinian gaige yu baji minyun*, 163.

<sup>16</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]*, 361–362.

in the future [以后再补]. This is also how it's done during wartime.” Xu: “Now is not wartime, I cannot execute verbal orders!” Li: “Then call your commissar and give him the order.” Xu called his commissar and said: “I am transmitting the order, I cannot participate, I have no connection with this matter.” After returning to the hospital Xu told a friend: “I would rather have my head cut off then become a historical villain! [宁肯杀头也不能做历史的罪人].” Because the 38 Group Army was the largest, most high quality, and most mechanized in the entire PLA, his opposition consisted a major potential threat. Xu was arrested soon after returning to the hospital, spent five years in prison, and was stripped of his party membership.

According to Ye Jianying's adopted daughter, Xu provided a somewhat different account to party elder Li Rui. Xu remarked on the strangeness that field army commanders were summoned individually to the Beijing Military Region command to be given their specific orders, as opposed to attending a joint meeting.<sup>17</sup> Xu told Zhou Yibing, commander of the Beijing Military Region: “You all give the orders to the army personally, I will not get involved [你们亲自给军里边传达去，我不管].” When Zhou asked how he could not get involved since he was commander, Xu said: “The military is led by the party, if not me there are other people.” When Xu was still pressured to give the order, he asked for a written command. Xu believed that “this matter was different from fighting a war, this was a political incident, political incidents cannot be managed this way.” Zhou argued that in war the verbal order comes first, and after it is executed there is a written order. Xu remarked: “He was correct too, the military has the regulation [军规] of a verbal military order [口述战斗命令]... I was also correct to request a written order, his refusal was also correct. We were deadlocked for a long period of time... Ultimately, I still went to the command center to use a confidential machine to send the order... After sending the order I expressed my position, I said I disagree.” Xu then told his superiors he would not participate in anything

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<sup>17</sup> This was likely because summoning such a large group might have allowed the generals to realize how many others shared similar inclinations: more evidence for the explanatory power of hypothesis 2b.

that came later.<sup>18</sup> Xu's behavior shows that the legitimacy of the orders at the time was significantly ambiguous.

Two other versions of this story also exist. Xi Jinping ally and son-in-law of Li Xiannian, Liu Yazhou, stated:

During "June 4", Beijing was in trouble, the Beijing Military Region commander Zhou Yibing personally drove to Baoding and asked Xu Qinxian to take his forces to enter Beijing. Xu Qinxian asked whether there was an order from the CMC. Zhou said yes. Xu asked whether there was an order from Comrade Xiaoping. Zhou said yes. Xu asked whether there was an order from vice chairman of daily affairs Yang Shangkun. Zhou said yes. Xu asked whether there was an order from first vice chairman Zhao Ziyang. Zhou said no. Xu said then I cannot lead these troops. Zhou Yibing pointed at Xu Qinxian's nose and said: I know that your wife is a judge! Your two sons are at Tiananmen Square!<sup>19</sup>

This account is similar to a story in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. A serving general in the PLA told the newspaper that when Xu was ordered to march to Beijing, "he asked if there was an order from... Zhao Ziyang." The answer was no and Xu refused the order.<sup>20</sup> On the night of June 3, the 38 Group Army would be under the control of four officers from the Beijing Military Region.<sup>21</sup>

The two marshals Nie and Xu also wrote a letter opposing force. After June 4, Li Rui exclaimed: "At the time several generals and two marshals all wrote letters to express lack of support, what were you [Deng Xiaoping] doing acting this way?"<sup>22</sup> Xu Jiatusi also wrote that Yang Shangkun told him explicitly on May 25 that Xu and Nie did not want there to be violence and that they had communicated their

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<sup>18</sup> Dai Qing, "Ye Jianying Yang Nv Dai Qing: Liusi Shi Jian Quan Cheng Shi Lu [Ye Jianying's Adopted Daughter: True Record of the June 4 Incident]."

<sup>19</sup> Although this is an internet source, the author has high confidence in its authenticity because of the similarity of language used in a collection of Liu's speeches distributed by the Service Center for Chinese Publications. Tiananmen analyst Wu Renhua also trusts this document. Liu Yazhou, "Li Xiannian Nuxu Liu Yaozhou Dianping Liusi Shijian Jundui Biaoxian [Li Xiannian's Son-in-Law Liu Yazhou Evaluates the Military's Performance during June 4]," accessed July 13, 2015, <https://news.powerapple.com/li-shi-jun-shi/2015/4/30/2196718.html>.

<sup>20</sup> John Garnaut, "How Top Generals Refused to March on Tiananmen Square," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 4, 2010, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/how-top-generals-refused-to-march-on-tiananmen-square-20100603-x7f0.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Wu Renhua, *New York Times* interview notes, author's personal collection.

<sup>22</sup> Fan, *Dangnei Juexingzhe: Li Chang Zai Zhongguo Gaige Niandai. Xia [An Awakened Person in the Party: Li Chang in China's Era of Reform. Part 2]*, 155.

position to the party center.<sup>23</sup> Xu and Nie also met publicly with students on May 21 and assured them they would not be attacked by the PLA.<sup>24</sup>

The evidence about other military leaders is more mixed. Rumors persist that Defense Minister Qin Jiwei and the head of the General Logistics Department, Hong Xuezhì, opposed violence. A “prominent scholar, whose father had served under Qin” told Australian reporter John Garnaut that “[Qin] was ordered to implement martial law [after a meeting at Deng’s home on May 17] but he refused, saying he needed party authority. Qin called Zhao’s office and waited for four hours until 2:30 in the morning to receive Zhao’s return phone call overruling Deng Xiaoping... but the call never came in.”<sup>25</sup> Hong’s secretary Wang Dong told two intellectuals around May 23 that violence was out of the question and was apparently involved in the letter signed by the seven generals.<sup>26</sup> One contact told the US embassy on May 24 that Defense Minister Qin Jiwei and CMC member Hong Xuezhì “have all been accused by conservatives of colluding with Zhao and are in a dangerous position.”<sup>27</sup> The Hong Kong rumor mill also picked up on this rumor. Even more strangely, this was not the first time such speculation had appeared. When Hu Yaobang was removed in early 1987, there were rumors within the leadership that Beijing had been surrounded by large numbers of troops in order to deal with Qin Jiwei, then said to be one of Hu

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<sup>23</sup> Xu, *Xu Jiatur Xianggang Huiyilu [Xu Jiatur’s Hong Kong Memoirs]*, 2:377.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Oksenberg and Lawrence R. Sullivan, eds., *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict: The Basic Documents* (Armonk: MESHARPE, 1990), 316–317.

<sup>25</sup> Garnaut, “How Top Generals Refused to March on Tiananmen Square.”

<sup>26</sup> Zhang Gong, Zhou Duo, *New York Times* interview notes, author’s personal collection.

<sup>27</sup> Cable, American Embassy Beijing to Secretary of State Re: China Issues, May 24, 1989, ID# CF01722-005, Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, China Part 1 of 5 Tiananmen Square Crisis (1989) (5) George Bush Presidential Library. Another cable reported “credible reports that Defense Minister Qin Jiwei and Chief of the General Staff Hong Xuezhì opposed martial law and the movement of troops to Beijing.” Cable, American Embassy Beijing to Secretary of State Re: China Issues, June 11, 1989, ID# CF01722-018, Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, China Part 4 of 5 Tiananmen Square Crisis (1989) (3), George Bush Presidential Library.” The Eastern bloc was also picking up on these rumors: according to “discussions in well informed circles,” Qin Jiwei was supposed to be dismissed from his position. May 26, 1989. “Telegram from the Romanian Embassy in Beijing to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” Wilson Center Digital Archive. In another document, the Romanians wrote that “we were informed that Cde. Qin Jiwei had been under house arrest until the situation in the leadership of the party was clarified. We have also been informed that he had a discussion with Cde. President Deng Xiaoping, and regained his trust in leading the daily operation of the Armed Forces.” June 4, 1989, “Telegram from Romanian Embassy in Beijing to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (3)”, Wilson Center Digital Archive.

Yaobang's men.<sup>28</sup> Hong was removed from his position as deputy secretary general of the CMC shortly after the crisis.

However, there is no solid evidence that Hong or Qin had opposed martial law. These rumors may have been started to create doubts within the military ranks, or wishful thinking. As discussed in the last chapter, according to Li Peng's memoirs they both attended the meeting with Deng on May 20 at which support for Deng's tactics were allegedly unanimous.

Reluctance within the ranks may have at least delayed the final outcome. Some evidence suggests that the leadership was preparing to clear the square at a much earlier date than June 4, but that the decision was called off at the last minute. On May 20, an "extremely important figure" told student leader Zhang Boli that there would be a massacre. This figure suggested that they immediately retreat so they could use legal measures later to force Li Peng to take responsibility. The next day, on the 21<sup>st</sup>, a man claiming to represent Deng's son, Pufang, used graphic language to describe to them the massacre that was coming. They were told to definitely leave the square by 5 pm.\* Li Lu told Feng Congde around 7 pm that he had "absolutely reliable intelligence" that there would be a massacre that night at 1 am. That same night another man saying he represented Hu Qili also came to warn of a crackdown. At 3:30 am on May 22, Wuer Kaixi independently tried to get the students to leave the square, telling them that he had a direct connection with a central leader who told him the military would spare no cost to end the protests. The situation was extremely tense, leading at least one student to believe that all the pieces were set in motion for a massacre which for some reason was delayed until June 3: the warnings that day described exactly what would happen at the later date. As citizens of Beijing blocked the PLA from entering the

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<sup>28</sup> Wu, *Zhongnanhai riji*, January 17.

\* Evaluating the possible role of Deng Pufang is complicated by other evidence that he had a difficult relationship with his father. Wu Jiayang wrote that they argued about the importance of fighting 'bourgeois liberalization. Wu, *Zhongnanhai riji*, January 29.

city, some of the student leadership fled the square with money that had been saved up for this purpose, only to return on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>29</sup>

This hypothesis is further strengthened by a document at the George Bush Presidential Library: “Based on DAO [Defense Attache Office] observations of PLA activities and on DAO conversations with military personnel, at approximately 11:00 pm, May 20, a political decision was made to move on Tiananmen at 2:00 am. The order appears to have been rescinded between 1:00 am and 2:00 am on May 21.”<sup>30</sup> On the morning of May 21, Yang Shangkun announced that the military would have to regroup for three days for “thought mobilization [进行思想动员].” According to Li Peng’s memoirs on the day of May 22, “Deng Xiaoping worried that morale in the military was not stable.”<sup>31</sup> On that same day, two high-ranking officers from the Central Guard Unit (8341) told Chen Yizi that “the fact that for three days the military has not entered the city shows how they feel.” They also told Chen that 80% of their officers all sympathize with the students and Zhao Ziyang.<sup>32</sup> Soldiers were even coming to the square to give advice to the students on the best way to block their fellow PLA.<sup>33</sup>

One reason for this lack of enthusiasm for the use of force was almost certainly also related to concerns about the legitimacy of orders. As described above, Xu Qinxian was very concerned about the oral nature of the order, as well as clear evidence that Zhao, the party secretary, was not involved. Xu’s

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<sup>29</sup> *Huigu yu fansi: Bajiu xueyun lishi huigu yu fansi yantaohui jilu [Review and Reflect: The 1989 Student Movement Review and Reflection Discussion Meeting Record]* (Germany: Deguo Laiyin bi hui. <http://www.64memo.com/b5/1.htm>, 1993), 4.1.1, Zhang Boli; 4.8.1, Liu Yan; Feng Congde, *Liusi rijì: guangchang shang de gongheguo [Diary of June 4: Republic on the Square]*, Guo qing jiao yu. Gong min jiao yu shu xi (Hong Kong: Suyuan shushe, 2013), 366–367.

<sup>30</sup> Cable, Sitrep No. 6: The Scene on Tiananmen, the Military Situation, Possible Central Committee meeting, Chinese press play, May 21, 1989, ID# CF07122-003, George H.W. Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, China- Part 1 of 5 Tiananmen Square Crisis (May-June 1989) (3), George Bush Presidential Library.

<sup>31</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Rijì [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 22. For PLA documents on skepticism within the ranks, see Shier jituantuanjun silingbu, “Zhixing fu Jing jieyan renwu jingyan ziliao huibian [Collection of Material on the Experience of Executing the Mission of Martial Law in Beijing]”, 1989, Service Center for Chinese Publications, Series 27, Volume 22, 22;

<sup>32</sup> Chen Yizi, *Chen Yizi huiyilu [Memoirs of Chen Yizi: China’s reform in the 1980s]* (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chubanshe, 2013), 611.

<sup>33</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 4.4.1, Chai Ling.

attitude perfectly encapsulates what was probably Deng's greatest fear: "I said the best thing to do was retract the order, to deeply investigate [好好研究研究], the Politburo, NPC Standing Committee, State Council, [all] deeply investigate..."<sup>34</sup> The secretary of the commander of the Jinan Military Region recalls: "at the time, because the direction of the media and public opinion was in error, the situation was extremely complicated, under a condition in which two voices were coming out of the party center there truly was a problem of whose order to listen to."<sup>35</sup> The interim between the decision to introduce martial law and the actual use of force suggests that the party found it necessary to create more a sense of legitimacy for the proceedings.

One reason for the high suspicion about the legitimacy of the orders revolved around concerns of nepotism at the very top of the PLA. Many were deeply upset about the promotion of Yang Shangkun's half brother Baibing to the head of the General Political Department and secretary of the CMC.<sup>36</sup> According to one document being distributed on the square on May 23 supposedly written by an infantry officer [陆军少校], CMC meetings had become "family meetings." This document claimed the Yang family was participating in a military coup to establish a "fascist military dictatorship" and that a group of high-ranking military officers were opposing them.<sup>37</sup> The CIA saw "[a] concern that the martial law declaration was a ploy by Premier Li Peng and President Yang Shangkun to stage a coup against General Secretary Zhao Ziyang" as a major reason the army was reluctant to participate in a crackdown: "Yang's

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<sup>34</sup> Dai Qing, "Ye Jianying Yang Nv Dai Qing: Liusi Shi Jian Quan Cheng Shi Lu [Ye Jianying's Adopted Daughter: True Record of the June 4 Incident]," *New York Times Chinese Language*, June 4, 2014, sec. <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140604/cc04daiqing/>.

<sup>35</sup> Chen Dejie, *Pili Jiangjun Li Jiulong [Thunderbolt General Li Jiulong]* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2008), 323.

<sup>36</sup> Zhang Aiping had originally not opposed Yang Shangkun's installation as CMC secretary in the early 1980s. Zhang thought Yang had been outside the military for a bit and was not decisive, but he was a good coordinator and could listen to other people's opinions. When Yang learned of his appointment, he told Zhang that he was concerned because he had been outside the military for too long and "understood nothing about the situation in the military." Zhang told him not to worry and to call him if he had any problems. Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zoulai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]*, 432.

<sup>37</sup> Xiaoya Chen, "Bajiu Minyun Zhong Zhan Zai Xuesheng Yibian de Junren [The Solders Who Stood on the Side of the Students in the 1989 Democracy Movement]," May 27, 2002.

longstanding animosity for Zhao was well known in the military, which had seen him chafe at Zhao's appointment as the second-ranking member of the Military Affairs Commission- outranking Yang. Immediately following the imposition of martial law, numerous rumors circulating in the capital alleged that Deng had become mentally unstable, ill, or had even died." These rumors almost certainly fueled suspicions within the military that Yang and Li were manipulating the aging leader or issuing orders under his name."<sup>38</sup>

On May 20, the student broadcast system on the square announced that "according to reliable sources, Li Peng, Yang Shangkun, and Bo Yibo have staged a coup. They have formed an illegitimate government and now control part of the army."<sup>39</sup> Zhao Ziyang said in June 1993 that "Yang Shangkun believes that he has the respect of old comrades in and outside the military, but old comrades like Zhang Aiping, Xiao Ke, and Yang Yong all oppose him!"<sup>40</sup> Yang was disliked by many former members of the 4<sup>th</sup> Front Army because of a play his wife wrote about the historical incident when their former leader Zhang Guotao supposedly betrayed Mao Zedong.<sup>41</sup> These concerns of nepotism further created ambiguity about the legitimacy of orders (hypothesis 3b).

#### *Authority over the PLA*

Yet Deng's importance, prestige, and personal connections in the military were not ambiguous (hypothesis 1b). Civil-military relations in June 1989 were largely the result of forces that had dominated elite politics throughout the 1980s: military reform and the succession. The Cultural Revolution left behind a disastrous legacy for the PLA that required to be addressed. The military suffered from leftist

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<sup>38</sup> CIA Directorate of Intelligence, *China's Military: Fragile Unity in the Wake of Crisis* [Deleted], August 25, 1989, SECRET, National Security Archive.

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights in China, *Children of the Dragon: The Story of Tiananmen Square* (New York: Collier Books, 1990), 103.

<sup>40</sup> Du, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuo guo shen me?*, 48. Why Zhao mentioned Yang Yong is a puzzle: he died in 1983.

<sup>41</sup> Wei Yuan, *Mengzhi Changzai: Wang Meng Jiangjun Zhuan* [*Fierce Determination Always Present: Biography of General Wang Meng*] (Hong Kong: Beixing chubanshe, 2008), 247–252.



ideological influences,<sup>42</sup> intense factional infighting,<sup>43</sup> and an outdated military doctrine.<sup>44</sup> Removing those individuals with loyalties to the Cultural Revolution was a major task needed to guarantee the military would stay loyal to the reforms after the old revolutionaries passed.<sup>45</sup> The PLA also enjoyed a massive share of national resources<sup>46</sup> and was dominated by older officers with big egos. These legacies left behind a PLA that needed to change for the reform to be possible but was exceptionally difficult to control effectively.

Solving these problems needed a strong hand. In August 1986, Nie Rongzhen wrote a memo to the Central Committee that said Deng should remain head of the CMC: “at present it is not likely a big war will be fought, but since declaring military reorganization and the cut in one million soldiers, grassroots thinking is very unstable. If Comrade Xiaoping left, it would not be advantageous for stabilizing morale.”<sup>47</sup> Deng said that “for those big old problems, they will be a bit easier to solve if the old men are still around.” In 1988, when ranks were introduced, Deng said that “this is an issue that offends people. Let me be the one to offend so as to not leave this dilemma to the new CMC chairman.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> For addressing leftist attitudes, see. Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen Huiyilu (xia)* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2003), 338; Alastair I. Johnston, “Party Rectification in the People’s Liberation Army, 1983-87,” *The China Quarterly* 112 (December 1987): 591–630.

<sup>43</sup> For factionalism in the PLA, see Li Lei, *Lishi fengyun zhong de Yu Qiuli [Yu Qiuli in the Clouds and Rain of History]* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2007), 461–466.

<sup>44</sup> See Fravel, forthcoming.

<sup>45</sup> For the purges of the so-called “three types of people” in the military, see Series 5, Volumes 101-105 (especially 101 and 105) in the Service Center for Chinese Publications collection *Chuli wenge yiliu wenti, qingli sanzongren wenjian huibian* [Document Collection on Managing the Leftover Problems of the Cultural Revolution, Removing the ‘Three Types of People’], originally published by the Zhonggong Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiwei zhengdang bangongshi, 1986-1987. The language used to describe the problem was striking. On December 11, 1984, Yang Shangkun said “This is a matter of what kind of person we choose as successors.” (Volume 101, 74). Yu Qiuli, head of the GPD at the time, stated as late as May 1987 that: “The military holds the guns, making it clean organizationally is extremely important, otherwise the problems will be never-ending [后患无穷]. Comrade Xiaoping has emphasized this important issue many times.” (Volume 105, 258)

<sup>46</sup> In 1985 Deng Xiaoping cut the size of the military by 1 million, an act which caused intense personal feelings among the top ranks. Chief of Staff Yang Dezhi writes that at this time he was afraid to see his friends or even answer his phone. Xie Hainan, Yang Zufa, and Yang Jianhua, *Yang Dezhi Yi Sheng [The Life of Yang Dezhi]* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2011), 341–347.

<sup>47</sup> Zhou Junlun, *Nie Rongzhen Nianpu* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe Zhou Junlun, 1999); Nie Li, *Shan Gao Shui Chang: Huiyi Fuqin Nie Rongzhen [High Mountains and Long Water: Remembering My Father Nie Rongzhen]* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 369.

<sup>48</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2004), 533, 560.

General Wang Meng recalled how former chief of staff Yang Dezhi explained to him why he was removed from power in 1985: “I’ll just tell you the truth, Comrade Yang Shangkun cannot pass this at the CMC, on his own he cannot get his opinion to pass, so he ran to chairman Deng, what exactly he said to chairman Deng is unclear to us, but when he came back he said it was Deng’s order. So you have to go. After he spoke none of us could say anything [他说我们都没有话说].” Even though Yang Dezhi, GPD head Yu Qiuli, General Logistics Department head Hong Xuezhong, and Defense Minister Zhang Aiping all wanted Wang Meng to stay in his position as commissar of the Guangzhou Military Region, Deng’s vote was decisive.<sup>49</sup> At times Deng’s power over the military became almost farcical. According to one credible account, older general Qin Jiwei met the much younger Chi Haotian once and briefly. At a discussion with Deng, Qin offhandedly described Chi as “a pretty good [还可以] officer.” Deng interpreted this to mean that Qin knew Chi well and had Chi promoted to the general staff. When Luo Ruiqing told Qin he should explain the mistake to Deng, Qin refused: “Commander Luo, I simply do not dare to go to the old man’s face again and make careless remarks [罗总啊，我可不敢再去老爷子面前乱说了].” In other words, Qin was so afraid of his boss that he did not even feel comfortable pointing out Deng’s misunderstanding.<sup>50</sup>

For years, Deng’s point man on military affairs was Yang Shangkun. In the early 1980s he became secretary of the CMC, and in 1987 became vice chairman for daily affairs. Yang and Deng met for the first time in 1932.<sup>51</sup> They worked closely together in the military in the 1930s when Deng led the political department of the First Red Army Group and Yang was deputy director of the political

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<sup>49</sup> Wei Yuan, *Mengzhi Changzai: Wang Meng Jiangjun Zhuan [Fierce Determination Always Present: Biography of General Wang Meng]* (Hong Kong: Beixing chubanshe, 2008), 254.

<sup>50</sup> Luo Yu, *Gaobie Zongcanmou Bu [Farewell to the PLA General Chief of Staff]* (Hong Kong: Kaifang chubanshe, 2015), 361.

<sup>51</sup> This was Yang’s answer when Deng asked him what year they met. Deng responded: “Sixty years. Sixty years!” Deng’s daughter joked: “They look like two old brothers, as soon as they meet they are so happy!” Deng responded: “We are often together.” Wu Songying, *Qinlizhe Jishu- 1992 Nian Deng Xiaoping Nanxun Neiqing [Record of a Witness: The Inside Story of Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour in 1992]* (Hong Kong: Mingpao, 2012), 160.

department of the CMC.<sup>52</sup> They were both from Sichuan and often ate and watched movies together, and Yang's son was close to Deng's children. Yang's son says that his father was in Hainan when Deng died and was horrified that he might not make Deng's funeral.<sup>53</sup> Yang was not a major military legend, but for years he had managed the daily affairs of the CMC.<sup>54</sup> Former party official Wu Jiexiang writes that he personally heard Yang claim to have persuaded Deng to remain as CMC leader at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress by saying: "Comrade Xiaoping, if you retire completely, I support this. But have you considered who will command the three services? Even if you aren't worried, I still am!"<sup>55</sup> With Yang running the show for so long, neither Hu Yaobang nor Zhao Ziyang had many opportunities to develop their own power in the PLA.<sup>56</sup>

Deng also closely controlled the elite security forces in Beijing. His allies Yang Dezhong and Sun Yong controlled the Central Guard Bureau and the Central Guard Division (also known at other times as Unit 8341 and the Central Guard Regiment), respectively. During the Deng era, these security forces were under the dual authority of the Central General Office and the PLA General Staff Department, but Deng had an extremely close relationship with Yang and Sun. Yang had avoided attacks on Deng Xiaoping during the Cultural Revolution and the two formed an alliance against Wang Dongxing after the death of

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<sup>52</sup> Xuezhong Guo, "Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics," *The China Journal*, no. 46 (July 1, 2001): 85.

<sup>53</sup> Zhang Yue and Zhao Lei, "'Hongse Sheyingshi' Shushuo Xiaoping Shishi [The Red Photographer Describes the Death of Xiaoping]," *Nanfang Zhoumo*, April 4, 2008. Deng's daughter Maomao even called Yang "father Yang [杨爸爸]."

<sup>54</sup> According to the CIA, "Chinese officials have stressed to US diplomats that Yang is now the day-to-day military leader. Directorate of Intelligence, "China's Yang Shangkun: Growing Influence", May 6, 1987. CIA Crest, College Park.

<sup>55</sup> Deng allegedly agreed to change his mind about retiring, but on the condition that Zhao Ziyang was made first vice chairman of the CMC. Jiexiang Wu, "'Tiananmen Mijian' Yu Yang Shangkun [The 'Tiananmen Papers' and Yang Shangkun]," *Epoch Times*, January 17, 2001, <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/1/1/18/n36389.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> Another key figure was Deng's secretary Wang Ruilin, who served as deputy director of the PLA General Office from 1983-1990. Xuezhong Guo, *China's Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18.

Mao. During the fourteen years Yang was in office, the head of the Central General Office changed six times.<sup>57</sup>

Compared to Deng, Hu and Zhao were powerless. In June 1985, Hu Yaobang said in an interview with a Hong Kong news organization that “There has always been a practice of arranging seniority according to length of service in the Army. With Comrade Deng Xiaoping taking charge, it is sufficient for him to say one sentence, but we [Hu and Zhao Ziyang] have to say five sentences. Our five sentences also work, but he has to utter only one sentence. This does not take him a lot of time and energy but it can save our time.”<sup>58</sup> Zhao was clearly not up to managing the old military hierarchy: in October 1981 during a State Council meeting on nuclear energy policy, Zhang Aiping accused Zhao of lying that he did not read a particular document and Zhao lost his temper.<sup>59</sup>

We do not know the precise extent to which Hu Yaobang’s failure to ascend to the position of head of the CMC was a result of the difficulty of military reform, the military’s lack of respect for him, or Deng’s jealous hold on power and increasing dissatisfaction with Hu as a leader in general.<sup>60</sup> It is clear, however,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 133, 175–183, 430–431. The Central General Office technically provided daily administration, while the PLA General Staff Department had authority over “political control, appointments and promotions, and logistical supplies.”

<sup>58</sup> “Hu Yaobang Interviewed by Pai Hsing’s Lu Keng” June 1, 1985, FBIS

<sup>59</sup> Zhang’s son provides the following account on the debate over whether to import nuclear power plants (Zhang opposed):

Zhang Aiping: I personally called your secretary. He said that the boss read it and approved it and already send it to the Planning Commission [计委]. You dare say you did not read it? (When father recalled this part, he complacently said: ha, his face immediately went all red.)

Silence... more silence.

Zhao Ziyang: So it’s decided this way. If you say I’m someone who wells out the country then I guess I am!

Zhang: Premier, if you understand things this way, I will never speak again!

Zhang told his son that he did not fight back because Zhao was the premier and he was afraid Zhao would accuse him of relying on his old credentials [摆老资格]. Zhang was likely fired from his position as vice premier because of his inability to work with Zhao.

Zhang Sheng, *Cong Zhanzheng Zoulai: Liang Dai Junren de Duihua [Returning from War: A Conversation Between Two Generations of Military Men]* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2008), 423.

<sup>60</sup> In 1985 the CIA believed that “Hu’s accession to the Military Commission chairmanship seems the linchpin of Deng’s overall succession package. Deng intended to hand over the Military Commission chairmanship to Hu Yaobang by the fall of 1985... Deng’s apparent decision to wait for a better time to further adjust the military leadership suggests that he remains concerned over the senior officers’ loyalty to reform. He also may have calculated that foisting Hu—still viewed as too inexperienced to assume the top military post—upon the Army at this time would unnecessarily alienate some senior soldiers. Directorate of Intelligence, “China’s Party Conference: The

that Hu's lack of real support in the military was a problem for him politically. Hu Yaobang's daughter writes that every time her father fell into political difficulty, he would say "If only commander Luo [Ruiqing] were still alive! [要是罗总长还在就好了]"<sup>61</sup> According to Luo Ruiqing's son, after Hu became general secretary he told him and his mother: "Commander Luo [罗总] died too early. If commander Luo were still alive, Ziyang would manage the government, I would manage the party, Luo would manage the military, that would have been great!"<sup>62</sup> When Luo Ruiqing began preparing Yang Yong for chief of the general staff, Deng opposed this, possibly because Yang and Hu were cousins.<sup>63</sup> After Hu was removed from the position of party secretary in 1987, he said: "If at the time Marshal Ye was still around, if the old marshal said one word then maybe it would not have turned out that way."<sup>64</sup> But even if Hu did want to create inroads with the military he had to be careful. In the interview with a Hong Kong reporter, Hu was asked how he would manage military commanders who opposed him in the future if Deng did not give up the CMC position while he was still alive. Zhao Ziyang later surmised, "The talk was sure to provoke Deng's displeasure. He reference to the Central Military Commission position especially displeased him. Deng could have interpreted this to mean that deep in Yaobang's heart, he agreed with what Lu Keng said."<sup>65</sup>

Hu did not entirely lack friends in the military.<sup>66</sup> He was even praised for his political work in the military before 1949 in the eulogy at his funeral. But Zhao Ziyang had even fewer military credentials

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Waning of the Ancien Regime," November 1985, CIA Crest, College Park. In another document, the CIA states that "this arrangement was repeatedly confirmed in intelligence and Hong Kong reports until the September sessions, when the stories stopped completely." Why Hu was not promoted to the CMC in 1985 remains a mystery. Director of Central Intelligence, "China After Deng: Succession Problems and Prospects." Special National Intelligence Estimate. May 1987. CIA Crest, College Park.

<sup>61</sup> Man Mei, *Sinian Yiran Wujin: Huiyi Fuqin Hu Yaobang [Longing Still Never Ends: Remembering My Father Hu Yaobang]* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2005), 295.

<sup>62</sup> Luo Yu, *Gaobie Zongcanmou Bu [Farewell to the PLA General Chief of Staff]*, 343. Luo surmises: "Later when I remembered these words, I thought that at that time Deng Xiaoping had turned the military into an independent kingdom, Yaobang already realized that it would be difficult for him as general secretary."

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 363–364.

<sup>64</sup> Zhou Ziheng, "Hu Yaobang Tai Tianzhenle! Yang Xiguang Pingjia Hu Yaobang [Hu Yaobang Is Too Naive! Yang Xiguang Evaluates Hu Yaobang]," *21ccom*, August 29, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Zhao Ziyang, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang*, trans. Pu Bao, Renee Chiang, and Adi Ignatius, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 168.

<sup>66</sup> For Hu's relationship with marshals Nie Rongzhen and Xu Xiangqian, see Tang Jun and Qiao Xizhang, *Hu Yaobang yu jundui: jinian Hu Yaobang tongzhi shishi shi zhou nian* (China: Hu Yaobang yu jundui bianji zu, 1999); Zhang

than Hu, although, unlike Hu, he was made first secretary of the CMC. According to Bao Tong, Zhao did not seek military power because he was too busy with economic and political reform.<sup>67</sup> After Zhao became general secretary, he summoned a meeting of generals at the division level and beyond, but Yang Shangkun's office called to ask whether Yang could also attend: Zhao understood this to mean that he was overstepping [他就知道, 已经插进来了].<sup>68</sup> Zhao's behavior might have also been shaped by the fact that one of his predecessor's alleged crimes was seeking the position of CMC chairman.

At the same time, however, Deng wanted Zhao to ultimately replace him as head of the CMC. After all, only by ultimately taking control of the military could Zhao truly succeed Deng. Liu Huaqing writes in his memoirs that on December 31, 1987, the entire new CMC except for Zhao went to celebrate New Year at Deng's home. Deng asked Yang Shangkun: "did you tell everyone that from now on Comrade Ziyang would take primary responsibility for the CMC?" After Yang said that he did, Deng continued: "Comrade Ziyang will need some time to understand the military [对军队有个了解过程], he is not too familiar with the military. He should get to know officers at the army level and above."<sup>69</sup>

Zhao might not have been entirely blind to the benefits of developing a relationship with the military. When Zhao received a report that Xu Xin, whose secretary was Zhao's son-in-law, was to become the second vice head of the general staff, Zhao's office proposed he became first vice head instead.<sup>70</sup> Liu Huaqing wrote that Zhao played an important role in preparing to defend the Spratleys.<sup>71</sup> In February 1988, Zhao wrote a notification to Li Peng and Yao Yilin that supported PLA complaints about

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Liqun et al, *Huai Nian Yaobang [Remembering Yaobang]*, vol. 4 (Hong Kong: Yaotai guoji chuban youxian gongsi, 2001), 1–6.

<sup>67</sup> Chen Xiaoya, "Chen Xiaoya: Zhao Ziyang Yu Yang Shangkun de Moqi [Chen Xiaoya: The Secret Agreement between Zhao Ziyang and Yang Shangkun]," *NewCenturyNet*, May 31, 2010, [http://2newcenturynet.blogspot.com/2010/05/blog-post\\_31.html](http://2newcenturynet.blogspot.com/2010/05/blog-post_31.html).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu*, 530, 535.

<sup>70</sup> Luo Yu, Gaobie Zongcanmou Bu [*Farewell to the PLA General Chief of Staff*], 55.

<sup>71</sup> Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing Huiyilu*, 530, 535.

local governments taking resources from them.<sup>72</sup> Yet Deng's attempts to build up Zhao's credentials were cut short by June 4. Liu Yazhou put matters simply: "The military was not in the hands of Zhao Ziyang."<sup>73</sup>

Unlike Zhao, Deng was able to rely on some loyal figures to guarantee the PLA obeyed him despite significant reluctance. But who were these individuals? Yang Shangkun explicitly stated that "I think that at the level of Major Military Region the comrades are no problem. But will there be a problem with the men at the level of army and below?"<sup>74</sup> On September 4, Deng told other members of the leadership that "Our PLA is also good! Even though some young people have been promoted, and I don't know a single army commander [军长], this military certainly maintained good traditions."<sup>75</sup>

According to the unpublished *New York Times* notes of an interview with intellectual Wang Juntao, Hong Xuezhì's secretary Wang Dong had the following analysis:

Wang Dong told me that the company-level officers were all graduates of military colleges, and they have the same ideas as the students on the square. He said the corps and division-level officers were from high school students at the start of the Cultural Revolution, and they understand all the difficulties the republic faced and disapproved of the military entering the city." Wang Dong told him that the PLA regional-level commanders had been dragged into the Cultural Revolution when Mao ordered the military to come in and restore control. Wang told him that experience- setting the military into the middle of factional struggle- had also set them against mobilization against the protesters. Wang Dong told him that only at army level were there some princeling commanders who were willing to go along with Deng Xiaoping.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Zhao said "over the last few years there have been difficulties in national funds, the military budget has not increased, the PLA diligently enforces chairman Deng's order to be patient and take a big picture look and not complain, they have not asked the country to increase the military budget, if all over the country the military's difficulties are not understood and [local government] continues to ask for resources from the military, that is simply not appropriate [就太不应该了]." Xianyang Zhang and Yijun Shi, *Zhao Ziyang Zhongnanhai shinian jishi, 1980-1989 [Record of Zhao Ziyang's Ten Years at Zhongnanhai 1980-1989]* (Hong Kong: Shijie kexue jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 881.

<sup>73</sup> Liu Yazhou, "Chutan 'Liusi' [An Initial Discussion of 'June 4'] August 1989," Series 27, Volume 24 (Service Center for Chinese Publications, 2004), 90.

<sup>74</sup> Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, "Yang Shangkun Tongzhi Zai Zhongyang Junwei Jinji Kuada Huiyi Shang de Jianghua Yaodian [Key Points of Comrade Yang Shangkun's Speech at the Emergency CMC Enlarged Session]," in *Beijing Junqu Budui Zhixing Jieyan Renwu Zhong de Zhengzhi Gongzuo*, Series 27, Volume 37 (Beijing: Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1989).

<sup>75</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan [Collected Works of Deng Xiaoping]*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), 318.

<sup>76</sup> Wang Juntao, *New York Times* interview notes, author's personal collection.

In any case, Deng had decades of relationship-building on which to rely. The use of these intensely loyal men allowed Deng to bring the lower ranks into line as well. First, old generals like NPC vice chairman Liao Hansheng, CMC vice secretaries Hong Xuezhong and Liu Huaqing, head of the general staff Chi Haotian, General Political Department (GPD) head Yang Baibing, and General Logistics Department head Zhao Nanqi repeatedly met with the units to communicate the orders of Deng and Yang Shangkun.<sup>77</sup> By guaranteeing unified support at the top, the chain of command was clear and almost certainly went far to assuage concerns. Second, the GPD, which was run by the half-brother of Yang Shangkun, played a crucial role in political indoctrination.<sup>78</sup>

### *The May 17 Meetings*

If Zhao's strategy of dialogue with the students had been basically approved by both the PSC on May 8 and the full Politburo on May 10, how is it possible that the top leadership would decide to impose martial law on May 17? Even after the May 14 meeting, the students, including the radical Li Lu, had hopes that the situation was moving in the right direction. After all, even if the meeting ended in acrimony, the fact that it happened at all was a major step forward.<sup>79</sup> The two May 17 meetings were disastrous for Zhao and can be seen as the first major step towards the use of force. The outcome of these

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<sup>77</sup> Shier jitianjun silingbu, "Zhixing fu Jing jieyan renwu jingyan ziliao huibian [Collection of Material on the Experience of Executing the Mission of Martial Law in Beijing]", 1989, Service Center for Chinese Publications, Series 27, Volume 22, 2. Interestingly, Qin Jiwei is not listed in this account.

<sup>78</sup> The most important documents studied in the ranks were the speeches by Li Peng and Yang Shangkun on May 19, the April 26 editorial, the *People's Liberation Army Daily* editorial of May 21, a speech by Beijing party head Li Ximing on the protests, the answers of marshals Nie Rongzhen and Xu Xiangqian to students (see above), and a letter from Zhou's widow Deng Yingchao to the citizens of Beijing. The intent of the indoctrination was to prove that the protests were intended to overthrow the CCP. Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, "Zongzhengzhibu Guanyu Budui Zhixing Jieyan Renwu de Zhengzhi Gongzuo Zhishi [GPD's Political Work Orders on the Army Executing the Martial Law Mission]," in *Beijing Junqu Budui Zhixing Jieyan Renwu Zhong de Zhengzhi Gongzuo*, Series 27, Volume 37 (Beijing: Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1989), 24.

<sup>79</sup> *Huigu yu fansi: Bajiu xueyun lishi huigu yu fansi yantaohui jilu [Review and Reflect: The 1989 Student Movement Review and Reflection Discussion Meeting Record]* (Germany: Deguo Laiyin bi hui. The record of this conversation among many of the major student leaders is also available online: <http://www.64memo.com/b5/1.htm>, 1993), 3.5.2, Li Lu.



meetings can only be understood by appreciating the extent to which Deng's control over the military affected the deliberations (hypothesis 3b).

According to Zhao Ziyang, on May 16, the PSC met to write a public statement in the name of its five members to persuade the students to end the hunger strike. Li Peng opposed including the sentence "The passionate patriotism of the students is admirable, and the Central Committee and the State Council approve of their deeds," quibbling that "mentioning 'admirable' is quite enough. Do we have to also add that we 'approve'?" Even at this late point, Yang Shangkun was saying the government could support the students' proposed action against corruption. The PSC decided to include the line to which Li Peng objected without any changes.

Concluding after the declaration of the hunger strike that only revising the April 26 editorial could now guarantee a peaceful outcome, Zhao for the first time called for considering its revision. Li Peng said that certain phrases from the editorial could not be changed because they were Deng's original words. Zhao disagreed with this point of view because he believed that the editorial was written based on the spirit of the April 24 meeting. Zhao believed that despite the 1st plenum of the Central Committee's decision, "as long as the PSC made a collective decision, he always supported it." Almost certainly to make the deal sweeter to Deng, he said he did not oppose the word "turmoil," only qualifying it by emphasizing that turmoil was the implication of the movement, not its intent or nature. Here Yang broke with Zhao, warning that changing the April 26 editorial would hurt Deng's image. Zhao offered to take responsibility for the editorial instead. To resolve the impasse, Zhao requested to see Deng the following day, the 17<sup>th</sup>. Deng's response was to call for a full PSC meeting at his home.<sup>80</sup>

According to Li Peng's memoirs, at this meeting everyone called on Zhao to speak to the students and clarify the party's position, but the meeting fought over what exactly Zhao should say. "Most" [多数]

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<sup>80</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 26–27; Wang Ding, *Liusi qian hou*, vol. 2 (Taipei: Yuan jing chu ban you xian gong si, 1995), 126.

of the participants supported only affirming the “patriotic fervor of the students” and guaranteeing that they would not be punished. Zhao, on the other hand, wanted to affirm that the students were a “patriotic movement.” Although the phrases differed by a single word, this was the heart of the debate. Yang Shangkun argued that the term “patriotic movement” would violate Deng’s decree that the protests were a rejection of the party and socialist system. Zhao was forced by the majority to use the “patriotic fervor” phraseology.<sup>81</sup>

Interestingly, the Li and Zhao accounts both describe Yang Shangkun playing a key role in supporting different wordings, indicating his role as a mediator. According to *People’s Daily* employee Lu Chaoqi, the idea of sending a written statement to the students that met their demands while protecting Deng’s image was in fact proposed by Yang and the draft was written by the *People’s Daily* staff at his suggestion. The Li and Zhao accounts are essentially identical in their portrayal of Zhao’s expression of opposition to the April 26 editorial and his offer to take responsibility. According to Li’s speech to the 4th plenum in late June, a majority of the PSC refused to accept Zhao’s proposal to take responsibility for the April 26 editorial.<sup>82</sup>

This crucial meetings of the 17<sup>th</sup> remain shrouded in mystery. Zhao writes that he began the meeting at Deng’s home by making the case that the April 26 editorial was the key roadblock to solving the crisis. Deng appeared very impatient while Zhao was speaking, and Li Peng and Yao Yilin immediately attacked Zhao when he was finished. Zhao wrote that this was the first time Li and Yao openly criticized the Asian Development Bank speech. They were so vehement in their accusations that Zhao believed Deng had already given them approval. Yang Shangkun, dramatically reversing his earlier

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<sup>81</sup> Li Peng, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, Online Version, n.d., May 16.

<sup>82</sup> Han Shanbi, *Lishi de chuangshang : 1989 Zhongguo minyun shiliao huibian [The Wound of History: Collection of Historical Materials of China’s 1989 Democratic Movement]* (Hong Kong: Dong xi wen hua shi ye gong si, 1989), 400.

support for Zhao, not only opposed changing the editorial, but said “Liao Hansheng<sup>83</sup> [a major military leader] believes that martial law should be imposed. Perhaps we should consider martial law.” Deng then blamed the continued protests on Zhao’s ADB speech, saying the situation was caused by a problem within the party itself [问题出在党内]. Despite these attacks, Zhao stated that Hu Qili called for the editorial to be revised and Qiao Shi equivocated.<sup>84</sup> Elsewhere, Zhao said that Hu Qili opposed martial law while Qiao Shi supported it.<sup>85</sup> Clearly addressing the contents of the *Tiananmen Papers* (“public hearsay,” in his words), Zhao explicitly stated that “in fact there was no ‘three versus two’ vote” at the May 17 meeting.” Instead, Hu Qili and Zhao expressed support for revising the editorial, Yao Yilin and Li Peng opposed revision, and Qiao Shi “remained neutral by not expressing any clear view.”<sup>86</sup>

According to Li Peng, after Zhao gave his opening speech, Qiao Shi clearly expressed that he believed the April 26 editorial was completely correct, while Hu Qili simply said that he was worried about the present situation and that the gap between the party and the masses was too great. Li and Yao supported the April 26 editorial. After Deng proposed martial law, Li Peng and Yao Yilin immediately expressed support. Qiao nodded in agreement, and Hu repeated his earlier statement that he was concerned about the current situation.<sup>87</sup> Therefore Li concludes that “only Zhao Ziyang expressed opposition” and that Zhao himself expressed respect for the decision of the “majority of the PSC.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> The reference to Liao Hansheng is curious. Other evidence described below indicates strongly that Liao was opposed to a crackdown. According to Luo Ruiqing’s son, Liao was Yang’s brother-in-law [妹夫]. Luo Yu, Gaobie Zongcanmou Bu [*Farewell to the PLA General Chief of Staff*], 22.

<sup>84</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 28–29.

<sup>85</sup> Zhang and Shi, *Zhao Ziyang Zhongnanhai shinian jishi, 1980-1989 [Record of Zhao Ziyang’s Ten Years at Zhongnanhai 1980-1989]*, 1047.

<sup>86</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 27–30.

<sup>87</sup> Another piece of evidence supports the likelihood that Hu Qili abstained instead of supporting Zhao. According to Wu Jiayang, Hu was the type of person who would always try to seek the middle ground and never had a strong personal opinion. Of course, the prospect of a violent end to the protests might have caused him to behave differently in this instance. Jiayang Wu, *Zhongnanhai riji [Journal from Zhongnanhai]* (Carle Place: Mirror Books, 2002), November 6.

<sup>88</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 17.

Zhao claims that after this meeting was over he tried to hold a PSC meeting to see if he could get a clear majority in his favor [看能不能形成少数服从多数] without Deng present. According to Zhao, at this meeting only Hu Qili supported him: Qiao Shi refused to reveal his position. Li Peng and Yao Yilin opposed any discussion, saying that the decision at Deng's home earlier that day was the final decision. Yang Shangkun stepped in to say: "Since the members of the PSC cannot form a majority opinion, that means asking Xiaoping to make a final decision. I will return to Comrade Xiaoping and make a report."<sup>89</sup> According to the *Tiananmen Papers*, a formal vote was cast on martial law: Zhao Ziyang and Hu Qili in opposition, Li Peng and Yao Yilin in favor, and Qiao Shi abstaining.<sup>90</sup>

Li Peng writes that *he* was the one to call the meeting, with the purpose of preparing to execute martial law. In his narrative, he writes that Zhao wanted to resign, but was persuaded not to by Yang Shangkun. The meeting set the date of May 19 for a mobilization meeting of party, government and military leaders and tentatively decided on May 21 for the first day of martial law. Yang was put in charge of military deployments. Li does not write anything about a second debate over what was decided at Deng's residence.<sup>91</sup>

Two other accounts of the events of May 17 are available. According to Chen Yizi, both Qiao Shi and Hu Qili abstained.<sup>92</sup> Gao Xin rejected Chen's story and claimed to provide a different account based on interviews with "multiple people in the know with greater authority," including two unidentified figures who participated in the 4th plenum after the crackdown and someone involved in high-level work [中共高层工作的人士]. Gao writes that at Deng's home on May 17, Hu Qili and Zhao Ziyang disagreed

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<sup>89</sup> Wenbin Cai et al, *Zhao Ziyang de daolu [The Road of Zhao Ziyang]* (Hong Kong: Chen zhong shu ju, 2011), 105.

<sup>90</sup> Zhang Liang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, Paper back edition (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 192–193.

<sup>91</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 17.

<sup>92</sup> Chen Yizi, *Zhongguo, shinian gaige yu baji minyun: Beijing liusi tusha de beihou [China, Ten Years of Reform and the 1989 Democracy Movement: Behind the Beijing June 4 Massacre]* (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1990), 161.

with Deng while Li Peng and Yao Yilin supported him. Qiao was left on the spot and decided to support Zhao.<sup>93</sup>

If Zhao is correct about the first meeting (with Deng), then Qiao Shi equivocated on the question of revising the editorial and the PSC split with two for, two against, and one abstention. However, if Qao supported martial law, then Zhao did lose three to two on that issue. If Zhao is correct about the second meeting, the last full PSC meeting before June 4 did not form a majority in favor of Deng (unless Qiao's silence can be interpreted as a refusal to change his position from the last meeting), and claims that it did were at best a tendentious account. However, it would be inappropriate to rely on Zhao's word alone. Moreover, Qiao Shi was made the member of a small group, along with Yang Shangkun and Li Peng, in charge of executing martial law. If he abstained, that might have been very unlikely. One very strong possibility is that precisely because there was no formal vote, it would have been easy for different interpretations for what exactly the positions of the different participants were.

If we assume that Li's account is accurate, do we have reason to suspect that Hu Qili or Qiao Shi behaved in this way because of pressure of an undemocratic nature? Zhao is emphatic that Hu and Qiao (and even Yang) supported his position until the meeting with Deng.<sup>94</sup> The same individuals who told Gao Xin that Qiao voted in favor of Deng also said that up until the 17<sup>th</sup> he supported Zhao.<sup>95</sup> On May 21, Qiao visited Zhao's house and made a shocking statement: "If it were not for Deng's insistence and his decision to call more troops to Beijing, a great tragedy might be avoided."<sup>96</sup> Even if Li is right that Qiao "nodded" his support, this does not indicate great enthusiasm.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, as mentioned above, Hu Qili

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<sup>93</sup> Xin Gao, "Dangnei Kaimingpai Zai 'Liusi' Zhong de Ganga Juese [The Dilemma of the Enlightened Faction in June 4]," *Zhongguo Zhi Chun*, no. 139 (April 1995): 19–22.

<sup>94</sup> Zhang and Shi, *Zhao Ziyang Zhongnanhai shinian jishi, 1980-1989 [Record of Zhao Ziyang's Ten Years at Zhongnanhai 1980-1989]*, 1047.

<sup>95</sup> Gao, "Dangnei Kaimingpai Zai 'Liusi' Zhong de Ganga Juese [The Dilemma of the Enlightened Faction in June 4]."

<sup>96</sup> Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 32.

<sup>97</sup> Wu Jiaxiang placed Qiao Shi along with Hu Qili squarely in the reform camp. Wu, *Zhongnanhai riji*, February 8.

told Li Peng on May 15 that he believed the editorial should be revised.<sup>98</sup> If Li's account of the May 17 meeting is accurate, this begs an important question: why would Qiao and Hu refuse to express their true feelings?

One possibility is that they so respected Deng's wisdom that they accepted his appraisal of the situation. Another possibility is that they did not believe martial law meant a massacre. According to Li, Deng said that "as long as there is no beating, smashing, or stealing, the military will not fight back," although he left open the possibility that "if a conflict arises, it is difficult to avoid that some people will be hurt [碰伤]."<sup>99</sup> Some members of the meeting might have therefore believed that even after martial law was introduced, the PLA would not be used in the way it ultimately was.

The most likely possibility, however, is the sense that even if they expressed clear opposition to Deng's plan for martial law it would be useless. What was the source of Deng's overwhelming power? First, as described in the last chapter, the 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee decided that Deng was to "take the helm" over questions of major significance. Second, Deng's revolutionary credentials and service contributed to his moral authority. Third, Deng was of head of the Central Military Commission and Yang Shangkun was running its daily affairs. Which of these factors, the CC decision, moral authority, or Deng's control over the military, lay greater on the minds of these two PSC members is virtually impossible to determine. However, as discussed above, it was not entirely clear whether the CC decision meant the PSC entirely lacked the right to disagree with Deng. The Soviet case shows that the moral authority conferred by revolutionary credentials is not invulnerable: even a formal majority vote by the Old Bolsheviks in the Presidium was reversed by the Central Committee in 1957. Moreover, neither of these two sources of authority would disallow PSC members to express their own opinion as a part of discussion, and they certainly did not prevent Zhao Ziyang or many others from opposing martial law.

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<sup>98</sup> On May 13 or 14, Hu Qili told Bao Tong that he thought the April 26 editorial was problematic and that as the person in charge of writing it, the responsibility was his. Bao Tong, "Bao Tong Liusi Mijian [Bao Tong's Secret June 4 Document]," *Epoch Times*, accessed July 12, 2015, <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/1/4/23/n79472.htm>.

<sup>99</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 17.

On the other hand, strong evidence indicates that Deng and Yang were already flexing their muscles vis-à-vis the PLA, which might have led some on the Politburo to feel that martial law would happen no matter how they voted. Li Peng writes that 1,500 soldiers from the 38<sup>th</sup> Group Army were sent on April 21 to defend Zhongnanhai, the central leadership compound.<sup>100</sup> According to the official history of the 38<sup>th</sup> Group Army, there were 8,986 troops helping to ensure stability in the capital on April 22. On April 26, an additional 5,100 soldiers from the 38<sup>th</sup> Group Army came to Beijing as a reserve force [预备队]. Zhao Ziyang was still outside the country at this time.<sup>101</sup> As mentioned above, Deng spoke of the PLA as a base of support against the student protesters on April 25 (or possibly earlier if the meeting was not actually on that date).

Some scholars propose that Deng was unable to meet with Zhao or the Iranian president because he was rallying support from military leaders for a crackdown.<sup>102</sup> Chen Yizi writes that Deng started on May 8 to meet with the heads of the Main Military Regions and services, although he provides no evidence.<sup>103</sup> According to Wu Wei, the military was first mobilized as early as the beginning of May. Some soldiers told citizens of Beijing that they left their garrisons around May 12<sup>th</sup> without being told of their destination: all without approval of the Politburo or Zhao Ziyang being informed.<sup>104</sup> Chen Yizi writes in his memoirs that on May 15 he asked a friend with connections in the military to find out whether the military was active. The next day, he was told “Old Chen, things are bad, in every area units

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., April 21.

<sup>101</sup> Lujun di sanshiba jituanjun junshi bianshen weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Lujun Di Sanshiba Jituanjun Junshi* [Military History of the Chinese PLA Infantry 38 Army Group], vol. Series 27, Volume 68 (Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1993), 695.

<sup>102</sup> Wu Guoguang, “Deng Xiaoping Shizong Zhi Mi: You Guan 1989 Zhenxiang de Yi Ge Tuice [The Mystery of Deng’s Disappearance: A Guess About the Truth of 1989],” *Botanwang*, April 24, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Chen, *Zhongguo, shinian gaige yu bajiu minyun*, 164.

<sup>104</sup> Wu Wei, *Zhongguo 80 niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqian muhou* [On Stage and Backstage: hina’s Political Reform in the 1980s] (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2013), 519.

under the name of ‘practice,’ ‘camp and field training,’ ‘and garrison relief’ are being deployed towards Beijing from every direction.”<sup>105</sup>

A former soldier that participated in the crackdown writes that on May 9 his unit was “again” studying the April 26 editorial. At 3:30 in the afternoon, he received an order to prepare to go to Beijing. On May 11<sup>th</sup>, a mobilization meeting was held at which the regiment commander stated that they would go to Beijing to destroy the anti-CCP turmoil. By May 15, they arrived at the Shijingshan region of Beijing.<sup>106</sup>

According to an official PLA document, on May 11<sup>th</sup> the Beijing Military Region political department [政治部] held an enlarged party committee meeting that “unified thinking” around the April 26 editorial. At a May 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the heads of the political departments of all major units [单位], the Beijing MR political department gave a serious “heads-up [郑重地给大家打了招呼]” that emphasized the spirit of the April 26 editorial. On May 13, the Beijing MR political department sent a telegram to the entire Military Region. The document evaluates these actions in the following way: “The MR’s party committee and political organs had a clear position, the units at this critical moment had a backbone [主心骨], every level’s party committee and political organs copied the method of the Military Region, every level managed its business, thus stopping the influence of the trend of incorrect public opinion, removing any interference, in terms of thought and action maintaining a high level of unity with the party center.”<sup>107</sup>

According to the official *Short Biography of Yu Yongbo*, the head of the Nanjing MR political

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<sup>105</sup> Chen Yizi, *Chen Yizi huiyilu [Memoirs of Chen Yizi: China’s reform in the 1980s]* (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chubanshe, 2013), 592.

<sup>106</sup> If this account is true, the implications are truly remarkable, as the decision to impose martial law was not made until May 17. Journalist Louisa Lim has personally met with the alleged author, thus conveying some authenticity to the document. He is now an artist in Beijing. Chen Guang, “Yuan Jieyan Budui Shibing 1989 Guangchang Riji [Journal from the Square by a Former Martial Law Unit Soldier in 1989],” <http://www.backchina.com/forum/20090606/info-770147-1-1.html>, n.d.; Louisa Lim, *The People’s Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, “Junqu Jieyan Budui Zhengzhi Gongzuo Qingkuang Baogao [The Military Region’s Martial Law Units Political Work Situation Report],” in *Beijing Junqu Budui Zhixing Jieyan Renwu Zhong de Zhengzhi Gongzuo*, vol. Vole 27, Volume 37 (Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1989), 107, 112.



department, Yu Yongbo, executed the GPD's order to study the April 26 editorial "at a critical moment." This was described as an important step in "unifying thinking with the spirit of the notifications of the party center and the CMC."<sup>108</sup> In other words, one day after the Politburo met to support Zhao Ziyang's plan of resolving the crisis with peaceful measures, Deng not only warned Li Peng that the April 26 editorial was still untouchable, but also informed him that the military had also started to intensely study its importance.

Chen Yizi writes that given all of Deng's activity in the military, "when the PSC on the 17<sup>th</sup> discussed whether to enact martial law, the troops were already at the city walls [兵临城下, a literary expression]: there was no room for discussion."<sup>109</sup> Zhao Ziyang told historian Yang Jisheng: "Actually, it does not really matter what the attitudes of those people on the PSC were, Deng Xiaoping had already decided to use the military, other people would find it very difficult to turn back. The proportion of people in favor or against martial law was meaningless [常委对戒严的态度几比几是没有意义的]."<sup>110</sup> In a conversation with friends in 1993, Zhao stated:

Hu Qili also opposed military control [军管], Qiao Shi originally also opposed military control, but at this meeting he supported it, Yang Shangkun used to oppose military control, later he supported it, those most in favor were Li Peng and Yao Yilin... Actually, the attitude of these few people with regards to military control did not matter, even if five people did not support it, military control would still happen. But before the meeting at Deng's home, my opinion had a majority support, Qili, Qiao Shi, Shangkun, and I had the same opinion.<sup>111</sup>

We therefore have strong reason to believe that Hu and Qiao did not whole-heartedly support Zhao because such an action would be meaningless. They likely believed that if martial law was inevitable, then the situation would only be exacerbated if the PSC set itself in direct opposition.

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<sup>108</sup> Yu Yongbo zhuanjizu, *Yu Yongbo Zhuan Lue [Short Biography of Yu Yongbo]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), 83.

<sup>109</sup> Chen, *Chen Yizi huiyilu*, 164; Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, "Yang Baibing Tongzhi Zai Jieyan Budui Zhenggonghui Shang de Jianghua [Yang Baibing's Speech at the Martial Law Units Political Work Meeting] May 31, 1989," Series 27, Volume 37 (Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1989), 27–28.

<sup>110</sup> Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo Gai Ge Niandai de Zhengzhi Douzheng [Political Struggle During the Reform Years]* (Hong Kong: Tian di tu shu you xian gong si, 2010), 356.

<sup>111</sup> Li Lun, *Zhuanfang Zhao Ziyang: 1992-2004 Yu Youren de Tanhua [Special Interviews with Zhao Ziyang: Conversations with Friends 1992-2004]* (Hong Kong: Jingcheng wenhua shiye gongsi, 2006), 32.

Ironically, Deng's ability to take unilateral, illegal measures was a catalyst for persuading skeptics to provide his decision with more legitimacy.

Why Deng believed it was necessary to enact martial law at this time remains a mystery, but we can imagine two possible hypotheses. The first is that after Gorbachev departed, Deng decided the time was ripe to use violence. Another possibility, however, is that Deng had interpreted Zhao's comments to Gorbachev as the signal of a political struggle. He told a major meeting of the leadership at his house that "the problem is in the party. There are two headquarters, it looks like they are Li Peng and Zhao Ziyang, but actually it is me and Zhao Ziyang."<sup>112</sup>

Zhao did not attend the May 19 meeting that declared the PLA would enter Beijing, thus indicating a major rift within the leadership. Any acute observer would have wondered why the general secretary was not expressing support for such a decision. In fact, neither Zhao nor Hu Qili would ever again attend an important meeting before June 4 (this also supports the assertion that Hu Qili did support Zhao at Deng's home). If the actual decision to introduce martial law was possibly problematic from a legal point of view, all subsequent decisions therefore were even more so.

### *Rallying the Troops*

Given that the last full Politburo meeting was on May 10 and supported Zhao's tactics, the party rules were already stretched to their limits. When considered in conjunction with the attempts to muzzle the NPC Standing Committee and Politburo, the legitimate chain of command over the military becomes even hazier. Given the possibly problematic justifications for martial law and the military's reluctance to fire on the protesters, why did June 4 still happen?<sup>113</sup> Why was the matter not "well researched" by the

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<sup>112</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 19.

<sup>113</sup> Interestingly, even before Hu Yaobang's death, some students had already discussed the possible role of the military: "Our analysis of the army was largely borne out by events. We saw that new recruits were mainly farmers who had benefited greatly from the reforms. Having a personal investment in the new economy, they were unlikely to be brainwashed easily or to obey orders blindly. Another part of the army was composed of young officers who had recently graduated from military schools. They were well educated and likely to be sympathetic to the democracy movement. At the very top were some 800 generals who were not very happy with Deng and

most important decision-making bodies, as Xu Qinxian had hoped? Why did Zhao not behave like Yeltsin in 1991 and climb a tank with a megaphone? Why did he not have forces loyal to him in Unit 8341 occupy key buildings, go to the square and declare his support for students, and make a speech on television summoning an emergency CC meeting, as Chen Yizi proposed to Zhao through a common friend?<sup>114</sup> Hong Xuezhi's secretary Wang Dong told intellectual Zhou Duo that "a corpse-level commander [sic] in the martial law forces secretly sought him and said, 'Damn it. Let's round up a unit and attack and occupy Zhongnanhai and arrest this bunch of old bastards.'"<sup>115</sup>

To answer the puzzle of why the military attacked despite its own inclinations and the ambiguity of the legal environment, we can examine what kinds of information were being communicated to the PLA. As will be shown in this section, Deng's personal prestige and Zhao's supposed crimes were emphasized (hypothesis 1b). Second, the leadership attempted to convey as much legitimacy to the decision as possible without actually summoning a real Politburo meeting. Party rules were very obviously being manipulated (hypothesis 2b).

As discussed in the last chapter, on May 20, Deng met at his home with other members of the top leadership in a highly irregular "enlarged PSC" meeting that lacked two of the five PSC members. After the PLA was blocked from entering the city and the possible aborted crackdown around May 21, the leadership tried to further build up legitimacy for the decision without the Politburo or NPC Standing Committee by badgering provincial leaders individually to express their support for martial law.<sup>116</sup> In the next few days, Li Xiannian addressed the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.<sup>117</sup> The

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Yang Shangkun. The only group that stood firmly against the student movement was the so-called Prince Clan, which included the sons of high officials. We concluded that the army would pose a threat to the 1989 pro-democracy movement but felt that if we did not go too far, they would not present a real danger." Human Rights in China, *Children of the Dragon: The Story of Tiananmen Square* (New York: Collier Books, 1990), 48.

<sup>114</sup> Chen's friend described Zhao's response as: "Ziyang believes that no matter what he does not want to see blood spilled." Chen, *Chen Yizi huiyilu*, 611.

<sup>115</sup> Zhou Duo, *New York Times* interview notes, author's personal collection.

<sup>116</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Rijì [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, May 23–26.

<sup>117</sup> "Li Xiannian zhuan" bianxiezu, *Li Xiannian nianpu [Chronology of Li Xiannian]*, 6:481.

Central Advisory Commission listened to a speech by Chen Yun and expressed support for the martial law decision.<sup>118</sup> Peng Zhen also gave his speech on the legality of martial law that was discussed in the previous chapter.

The most revealing piece of evidence with regards to the military, however, is the speech given by Deng's fiercely loyal Comrade Yang Shangkun on May 24 to an enlarged session of the Central Military Commission. In this speech, Yang provided a case for the legitimacy of martial law to the top brass. He claimed that every time the student movement started to die out, Zhao would praise the students and cause them to increase pressure, a remarkable lie given Yang's strong support for him up until May 17. The "root of the problem is in the party. That means there are two voices on the PSC, two different voices. As Comrade Li Xiannian calls it, there are two headquarters." Yang said that Deng himself believed Zhao's ADB speech was a turning point: by revealing two different positions on the PSC, the students rallied and starting supporting Zhao and calling for the overthrow of Deng and Li. Because the students knew someone was supporting them, they became increasingly radical.

Yang explicitly raised the issue of the NPC Standing Committee:

Now the problem is that two voices within the party have been completely revealed publicly, the students think that there is someone in the party center that is supporting them, therefore they are increasingly radical, they want to hold an emergency session of the NPC Standing Committee, to hold an emergency NPC session, their goal is clearly to use these organizations to make a decision, reject the April 26 editorial, according to them the student movement is a spontaneous, patriotic, and democratic movement. Think for a moment, if the NPC Standing Committee made this decision, wouldn't that be overturning the previous editorial, now they are actively pursuing this, they are looking for signatures. Facing this situation, what is to be done? Comrades [Li] Xiannian and Chen Yun returned to Beijing, they demand that no matter what a meeting must be held to settle a guideline of what is to be done. Of course there are some other comrades like Peng Zhen, Wang Zhen, Big Sister Deng [Zhou Enlai's widow] and our two marshals, they all are paying close attention to the situation."

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<sup>118</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de dabaozha*, 290–291.

In other words, Yang was not arguing against the legality of pro-student figures calling for an NPC Standing Committee meeting: he was emphasizing the negative consequences of such a decision and the position of the old revolutionaries. Yang continued:

This is the first time in many years that several old people above eighty years old met to discuss the situation in the party center. Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Peng Zhen, Big Sister Deng, Old Wang [Wang Zhen], all believe there is no more ground to retreat, retreating means collapse, the fall of the People's Republic of China, the restoration of capitalism, what the American Dulles wanted, after several generations for socialism to become liberalism. Comrade Chen Yun said something very important, he said that this means the destruction in one moment of the People's Republic that was achieved in decades of fighting and the fruits achieved with the blood of millions of revolutionary martyrs, it means the rejection of the Communist Party.

Yang said that a change in the leadership would have to take place because Zhao could not execute the will of the party center and was pursuing a separate agenda. He claimed that "on the PSC his [Zhao's] was the only vote." Yang recognized the suspicions people might have about the old revolutionaries taking over the situation and tried to walk a fine line between the relative importance of the PSC and the old comrades:

That Zhao Ziyang had wanted to resign was revealed publicly, now there is a certain atmosphere outside, people say that people in their seventies and eighties, how could they solve problems? The answer is very simple. This is a decision made by the majority of the PSC. These old comrades have the most prestige in the party, the longest history, and as for their huge contributions to the party and the nation, there's no need to say anything about Comrade Xiaoping, Xiannian, Chen Yun, Marshal Xu, Marshal Nie, Big Sister Deng, Peng Zhen, and also Old Wang all have major contributions, at this critical moment in the party and nation, how could they not speak up?... Now people are saying that there is no party, all is decided by one man, this is very inaccurate, this matter was managed by the correct decision of the Politburo and a majority of the PSC\*, Chen Yun, Xiannian, and Comrade Xiaoping and others of the old revolutionary generation completely support and defend this correct decision.

Yang then proceeded to address the situation within the military, possibly making a reference to Xu Qinxian's alleged complaint that Zhao had not signed the order to bring the PLA into Beijing.

Does the military see matters clearly? This depends on your work. I think that at the level of Major Military Region the comrades are no problem. But will there be a problem with the men at the level of army and below [但军以下会不会有人有何问题呢]? Now people are saying that the army has three chairmen, why is it that one man, Deng Xiaoping, can deploy the military enforcing the martial law order.

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\* As discussed above, there was no Politburo meeting, the question of a majority on the PSC is problematic, and without Zhao present no further PSC meetings should have been possible. These facts almost certainly explain why Yang went out of his way to emphasize the role of the elder revolutionaries.

These people simply do not understand the military, they can only trick students, the military enforces the one-man responsibility system [首长负责制], we only assist the chairman work, serve as advisors. Once he made the decision, he not only sought out me but also [Hong] Xuezhong and [Liu] Huaqing, Minister Qin [Jiwei] also went, why could he [Deng] not make this order? I am giving you this information so that when there is a personnel change at the highest level of the party it will not seem sudden to you.

Yang also admitted that some of the older generals were skeptical: “There are some retired old comrades, we must separately go and keep them updated, this is an extremely important matter, it is no good if work on the retired cadres is done poorly.”<sup>119</sup> On May 31, Yang’s half brother Baibing, head of the GDP, said the emphasis of political work in the ranks should be that the nature of the protests was not patriotic and democratic but an attack on the CCP, that the reason the protests went out of control was because of Zhao Ziyang, that the decision to start martial law was correct, and that martial law is a holy mission accorded to the PLA in the constitution.<sup>120</sup> The top leadership therefore mainly justified martial law by emphasizing Zhao’s guilt, the role of the old revolutionaries, and the counterrevolutionary nature of the protesters.

### *The Final Decision*

Given broad opposition within the party and state legislature to violence, discussions were obviously not made by a broad segment of the leadership. But how narrow was the decision-making group? How broadly were specific decisions supported? These questions relate directly to the hypotheses because the extent to which decision-making was based on highly irregular political decision-making bodies means more explanatory power for hypothesis 2b, and the extent to which the legitimacy of orders was ambiguous signifies the importance of hypothesis 3b. The evidence indicates that the group making decisions after May 17 was even smaller than previously understood, excluded key civilian figures, and

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<sup>119</sup> Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, “Yang Shangkun Tongzhi Zai Zhongyang Junwei Jinji Kuada Huiyi Shang de Jianghua Yaodian [Key Points of Comrade Yang Shangkun’s Speech at the Emergency CMC Enlarged Session],” 14–19.

<sup>120</sup> Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, “Yang Baibing Tongzhi Zai Jieyan Budui Zhenggonghui Shang de Jianghua [Yang Baibing’s Speech at the Martial Law Units Political Work Meeting] May 31, 1989,” 31.

included individuals who still hoped for something less than a brutal massacre. The unwritten final order was deliberately formulated in a way to provide plausible deniability and minimize culpability.

Li Peng writes that on May 18 a “martial law work meeting” that included Li, Yang Shangkun, and Qiao Shi decided to create a Beijing Martial Law Command [北京戒严指挥部] with Beijing Mayor Chen Xitong and Beijing Military Region commander Zhou Yibing as commander and vice commander, respectively.<sup>121</sup> Chen Xitong revealed years later, however, that he was never informed of this assignment and wanted an opportunity to demand an explanation from Li for why he wrote this in his memoirs.<sup>122</sup>

As former Zhao advisor Wu Guoguang argues, this is a matter of fundamental importance. No other official source mentions Chen Xitong’s assignment to any such organization. Yao Jianfu, who interviewed Chen Xitong, concluded that Li Peng made this claim in order to use the Beijing mayor’s name to hide the fact that June 4 was a military coup. The question is essentially over how much of the leadership participated in martial law decisions. Chen himself was clearly afraid he was being scapegoated, saying sarcastically: “On “June 4” I was in the Great Hall of the People, Wan Li was there too, Zhou Yibing came later. Vice Commander Zhou Yibing did not come to find this ‘commander’ to ask for orders, and me, the ‘commander,’ never commanded Vice Commander Zhou Yibing. The location of this command center, me, the ‘commander,’ also did not know. How was I supposed to coordinate martial law work? I wonder what the intentions and goal were of Li Peng announcing I was ‘commander’ in *Li Peng’s June 4 Memoirs*?” Most crucially, Chen made the following comment about June 4: “The decisions on martial law and to clear the square were made above us, as for why these decisions were made, it was not clear at lower levels [上头作了戒严，清场的决定，至于为什么做出这个决定，下面不清楚].”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 18.

<sup>122</sup> Yao Jianfu, *Chen Xitong qinshu [Conversations with Chen Xitong]* (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2012).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–8, 28–29, 62.

Who gave the order to shoot and how broadly was that specific decision supported? Why was the solution “not a limited security operation appropriate to a civilian situation but a full-blown military operation designed for war” that turned into a “massacre,” in the words of Timothy Brook?<sup>124</sup> A very common opinion about the protesters was that they expected, and even intended to provoke, the bloody outcome.<sup>125</sup> Although they certainly expected a crackdown, they did not foresee a massacre. The students knew that if they simply surrendered the square, they would later be arrested. However, if they were arrested *on* the square, then the violation of their rights would not be secret and the “true” face of the government would be revealed. Some of the students concluded that “a secret massacre [meaning a roundup after leaving the square] was possibly more serious than suppression [镇压].”<sup>126</sup> Even though the students described a future crackdown in bloody terms [“when the Square is awash with blood - only then will the people of China be awakened and united to overcome this government”], they did not think live weapons would be used.<sup>127</sup> The previous case of major protests on the square, the 1976 Tiananmen Incident, had provided an example of resolution without fatalities.<sup>128</sup> Citizens of Beijing commemorating the death of Zhou Enlai were evicted from the square by policemen, militia, and the Beijing Garrison with clubs: apparently without causing a single fatality.<sup>129</sup>

More evidence suggesting the students did not expect a violent crackdown was the shock experienced by so many people when they realized live weapons were being used. The students found it

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<sup>124</sup> Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>125</sup> The origins of this belief stem from an interview Chai Ling gave and which appeared in a major documentary. Peter Kovler and Long Bow Group, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace Tian'an men* (San Francisco, CA: NAATA Distribution [Video Documentary], 1995). In response to this documentary, student leaders and intellectuals wrote a public letter complaining that the directors deliberately created a false impression. See <http://64memo.com/d//?tabid=97&language=zh-CN>.

<sup>126</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 5.2.1, Li Lu.

<sup>127</sup> Ling Chai, *A Heart for Freedom*, International trade paper ed. (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 165.

<sup>128</sup> In 2000 extreme leftists [极左派] asked that the verdict on June 4 be reversed and that the blame be placed on Deng Xiaoping, arguing that Mao never fired upon student protesters and was relatively restrained during the 1976 protests. Du, *Zhao Ziyang hai shuo guo shen me?*, 136.

<sup>129</sup> Michael Schoenhals and Roderick MacFarquhar, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 427.



hard to believe when they realized the army was using real bullets on the night of June 3. Jiang Yanyong, a military doctor working at Hospital 301, considered calling the leadership and informing them that he heard gunfire, thinking that some officer must have lost his mind [我当时也以为不知是哪个部队的头头在胡来].<sup>130</sup> Luo Ruiqing's son, a military officer in the General Armaments Department, thought the noises he heard were fireworks because up until that point all the notifications he received were that blood would *not* be spilled.<sup>131</sup>

According to a Xinhua account on June 4, the military ultimately needed to use force because the city had fallen into utter chaos: soldiers were being attacked and kidnapped, and guns were being stolen.<sup>132</sup> The official publication *The Truth About the Beijing Turmoil* claims that “At about 5 pm on June 3, ringleaders of illegal organizations the ‘Federation of Autonomous Student Unions in Universities and Colleges’ and the ‘Autonomous Union of Workers’ distributed kitchen knives, daggers, iron bars, iron chains, and sharpened bamboo sticks to the crowd in Tiananmen Square and threatened to ‘beat the soldiers and policemen to death whenever they are seized.’ They incited mobs to ‘take up arms to topple the government.’”<sup>133</sup> These developments allegedly forced the government to use force to end the riots.

This account remains difficult to verify. One possibility is that the protesters were not seeking out weapons for an armed revolt, but had simply discovered and confiscated arms intended for soldiers, who had secretly entered the city disguised as civilians.<sup>134</sup> According to Li Lu, the kidnapping of soldiers was a provocation: one general [将军] and two lieutenant colonels [中校] allegedly told him that this was a

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<sup>130</sup> Jiang Yanyong, “Yaoqiu wei liusi zhengming de shangshu [Petition to Demand Reversal of the June 4 Verdict],” in *Zhao Ziyang yu Zhongguo gaige: jinian Zhao Ziyang*, ed. Chen Yizi, “Zhongguo ju shi” xi lie ; 38 (Carle Place: Mingjing chubanshe, 2005), 361.

<sup>131</sup> Luo Yu, *Gaobie Zongcanmou Bu [Farewell to the PLA General Chief of Staff]*, 61.

<sup>132</sup> See, for example, the first, second, and third emergency notifications of the martial law units sent on June 3 in *Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she, Huo yu xue zhi zhenxiang : Zhongguo dalu minzhu yundong jishi, 1989 [The True Story of Fire and Flood: Record of the Chinese Mainland Democracy Movement]* (Zhonghua Minguo Taibei Shi Shilin Qu: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she, 1989), 4–189.

<sup>133</sup> “Beijing fengbo jishi” huace bianweihui, *Beijing fengbo jishi [The truth about the Beijing turmoil]* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1989), 49.

<sup>134</sup> Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 203.

plot to increase tensions. The weapons that students discovered and confiscated were rusty and had no rifle bolts. Moreover, students had been under orders established on May 19 and 20 not to fight back.<sup>135</sup> The weapons were given to the police and the students were given a receipt. Chai Ling even held a press conference with this receipt and other weapons to show their principle of non-violence.<sup>136</sup> Shen believes that the government was trying to “goad the students into taking these weapons, so it would be able to call us violent counterrevolutionaries and use this to justify a crackdown.”<sup>137</sup>

The behavior of the Autonomous Union of Workers remains difficult to evaluate, and the possibility remains that the most egregious acts of violence on soldiers were caused by troop deployments in preparation for a crackdown that was to happen soon anyways. Brooks writes that “most of the ‘rioting’ footage was shot after-and in response to- violent acts committed by the army.” One foreign diplomat told Brooks that “[the government] had to provoke violence and riot in order to justify their actions.”<sup>138</sup> As described below, preparations for the final solution to the crisis on the side of the government intensified long before 5 pm on June 3. A full evaluation of the interplay between crowd violence, military behavior, and the evolving plans to clear the Square will require more information and research, but the evidence points to the possibility of the military playing the primary provocative role.

The most curious pieces of evidence, however, are those that indicate that even at this late point differences in the leadership persisted over how violent the suppression should be. It is possible some in the leadership still hoped for a peaceful resolution. Yang Shangkun explicitly and repeatedly told Xu Jiatun on May 25 that there would be no violence.<sup>139</sup> In 1998, Yang would tell military doctor Jiang Yanyong that June 4 “was the most serious mistake ever made in the history of the party.”<sup>140</sup> The

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<sup>135</sup> *Huigu yu fansi*, 5.2.2, Li Lu.

<sup>136</sup> Feng Congde, *Liusi riji: guangchang shang de gongheguo [Diary of June 4: Republic on the Square]*, Guo qing jiao yu. Gongmin jiaoyu shuxi (Hong Kong: Suyuan shushe, 2013), 505.

<sup>137</sup> Shen Tong, *Almost a Revolution*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 317.

<sup>138</sup> Brook, *Quelling the People*, 199–201.

<sup>139</sup> Xu Jiatun, *Xu Jiatun Xianggang Huiyilu [Xu Jiatun's Hong Kong Memoirs]*, vol. 2 (Hong Kong: Xianggang lian he bao you xian gong si, 1993), 377.

Jiang, “Yaoqiu wei liusi zhengming de shangshu [Petition to Demand Reversal of the June 4 Verdict],” 364.

unreliable *Tiananmen Papers* quote Yang Shangkun saying on June 2 that “I am fully confident we can clear the Square in a peaceful way.”<sup>141</sup> The man claiming to represent Li Peng who came to the square on May 26 not only said soldiers would not use weapons, but that if the students left the Square the government would consider changing the verdict and would not take revenge. He even offered to use “plenty of government agents in the square to help if we decided to end the sit-in.”<sup>142</sup>

Some evidence hints that more peaceful plans to clear the square were actually considered. At a “PSC brief meeting [碰头会]” on May 29, the Beijing party organization suggested using a giant workers march to “end the current standoff.”<sup>143</sup> This plan was rejected allegedly because of concern that the Beijing city government was not up to the task. On May 31, Deng Xiaoping and Yang Shangkun approved the “martial law command center” [戒严指挥部] plan for the PLA’s entrance to Beijing. This plan was then passed to the ranks as an order.<sup>144</sup> Li leaves many questions unanswered. What were the contents of these orders? What was the role of the PSC in this decision? And if Chen Xitong was not a member of this organization, was there any other civilian input? On June 1, a PSC brief meeting approved a plan for clearing out Tiananmen Square provided by “the city of Beijing and the martial law units.” The relationship of this plan to the orders of May 31 remains obscure. But the contents of the June 1 plan are remarkable: “everyone believed that it would be better for a workers ‘picket line’ [纠察队, essentially a workers militia] to clear out the square than for the martial law forces to directly clear out the square. Therefore, the meeting decided that the city of Beijing and the martial law troops would use the workers

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<sup>141</sup> At this same meeting, Peng Zhen allegedly said that “I think the students will withdraw once we’ve given them a clear explanation. And that’s because the clearing isn’t aimed at any individual student...” Zhang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, 361–362.

<sup>142</sup> Lu Li, *Moving the Mountain: My Life in China from the Cultural Revolution to Tiananmen Square* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 188.

<sup>143</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, May 29.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, May 31.

picket line as a forward force and the military only as a back-up force to clear the square.”<sup>145</sup> Why these workers never appeared remains a mystery.

According to a military reporter, at 1 am June 2, the 27 and 65 Army Groups were ordered to put on civilian clothes and sneak into the Great Hall of the People, only leaving at 2 pm.<sup>146</sup> In the June 2 entry of Li Peng’s memoirs, however, he writes that, by 3 am, 25,000 soldiers had already secretly surrounded Tiananmen Square. According to Li, this plan was approved by the CMC and proposed by the Beijing Military Region.<sup>147</sup> When this decision was made, and whether the CMC and BMR were the only organizations to approve it, remains unclear. According to the *Tiananmen Papers*, party elders Deng Xiaoping, Li Xiannian, Peng Zhen, Yang Shangkun, Bo Yibo, and Wang Zhen met with PSC members Li Peng, Qiao Shi, and Yao Yilin on the morning of June 2. The meeting supposedly decided to clear the Square within two days. Deng said “As we proceed with the clearing, we must explain it clearly to all the citizens and students, asking them to leave and doing our very best to persuade them. But if they refuse to leave, they will be responsible for the consequences.”<sup>148</sup>

According to Li Peng’s memoirs, at 4 pm on June 3, an emergency meeting was held that included Li, Qiao Shi, Yang Shangkun, Chi Haotian, Li Ximing, Zhou Yibing, and Luo Gan. The *Tiananmen Papers* state that this meeting also included Yao Yilin, Qin Jiwei, Hong Xuezi, Liu Huaqing, Chen Xitong, Chi Haotian, Yang Baibing, Zhao Nanqi, Luo Gan, and Liu Zhenhua. If the former list is correct, only two PSC members were at this meeting. If the second list is correct, three PSC members were present, as well as the mayor of Beijing. According to Li, the meeting concluded that the troops and protesters had already started fighting and the latter should not be given an opportunity to regroup. Because the next day was a Sunday and more people might use the free day to come to the square, the situation had to be resolved immediately. That night the troops would enter Tiananmen: the decision

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., June 1.

<sup>146</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de dabaozha*, 331.

<sup>147</sup> Li, *Li Peng Lishi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, June 2.

<sup>148</sup> Zhang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, 354–362.

included explicit approval for the military to “execute self-defense” if the “rioters” used force to cause injuries and deaths among the soldiers. The meeting also decided that the worker pickets should “take the lead [在工人纠察队的引导下],” which inexplicably never happened. Yang brought this decision to Deng Xiaoping, who approved it.<sup>149</sup>

The unreliable *Tiananmen Papers* provides a somewhat different account. Li Peng allegedly stated that “The PLA martial law troops, the People’s Armed Police, and Public Security are authorized to use any means necessary to deal with people who interfere with the mission.” Yang Shangkun then said:

You all get the picture now. I’ve also just been in touch with Comrade Xiaoping, and he has asked me to relay two points to everyone. The first is: Solve the problem before dawn tomorrow. He means our martial law troops should completely finish their task of clearing the Square before sunup. The second is: be reasonable with the students and make sure they see the logic in what we’re doing; the troops should resort to ‘all means necessary’ only if everything else fails... we must do everything we possibly can to avoid bloodshed. The Martial Law Command must make it clear to all units that they are to open fire only as a last resort. And let me repeat: No bloodshed within Tiananmen Square- period. What if thousands of students refuse to leave? Then the troops carry away thousands on their backs!

The meeting also allegedly decided to order the troops to reach the Square by 1 am on June 4 and have it cleared by 6 am without any delays.<sup>150</sup>

Around 5 pm the units were ordered to forcefully move forward (强行挺进) at 9 pm that night. At 10 pm, a military reporter told Xinhua that an order had been made at the highest ranks: “shoot as a warning, crush the rioters” [鸣枪示警，镇压暴徒].<sup>151</sup> That night, Zhou Yibing and Luo Gan of the Martial Law Command Center were in the Great Hall of the People while Chief of Staff Chi Haotian commanded the troops from the Xishan main commander center [总指挥所]. Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, and Qiao Shi read reports in the Zhongnanhai swimming pool, Mao’s old favorite haunt. Nowhere does

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<sup>149</sup> Li, *Li Peng Lishi Riji [Li Peng’s Diary of June 4]*, June 3.

<sup>150</sup> Zhang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, 368–370.

<sup>151</sup> Zhang, *Lishi de dabaozha*, 334, 338–340.

Li mention Chen Xitong, who was allegedly head of the Martial Law Command Center. Yang, Li, and Qiao allowed the students to leave peacefully in the early morning of June 4.<sup>152</sup>

Who gave the order to shoot? As discussed above, a series of meetings were held in the run-up to June 3. Did any of them decide explicitly that the PLA should use live weapons on the protesters? How many people supported that decision? According to overseas media reports, Jiang Zemin later released a secret documentary about June 4, which claimed that Yang Baibing, head of the General Political Department and secretary of the CMC gave the order to shoot. Jiang and Yang were political enemies, however, and therefore this account is immediately suspect.<sup>153</sup> Even if the story were true, it is highly unlikely that Yang made the decision himself.<sup>154</sup>

After a careful evaluation of the available evidence, Wu Renhua concludes that the order to fire was made as the units were moving forward and that different units received this order at different times. This eventuality was clearly prepared for, as the units were ordered to bring their weapons into the city, although bullets were not distributed until the order was given. Wu believes that the weight of evidence indicates that the decision to fire was made at the highest level: the CMC.<sup>155</sup> The decision was almost

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<sup>152</sup> Li, *Li Peng Liusi Riji [Li Peng's Diary of June 4]*, June 3–4.

<sup>153</sup> “Zhonggong Zhizuo Liusi Guangpan de Xuanji [The Mystery of the CCP Creating a CD About June 4],” *BBC*, June 4, 2004, sec. 中文网主页, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/chinese/simp/hi/newsid\\_3770000/newsid\\_3778500/3778503.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/chinese/simp/hi/newsid_3770000/newsid_3778500/3778503.stm).

<sup>154</sup> The CIA apparently believed that Yang Baibing's older half-brother Shangkun was behind the carnage: “The evidence that the CIA has since compiled on the Tienanmen [sic] massacre indicates that military commander Yang Shangkun (China's ceremonial president) sent the 27 Army into Beijing to strengthen his position inside the Politburo. The vicious slaughter was purposely planned by President Yang himself, even though he had not obtained the unreserved approval of the top man in the party, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. While Deng had agreed that units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) should be deployed to Beijing to suppress the prodemocracy movement, he was shocked by the violence that resulted. Another key Politburo member who opposed the violence in the streets was China's internal security chief, Qiao Shi. The CIA and several leading American experts on China concluded that a significant struggle took place in the midst of the Tiananmen attack between Yang and Qiao. That's why Qiao's security officers attempted to clear the square without bloodshed. They thought Yang was trying to take over the government.” This account strongly conflicts with what all other evidence shows about the role of the 27 Group Army (Wu Renhua shows that the 27 Group Army did not play a major role in the killings, unlike the 38 Group Army and 15 Airborne Corps), Deng's iron control over the military, and the decision to allow the students on the Square to leave peacefully. The CIA was either believing rumors created to hurt Yang, suffered from flawed analysis, or was privy to intelligence that makes much of what we think we know about Tiananmen wrong. Mark Perry, *Eclipse: The Last Days of the CIA* (New York: Morrow, 1992), 238–239.

<sup>155</sup> Wu, *Liusi shijian zhong de jiefan budui [The Martial Law Units of the June 4 Incident]*, 40–49.

certainly Deng's. When Yang was later blamed for June 4, he exclaimed: "What power do I have to deploy the military [我有什么权调动军队啊! ]!"<sup>156</sup>

Another puzzle is how the order was formulated: was it an explicit order to shoot to kill, or was this only implied? According to one official account, at around 9 pm, a staff officer was told by an army group commander that their forces should move towards Tiananmen "at any cost [不惜一切代价]."<sup>157</sup>

Wu Renhua believes that the command to shoot was probably passed down orally, and that "whether the shooting should be into the air or into the crowd was left unclear."<sup>158</sup> According to one soldier who participated in the crackdown: "At that time, it wasn't as if there was a direct order, but the guys in front would tell the guys behind them that if you run into danger, you can open fire. And that's an order from above. It was just spread down the line from person to person."<sup>159</sup>

In any case, no units were punished for shooting. On June 17, GPD head Yang Baibing stated:

Here I want to specially address the question of opening fire. When some rioters brazenly hit, smashed, stole, burned, and killed, the units were pushed beyond the limit of endurance, they were forced to defend themselves, they fired into the air as a warning, this was completely necessary, was righteous, and was correct. If this was not done, it would not have been possible to quickly end the riots, there would have been greater losses. As for some units not firing into the air, it cannot be said that this was not correct. As for this issue, I have three points: first is that it is impossible to simply say whether firing or not was right or wrong, it is necessary to look at the situation at the time, to see how the unit performed during the quelling of the riots, the size of the contribution, evaluation should not be made on whether guns were used [不能以有没有开枪来衡量]; second is that opening fire was forced, it was an act of self defense; third is that we were firing into the air, it is not like some rumor mongers who said that we fired into the masses. Ultimately, the martial law units are one body, in the future no unit or individual is allowed to announce to the masses that this unit did not open fire, that other units did open fire, it is necessary to very carefully defend the unity among the martial law troops.

Yang's statement is contradictory. If the order was to shoot into the air, why was it not a crime to shoot to kill? Why is it only a rumor that the army shot to kill if "as for some units not firing into the air, it cannot

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<sup>156</sup> Hu Jiwei, *Hu Zhao Xin Zheng Qishilu [The Beginnings of Reform Under Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang]*, 164.

<sup>157</sup> Shoudu wenming chengshi jianshe xietiao weiyuanhui, Jiefangjun Zongzhengzhibu qunzhong gongzuobu, *Zai gongheguo weiji de shike- shoudu junjingmin pingxi fan geming baoluan xianjin yingmi shiji huibian [The Republic at the Moment of Crisis]*, Service Center for Chinese Publications, Series 27, Volume 28. 1989, 58.

<sup>158</sup> Wu Renhua, *New York Times* interview notes, author's personal collection.

<sup>159</sup> Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia*, 18.

be said that this was not correct”? Yang’s phrasing seems to hint that no explicit order to kill was given: only a strong implication.

Why would the order be given in such a way? Li Xiaoming, who served in the 39<sup>th</sup> Group Army, suggests it was a deliberate decision to avoid responsibility:

Li said he believed that the party’s central leaders and the PLA commanders were too scared to put their names to explicit instructions about shooting: ‘They were being political. At the top, in the party center or the military, they all knew that shooting would be a historical problem, and nobody dared assume responsibility and dared to issue those orders.’ He said: ‘You won’t be able to find any orders to open fire, certainly any in writing, and you won’t be able to find anything oral either.... There was absolutely nothing saying you must open fire.’<sup>160</sup>

Luo Ruiqing’s son argues that there was a written order but that it was ambiguous. After returning from Paris on June 21, Luo asked officers in the General Staff Operations Department [作战部] what happened:

Those in the Operations Department told me: after the order was written, it was first sent to Yang Shangkun because generally the vice chairman signs it before it is sent to the chairman... Yang Shangkun said: ‘Send it to Deng first, if Deng does not sign it, I will not sign.’ Therefore the order was first sent to Deng Xiaoping, after Deng Xiaoping signed it, Yang Shangkun added his signature... I also asked: how was the order written, was it written that it was permissible to open fire? Those in the Operations Department told me: it was written ‘at any cost,’ when the units were met with resistance from the masses while moving forward, the lower levels asked what to do, and the top said: are the fellows under your command poles for lighting fires [烧火棍, meaning useless for killing]? The lower level asked: can we open fire? The top answered: on the order it was written not to spare any cost.<sup>161</sup>

Xu Qinxian also believes the violence was intended:

In this way, it was impossible for there not to be an incident, the military and masses would clash. Clashes certainly meant spilled blood. Because [the PLA] was already clearly carrying guns and bullets, carrying guns and bullets definitely means there will be a problem... Carrying guns and bullets was precisely in order to repress, because Deng before this had said many things, ‘we have 3 million men in the military,’ ‘do not fear to spill blood,’ ‘do not fear this will hurt your prestige’ - his brutal trick [狠招儿] was already played.<sup>162</sup>

We have no proof, but the orders might have been verbal and ambiguous to shift responsibility to lower ranks if in the future the PLA was held responsible for the killings. Was such an order guaranteed

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<sup>160</sup> Li Xiaoming, *New York Times* interview notes, author’s personal collection.

<sup>161</sup> Luo Yu, Gaobie Zongcanmou Bu [*Farewell to the PLA General Chief of Staff*], 236.

<sup>162</sup> Dai Qing, “Ye Jianying Yang Nv Dai Qing: Liusi Shi Jian Quan Cheng Shi Lu [Ye Jianying’s Adopted Daughter: True Record of the June 4 Incident].”



to ensure a bloody finish but to muddy the blame? If the order was only verbal, can it be considered legal? Can decision-making bodies be considered to have worked as they were intended?

The evidence raises one final question: did the leadership want such a bloody outcome? This puzzle can be subdivided into two smaller questions. First, to what extent were other options available? Some leaders later claimed that so many deaths occurred because of the lack of tear gas. The Canadian government found such claims “a ludicrous excuse given time authorities had to prepare for army action.”<sup>163</sup> Wu Renhua also believes the government could have used underground tunnels to move forces to Tiananmen Square without shooting their way into the center of the city.<sup>164</sup> Historian Yang Jisheng believes that “there was really no need for armed forces to clear the square. They could have organized civil maintenance corps with clubs.... That’s a misjudgment for them... Some analysts say it was a misjudgment, others say it was an intentional decision by Li Peng.”<sup>165</sup> As discussed above, the leadership did apparently consider other options. However, a final answer will require a full campaign analysis that takes into account all riot control resources, the number of protesters, and the geography of the city. It will also need a better sense of the intelligence the leadership was receiving about the intent and behavior of the protesters to better understand how and why the government reacted in the way it did.

The second question is whether the leadership expected the death count to be so high. The answer is impossible to determine with certainty, but there is some evidence that the death count was higher than intended. First, incompetent command was a serious problem. An officer from the American DAO flatly told a group of PLA officials on June 16 that “from a military point of view the operation could not have been adjudged to have been well executed.”<sup>166</sup> Brook also believes that the operation itself was “badly

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<sup>163</sup> “Confidential FM PEKIN to EXTOTT.” July 6, 1989. File No. Dossier 20-1-2-China. Volume 43. From 890622 to 890415. Political Affairs, Policy and Background, Canadian External Policy and Relations, China. Canadian Archives.

<sup>164</sup> Wu, *Lishi shijian zhong de jieyan budui [The Martial Law Units of the June 4 Incident]*, 65.

<sup>165</sup> Yang Jisheng, *New York Times* interview notes, author’s personal collection.

<sup>166</sup> Cable, American Embassy Beijing to Secretary of State, “China Issues”, June 16, 1989, ID# CF01722-019, Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, China Part 4 of 5 Tiananmen Square Crisis (1989) [4], George Bush Presidential Library.

executed and poorly coordinated,” even though he admits that it “was designed- or, at the very least, expected- to cause violence and produce civilian casualties.”<sup>167</sup> Second, the leadership may have not expected the stunning bravery shown by the citizens of Beijing and the amount of violence that would have to be used over the course of the night as tensions escalated. Third, the combination of humiliation, frustration, and political indoctrination may have led to an unforeseen level of aggression on the part of regular soldiers.<sup>168</sup>

This issue can also be contextualized by examining possible motives. Was there a reason to use violence? On January 18, 1990, Deng told Hong Kong business magnate Li Ka-shing that “resolving the turmoil rapidly and achieving a peaceful environment, this was a correct decision. Otherwise, there would always be protests, in every corner every day there would be trouble, who knows how many people would die, the results of ten years of development would disappear, no one would be able to fix the situation.”<sup>169</sup> As discussed above, on May 19, 1989, Deng had said it was necessary to “spill a little blood.” Was the decision to use at least some violence made to inspire fear into the population to ensure stability in the future? Was that questionable idea a reason for the narrowness of the decision-making group?

Tiananmen analyst Wu Renhua believes that the main reason the soldiers actually fired was the promise of winning commendations. According to one document, ending the counter-revolutionary riots

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<sup>167</sup> Brook, *Quelling the People*, 6.

<sup>168</sup> The rage was so intense that it made controlling the martial law troops after June 4 difficult. One document on political work revealed the following: “The attitude of blindly seeking vengeance has yet to dissipate. Now everyone is grabbing rioters, the desire to dig them out of their wholes is enough, but an attitude of emotionally handling matters and blindly seeking vengeance has appeared. Some soldiers that were surrounded and beaten said: ‘The citizens of Beijing are truly evil, when they saw the PLA they started beating them to death, I cannot swallow this rage.’ When they saw rascally looking people, they thought they were thugs and wanted to grab them. The 188 Division grabbed a few thugs, the officer wouldn’t let them beat them, some soldiers were so mad they started crying. One unit in the 38 Group Army grabbed a rioter, an officer hurried to where it happened and wanted to beat him to death. When the commissar of the Sixth Dank Division tried to stop him, this officer furiously demanded: ‘The rioters were so vicious to us, you are defending him, don’t you have any class feelings?’” Jiefangjun Beijing junqu zhengzhibu bangongshi, “Guanyu Dangqian Jieyan Budui de Sixiang Qingkuang He Xia Yi Bu Gongzuo de Yijian (Beijing Junqu Zhengzhi Bu) [Opinion Regarding the Current Thinking Situation in the Martial Law Units and the Next Step in Work] Beijing Military Region Political Department] June 15, 1989,” in *Beijing Junqu Budui Zhixing Jieyan Renwu Zhong de Zhengzhi Gongzuo*, Series 27, Volume 37 (Service Center for Chinese Publications, 1989), 75.

<sup>169</sup> Yang Mingwei, *Chen Yun wannian sui yue [The Later Years of Chen Yun]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005), 252.

constituted war [属于战争性质] and participants would be rewarded as such. For soldiers with peasant upbringings, such awards meant better future lives, even the right to move to into a city.<sup>170</sup> Other evidence indicates that the leadership might have deliberately put the soldiers in humiliating situations to raise their ire. A report from Canadian representatives in Hong Kong concluded that “it appears that military leadership carefully planned carnage. Night of 02Jun, unarmed troops were ordered to break through groups of demonstrators and reach Tiananmen Square... They eventually retreated, exhausted and humiliated... It appears that military authorities carefully planned humiliation of 02Jun to guarantee that troops would respond immediately to orders requiring them to shoot an [sic] unarmed civilians, if necessary, they did.”<sup>171</sup> In any case, many troops had already been humiliated in the failed attempt to take the square immediately after martial law was declared. The humiliation, intentional or otherwise, plus the intense political indoctrination and desire to win commendations created an atmosphere conducive to a brutal and bloody crackdown.<sup>172</sup>

Before concluding this chapter, one last puzzle must be addressed: who told the student leadership on June 4 that if they stayed until 6 am, “Zhao Ziyang’s army will rebel”? When Taiwanese singer Hou Dejian asked student leader Chai Ling what they should do, she said “I told him we had received information that if we held out, Zhao Ziyang’s army would come to our side.”<sup>173</sup> According to Li Lu, the man who conveyed this information was holding a pistol.<sup>174</sup> Feng Congde has no recollection of

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<sup>170</sup> Wu Renhua, *Liusi shijian zhong de jieyan budui [The Martial Law Units of the June 4 Incident]* (Alhambra, CA: Zhen xiang chu ban she, 2009), 66.

<sup>171</sup> “Confidential FM HKONG to EXTOTT.” June 15, 1989. File No. Dossier 20-China-1-4. Volume 61. From 890516 to 890615. Political Affairs, Policy and Background, Internal Policy Trends, China. Canadian Archives.

<sup>172</sup> Except apparently in the 28 Army Group, whose commander and commissar allegedly refused to open fire even though Liu Huaqing ordered the navy to send a helicopter to shout “move forward! Move forward at any cost!” See Liu Yazhou, “Li Xiannian Nuxu Liu Yaozhou Dianping Liusi Shijian Jundui Biaoxian [Li Xiannian’s Son-in-Law Liu Yazhou Evaluates the Military’s Performance during June 4],” accessed July 13, 2015, <https://news.powerapple.com/li-shi-jun-shi/2015/4/30/2196718.html>.

<sup>173</sup> Chai, *A Heart for Freedom*, 188.

<sup>174</sup> Li, *Moving the Mountain*, 197.

this rumor.<sup>175</sup> Yao Jianfu believes this was a trick played by someone opposed to Zhao.<sup>176</sup> Yet the students thought that before June 4 the government was already “buying off people on the Square with promises of riches and power if they can bring the students out of the Square.”<sup>177</sup> And if the government really wanted a massacre on the Square itself, why did it allow the Four Gentlemen\* to negotiate a peaceful exit? Liu Yazhou, on the other hand, believes Zhao sent the message to guarantee a massacre even larger than the one that happened, thus setting the stage for his return to power: “some people wanted to use the blood of the students to baptize their own laurels.”<sup>178</sup> The answer remains a mystery.

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

As should now be obvious, the path to the night of June 3 was marked by the sidelining of the party and state’s most important decision-making bodies. However, institutions did matter in the ways predicted in the theory chapter. As discussed in both of the last two chapters, Deng did go to great lengths to make the decision to use force at least *seem* legitimate, both for the party in general and the military in particular. But the limits were clear: at no time did the attempts to convey a greater sense of legitimacy create a real possibility for the choice to be evaluated.

Second, although the military was clearly concerned about the legitimacy of the orders it was receiving, ultimately the PRC did not collapse into civil war. The PSC, Politburo, CC, and NPC Standing Committee might have failed to rally, but the military accepted that Deng had won the game of political maneuvering without using force to demand a re-evaluation of the orders they received. Even Xu Qinxian did not decide to use force *against* the leadership, but instead to simply refuse to execute his orders. Zhao ultimately did not climb a tank with a megaphone and call for a revolution. Because Deng’s control over

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<sup>175</sup> Feng, *Liusi riji*, 535–536, fn 349.

<sup>176</sup> Yao Jianfu, “Yao Jianfu: ‘Zhao Ziyang Yao Xuesheng Jianchi Dao Liusi Qingchen’ Shi Yi Ge Yaoan [Yao Jianfu: ‘Zhao Ziyang Wanted Students to Hold Out Until Morning’ Is a Rumor],” *Dongxiang* 5 (2009).

<sup>177</sup> Chai, *A Heart for Freedom*, 168.

\* Liu Xiaobo, Zhou Duo, Hou Dejian, and Gao Xin, four older men who had started a brief hunger strike to help the protests last until the NPC Standing Committee meeting on June 20.

<sup>178</sup> Liu Yazhou, “Chutan ‘Liusi’ [An Initial Discussion of ‘June 4’] August 1989,” 90.

the PLA meant violence was inevitable in any case, the men who deeply respected the party as an organization had a strong incentive to go along to minimize unnecessary damage and instability, thus imbuing the decision with more legitimacy than it truly deserved.

Third, June 4 was not a case of blatant violence triumphing over the party. Coercion was at least in part legitimized by Deng's status as both a military *and* a party figure, the post-13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress decision on his authority, support from some of the PSC at the May 17 meetings, the ad hoc "PSC enlarged session" on May 20, and the support of some old revolutionaries after Deng made his position known. The argument of this chapter is not that institutions were totally irrelevant, but that their inherent ambiguity and absence of an objective third-party enforcer made the manipulation of those rules possible. And like in so many other cases of this dissertation, the victor was the man who adopted the clearly more problematic interpretation of even highly ambiguous rules.

## **Conclusion**

On June 9, Deng gave a speech to the martial law forces in which he said that the events on Tiananmen Square were bound to happen sooner or later because of international and domestic trends. It was best they happened now while the "old comrades" were still around: "We have a group of old comrades still in good health, including in the military, as well as a core group that joined during every period of the revolution, therefore, for this to happen now made it relatively easy to deal with.... Managing this issue was a very serious political test of our military, but the experience has shown us that our PLA has passed the test."<sup>179</sup> Deng did not say a single word about the PSC, the Politburo, or the NPC: only his old friends from the early days of the revolution.

According to the 22<sup>nd</sup> clause of the 2009 PRC National Defense Law, the PLA's main responsibility is defense of the nation in war. Yet "when necessary it can, according to law and regulation,

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<sup>179</sup> Xiaoping Deng, *Deng Xiaoping junshi wenji [Deng Xiaoping's Writings on Military Affairs]* (Beijing: jun shi ke xue chu ban she, 2004), 303.

assist in the protection of societal order.” Exactly what “when necessary” means remains ambiguous. As Walton points out, “notably absent from any publicly available regulations, laws, or plans is any notion of when the PLA might have to step in to resolve an incident of domestic unrest or, more likely, a series of linked incidents or a general lawlessness engulfing a city or region.”<sup>180</sup> The “nationalization” of the PLA remains a distant dream. One *PLA Daily* article recently argued: “Foreign hostile forces preach the nationalization and de-politicization of the military, attempting to muddle our minds and drag our military out from under the Party’s flag... The [goal of] nationalizing the military is to divorce the military from the Party’s leadership and to overthrow the Party’s ruling position, which is completely against the CPC’s [governing] principles.”<sup>181</sup> The June 4 incident as described in these two chapters reveals the past and possibly future implications of the party’s choice not to seek such “nationalization.”

China’s current leader, Xi Jinping, holds strong opinions about the lessons of history. Like many others in the CCP, he is fascinated by the possible historical lessons from the Soviet experience.<sup>182</sup> In an important speech given in the south of China on the collapse of the USSR, Xi stated:

Comprehensively rejecting the history of the Soviet Union, the history of the CPSU, rejecting Lenin, rejecting everything, engaging in historical nihilism, thinking was thrown into chaos, the party at every level practically had no role. Why do we want to unwaveringly maintain the party’s leadership over the military? This is the lesson learned from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet military was de-politicized, de-partified, nationalized, the party’s weapon was removed. Some men who wanted to save the Soviet Union appeared, they dealt with Gorbachev, but before a few days passed it was reversed, because the tool of dictatorship was not in their hands. Yeltsin stood on a tank and gave a speech, the military was useless, they maintained so-called ‘neutrality.’ Finally Gorbachev said one word declaring the end of the CPSU, and a great party was lost. In terms of size, the CPSU was bigger than us, but no one was a real man, no one came out to resist.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Jonathan Walton, “China Plans for Internal Unrest: People’s Armed Police and Public Security Approaches to ‘Mass Incidents,’” in *The People’s Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, ed. Andrew Scobell et al. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 72. Walton suggests it is “also possible that PLA and civilian authorities both wish to avoid making concrete promises about military intervention, leaving that instead as a special mission to be invoked only if circumstances require.”

<sup>181</sup> Zhang Hui, “Party Commands Gun: Xi,” *Global Times*, November 3, 2014, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/889686.shtml>.

<sup>182</sup> David L. Shambaugh, *China’s Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008).

<sup>183</sup> Gao Yu, “Nan’er Xi Jinping [Real Man Xi Jinping],” *Deutsche Welle*, January 25, 2013, <http://www.dw.com/zh/%E7%94%B7%E5%84%BF%E4%B9%A0%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B3/a-16549520>.

For Xi, historical revisionism, or in his words “historical nihilism,” is a threat to the party itself. Yet because the nature of politics in regimes like the PRC values the use of *kompromat* and character assassination, the historiography of such states will necessarily be revisionist. In other words, refusing to engage in such “nihilism” will inevitably affect the study of history in systematic ways. Perhaps Xi’s skepticism of this type of historical investigation helps explain the particular lessons he has chosen to draw.

As the above excerpt of Xi’s speech indicates, for him one of those lessons is the importance of a continued political role for the military. Significantly, Xi noted that the military should have been used not only against the Soviet populace but other members of the elites. The Chinese leader was informing his colleagues that in case of a crisis, he would be a “real man.” In the Soviet case, lack of “manliness” probably saved human history from another civil war across Eurasia. It certainly saved the armed forces that crushed Hitler’s Germany from the stain of shooting Soviet citizens.

Blaming “historical nihilism” or the behavior of the Soviet Army at one specific moment at the end of the regime for the fall of the Union is a rather myopic interpretation. As the Soviet chapters in this dissertation demonstrate, a more crucial element to understanding the poor and often tragic long-term trajectory of “Lenin’s cause” was the low level of political institutionalization at the elite level. Whether China’s political system can be institutionalized within the bounds of inner-party democracy is an open question. In any case, without fully understanding the history of their own party, the CCP’s leadership will not be equipped with the tools to fully assess whether they should even try.

## Chapter 10: North Korea

### Introduction: The Paradox of North Korean Resiliency<sup>1</sup>

Having demonstrated the explanatory power of the authority model in the Soviet Union and China, in this chapter I turn to North Korea. In 1945, the idea that Kim Il Sung could eliminate all but his closest associates and establish a multi-generational personality cult would have seemed utterly preposterous. The early Korean communist movement was riven by factions, dominated by the interests of outside forces, and only came to power after the Soviet Union seized the northern half of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>2</sup> North Korea is such a puzzling case that two important works on authoritarian regimes simply kick it into the error term or use ad hoc explanations to account for the continuing resilience of the regime and its system of dynastic succession.<sup>3</sup>

To better understand the nature of elite politics in North Korea, I investigate three crucial moments during the reign of Kim Il Sung. In each case, we see Kim able to surmount difficulties primarily by relying on his prestige as a war leader, reliance on partisan comrades from his time in Manchuria, manipulation of the Central Committee (CC), and support from the military and secret police. The first episode consists of an attempt in 1956 by members of Kim's own party, as well as the Soviets and Chinese, to resist the young leader's attempts to weaken other voices in the leadership. In the second episode addressed in this chapter, I show how the purges of 1967 to 1969 revealed divisions among the

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, transliteration will follow the Revised Romanization system used by the Republic of Korea, but not for exceptions like Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, quotations from other sources, and for the names of Korean authors writing in English. I thank James Person of the Wilson Center for his assistance with transliteration.

<sup>2</sup> For factionalism in Korean communism before 1945, see Kirill Shirinia and Haruki Wada, eds., *VKP(b), Komintern i Koreia, 1918-1941 [VKP(b), The Comintern and Korea, 1918-1941]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007); Yoshihiro Ishikawa, *The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 135–13, 231–23. The Soviets originally planned on a "bourgeois-democratic" revolution in North Korea, the only place where such a term was used and which was meant to imply a regime based on multiple social forces. Ki Kvan So, "Politika SSSR v Otnoshenii Severnoi' Korei v 1945-1946 Gg. [The Policy of the USSR towards North Korea in 1945-1946]," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 10 (October 2015): 93–102.

<sup>3</sup> Jason Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies," *World Politics* 59, no. 04 (June 13, 2011): 595–628; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 3 (2013): 5–17.



partisans themselves. Faced with economic difficulties at home, an atmosphere of increased tension with South Korea, attempts by China to destabilize Kim Il Sung's leadership, and possibly debates over the succession, Kim increasingly chose to rely only upon those partisans who had served directly under his command in Manchuria and his own family. In other words, Kim's authority narrowed to those with whom he had developed only the closest relations. This cleared the way for the third and final episode: the role of the old partisan elite in the installation of Kim Jong Il. The available evidence indicates strongly once again that the partisans played a critical role in the succession, a process that was smoothed by Kim Jong Il's use of propaganda to emphasize their achievements as guerrillas.<sup>4</sup>

### **Kim's Martial Prestige**

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<sup>4</sup> For two excellent recent accounts of this time period by historians, see Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992*, Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: WWNorton & Company, 2013). As a work of political science, this chapter will synthesize the most important dynamics shaping these events and therefore should not be considered a general history. But unlike most works of political science, this synthesis will be achieved primarily through the use of archival materials. Moreover, some of the most important of these documents were either discovered by the author or presented here for the first time in English. The former include the GARF documents on the Sino-Soviet delegation to Pyongyang in August 1956 and the RGANI documents on the orders the Presidium gave to this delegation. The Chinese archival accounts of Mao Zedong's meetings with the Soviet and DPRK delegations in Beijing during the Eighth Party Congress were found in a Chinese masters thesis. The ability to rely primarily on documentary material was also made possible by the Wilson Center's North Korean International Documentation Project, which allowed the author to use a wide variety of translated Polish, Hungarian, Albanian, Czech, German, and Mongolian documents. The center also provided the author with documents not yet translated or put on the publicly available website, including documents from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive. Books by Kim Hakjoon and Jae Cheon Lim were valuable resources because of their heavy use of South Korean materials, including accounts by high-ranking North Korean defectors. These were further supplemented by US intelligence documents from the CIA Crest database in College Park and the National Security Archive Online Database at George Washington University. Key memoirs and crucial scholarly materials produced by American, Russian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese scholars played an important role in reconstructing these episodes as well. This chapter should therefore be of interest to both political scientists and historians. Scholars of North Korea have already noticed the importance of the partisan guerrillas in North Korean politics, but they have mostly emphasized how that experience shaped their worldview. See Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Adrian Buzo, *The Guerrilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999); Haruki Wada, *Kim Ilchisei to Manshu konichi senso [Kim Il Sung and the Anti-Japanese War in Manchuria]*, 初版., Shohan. (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992); Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). This chapter brackets the question of why Kim adopted the goals he did.

Understanding the three episodes of political contestation presented in this chapter first requires a review of Kim Il Sung's military accomplishments. Kim fought as a partisan in Manchuria in Chinese Communist Party military units with high numbers of Koreans. In 1936, Kim became head of the sixth regiment of the Second Front of the First Route Army, part of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. The sixth regiment fought well. In late August 1936, Kim led his unit into Changbai (Paektu in Korean) county to start guerrilla warfare, ultimately fighting dozens of battles and destroying a number of units sent to destroy him.<sup>5</sup> Most famous, however, was the Battle of Pochonbo, which became a symbol of Kim's martial prestige. On June 3, Kim led a part of the sixth regiment across the Yalu River to attack a police station at Pochonbo, freeing a number of prisoners and destroying Japanese installations.<sup>6</sup> Several dozen Japanese were killed or injured and one machine gun was captured, as well as several rifles and other military materials.<sup>7</sup> According to one North Korean defector, Kim was famous within Korea primarily because of Japanese propaganda on their campaigns against him.<sup>8</sup> Two Japanese Kwantung Army colonels told American officers in 1951 that Kim was "the most famous" guerrilla leader in the 1930s, and that although he was formally under the control of the CCP generally made his own decisions. They admitted that "[n]ot infrequently, units under the command of the Kwantung Army... were annihilated by bandit [guerrilla] ambush."<sup>9</sup> In 1946, a partisan told the following to Kim Il Sung's first biographer:

This sort of person naturally has an extremely strong power of attraction to others... And it goes without saying that a guerrilla organization with such a person at the center is incomparably strong... The General's embrace and love are like the Sun's and when our fighters look up to and receive the General, their trust, self-sacrifice and devotion are such that they will gladly die for him... our guerrilla's historical tradition is

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<sup>5</sup> Huang Runhao, *Dongbei Diqu Chaoxian Gongchanzhuyizhe de "Shuangchong Shiming" Yanjiu [The Research on "Dual Mission" of Korean Communists in the Northeast]* (Yanbian University PhD thesis. Accessed on CNKI, 2012), 170–171.

<sup>6</sup> Another major victory was over 150 Japanese soldiers led by Maeda Takashi, the head of a special group tasked with catching Kim, in 1940.

<sup>7</sup> Huang, *Dongbei Diqu Chaoxian Gongchanzhuyizhe de "Shuangchong Shiming" Yanjiu [The Research on "Dual Mission" of Korean Communists in the Northeast]*, 173–174.

<sup>8</sup> Un Lim, *The Founding of a Dynasty in North Korea: An Authentic Biography of Kim Il-Song* (Tokyo: Jiyū-sha, 1982), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New York: New Press, 2003), 116–117.

precisely that of uniting around Kim as our only leader... Our discipline grew and became strong amid respect and obedience for him.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the devoted loyalty of the other partisans to Kim's leadership, however, in the broader picture his accomplishments were not overwhelming. Starting in 1938, the partisan movement in Manchuria started taking serious losses, dropping from 10,000 to 1,000 by the end of 1940. By the beginning of 1941, almost the entirety of the partisan forces had fled into the Soviet Union, including Kim. A Soviet evaluation of the partisan experience written in May 1941 was not flattering, pointing out their failure to recruit among local people and infighting among the various units over spheres of influence and needed materials: "because of the small number of units and fragmentary nature of their activities, the military operations of the partisans were not able to cause serious damage to the occupiers, and relatively insignificant results were achieved with great blood."<sup>11</sup> Kim's group was extremely small. According to one Soviet document written in May 1941, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army [*napravlenie*] of the 1<sup>st</sup> Front Army, which Kim commanded by this time, had 150-240 people.<sup>12</sup> Kim allegedly even admitted to his confidant Hwang Jang-yop that "I wasn't a big part of the partisan struggle against the Japanese, but it's better than nothing."<sup>13</sup>

On August 1, 1942, the Chinese and Korean partisans were reformed into the Anti-Japanese United Training Brigade, also known as the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>14</sup> At this point, Kim's authority among the partisans becomes clearer. Although Choe Yong-geon was put in charge of the CCP Northeast Party Organization Special Branch [中共东北党组织特别支部局], Kim was vice secretary. Moreover, he was put in charge of the battalion (First Battalion) in which Koreans were most heavily concentrated.<sup>15</sup> These

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 123–124.

<sup>11</sup> Shirinia and Wada, *Komintern i Koreia*, 756–57.

<sup>12</sup> According to this document, each unit [*otriad*] had 50-80 people, each *napravlenie* had three *otriad*, and Kim was commander of the Second *Nappravlenie*. (50-80)\*3=150-240. Ibid., 754.

<sup>13</sup> Hwang Jang Yop, "The Problems of Human Rights in North Korea (1)," [www.nknet.org/en/keys/lastkeys/2002/7/03.php](http://www.nknet.org/en/keys/lastkeys/2002/7/03.php).

<sup>14</sup> A.N. Pochtarev, "Iz Istorii Sovetsko-Koreiskikh Otnashenii v 1920-1950 Gody [From the History of Soviet-Korean Relations from the 1920s to 1950s]," *Novaia i Noveishaya Istorii*, no. 5 (1999).

<sup>15</sup> Huang, *Dongbei Diqu Chaoxian Gongchanzhuyizhe de "Shuangchong Shiming" Yanjiu [The Research on "Dual Mission" of Korean Communists in the Northeast]*, 178–179.

facts show that Kim was a leading figure in the partisan movement as early as 1942, even if to an important extent this was the result of many high-ranking Koreans dying or defecting during the Japanese occupation.<sup>16</sup> In July 1945, in preparation for the liberation of Korea by the Red Army, 290 Koreans formed a Korean Work group committee with Kim Il Sung in charge of military affairs and political work, Choe Yong-geon in charge of party work, and Kim Chaek in charge of executing policy. Choe was party secretary and Kim was committee leader. The plan was for the group to return to Korea, set up a Korean Communist Party, and finally separate organizationally from the Chinese communists.<sup>17</sup> Kim was known for his strict discipline and told his comrades “that we were future generals and would fight together.”<sup>18</sup>

According to Wada Haruki, a preeminent scholar of North Korea, Kim was given high positions while in the Soviet Union primarily because of his military prowess. Choe Yong-geon and Kim Chaek, two leaders with more seniority than Kim Il Sung, ultimately decided that Kim was their best chance. Unlike them, Kim was better known in Korea itself because he had been fighting in a part of Manchuria closer to Korea. Kim’s relationship with the Soviet Union was strong, and he could get along with the Chinese. He also had proven to be a strong leader. Wada describes this decision such: “The eldest brother and the middle brother decided to bequest to the youngest brother their household wealth and inheritance. They praised the youngest brother’s wisdom, and even went so far as to deprecate themselves in service of him. This was all for the purpose of restoring their own house in the midst of serious opposition from other houses.”<sup>19</sup> When Kim met with Soviet military commanders in August 1945, he impressed them

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<sup>16</sup> After the infamous Minsaengdan Incident, in which Chinese cadres slaughtered Koreans communists suspected of having ties with the Japanese, Kim Il Sung was the last of only two Koreans in a leadership position in eight army units. Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed*, 205; Jae-Jung Suh, “Colonial Origins of Juche: The Minsaengdan Incident of the 1930s and the Birth of the North Korea-China Relationship,” in *Origins of North Korea’s Juche: Colonialism, War, and Development* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Huang, *Dongbei Diqu Chaoxian Gongchanzhuyizhe de “Shuangchong Shiming” Yanjiu [The Research on “Dual Mission” of Korean Communists in the Northeast]*, 184, 189. In other words, dual leadership: Choe running the party and Kim running the organization.

<sup>18</sup> S. N. Goncharov, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 131–132.

<sup>19</sup> Haruki Wada, *Kin Nichisei to Manshu konichi senso* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 331–332.

with his claimed commitment to the world revolutionary movement. Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevskii recommended to Lavrentii Beria that Kim command a Korean Operational Committee in Pyongyang. Stalin accepted this proposal.<sup>20</sup>

Similar to his time as a partisan, Kim's role in the Korean War was both useful and problematic for the cultivation of martial prestige. Kim believed that the United States would not intervene in the conflict and that the North would win in three days.<sup>21</sup> The entire Korean offensive was planned by Soviet advisers.<sup>22</sup> Despite Mao Zedong's advice, the North Koreans failed to create a reserve force to destroy the US amphibious landing at Inchon.<sup>23</sup> The Soviet ambassador described the DPRK leadership as "overwhelmed by confusing events and uncertain of the future."<sup>24</sup> When the Sino-Korean joint headquarters was established in December 1950, Kim Il Sung was entirely pushed out of the operational leadership of the war: its commander, Peng Dehuai, was Chinese, and the two vice ministers were Koreans who had served with the Chinese far away from Kim's base of operations in Manchuria.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, however, the Korean War was not entirely bad for Kim. First, Kim blamed the failures of the war on others. The initial targets were the front line commanders: five men were dismissed in December of 1950, including three of Kim's compatriots from Manchuria but also a major leader of the Koreans who had served with the Chinese military, Mu Chong.<sup>26</sup> The most important victory was over Pak Heon-yeong, Kim's co-leader during the early years of the DPRK and the Korean War. Pak's power

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<sup>20</sup> Kim Hakjoon, *Dynasty: The Hereditary Succession Politics of North Korea* (Stanford: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center Books, 2015), 36–37.

<sup>21</sup> Haruki Wada, *The Korean War: An International History*, trans. Frank Baldwin, Asia/Pacific/perspectives (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 59. Mao Zedong thought the United States might send 20,000 to 30,000 Japanese troops, which would increase the likelihood of direct US intervention. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. The Soviets were in fact so heavily involved that Stalin blamed the failures of 1950 on the *Soviet* advisers, not Kim. See *Ibid.*, pg 115.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 148–149.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 120. Although they took the heat off Kim for the initial failures of the war, these sacrificial lambs would later play major roles in the DPRK government (Choe Gwang, Kim Il, and Yim Cheon-ju). Kim's ability to lay blame on his close associates and maintain their loyalty proved to be powerful political capital.

base consisted of underground communists who remained in Korea during the occupation. Pak was consistently optimistic that guerrilla warfare would erupt in South Korea and help lead to a victorious outcome in the war. This optimism drew Pak into a dispute with Kim Il Sung over the wisdom of continuing the war. In early 1953, Pak, along with other cadres from the underground movement, were purged.<sup>27</sup> They were blamed for the failure to spark a real guerrilla movement in the South. Kim had therefore fire-walled himself from the failures of the war. According to a Polish embassy report written in February 1953, “Comr. Kim Il Sung’s life has been inseparably connected with the wartime successes of the Korean People’s Army.”<sup>28</sup> Even the man who became one of Kim’s primary nemeses, Ri Sang-jo, admitted that during the war all power was centralized in the hands of Kim Il Sung.<sup>29</sup>

Second, by vastly expanding the size of the party during the war Kim was able to forge a new constituency whose only political experience was his own political leadership. Moreover, the decision to make the KWP a mass political party entailed the defeat of a major figure from the Soviet faction, Ho Kai-I, who had supported the creation of a small vanguard party with restrictive credentials.<sup>30</sup> The Korean War then allowed Kim to purge his most powerful foes and drastically increase the size of the party under his war leadership. Although his record as a military leader was weak, Kim could still rely on his partisan comrades from his earlier days in Manchuria within the elites that knew the truth.

### **First Episode Introduction**

The first episode in the chapter consists of a failed attempt in 1956 at a Central Committee (CC) plenum (subsequently the August plenum) by Koreans who had served in China (outside of Manchuria)

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 249–251.

<sup>28</sup> “Report No. 1 of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of Poland in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea for the Period of 1 January 1953 to 28 February 1953,” February 28, 1953. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>29</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 246. A major partisan figure, Kim Chaek, was also killed during the Korean War. The net effect of his loss on Kim Il Sung is unclear. Although he was a partisan with a similar level of renown as Kim himself and had served in a different area of Manchuria, Kim Chaek was apparently loyal. He therefore resembles Choe Yong-geon, who had even more prestige than Kim Il Sung and also had served in a different area of Manchuria but proved to be his critical ally. Wada believes Kim Chaek’s death to be a great loss, while a Korean defector, Un Lim, provides an unlikely store that Kim Il Sung had him killed in *Founding of a Dynasty*.

<sup>30</sup> Wada, *The Korean War*, 205–207.

and Koreans with origins in the Soviet Union to convince Kim Il Sung to stop promoting lackeys, divert more resources to peoples' livelihoods, and limit his own burgeoning personality cult. A Sino-Soviet delegation arrived in Pyongyang to force Kim to reverse his decision to purge those opponents, and possibly even remove him from power, but failed because Kim's position was too secure. To explain why Kim emerged victorious, I test the competing explanatory power of the economic model and the authority model as presented in the first chapter of this dissertation. Although economic interests played a role in sparking the resistance to Kim and were therefore important, sociological forms of authority ultimately allowed Kim to achieve victory. Kim used the support of his comrade partisans, defections from the competing groups who had less intergroup loyalty than the guerrillas, the support of party members who had joined the Korean Workers Party (KWP) during the Korean War, and nationalistic sensibilities to overcome opposition to his radical economic policies. Moreover, the nature of Kim's history as a wartime leader was a major question of debate during the struggle, showing the importance of historical interpretations for personal authority during power struggles. Kim manipulated party rules by delaying the opening of a Central Committee (CC) plenum to put intense individual pressure on its membership. Third, Kim used close control over the military and secret police to exert heavy pressure on his challengers.

### **Brief Chronology**

After the Korean War, Kim Il Sung's radical economic policies and increasing reliance on his partisan comrades from Manchuria led to dissatisfaction within the ruling party. Kim's opponents were supported by the Soviet Union and China, countries in which many of these dissenters had either been born or spent a great portion of their lives. When Kim learned of a plan to confront him at a Central Committee plenum in the summer of 1956, he delayed that meeting to put pressure on individual members. When the August plenum was held, those who spoke out against Kim were shouted down by his allies. After some of the dissenters fled to China, the Chinese and Soviets sent a joint delegation (led by Peng Dehuai and Anastas Mikoian) to support Kim's detractors. The compromise they were able to secure at the September CC plenum heavily favored Kim, but he soon violated it. Later Kim would

compare the defeat of the opposition figures to the “same kind of watershed moment” as 1946 when the DPRK was founded.<sup>31</sup>

## **Section 1: Policy Differences vs. Sociological Forms of Authority**

### *Difficulties in Economic Policy*

Hypothesis 1a would predict that Kim would either co-opt threats to his rule by adopting their policies or be removed because of the failure of his agenda. Yet the evidence demonstrates that Kim instead decided to crush his opposition and ultimately succeeded despite the disastrous consequences of many of his policies. In the 1950s, Kim’s economic policies were not going well.<sup>32</sup> The danger was that party members would point to those difficulties among regular people to create political capital (a term known as “rightist opportunism” in the communist political lexicon) or that the party would split if economic dissatisfaction led to riots like the ones in Hungary. In 1955, peasants were beaten during a grain collection drive, leading to a heightened number of flyers among the population calling for opposition to the state.<sup>33</sup> By August 1956, opposition figures were arguing that “the Party does not pay attention to the lives of the people” and threatened that protests similar to those in Hungary were possible.<sup>34</sup>

In the first openly critical speech at the August plenum, Minister of Trade Yun Gong-heum in his speech pointed to the mass dissatisfaction in the country due to Kim Il Sung’s economic policies, especially in 1955, when “the people’s lives had reached the limit.”<sup>35</sup> According to a Polish report, “the view dominates here that the group could count on the support of many persons on the government level,

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<sup>31</sup> “Note from Minister M. Naszkowski, ‘Regarding the Political Situation in the DPRK,’ February 3, 1958. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>32</sup> For the DPRK’s agricultural problems and famine in the 1950s, see Balazs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964*, Cold War International History Project Series (Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> RGANI. Fond 5, opis 28, delo 314, list 43.

<sup>34</sup> “Decision of the KWP Plenum. 30-31 August, 1956”. GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>35</sup> “Draft of a statement by Yun Gong-heum at the CC plenum of the Korean Worker’s Party in August 1956”. GARF. Wilson Center translation.



had many supporters and sympathizers in the ministries and institutions in Pyongyang, as well as in the provinces.”<sup>36</sup>

Dissatisfaction with Kim’s economic policies were exacerbated by another major political event in 1956: the 20th Party Congress of the Soviet Union and Khrushchev’s Secret Speech on Stalin’s crimes. The KWP initially ignored de-Stalinization in the USSR, arguing at their own 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Congress two months later that although a cult of personality had existed in Korea, it revolved around Kim’s former nemesis Pak Heon-yeong. Kim’s failure to recognize the importance of the 20th Party Congress and affirm the importance of inner-party democracy upset many within the party.

These economic problems and internal fighting were intrinsically connected to an external threat, as the Soviet Union and China were afraid that Kim’s economic policies and failure to accept criticism would lead to a crisis and affect their interests. Essentially, the Soviets and Chinese had a theory of political stability that differed from Kim’s. Especially for the Soviets, the most important objectives for the DPRK were improving consumer goods and housing, as opposed to heavy industry, and treating inter-party disputes as a mechanism for solving problems as opposed to political threats. During a trip to the Soviet Union in May of 1955 Moscow was able to exert enough pressure on Kim to significantly (but temporarily) change his economic objectives, spend more time and energy improving people’s livelihood as opposed to heavy industry, and improve collegiality in important decision-making.<sup>37</sup> In the lead-up to the August plenum, the Soviet embassy repeatedly told the North Korean leadership that accepting criticism and using it to address shortcomings would lead to a stronger party.<sup>38</sup> According to a Soviet embassy report after the August plenum, if Kim had acknowledged the criticisms it would have

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<sup>36</sup> “Note Concerning the August Group, Developed on the Basis of Party Documents, as well as on the Basis of Unofficial Sources of Information.” May 6, 1958. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>37</sup> Illarion Dmitrievich Pak, chair of the People’s Committee of one of the provinces, told the Soviet embassy that Kim’s mid-1955 reversal due to Soviet “consultations” was popular, especially among provincial party and state organs. RGANI. Fond 5, opis 28, listy 243-249. This was almost certainly the origins of Kim’s famous *juche* speech in December 1955. At the same plenum Kim criticized representatives of the Soviet group, especially Pang Chang-ok, its most powerful and visible member.

<sup>38</sup> “The August KWP CC Plenum.” GARF. Wilson Center translation.

strengthened the position of the KWP leadership. The Soviets believed that it was “unlikely that the big shortcomings in the Party can be eliminated and the leadership strengthened with repressive measures.”<sup>39</sup>

At a KWP Presidium meeting during the intervention, Mikoian explained that the August purges were signs of a crisis in state and party leadership and raised the possibility that the party would tear itself apart in disagreement. The Chinese had similar sentiments. At the same KWP Presidium meeting, Peng explained that if opposition figures in communist parties were simply expelled, others would appear as long as “there are conditions for incorrect opinions.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, the Soviets and Chinese were giving the same exact advice that scholars associated with the economic model would have given Kim: co-opt threats by giving in to their demands.

The danger was that these economic problems and pressure from the outside would be used by Korean communists with whom Kim did not enjoy a strong personal relationship but were connected to Moscow and Beijing. When the DPRK was formed in 1946, its leadership consisted of four groups whose revolutionary careers strongly differed. Koreans who had served in the Chinese Communist Party outside of Manchuria formed what was later called the “Yan’an” group.<sup>41</sup> The “Soviet” Koreans were those individuals who were born in the Soviet Union and were sent by the Soviet government to assist in the formation of the North Korean regime.<sup>42</sup> Korean communists who had survived on the peninsula despite intense Japanese police work made a third group (sometimes known as the “Domestic” group), and the fourth was of course Kim’s partisans.<sup>43</sup> The leader of the Domestic group, Pak Heon-yeong, was defeated by a coalition of the other groups in 1953. Tensions among the remaining groups surfaced in 1955 when

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<sup>39</sup> “The August KWP CC Plenum.” GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>40</sup> “Record of the discussions at the meeting of the Presidium of the KWP CC on 20 September.” GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>41</sup> Yan’an is the Chinese city in northern Shaanxi province that the Chinese Communist Party used as a wartime capital.

<sup>42</sup> Pochtarev, “Iz Istorii Sovetsko-Koreiskikh Otnashenii v 1920-1950 Gody [From the History of Soviet-Korean Relations from the 1920s to 1950s].”

<sup>43</sup> These groups used to be understood as factions, but this term has been challenged on the grounds that these groups were not nearly as cohesive and based on personal relationships as in the famously factional Choson court. See James Person, *“We Need Help from the Outside”: The North Korean Opposition Movement of 1956*, Working Paper #52 (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, 2006).

Kim realized that Soviet priorities for North Korea's economic development clashed with his own and that the Soviet Koreans might serve as agents of influence for the USSR.

Kim's group faced serious political troubles. Deep understanding of Marxist theory, a major source of political capital in communist movements, was lacking in the poorly-educated partisans, which would have limited their popularity among intellectuals.<sup>44</sup> Another Polish report concludes that the opposition had support from "intelligentsia, young writers, students and employees of the party and state apparatuses," although there is less evidence of support from workers and peasants.<sup>45</sup> In August 1956, Kim was at first concerned that the opposition was a "big group."<sup>46</sup> The Soviet embassy reported that for Kim it was clear that dissatisfaction with him had deep roots and was supported by major figures like Kim Tu-bong, the doyen of the Yan'an group.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Pressure from the Outside*

The most controversial question will be addressed first: what exactly was the objective of the Sino-Soviet delegation in September 1956? This is an important question because it sheds light on the extent to which Kim's position was truly threatened during this time period. Despite the use of new and important documents in this chapter, the exact extent of Soviet and Chinese ambitions towards DPRK domestic politics at this time is still not entirely clear.<sup>48</sup> The documents provide evidence indicating both the possibility that the Chinese and Soviets were trying to remove Kim from power, and other evidence that they simply wanted to restore collective leadership.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Wada, *Kim Nichisei to Manshu konichi senso [Kim Il Sung and the Anti-Japanese War in Manchuria]*.

<sup>45</sup> "A Note from Sluczanski to Several Comrades in Warsaw concerning the "August Group" and the Political Situation in the DPRK." December 9, 1957. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>46</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 342.

<sup>47</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 336.

<sup>48</sup> According to Mao, the Koreans did not listen to the Chinese 100% while they did not listen to the Soviets only 30%. "[To the] CPSU. Mikoian." GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>49</sup> Evidence about the domestic threat was clearer: they desired to change Kim's course and saw his removal as desirable only if he refused to take into account their demands. See Person, *"We Need Help from the Outside": The North Korean Opposition Movement of 1956*.

The case that the Soviets and Chinese at least considered removing Kim from power is strong. First, the Soviets were clearly fed up with Kim. At a meeting of the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on September 6, a decision was made that the Soviet delegation to the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in China would have a serious discussion with their Chinese counterparts about the situation in North Korea.<sup>50</sup> On September 13, the Presidium passed a set of instructions for the Soviet delegation in Beijing. These instructions began with a long list of Kim's mistakes and a recounting of the multiple times the USSR had warned Kim about their seriousness (including the cult of personality, lack of self-criticism and inner-party democracy, artificial separation of cadres into factions, the habit of top leaders holding multiple positions, lack of elections in certain bodies, and focus on industrialization at the expense of consumer goods). The instructions concluded that unfortunately these problems were not being solved and that the "main responsibility" lay with Kim and Choe Yong-geon.<sup>51</sup>

Second, at the crucial September 18 meeting between Mikoian and the Chinese leadership in Beijing, Mao said, "It is necessary to let Kim Il Sung know all the same that he cannot remain in the leadership without correction of the mistakes." Mao hinted strongly at the potential role the Chinese military forces in Korea might play: "It is necessary to be prepared for extreme steps from Kim Il Sung. He might even raise the issue of withdrawal of the Chinese volunteers from Korea. Of course, the Chinese units want to return home, but we know that the Americans are strengthening their positions in South Korea and we consider it necessary to leave our volunteers in Korea."<sup>52</sup> Mao therefore might have been

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<sup>50</sup> A.A. Fursenko, ed., *Presidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zacedanii. Stenogrammy [Presidium of the CC CPSU 1954-1964. Tome 1. Draft Minutes of Meetings. Transcripts]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 166; A.A. Fursenko, *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964. Tom 2. Postanovleniia 1954-1958 [Presidium of the CC KPSU 1954-1964. Volume 2. Resolutions 1954-1958]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 421-422.

<sup>51</sup> RGANI, fond 3, opis 12, delo 109, list. 4-10.

<sup>52</sup> "[To the] CPSU. Mikoian." GARF. Wilson Center translation. Kim was already showing signs of dissatisfaction towards the Chinese troops. In May 1956 Kim told the Soviet embassy that the government was planning on asking China to decrease the number of its troops in the DPRK. RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 200.

trying to indirectly communicate to Mikoian that if Kim did not obey Beijing and Moscow, or tried to remove Chinese troops, matters would reach a head.<sup>53</sup>

Third, Mikoian clearly threatened Kim Il Sung with removal at a KWP Presidium meeting on September 20 if he did not change his behavior.

For no one is raising the question of replacing Cde. Kim Il Sung, although legally, according to the Party charter, this question can be raised. We think that Cde Kim Il Sung needs to be supported in the leadership by the Party, but supported on the basis of the [inserted by hand: ideological] solidarity of the KWP leadership, on the basis of [inserted by hand: a patient attitude towards the opinions of CC members when they differ on specific issues], of friendly relations in the ruling collective and not on the basis of fear, repression or expulsion from the party... We can frankly say that before arrival in Pyongyang we had a conversation in the CCP CC. Both Mao Zedong and the CC of our party trust Cde. Kim Il Sung, but we have to frankly say that the KWP leadership has often decided issues carelessly, without reckoning with the opinions of those who think differently.<sup>54</sup>

Fourth, a wealth of strong evidence shows Mao's strong antipathy towards Kim dating back to the Korean War. Mao's Russian translator wrote that Mao complained that Kim did not provide the Chinese with details on the war situation even though "they are our next-door neighbors."<sup>55</sup> Mao felt that Kim ignored both his warnings about possible US intervention in general and a landing at Inchon in particular.<sup>56</sup> During a meeting with Mikoian in September 1956 in Beijing, Mao complained about all the purges Kim had conducted, especially that of Pak Il-u, and admitted to asking Kim Il Sung to spare Pak Heon-yeong's life.<sup>57</sup> Soon after in a meeting with the Korean delegation to the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Mao again complained about the arrest of Pak Il-u, saying this was an "extremely serious mistake." When a Korean delegation member replied that Pak had committed the crimes of individualism and factionalism,

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<sup>53</sup> Curiously, an account of this meeting based on the Chinese archives said that Mao was willing to remove the troops if Kim requested. Jin Dongcan, *Yijiuwuliu Nian Chaoxian "Ba Yue Shi Jian' Yan Jiu [Research on the 1956 Korean "August Incident]"* (Fudan University Masters Thesis. Accessed on CNKI., 2013), 36; Jin Guangxi, "'The August Incident' and the Destiny of the Yanan Faction," *International Journal of Korean History* 17, no. 2 (2012): 47–76.

<sup>54</sup> "Record of the discussions at the meeting of the Presidium of the KWP CC on 20 September." GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>55</sup> Zhihua Shen, *After Leaning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War*, Cold War International History Project Series (Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), 32.

<sup>56</sup> Shen, *After Leaning to One Side*.

<sup>57</sup> This account is based on access to the Chinese archives. Jin, *Yijiuwuliu Nian*, 36.

Peng interrupted him, castigating him personally for not speaking out for Pak even though he knew the truth. When he tried to defend himself, Mao interrupted him:

You have not developed democracy in your party, when some people raise different opinions or disagree, you see them as anti-party or traitors, remove their party membership, arrest them, even kill them. *In the feudal era even relatively wise emperors did not do this* [italics added]. Stalin in his last years was a foolish ruler [昏君], and now you are like this too. Not only that, but in terms of taxes, cadre personnel, improving the livelihood of the people, and the united front there are also mistakes. In order to solve this problem, we just exchanged opinions with Comrade Mikoian.... This delegation's objective is to help you solve problems, not damage you.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, in June 1960, the Soviets showed Kim a record of a conversation between Mao and the Soviet ambassador from November 1956 that contained extremely unflattering comments about the Korean leader. When Kim was shown this, he responded: "This is a lie. This didn't happen. How could Mao Zedong not only say but even think such a thing about me?" He then "sat silent for some time, and smoked unusually much." He exclaimed: "How could Mao Zedong not only say, but even think that I could be a traitor, that I could be in collusion with Syngman Rhee?"<sup>59</sup> Mao also apparently accused him of being an Imre Nagy, the Hungarian leader whose reforms led to a major Soviet military intervention in 1957.<sup>60</sup> According to the Soviet ambassador to the DPRK, "Kim Il Sung knows very well that we had conversations with Mao Tse-tung who then called him a Nazi and a fascist."<sup>61</sup> Chinese scholars Shen Zihua and Xia Yafeng, who have seen the transcript of Mao's conversation from November 1956, write that Mao said "Kim wants to drive the CPV army out of Korea. He might follow J.B. Tito's road, or even Imre Nagy's steps. Mao even said Beijing could use PLA forces to 'help Kim Il Sung correct his mistakes.'"<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>59</sup> "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for June 16, 1960." June 16, 1960. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>60</sup> "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for June 18, 1960." June 18, 1960. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>61</sup> "Memorandum of a Conversation with the Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK c. V.P. Moskowsky." February 26, 1964. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>62</sup> Shen Zihua and Yafeng Xia, *China and the Post-War Reconstruction of North Korea, 1953-1961*, North Korean International Documentation Project 4 (Wilson Center, 2012), 14.

Fifth, the Soviets apparently had evidence that proved Mao's involvement with the opposition group. According to a Czechoslovakian report in 1960, when the Soviets were trying to win the DPRK's support during the Sino-Soviet split, Kim was shown documents that show the group "was organized and supported by Chinese comrades against Kim Il Sung."<sup>63</sup> In December 1957, a Soviet Korean (Ivan Park) told the Soviet embassy that Kim Il Sung believed the interference was primarily a result of Chinese actions.<sup>64</sup>

Sixth, the Chinese themselves later admitted to an attempt to remove Kim. In a conversation with Polish leader Gomulka, Liu Shaoqi said, "Had that delegation, in 1956 in Korea, only opposed the cult of personality Kim Il Sung [that would be fine], but they wanted to topple the leadership."<sup>65</sup>

Seventh, according to V.V. Kovyzhenko, the man in charge of Korean affairs in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, at the meeting between Mikoian and Mao in Beijing the latter said that Kim had started a foolish war, generally worked poorly, and that he needed to be removed. Moreover, Kovyzhenko claims that the Soviets began a draft of a plenum decision that directly called for Kim's resignation the day before the plenum. This might be explainable by the fact that key demands were not being met: Choe Chang-ik, a key figure in the Yan'an group, was expelled from

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<sup>63</sup> "Record of Conversation between the Czech Ambassador in the DPRK with the Soviet Ambassador." July 26, 1960. Wilson Center Digital Archive. The North Koreans were apparently not persuaded and instead believed that the Soviet embassy was primarily involved in planning the opposition. Pak Geum-cheol told Enver Hoxha in 1961 that the Soviet ambassador Ivanov was main black hand: "The antiparty group in our country acted mainly under the leadership of Ivanov." However this claim might have been colored by the deterioration in DPRK-Soviet relations because of disappointment with the USSR's attempts to improve relations with the United States. See "Record Sheet of a Meeting held Between Enver Hoxha and Pak Geum-cheol." February 10, 1961. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>64</sup> This piece of evidence must be contextualized, however. The context was Kim Il Sung's report on his trip to Moscow in 1957, during which Mao apologized for China's role in the events of September 1956. Choe Yong-geon responded: "and what about Mikoian, does he feel he wasn't involved? [a kak zhe Mikoian, v storone sebja chuvstvuet?]" Kim looked askance at Choe, then looked at Park Ui-wan: "Yet it is clear to us that this was done by the CC CCP [Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party]". Park may be hinting that this statement was for his benefit. Blaming the Chinese exclusively seems strange also in the context that Kim apparently have believed the Soviet embassy was involved with the opposition before the August Plenum. AVPRF. "1957 1". Wilson Center physical copy.

<sup>65</sup> "Record of Conversation between Polish Delegation (Gomulka et al.) and Chinese Communist Politburo Member Liu Shaoqi, Moscow." November 29, 1960. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

both the Presidium and the Central Committee (CC). Although not mentioned in the September 19 meeting, Pak Chang-ok, a major figure from the Soviet group, who was already expelled from the Presidium, was removed from the CC as well. These removals clearly show that the September plenum was only a partial reversal. Despite language about the importance of criticism and self-criticism in the September plenum decision, the fact Choe and Pak were not fully restored still clearly implied their behavior was unacceptable. Yet Kovyshenko claims to have convinced Mikoian that Kim was too powerful to be removed, and that a failed Soviet attempt would damage Korean-Soviet ties irrevocably. Mikoian allegedly finally responded: “Fine, the Chinese insisted on this, let them do [what they want] and achieve it on their own.”<sup>66</sup>

Eighth, although the newly-discovered documents do not provide a smoking gun that Mikoian was sent to remove Kim, we have two reasons to believe that the absence of this piece of evidence does not mean it was possible he sought this outcome. First, when Mikoian visited Hungary in July 1956, he had a broad mandate to fix the political situation but no formal authorization to make changes. Yet one day after his arrival he told the Hungarian leader Rakosi to resign. Mikoian obviously had a wide mandate once again in the DPRK. Second, even if the Soviets did not state explicitly that they wanted Kim to be removed, they knew that was a strongly possible outcome given the nature of their criticism. For example, the Soviets played a direct role in Nagy’s removal in January 1955 simply by criticizing him strongly.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, during a conversation between high-ranking Soviet and Chinese leaders, Mikoian himself seems to have admitted that Peng attempted to remove Kim in November 1964:

Com. Zhou Enlai: Our former defense minister Peng Dehuai committed the crime of great power chauvinism towards the Korean comrades, and we removed him for this. I do not interfere in your internal affairs. With regards to Peng Dehuai, he indeed took a great power-chauvinism approach and tried to

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<sup>66</sup> Andrei Lankov, *August, 1956 God, Krizis v Severnoi Koree [August 1956, Crisis in North Korea]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 202–203.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 119–126, 137; Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (April 1998): 163–214.



interfere in the internal affairs of the DPRK. As you remember in 1956 our comrades along with Comrade Mikoian went to Korea with regards to this issue.

Com. Mikoian: Peng Dehuai tried to remove Kim Il Sung.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, other pieces of evidence hint that the goal of the delegation was more limited. At the September 18 meeting in Beijing, Mao “noted that Kim Il Sung understood that we do not want to overthrow him, but want to help him.” He also claimed that it would be useless for one group in Korea to overthrow another because the struggle would continue. Peng Dehuai at the September 20 KWP Presidium meeting stated explicitly that “according to the opinion of the CC of the Communist Party of China there is no such person right now who could replace Cde. Kim Il Sung and [inserted by hand: no] such [person] who wants this.” Mikoian agreed, saying, “even if such a person were found, this would [inserted by hand: not] solve the problem.”

According to a scholar who has seen the Chinese account of the meeting between Mao and Mikoian, Mao was even clearer on the need to avoid giving the impression the delegation intended to remove Kim. When Mikoian proposed sending a delegation to Pyongyang to hear both sides of the story, Mao said that the delegation should convince the Koreans to reverse the decision of the August plenum and restore those purged to their original positions.<sup>69</sup> Mao referred to the possibility that “Kim Il Sung will think that you in the past interfered in Yugoslavian domestic politics, now along with China you are interfering in my affairs. Therefore, this Sino-Soviet two party delegation must have Kim Il Sung understand that we are not trying to overthrow you but trying to help you. Only in this way will Kim Il Sung change his attitude.” Mikoian agreed with this approach.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, according to the Soviet

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<sup>68</sup> Andreï Artizov et al, eds., *Nikita Khrushchev. 1964: stenogrammy plenuma TSK KPSS i drugie dokumenty [Nikita Khrushchev. 1964: Stenograms of the Plenum of the CC KPSU and Other Documents]* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2007), 353. The meeting took place after the Soviet defense minister, apparently drunk, had suggested to members of the Chinese delegation at a reception that Mao should be removed from the Chinese leadership, just as the Soviets had removed Khrushchev.

<sup>69</sup> Curiously, Mao wanted the Soviet part of the delegation to include three while the Chinese would only include one. Mikoian said this would be inappropriate.

<sup>70</sup> Mao claimed that the success of the meeting depended on Mikoian, as the Koreans do not listen to the Chinese. Jin, *Yijiuwuliu Nian*, 35.

account of the meeting, Mao wanted the delegation to persuade Kim to allow those who fled to China to re-enter the party and raise the issue of Pak Heon-yeong, but Mikoian disagreed with these goals. This indicates that the delegation might not have gone to Pyongyang with maximalist positions.<sup>71</sup>

Claims made after 1956 about the goals of the delegation must be strongly qualified. Criticism of Peng especially should not be automatically accepted as truth. He himself was purged in 1959, and such individuals, as shown elsewhere in the dissertation, are often accused of crimes they did not commit to make the removal seem more justified. The Chinese also had a political interest in playing up the extent to which the intervention was a violation so as to convince the North Koreans of the sincerity of their apology and win their support in the intensifying Sino-Soviet conflict.

Finally, Kovyzenko's story faces certain problems. His account of Mao's meeting with Mikoian in Beijing is completely different from the record found in GARF. For the story to be true, either Mao conveyed his feelings privately, or he conveyed them in a meeting for which the record has yet to be found. Moreover, if Mikoian had actually wanted a draft resolution calling for Kim's removal written on the day before the plenum, this would be after both Mikoian and Peng affirmed Kim's leadership on September 20.<sup>72</sup> Mikoian's plans for another draft plenum decision on September 22 would have had to transpire simultaneously with his involvement in shaping the Korean draft more to his liking.<sup>73</sup> It is possibly also telling that no account exists of Mikoian's plan for another draft in the GARF records. Unfortunately, the RGANI documents only reveal that Mikoian's delegation was given wide flexibility to

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<sup>71</sup> "[To the] CPSU. Mikoian." GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>72</sup> The possibility remains, of course that Mikoian and Peng were lying about their support of Kim, which was in any case clearly conditional on him changing behavior. They also may have been hinting at support for Kim's removal but without being explicit by pointing out his mistakes. Mikoian and Peng may have felt that if enough opposition to Kim existed, their simple presence would have been enough to activate it.

<sup>73</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting Concerning the Discussion of a Draft Resolution of the KWP CC Plenum". GARF. Wilson Center translation. The GARF documents do show that Mikoian neglected to be involved with the initial draft process conducted by the Koreans, saying he would inspect it when it was done. It is possible the plan was to watch the direction this draft took and then decide whether to support it or not. When he saw the initial draft early on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, he could have decided it was not good enough but was then persuaded to accept it by Kovyzenko if the Koreans agreed to certain changes (like adding language about inner party democracy and criticism).

determine the best course of action. In sum, the new records make the Kovyshenko account less likely, although they do not fundamentally negate it and provide no evidence of Chinese behavior during the delegation's time in Pyongyang.

Different scholars will draw varying conclusions from the available evidence. The most persuasive story now is that Mikoian and Peng both strongly disliked Kim but had not made a final decision before reaching Pyongyang, both because they were unaware of the true nature of the political crisis and because they were unsure of how strong Kim's position was. Their failure to either remove Kim or force him to acquiesce to all of their demands was probably shaped by a mix of compromise and recognition that Kim's political position at home was solid. They might have assumed that simply by going to North Korea, if Kim's position was weak enough it would collapse on its own because his detractors would have had an opportunity to speak out. Unfortunately, even the new evidence prevents us from stating decisively to what extent these varying factors mattered, and therefore the size of Kim's victory cannot be verified with complete accuracy. Yet the fact that the delegation achieved so little and did not spark a broader course correction speaks largely to Kim's political resilience.

#### *Kim's Partisan Comrades*

Kim was able to surmount these challenges primarily by relying on his partisan comrades, and the promotion of these figures served as a major reason the crisis erupted. These two factors are very clear evidence for the explanatory power of hypothesis 1b. As early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Congress in April 1956, the Soviets were concerned about power being unnecessarily concentrated in the hands of Choe Yong-geon, the second most important member of the partisan group after Kim himself. In a letter to the Soviet CC based on his attendance of this Congress, Leonid Brezhnev complained that Choe was Deputy Premier, Minister of Defense, and Deputy Chairman of the Party Central Committee (CC). Along with Pak Geum-cheol, another partisan, Choe was accused of hinting that the KWP was better than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Moreover, Brezhnev wrote that "[i]t ought to be noted that all the descriptions of Choe Yong-geon we have received and our personal observations say that this is a person who is

incapable of work, close-mouthed, rude, passive, and conceited. Everyone is afraid of him.”<sup>74</sup> In a June 1956 report, the Soviets recommended that “it would be useful to also remove several vice ministers, especially Choe Yong-geon, either from his position as vice minister and minister of defense, or from his vice chairmanship of the CC KWP. All signs indicate Kim Il Sung is trying to strengthen the role of Choe Yong-geon in the government and party. According to several leading Korean comrades, Choe does not deserve this due to his [inferior] qualities.”<sup>75</sup> Even Kim Il Sung was aware of Choe’s incompetence. In January 1955, Pak Chang-ok had been assigned to manage defense issues because of Choe’s inability to cope, although Choe remained defense minister.<sup>76</sup>

The first dispute in the Political Council, in April 1955, was over whether Choe would be allowed to join that body.<sup>77</sup> The leadership split again in September 1955 when Kim, accused of concentrating too much power in his own hands by the Soviets and members of his own party, nominated Choe for the premiership.<sup>78</sup> Choe, however, served well as Kim’s attack dog. As soon as Choe entered the Political Council, compromising material against the Soviet Koreans was collected.<sup>79</sup> After an attack on Soviet Koreans in December 1955, one of them, Pak Ui-wan, was summoned to meet with Pak Geum-cheol,

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<sup>74</sup> “[To the] CPSU CC. From Cde. Brezhnev concerning Korea”. GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>75</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 411, list 155.

<sup>76</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 80.

<sup>77</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 79.

<sup>78</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 80. The combination of Choe’s political power but limited administrative abilities would turn into a major headache for the party in June 1957. Nam Il told the Soviet embassy that originally Choe was to take the premiership and was put into the positions of first vice premier of the party and first vice chairman of the party to prepare him. But his performance was weak. Even as Defense Minister, which he held concurrently, he did not pay attention to military matters, leaving them to chief of the general staff Kim Gwang-hweop. “But the problem is that Choe Yong-geon knows what position he was supposed to be given. He is a power-hungry and resentful. He can use cheap demagoguery to attract people to his side. Therefore there is a danger, Nam Il said, that appointing a different figure would cause a sharp reaction from Choe Yong-geon and possible serious complications in the party.” Later Nam also said that “a significant number of those serving in the military actively support Choe Yong-geon.” On July 29, Kim Il Sung himself admitted that Choe was not up to the job and the leadership decided to kick Choe upstairs to lead the Supreme People’s Assembly, a sinecure. Kim Il Sung would remain premier, but Kim Il, a partisan, was assigned to chair the Council of Minister’s with the expectation that Kim Il Sung would subsequently have more time to focus on party affairs. AVPRF. “1957-1.” Wilson Center physical copy.

<sup>79</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 77. The DPRK ambassador to the Soviet Union also identified Choe Yong-geon as the primary culprit along with Kim Il Sung in the attack on those unhappy with the personality cult. RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 225.

Choe Yong-geon, and Lim Khe to address the criticisms. Choe accused Pak Ui-wan of participating in factionalist activities, being educated in the bourgeois style, and not caring what kind of power was established in Korea. Pak interrupted Choe, accusing him of slander and fled the office.<sup>80</sup> Choe even deliberately pretended to have sympathy for the opposition in order to communicate their intentions to Kim Il Sung.<sup>81</sup>

At the August plenum, Minister of Trade Yun Gong-heum criticized the promotion to post of Deputy Chairman of the KWP Choe Yong-geon. In response, Choe Yong-geon stood up and called him a dog.<sup>82</sup> According to one Korean participant at the meeting, this criticism of Choe was a major strategic mistake, as his long history of contributions to the cause was clear and authority within the party was high.<sup>83</sup> In his own speech, Choe claimed that Choe Chang-ik, the main figure from the Yan'an group, had conspired against Kim Il Sung as early as 1952. He also accused Soviet Korean Pak Chang-ok of being a “deep factionalist” and claimed he had sent Yun to the Soviet embassy, implying the Soviets were involved in the plot.<sup>84</sup>

When the Chinese and Soviets became involved, the partisans strongly supported Kim. On September 16, Mikoian met with Choe in Beijing during the Chinese Communist Party 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.<sup>85</sup> Mikoian criticized the KWP for not allowing criticisms at the party August plenum. Choe bucked Mikoian, arguing that “it was frankly difficult to tolerate their statements” and refused to drink a

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<sup>80</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, listy 76-77.

<sup>81</sup> To be fair to the opposition, they did have some reason to believe that Choe would side with them. Ri Pil-gyu correctly pointed out that Choe and Kim had served in different parts of Manchuria and that Choe had a higher rank. However, Choe's respect for Kim as a fellow partisan with similar experiences clearly outweighed any other sentiments. Lankov, *August*, 133.

<sup>82</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 328.

<sup>83</sup> Jin, *Yijiuwuliu Nian*, 19.

<sup>84</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 331. The Soviets reported that Choe's speech was the major counter-attack. RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 64.

<sup>85</sup> Choe was often sent to manage relations with China, as he had gain the deep respect of the CCP by fighting closely with major Chinese revolutionary figures before becoming a partisan in Manchuria. Hwang Jang-yop, *Na-Neun Yeoksa-Eui Jinri-Reul [I Saw the Truth of History]* (Seoul: Haneul, 1999). Choe was even a classmate of Zhu De. See PRC FMA 204-00064-01, 1-8. Wilson Center collection.

toast.<sup>86</sup> At a KWP Presidium meeting on September 20 after Mikoian and Peng conferred with the Korean leadership, Choe argued that although Choe Chang-ik and Pak Chang-ok could be reinstated in the Central Committee, they should still not return to their previous posts in the government. Choe argued that “although we have exhibited magnanimity towards them, they have not ceased their factional activity.” He also argued that those who fled to China could reclaim their party membership, but they could not rejoin the Central Committee. Choe was supported by Kim Il<sup>87</sup> [not Kim Il Sung], another partisan, Nam Il, a Soviet Korean who grew close to Kim Il Sung as a powerful general during the Korean War, and Pak Geum-cheol.<sup>88</sup>

The September plenum was postponed in order to convince party members that reversing the August plenum was a good idea. This plenum ultimately did pass a resolution that Mikoian and Peng could accept, and Kim Il Sung explicitly recognized that “there are people in the Party from China, the Soviet Union, and Southerners” and that it was therefore necessary to study all opinions to avoid factionalism. However, the minutes of the plenum show strong dissatisfaction with even the partial reversal of the August plenum. Several speakers were interrupted by Kim Il Sung and other members of the Presidium after they continued to criticize the accused for their “factionalist” activities.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> “The Conversation with the Delegation of the Korean Worker’s Party at the 8 CCP Congress, 16 September 1956”. GARF. Wilson Center translation. Choe behaved differently in his meeting with Mao. After having seen how the other member of his delegation was interrupted by Mao and Peng, and also likely because of Mao’s personal authority, Choe was forced to pretend to agree with Mao’s comments. Jin, Yijiuwuliu Nian, 37-38.

<sup>87</sup> Official North Korean histories claim that Kim Il was saved by Kim Il Sung during a massive purge of Korean guerrilla fighters by the Chinese leadership in the 1930s in Manchuria. Kim Hakjoon, *Dynasty: The Hereditary Succession Politics of North Korea*, 31.

<sup>88</sup> The only man without partisan ties, or had fought with Kim as a general in the Korean War, to speak out for only partial rehabilitation was Kim Chang-man, a member of the “Yan’an Faction.” Kim would be later purged in the 1960s. See below. The only person who clearly supported the so-called “anti-party group” was Pak Ui-won, a Soviet Korean. His real name was Ivan Park. “Record of the discussions at the meeting of the Presidium of the KWP CC on 20 September.” GARF. Wilson Center translation. Pak Geum-cheol, a partisan figure, was along with Choe Yong-geon another major bete noire of the opposition. See RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, listy 355-358.

<sup>89</sup> Those interrupted include Ho Dong-suk, Minister of Culture and Propaganda, Hen Dyon Min, party chief of South Hamgyong, and Ri Son Uk, party chief of Pyongyang. Ri even claimed that So Hwi and Ri Pil-gyu raped women. Ri Chan ok, party chief of Kaesong City, was interrupted for a different reason: comparing Kim Il Sung to Mao. Kim interrupted him, saying that it would be an honor for the Korean leadership to be considered “worthy disciples” of Mao. No doubt this was intended for Peng.

The partisan group, whose ties had been forged by a common military experience, proved much more united than their competitors. When Mikoian and Peng came to the DPRK to reverse the August plenum decision, Kim Du-bong, the doyen of the Yan'an Koreans but who had largely retreated from the political scene by 1956, did not try to save his former comrades, instead expressing concern "about whether all 116 CC members and candidate members will agree with these measures for, being old Party members and revolutionaries, they think that they were right when adopting the decisions at the August CC plenum."<sup>90</sup> Nam Il, a Soviet Korean, deserted his comrades and blamed the current difficult situation on their own ability to win the trust of local Koreans.<sup>91</sup> Pak Jeong-ae, a Soviet Korean who had spent time on the Korean peninsula as well, also served as a Kim lackey. Even Kim Chang-man, a member of the Yan'an group, cast his lot with Kim. Therefore, both the strong cohesion among partisans and fractures among the competing political groups helped Kim emerge victorious. This was achieved even though the partisans held only eight positions on the Central Committee, compared to nine Soviet Koreans and eighteen Yan'an Koreans.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, the authority Kim had established during the Korean War proved significant as well. Fifteen members of the Central Committee had no political weight before 1945 and had joined the party with Kim as leader. The political viewpoints of these individuals were entirely shaped by the experience of Kim as their leader during the Korean War and therefore were a powerful source of support.<sup>93</sup>

### *The Importance of Historical Issues*

Hypothesis 1a would predict that debates about Kim would revolve primarily around policy issues, while hypothesis 1b would recognize the importance of personal status and historical

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<sup>90</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting Concerning the Discussion of a Draft Resolution of the KWP CC Plenum". GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>91</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 97.

<sup>92</sup> Lankov, *Avgust*, 110–114. The majority of the remainder of the CC were Koreans who had joined the party during the Korean War. His dominance on the Standing Committee was even greater: of the eleven full members, six were partisan comrades and three were members of other groups that had become Kim's lackeys.

<sup>93</sup> For the importance of this factor, see *Ibid.*, 113–114; Wada, *The Korean War*, 205–207.

contributions. The North Korean case shows the value of hypothesis 1b because evaluations of Kim's military leadership were a fundamental part of the power struggles over his leadership. His attempts to over-emphasize the nature of his own achievements helped spark those struggles in the first place, and his challengers used different evaluations of his wartime accomplishments to question his position. Debates over Kim's legitimacy as a leader often read like graduate seminars in a history department, but they had acute political importance.

In 1954, a historian preparing material to study the Korean War received documents from the deputy defense minister Kim Ung, a member of the Yan'an group that showed all military activities conducted by Korean troops were conducted by the Chinese and that Kim Il Sung was excluded (*stoidal v storone*). When the Central Committee learned of this all the material was removed.<sup>94</sup> Nam Il explained to the Soviets that one Korean War hero that Kim purged, Pak Il-u, was dangerous precisely because he "knew many secrets about the state and chatted about them." Nam complained that Pak told his friends that the war was started on Stalin's orders, stating emphatically that "such conversations are intolerable."<sup>95</sup> In May 1956, the director and individual in charge of research at the Museum on the Liberation Struggle of the Korean People asked whether Soviet museums could provide information on partisan activity between 1940 and 1945 as well as material about the Soviet Army's role in Korea after World War II. The director explained that "in the DPRK there are simply no exhibitions on the activity of the Korean revolutionaries and partisans during their presence in the USSR."<sup>96</sup>

The danger of the truth of history damaging Kim's martial prestige is also present in Mao's talk with the Korean delegation in which he accused Kim of being worse than a feudal emperor. Mao said: "In the past we have had different opinions about your activities. For example, with regards to the Korean War, I tried to persuade Kim Il Sung not to start the war. Later he sent Ri Sang-jo to Beijing and I

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<sup>94</sup> RGANI. Fond 5, opis 28, delo 314, list 210.

<sup>95</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 345.

<sup>96</sup> The entire museum was in fact dedicated to Kim Il Sung, as there was "no room" for other revolutionary traditions. RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 249-250.



reminded him that the enemy might land at Inchon. But at that time we did not criticize you like we are criticizing you now.”<sup>97</sup>

The importance of history in authority relations is clearly visible in Yun Gong-heum’s draft speech to the August plenum and a letter from Ri Sang-jo, who was the Korean ambassador to the USSR in 1956. Interestingly, Yun had been a major supporter of Kim Il Sung, as he freely admitted in the speech. But he heavily implies that he changed his mind for three reasons: Kim’s installation of guerrilla comrade Choe Yong-geon as deputy chairman of the party (discussed above), the Soviet 20th Party Congress, and Kim’s collection of all martial prestige for himself by rewriting history. In the draft of Yun’s speech, which may or may not have been finished due to the political atmosphere at the plenum, Yun explicitly connected the importance of obeying the spirit of the CPSU’s 20th Party Congress (meaning opposition to personality cults) to the Soviet role in the violent liberation of Korea: “the liberation of our country was by no means accomplished with the support of our own revolutionary forces, but with the support of the great Soviet Army.”

Yun read from an article from March 12 that claimed Kim Il Sung represented the main current in the revolutionary movement in Korea.” Yun complained that “the revolutionary movement which occurred in the past both inside the country and beyond its borders is denied and viewed as factional activity, but the partisan warfare of Cde. Kim Il Sung and the system of the “League for the Rebirth of the Motherland” is exaggerated in every possible way. On the other hand, the place of the only legal successor in the recreation of our Party stands out: completely unseasoned cadres from the [Kapsan] group [see below] are being promoted to the most important Party and government posts.”

Yun then took his criticisms a step further:

However, there is no need to excessively embellish the anti-Japanese partisan warfare of Cde. Kim Il Sung. It is generally known that partisan warfare against Japan in the region of Northeast China was waged by Chinese and Korean patriots located there under the leadership of the CCP; Korean Comrade Ri [Hon Kwan] was already operating in the south of Manchuria even before Cde. Kim Il Sung launched anti-Japanese

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<sup>97</sup> Jin, *Yijiuwuliu Nian*, 37.

partisan warfare... his bases could not establish sufficient ties with the popular masses and there was no opportunity to continue to extend the war further, in approximately the end of 1940 Cde. Kim Il Sung left Northeast China together with part of the Chinese comrades. However, in the cities and villages of Korea, patriots, workers, peasants and students continued to actively wage a revolutionary war: outside Korea itself, in Japan, and in regions of North China the Korean Volunteer Army under the direct leadership of the CCP CC waged an armed struggle to overthrow Japanese imperialism even up to the very moment of liberation, 15 August 1945. Why was it necessary to distort these facts and ignore them?<sup>98</sup>

In his letter to the Central Committee of the KWP, DPRK Ambassador to the Soviet Union Ri Sang-jo complained in the DPRK at the time only partisans were not considered a dangerous faction.<sup>99</sup> Ri, however, claimed that before Kim's partisan group, armed resistance to Japan had already appeared, as well as worker, peasant, and student movements. Ri also reminded the CC that the armed resistance was not led under Kim Il Sung but was instead part of the Chinese Communist Party. Most insultingly, Ri pointed out that Kim's partisan activities essentially ceased in 1940 and claimed that "not all possibilities were used" to strengthen the partisan movement. Ri demanded an investigation into the reasons why the partisans ended their activity in 1940, reminding his readers that the Chinese had been able to maintain partisan bases under more difficult conditions. Ri even discounted Kim's defining act of attacking Pochonbo: "Only three policemen were killed." He concluded that Kim's group did not have deep roots among the people. Instead, Ri emphasized the martial contributions of his own Yan'an group, which had not only fought the Japanese but also the Chinese Nationalists and Americans, ultimately contributing five divisions to the Korean War: "the entire Korean people know of the heroism and bravery of those soldiers in the Korean divisions from China." When Ri emphasized the importance of cooperation with the fraternal socialist parties, he revealed that Mao had warned Kim of an American landing on the Korean coastline during the Korean War: "one of the fundamental reasons that led our army to such a great loss is that Kim Il Sung without considering the real situation on the front rejected the suggestions and wishes of Mao Zedong." "History must not be distorted," Ri wrote.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> "Draft of a statement by Yun Kong-hum at the CC plenum of the Korean Worker's Party in August 1956". GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>99</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 265.

<sup>100</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, listy 274-280, 292, 294.

After Kim's victory, he went to extraordinary steps to delete Yun's arguments from the national memory. According to a Czech embassy report, five years after the August Incident, a museum opened in Pyongyang dedicated to the Korean revolution. In 11 rooms, only two photographs and a sign mentioned the Red Army's role in the liberation of Korea. Kim Il Sung and Choe Yong-geon's six-year holding pattern in the Soviet Union went entirely unmentioned.<sup>101</sup>

The importance of martial prestige is present also in Mao's decision to send Peng Dehuai as the Chinese representative in the joint Sino-Soviet delegation. Peng was the commander of the Joint Headquarters during the Korean War and knew better than anyone that Kim's military leadership abilities were limited. When Peng arrived in Korea in 1950, he quickly concluded that the Koreans were amateurs.<sup>102</sup> In January 1951, Peng had a major argument with the Korean leadership about whether to execute the next offensive immediately or allow time for the troops to rest and plan. Peng lost his patience entirely:

In the past, you assumed that the United States would never send troops to Korea. You never thought about what to do if they did send troops. Now you say that the American Army will definitely withdraw from Korea, but you are not considering what to do if the American Army does not withdraw. You are just hoping for a quick victory and are not making concrete preparations, and this is only going to prolong the war. You are hoping to end this war by luck. You are gambling on the fate of the people, and that's only going to lead to disaster.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> "Report on Political Development in the DPRK." April 18, 1961. Wilson Center Digital Archive. Interestingly, the Chinese criticized the Soviet role in the Korean War in their attempts to persuade the DPRK to join their side in the Sino-Soviet split, indicating that the Chinese believed the martial prestige accrued to the PRC justified more Korean support. For example, Liu Shaoqi told Kim Il Sung that the Soviets agreed to provide air support but changed their minds two days later. Liu also complained about having to pay back loans to the USSR dating from the war.

"Minutes of Conversation between Liu Shaoqi and Kim Il Sung." September 15, 1963. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>102</sup> Peng was especially incensed by Kim's recruiting policy that left no men to provide help to families, the order to defend Pyongyang against all odds, and the lack of a political commissar system. Peng said: "I had to be responsible for the Chinese and Korean people, and for the several hundred thousands of soldiers!" Shen, *After Learning to One Side*, 70–71.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Peng, therefore, was in the unique position of being able to challenge Kim's authority based on martial prestige since he had been present at Kim's worst moment of military leadership. That Peng had been sent to Korea before to clean up Kim's mess would not have been lost on Kim and his colleagues.

### *Nationalism*

One final non-economic factor must be addressed: the role of nationalism, a political issue of major importance in both the Koreas.<sup>104</sup> Having been subjected to outside meddling for centuries, Koreans had a skeptical attitude towards interference from outside powers. This likely affected the legitimacy of Koreans who had strong ties with China and the Soviet Union and could be portrayed as their agents of influence. Many of the Soviet Koreans in fact spoke Korean poorly. In other words, they were easy targets for *kompromat* and character assassination, even if other Koreans had reason to support their economic policies and opposition to the growing dictatorship. The importance of this *kompromat* based on nationalist sensibilities is clear evidence for hypothesis 1b. 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary of the Embassy of the USSR Comrade Pimenov told the Polish embassy that he believed antipathy towards Soviet Koreans was broad-based because of their well-paying positions and arrogant attitude.<sup>105</sup> Soviet Koreans often did not even give up their Soviet citizenship.<sup>106</sup>

However, this last factor should not be over-stated. After the purge of Pak Heon-yeong during the Korean War, none of the DPRK leadership had strong historic ties with the peninsula itself, including the partisan group. The history of Korean communism before 1945 took place almost entirely in the Soviet Union and China, as Japanese occupation forces proved exceptionally adept at rooting out underground communists in the Korean peninsula.<sup>107</sup> As an East German report in February 1968 pointed out, the

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<sup>104</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> "Notes from a Conversation between the 1 Secretary of the PRL Embassy in the DPRK with the 1 Secretary of the Embassy of the USSR, Comrade Pimenov, of 26-27-28-29.III.1957". April 4, 1957. Wilson Center Digital Archive. See also RGANI. Fond, 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 62.

<sup>106</sup> Kim Il Sung complained about this at a meeting with Soviet Koreans in December 1955. RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 4.

<sup>107</sup> Shirinia and Wada, *Komintern i Koreia*.

contacts between guerrilla groups in Manchuria and inside Korea itself were not extensive, and once those guerrillas fled to the Soviet Union that separation deepened further.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, if nationalism was such an over-riding force we would have trouble explaining the size of the threat that Kim had to overcome in the first place.

## **Section 2: Selectorate Theory vs. Rule Manipulation**

Hypothesis 2a would predict that Kim ultimately emerged triumphant after a structured debate within a defined elite. However, the evidence shows the opposite: Kim was able to triumph precisely because of his maneuvering. Aware of the opposition against him, Kim delayed holding a party plenum after returning to North Korea and used that time to put pressure on individual members with possible sympathies to Choe Chang-ik. Pak Ui-won, for example, was threatened by Kim Il Sung with compromising material.<sup>109</sup> Kim also emphasized the damage that de-Stalinization was having on Poland, promised to tone down the personality cult, and return some individuals who had fallen in previous campaigns to their posts.<sup>110</sup> In other words, instead of allowing a democratic discussion of the issues within the CC, Kim used his position as leader to unfairly rally support and isolate his competitors.

Significantly, the men who used the compromising material against the possible dissenters while the plenum was delayed were primarily partisans. The Soviet embassy reported to Moscow that in the lead up to the August plenum, all those suspected of harboring a critical attitude were summoned by Kim Il Sung, Choe Yong-geon, Pak Geum-cheol, Kim Il, and Pak Jeong-ae. All of these individuals except the last were members of the guerrilla faction.<sup>111</sup>

## **Section 3: Coercive Institutions**

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<sup>108</sup> "Report from East German Ambassador to North Korea, 'Some Aspects of the Political Line of the Korean Workers' Party after the January Events'" February 15, 1968. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>109</sup> "Reception of the DPRK Ambassador in the USSR RI SANG-JO 5 September 1956". GARF. Wilson Center translation.

<sup>110</sup> Lankov, *August*, 141–142.

<sup>111</sup> "The August KWP CC Plenum." GARF. Wilson Center translation.

Hypothesis 3a would predict that competing for support from the power ministries would be important only to the extent that the armed forces were voting members of the elite. Hypothesis 3b, however, would presume that the contest for power would revolve to a significant extent around control over the power ministries, and that the position of the power ministries would have a powerful effect on the position of the rest of the elites. In this case, Kim clearly found control over the power ministries to be exceptionally important, and his control over those bodies had a sobering effect on the opposition.

The opposition group was clearly limited in its ability to use members of the military to support them. When the DPRK was founded, the partisan group already concentrated itself in the military.<sup>112</sup> Kim even founded the Pyongyang School (later the Central Party School and Central Military School) to train military cadres, which only accepted students personally related to Kim or the partisans.<sup>113</sup> After losing de facto control of the military to Peng Dehuai and members of the Yan'an group during the Korean War, Kim set out to stabilize his control over the armed forces. Choe Yong-geon successfully purged a number of Soviet Koreans from the military in 1953.<sup>114</sup> In 1955, Kim completely defeated his main competitor for loyalty among the armed forces when two plenums officially made decisions against Pak Il-u, one of Peng Dehuai's deputies in the united command during the Korean War who had important support among the armed forces.<sup>115</sup> In the December 1955 plenum decision on Pak, he was accused of "posing as the 'representative' of those people who had come from China."<sup>116</sup>

Some generals were demoted for not praising Kim Il Sung enough in their lectures.<sup>117</sup> Koreans who had served in China but not in Kim's Manchurian partisan group complained that they were being

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<sup>112</sup> Wada, *The Korean War*, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Kim Hakjoon, *Dynasty: The Hereditary Succession Politics of North Korea*, 54–55.

<sup>114</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 75.

<sup>115</sup> RGANI. Fond 5, opis 28, delo 314, list 192.

<sup>116</sup> "Decision of the KWP CC December Plenum, 2-3 December 1955, Concerning the anti-Party, Factional Activity of Pak Il-u". GARF. Wilson Center translation. Pak was actually removed earlier, at the April 1955th plenum. See Balazs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964*, Cold War International History Project Series (Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), 68.

<sup>117</sup> "[To the] CPSU CC. From Cde. Brezhnev concerning Korea". GARF. Wilson Center translation.

pushed out of any important positions in the military.<sup>118</sup> Choe Yong-geon and his colleagues in the military looked down on those members of the Korean People's Army who had served in China.<sup>119</sup> When Kim attempted to head off the impending crisis at the August plenum by talking to those dissatisfied with his leadership, Kim Du-bong openly complained that the basis for the Korean People's Army was the partisan friends of Kim Il Sung.<sup>120</sup>

No persuasive evidence shows that the opposition had the ability or intentions to execute a coup, although one North Korean defector regrets that the opposition did not attempt one by using the purged generals as a "reliable reserve force."<sup>121</sup> One Polish report claims that there was a plan to use a "storm unit" of students from the Institute of Construction, but that "no preparations of a military character have been ascertained."<sup>122</sup> The Chinese embassy heard rumors that Kim Chang-man told the opposition that "no matter how hard they tried, we have the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the army."<sup>123</sup> According to one North Korean defector, at the August plenum Kim Du-bong asked Kim Il Sung, "Do you think you are everything if you hold military power?"<sup>124</sup> Moreover, Kim used armed forces to block the highways surrounding Pyongyang and had his quarters and main place of work put on alert. Two infantry divisions were mobilized twenty kilometers north of Pyongyang. Kim even commanded his partisan comrade Kim Gwang-hyeop to put border troops on a war-footing.<sup>125</sup>

Despite Kim's strengths, the sensitivity of military control was still clearly visible. The "Decision of the KWP CC PLENUM" included the line: "In addition, they even tried to foist anti-Party tendencies onto the army."<sup>126</sup> When reporting on the August plenum back to Moscow, the Soviet embassy believed

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<sup>118</sup> RGANI. Fond 5, opis 28, delo 314, list 49.

<sup>119</sup> AVPRF. "1957-2". Wilson Center physical copy.

<sup>120</sup> RGANI, Fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 339.

<sup>121</sup> Lim, *The Founding of a Dynasty*, 229.

<sup>122</sup> "A Note from Sluczanski to Several Comrades in Warsaw concerning the "August Group" and the Political Situation in the DPRK." December 9, 1957. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>123</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 346.

<sup>124</sup> Lim, *The Founding of a Dynasty*, 226.

<sup>125</sup> Jin, *Yijiuwuliu Nian*, 26.

<sup>126</sup> "Decision of the KWP Plenum. 30-31 August, 1956". GARF. Wilson Center translation.

that “dissatisfaction at the situation which has developed in the Party included even some of the senior officials of the army”.<sup>127</sup> In March 1958, three major military figures were removed and party committees were introduced into the military.<sup>128</sup> According to Minister of Internal Affairs Pan Hak-se, as late as December 1956 the leadership was concerned that Choe Chang-ik would rely on general-lieutenant Kim Ung, the vice minister of national defense, and Pak Heo-sang, a former commander of a front.<sup>129</sup> According to defector Yu Song-chol, the “military revolt plan” was forged by the government as an excuse to expand the size of the purges.<sup>130</sup> Although the possibility of the opposition linking with the military was slight, this level of concern shows the extent to which Kim was concerned about any possibility of such connections.

The only reliable piece of evidence suggesting that the opposition considered violent measures is a record of a conversation between Ri Pil-gyu and Soviet charges d'affaires Petrov. Li began by complaining about how over-the-top praise of the Manchurian partisans was leading to the falsification of history. He called for the removal of Kim Il Sung and referred to two paths: peaceful removal, and if that was not successful, violent. The second path would require underground activities and the support of the Chinese troops.<sup>131</sup> Yet as Lankov points out, this was the only opposition figure to raise this possibility.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, Li did not mention the use of KPA troops, only Chinese.

The military was not the only power ministry that played an important role, however. The Ministry of Internal Affairs also played a strong role, largely due to the role of partisan figures. When opposition activity accelerated during Kim Il Sung’s trip abroad in the summer of 1956, Choe Yong-geon

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<sup>127</sup> “The August KWP CC Plenum.” GARF. Wilson Center translation. “Deputy Minister of Defense Kim [Won Sun], Deputy Chief of the Military Academy Ri [Ur Gyu], and Chief of the Political Department of the Navel Directorate of the KPA Ri [Yn Ho] are being called to account concerning the case of the “anti-Party group.”

<sup>128</sup> The head of the Air Force, commander fo the 2 Army, and “chief of the political council,” probably a reference to the head of the General Political Department. “A Report form Comrade Sluczanski based on a Telegram from Comrade Siedlecki regarding the Agenda of the March Conference.” March 19, 1958. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>129</sup> RGANI, Fond 5, opis 28, delo 486, list 4.

<sup>130</sup> Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 107.

<sup>131</sup> Lankov, *August*, 131.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.



summoned the vice minister of internal affairs, Kan San-ho. Choe warned him that the Yan'an Koreans were plotting an "anti-party coup," demanded that steps be taken to guarantee Kim's personal security, and that the minister of internal affairs and the head of military counter-intelligence be summoned back from overseas immediately.<sup>133</sup>

## **Second Episode: Introduction**

The next major crisis that saw Kim defeat serious challenges and further strengthen his position occurred between 1966 and 1969. The origins of this crisis lay primarily in three areas: tensions over Kim's radical policy of generating enough military power to both instigate and/or exploit a period of political instability in South Korea<sup>134</sup>, Beijing's attempts to destabilize the DPRK, and possibly concerns over the succession. This remains a mysterious time period, as the relevant Chinese documents remain classified and the Soviets did not enjoy their previous high levels of access to the DPRK elite.<sup>135</sup> However, the available evidence allows us to make certain theoretical conclusions within the restricted area of the most likely possibilities. Kim clearly managed the challenges identified in this section by extending the purges in his party against some of his own partisan comrades, ultimately removing all but his closest compatriots and family members. In this moment of crisis, Kim's political base would narrow towards those for whom his martial prestige and blood relations commanded the most loyalty.

## **Brief Chronology**

Over the 1960s, Kim Il Sung's radical economic policies led to increased political tensions at home. The DPRK's relations with the Soviet Union and especially China dramatically deteriorated.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>134</sup> For a treatment of North Korea's foreign policy goals during this time period, see Balazs Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam: A New Look at North Korea's Militant Strategy, 1962–1970," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (October 2012): 122–66.

<sup>135</sup> For example, in December 1970 the Soviet foreign ministry warned the DPRK ambassador in Moscow that the Koreans were allowing "incidents of unfriendly relations" towards Soviets in North Korea. In August, two Soviet diplomats had been detained by Korean public security officers for meeting with a Soviet citizen and her daughter. RGANI fond 3, opis 72, delo 395, listy 31-32.

During the first years of the Cultural Revolution, the PRC made strong signals that it was dissatisfied with Kim's leadership. In this context of intense political strain, Kim purged former major ally Pak Geum-cheol in the spring of 1967. Over 1968 and 1969, Kim also removed the minister of defense and chief of staff.

## Second Episode

### *Economic Difficulties and Worsening Inter-Korean Relations*

Hypothesis 1a would predict that Kim should co-opt his competitors during a period of political challenge. However, the evidence shows decisively that Kim reacted to an intense political situation by even further relying on those members of the leadership for whom he had the greatest trust: partisans who had served directly with him and his own family.

One key reason for the intensified political atmosphere at home was related to the situation in South Korea. Kim was in a hurry, afraid that only his generation of partisans might be up to the task of unification.<sup>136</sup> A US National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Kim "has apparently decided not to wait for objective conditions to develop spontaneously, but to utilize violence and intimidation in the belief that this will somehow serve to create a revolutionary potential in the South."<sup>137</sup> Beginning in October 1966, armed harassment of US and ROK forces in the DMZ increased: in May 1967, the DPRK infiltrated small groups into South Korea by sea, in September 1967, acts of sabotage in the South occurred, and in January 1968, North Korean special forces attempted to assassinate the ROK president and captured the US intel ship *Pueblo*. Kim likely concluded after the South Korean political crises of

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<sup>136</sup> Zhou Enlai: "If they are going to come, then earlier is better. Before those of us who have fought once before die off." DPRK Vice Prime Minister Ri Ju-yeon: "Comrade Premier [Kim Il Sung] also says that. [They should] come and fight while we are still alive." These comments are strikingly similar to Deng's June 9 comments after Tiananmen about how it was better that the crisis occurred while he and other revolutionaries were still alive. "Record of the Third Conversation between Zhou Enlai and North Korean Vice Prime Minister Ri Ju-yeon." November 11, 1965. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>137</sup> "Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 14.2-69: Confrontation in Korea." National Security Archive Online Database.

1960-1961 that North Korea would have to maintain the military tools to exploit any future instability in the South, and in such quantity and quality that reliance on fickle neighbors would not be necessary.<sup>138</sup>

This plan had major implications for the domestic economy. In February 1965, Kim Il Sung freely admitted “We are not able to secure increase of workers’ wages and salaries. This, too, has obviously many causes. The main one is that we have to maintain a large army. Just about 30% is spent on the army.”<sup>139</sup> The CIA reported that the military build-up caused the goals of the five-year plan set for 1967 to be postponed to 1970, and that even then most goals would not be met.<sup>140</sup> The Soviets reported in March 1969 that the 1968 plan was not completed, and, according to “unofficial information,” more than 40% of the budget was being spent on the military.<sup>141</sup>

Meanwhile, the North Koreans were beginning to consider the succession issue. Because of the attack on Stalin in the Soviet Union after his death, as well as the purge of old revolutionaries during the Cultural Revolution in China more recently, this question started to become especially prominent. Some members of the leadership began to see Kim Il Sung’s younger brother, Kim Yeong-ju, as the successor.<sup>142</sup> These deliberations also contributed to the growing tension in the elite.

### *Tensions with Communist Allies*

These difficulties on the peninsula were exacerbated by poor relations with not only Moscow but especially Beijing. Evidence clearly shows that the North Korean leader was afraid that the Soviet Union would abandon the DPRK in a crisis. Kim Il told Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin in January 1965 that “the Soviet Union had betrayed Cuba at the time of the Caribbean crisis, and later it also betrayed the

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<sup>138</sup> “North Korean Strategy and Tactics: An Appraisal.” CIA Crest. CIA-RDP08S02113R000100120001-5.

<sup>139</sup> “Record of a Conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK Comrade V.P. Moskovsky.” Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>140</sup> “Thoughts on North Korea.” CIA Crest. RDP80B01439R000500110028-7.

<sup>141</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, list 72. Wilson Center collection.

<sup>142</sup> Kim Hakjoon, *Dynasty: The Hereditary Succession Politics of North Korea*, 63–64.

Vietnamese.”<sup>143</sup> Kim was afraid that the Soviets would betray the DPRK if another chance for unification presented itself. In a conversation with Liu Shaoqi, he remarked: “They watch Europe. They view us as toes, and they view Europe as the heart.... When Stalin was still alive, he wanted to enter the Korean War, but [even] he did not. How would Khrushchev ever do so?”<sup>144</sup> His antipathy towards the Soviets was intense, at times even bewildering. In 1964, he told a Chinese goodwill delegation that Soviet women were marrying DPRK students to “insert people for espionage activities.” After these students were sent away to different locations to separate them, the Soviet women allegedly “messed around with ruffians and engaged in prostitution.” They first seduced Albanian students, but after the Albanian ambassador intervened “they turned to African students.... It seems that the Soviet Embassy is constantly providing them with missions.”<sup>145</sup>

Yet by 1966 the Chinese Cultural Revolution was much more threatening to stability within the DPRK than any Soviet grumbling.<sup>146</sup> By October 1966, Kim spoke openly about his frustrations with the Chinese. A month later, Kim told the Soviet ambassador that “The Chinese want to conduct a cultural revolution at one stroke. Is this not an example of left opportunism on the part of the CPC and its leaders?”<sup>147</sup> According to a report from the Russian embassy in Pyongyang, “the so-called ‘Cultural Revolution’ in China has forced the Korean leadership to take steps to strengthen Party and government personnel both at HQ and at the grass roots. Steps were taken at the end of 1966 to reorganize the highest echelon of the Party apparatus, apparently not ignoring the possible negative consequences of the DPRK of the so-called ‘Cultural Revolution.’” The Soviets interpreted a remark on party unity by Deputy

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<sup>143</sup> “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.” January 8, 1965. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>144</sup> “Minutes of Conversation between Liu Shaoqi and Kim Il Sung.” September 15, 1963. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>145</sup> “Minutes of Conversation between Kim Il Sung and the Chinese Economic Goodwill Delegation.” September 5, 1964. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>146</sup> Bernd Schaefer, *North Korea’s “Adventurism” and China’s Long Shadow, 1966-1972*, Working Paper #44 (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, 2004).

<sup>147</sup> “First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in North Korean Reports on Sino-Korean Relations in 1966”. December 2, 1966. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

Defense Minister O Jin-U as a response to Chinese attempts to sow discord. Kim told the Soviet ambassador that the Cultural Revolution “has seriously alarmed us.” Koreans were speaking of the CR as a great madness and that Mao was “an old fool who has gone out of his mind.”<sup>148</sup> After the Chinese embassy put up posters on its walls, the DPRK government refused to allow Korean citizens to walk anywhere near the building. When the Chinese were told to take down the posters, they said they would “observe those laws of the DPRK that they liked, and not observe those they did not like.”<sup>149</sup>

Koreans told the Cuban ambassador that Mao had become senile and should try Korean ginseng root.<sup>150</sup> The Chinese even began exerting economic pressure by limiting the delivery of critical material like coking coal, sulphur, and some foods.<sup>151</sup> Kim was forced to publicly meet with Kim Gwang-hyeop after Chinese Red Guards spread a fabricated rumor that the latter had executed a coup. Kim told the Cuban ambassador that by now “Mao Zedong has made twice as many mistakes as Khrushchev did,” and said Choe Yong-geon’s mind was livelier than Mao’s even though they were the same age.<sup>152</sup> The North Korean ambassador in Bucharest told East German representatives that “it is obvious that China wants to organize an overthrow [of Kim Il Sung] in North Korea.”<sup>153</sup> The Romanians even believed that the DPRK was afraid that Beijing would activate the remnants of the “Yan’an faction” living in China. In line with one theme of this chapter, the Romanians believed this was a threat “especially with regard to the cult of personality in North Korea, by disclosing the fictitious nature of some of Kim Il Sung’s achievements.”<sup>154</sup> In October 1967, a Red Guard newspaper accused the DPRK of digging up the graves of Chinese soldiers and warned “Kim Il Sung and his minions in all seriousness that those who side with the US and

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<sup>148</sup> “The DPRK attitude Toward the So-called ‘Cultural Revolution’ in China”. March 7, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>149</sup> AVPRF, Fond 0102, opis 23, p 112, delo 24, l 73-74, Sergei Radchenko notebook #9, Wilson Center.

<sup>150</sup> Schaefer, *North Korea’s “Adventurism” and China’s Long Shadow, 1966-1972*, 5.

<sup>151</sup> Regarding Some Questions About Soviet-North Korean Relations.” May 2, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>152</sup> “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.” March 9, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>153</sup> “Excerpt from Information Report Embassy Bucharest.” June 26, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>154</sup> “Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, No.76.161, TOP SECRET.” May 20, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

revisionism and continue anti-Chinese policy are not expected to live through a happy ending. Sooner or later the Korean people will rise up and call them to account.”<sup>155</sup> Yao Wenyuan, a member of the Gang of Four, called Kim Il Sung a “revisionist” in November 1967 in an internal speech, which was equivalent to calling for his removal.<sup>156</sup> Chinese diplomats in Pyongyang “demonstratively” refused to applaud when Kim Il Sung’s name was mentioned at exhibitions and movie screenings.<sup>157</sup>

Most troubling was the deteriorating situation at the border. A Korean train was halted because the driver refused to wear a Mao badge, and Kim even warned the Soviet ambassador that “the DPRK has a long border with China and everything conceivable can happen.”<sup>158</sup> In the fall of 1967 ethnic Koreans murdered by Red Guards in Manchuria were put on a Sinuiju-bound train with signs like “Look, this will also be your fate, you tiny revisionists!”<sup>159</sup> The Chinese set up loud speakers and broadcast propaganda into the DPRK, calling on people to “smash Korean revisionists and Kim Il Sung.”<sup>160</sup> In 1968, Kim refused to fly over mainland China because “a forced landing might happen” and “insults by Red Guards might occur.”<sup>161</sup> On several occasions Chinese soldiers entered DPRK territory, the most serious case being around 1969. On this occasion, Kim ordered that, if they advanced any farther, five of them be captured alive.<sup>162</sup> After this incident, the Chinese increased their demonstrations on their side of the river, shouting “Down with Kim Il Sung” and “Down with the Korean revisionists!”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> “Note from the GDR Embassy in Pyongyang to Comrade Libermann.” October 27, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>156</sup> Schaefer, *North Korea’s “Adventurism” and China’s Long Shadow, 1966-1972*, 8.

<sup>157</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, list 7. Wilson Center collection.

<sup>158</sup> “50 Anniversary of the October Revolution in the DPRK.” November 13, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>159</sup> Schaefer, *North Korea’s “Adventurism” and China’s Long Shadow, 1966-1972*, 10.

<sup>160</sup> “Record of Conversation between Comrade J. Batmunkh and Kim Il Sung.” November 20, 1986. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>161</sup> “A Conversation with the 1 Secretary of the Embassy of the USSR in the DPRK, Comrade Zvetkov, and Comrade Jarck.” July 29, 1969. Wilson Center Digital Archive. Zhou later blamed the deterioration in relations on “some bad people among us.” “Record of Conversation: Zhou Enlai on the Apology to North Korea.” June 15, 1971. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>162</sup> “Memorandum on the Conversation between Kim Il Sung and Todor Zhivkov.” October 30, 1973. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>163</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 463, list 125. Wilson Center collection.

According to one Soviet cable from January 1969, the Chinese threat was worth taking seriously. According to the report, “apparently, it is not so much ideological penetration in the direct sense as the possibility of direct subversive actions and provocations by the Chinese that disturb the Korean government. This also can be seen in the statement by Kim Il Sung: ‘Mao Zedong hates us, the Chinese are embittered, we can expect anything from them.’”<sup>164</sup>

#### *Increased Reliance on Partisan Comrades and Family*

These threats led Kim to rely more upon his partisan comrades and family, as predicted by hypothesis 1b. After the political battles of 1956, Kim relied on an increasingly narrow set of devoted confidants to rule the DPRK. By 1958, he was able to finalize the purge of those who had opposed him at the August plenum. Two Soviet Koreans who had assisted Kim in these power struggles, Pak Jeong-ae and Nam Il, were left in leadership positions but stripped of any important power. The 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1961 elected a Central Committee with 27 new partisans who fought in Manchuria, bringing the number to 37 out of a total of 85. Because Kim Il Sung returned to Korea in 1945 with 130 partisan comrades, of whom a number had died, this meant approximately one third of all the living partisans were full members of the CC.<sup>165</sup> In 1965, the last significant member of the Yan’an group, Kim Chang-man, was removed from the Political Bureau and his position as vice chairman of the party.<sup>166</sup>

Soon after the split with China became open in October 1966, major purges erupted in the KWP. Unfortunately, we know much less about these purges than the ones in 1956. At the time, even the Chinese were flabbergasted, telling a Romanian diplomat that 80% of the reasons for the removal were unclear.<sup>167</sup> However, the timing of the purges, available background information about those purged, and a scattering of hints from Eastern bloc embassy reports allow us to at least frame some hypotheses. The

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<sup>164</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, list 9. Wilson Center collection.

<sup>165</sup> Lankov, *August*, 306.

<sup>166</sup> “Information on the Korean Workers’ Party.” October, 1966. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>167</sup> “Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, No. 76.208, TOP SECRET.” June 15, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

implications of the purges are clear, however: Kim would henceforth only rely on those members of the partisan group who served under him directly. Coincidentally or not, they would so firmly solidify Kim's dictatorship that it allowed him a few short years later to begin the installation of his son as successor.

The first round of major purges took place in March or April 1967 when several major figures were removed from the Korean leadership, including Ri Hyo-sun, Pak Geum-cheol, and Kim Do-man. Some observers concluded that they had resisted the Kim cult. Because the cult of personality was less fragrant before the October 1966 party conference and immediately afterwards, as well as comments by North Koreans that "while they can tolerate deviations from the party line, they can't tolerate a lack of respect for the leader," the Romanians concluded that they had opposed the Kim cult.<sup>168</sup>

The Chinese charge d'affaires strongly hinted that their relationship with China played a role, describing that the purge of these officials meant that "the last nationalist personalities who were in favor of friendly relations with the PRC ceased to be make [sic] their voices heard in the press and in other propaganda media."<sup>169</sup> The Hungarians reached a similar conclusion, writing that the first wave of purges that included Pak "affected primarily those leaders who had adopted a more or less pro-Chinese standpoint."<sup>170</sup> Yet an East German report concluded that "is it generally wrong for the evaluation of contemporary and prospective developments of the DPRK to assess certain persons to be pro Soviet or pro Chinese."<sup>171</sup> Moreover, the DPRK Minister of Internal Affairs told the Soviet Ambassador in August 1960 that, as opposed to Kim Chang-man, Pak Geum-cheol had "a very good attitude towards the Soviet Union."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> "Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, No. 76.203, TOP SECRET." June 13, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>169</sup> "Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, TOP SECRET." No. 76.247." July 28, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>170</sup> "Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry." November 25, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>171</sup> "Letter from GDR Embassy in the DPRK to State Secretary Hegen." December 22, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>172</sup> "Journal of Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 31 July 1960." July 31, 1960. Wilson Center Digital Archive.



On the other hand, some pieces of evidence hint that the dispute was primarily over policy questions. An East German report concluded that “we can now state with certainty, these conflicts also concerned the course of the party.” The GDR embassy concluded that the purged were less sanguine about unification and the possibility to create real instability in South Korea, and that they believed economic development was inappropriately being sacrificed at the expense of military development. They provide one key piece of evidence: Ri Hyo-sun had told the Soviet ambassador that nobody knew when unification was possible, but after his purge the emphasis was on the need to achieve unification during Kim’s lifetime.<sup>173</sup> The Soviets also believed that the issue was primarily about policy, writing of “evidence of a desire of the Korean leadership to involve new people in running the party and the country from among those who unquestionably approve of Kim Il Sung’s current domestic and foreign policies.”<sup>174</sup> In any case, the implications were clear. According to a Soviet report, “Those newly appointed to leading posts are basically those with a military background who had participated with Kim Il Sung in the partisan fighting in the 1930s and who had commanding posts in the army in the war of 1950-1953.”<sup>175</sup>

The Soviets also noticed the increasingly prominent role of Kim’s family among the leadership. By February 1969, his younger brother controlled the organization-instruction department of the party, his son commanded his personal guard, his wife was first vice chairman of the Union of Democratic Women of Korea, his cousin was in charge of ideological education for youth and the Pioneers, while the husband of that cousin was first vice foreign minister, another cousin was in charge of the history department at the Kim Il Sung Pyongyang University, his uncle was chairman of the Democratic Party of Korea, the husband of one relative was commander of the general staff (despite what the Soviets claimed was his

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<sup>173</sup> “Information about Some New Aspects on Korean Workers’ Party Positions Concerning Issues of Domestic and Foreign Policy.” August 18, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>174</sup> Mitchell Lerner, *“Mostly Propaganda in Nature”: Kim Il Sung, the Juche Ideology, and the Second Korean War*, North Korean International Documentation Project (Wilson Center, 2010), 33.

<sup>175</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, list 74. Wilson Center collection.

poor military talent), his brother-in-law was in charge of the material perquisites of the top leadership, and the head of the political police was also married to a Kim relative.<sup>176</sup>

### *Kim Tightens Control Over the Military*

During this time of political tension, the military was especially important. A Soviet report from March 1969 noted that “special attention is placed on the cultivation of tough discipline and personal loyalty to the leader [vozhd’] in the military. The leadership of the army and security organs (no matter who occupies them) are under the direct control of Kim Il Sung.”<sup>177</sup> After the purge of Pak Geum-cheol, soldiers with automatic guns were seen in the hallways of the Central Committee headquarters.<sup>178</sup>

The importance of the military is even more obvious in the second major set of purges. In 1968, Defense Minister Kim Chang-bong was replaced with Choe Hyeon<sup>179</sup>, a man with especially close ties to Kim from the partisan era. In February 1969, Choe Gwang was replaced as chief of staff by O Jin-u, a man who according to Kim Il Sung’s autobiography followed him as a teenager and played with his pistol before finally being allowed to join the partisans.<sup>180</sup> The director of the General Political Department, Ho Pong-hak, and Kim Gwang-hyeop, a vice premier and major partisan figure, were also removed. Years earlier, Kim Gwang-hyeop spoke out in favor of liberating Kim Il Sung’s old nemesis Pak Il-u, which may indicate he had the habit of speaking his mind.<sup>181</sup> In July 1957, Soviet Korean Park Ui-wan said that the only people to express their own opinions at Presidium meetings were him and Kim Gwang-hyeop.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 462, listy 7-9. Wilson Center collection.

<sup>177</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, list 75. Wilson Center collection.

<sup>178</sup> The role of the military in the 1966-1968 purges remains opaque. One piece of evidence that hints at its possible importance is that shortly after the purge of Pak Geum-cheol soldiers with automatic guns were seen in the hallways of the Central Committee headquarters. “Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, TOP SECRET, No. 76.276.” July 30, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>179</sup> Choe served with Kim in the First Route Army.

<sup>180</sup> Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 52.

<sup>181</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 177.

<sup>182</sup> AVPRF. “1957 1.” Wilson Center physical copy. Kim Gwang-hyeop also spoke out against Kim Il Sung’s nomination of Yun Gong-heum’s to become deputy prime minister. How to interpret this action is difficult, as Nam Il, who was close to Kim at this time, also opposed it, as well as Kim Du-bong, a fellow member of the Yan’an group. Also, it is not clear whether at this time Yun had turned against Kim or was still supportive of the personality

In the new order, this last individual who seems to have felt powerful enough to express his own opinion was no longer acceptable.

According to one Eastern bloc account, Defense Minister Kim Chang-bong and Kim Gwang-hyeop were reportedly blamed for failing to assassinate Park Chung Hee in the Blue House raid in January 1968.<sup>183</sup> A CIA report concluded that the purged generals had “reportedly convinced Kim that chances for sparking a revolution in South Korea were good” and convinced Kim to choose a more radical policy that ultimately failed.<sup>184</sup> Another CIA report, however, believed that Kim Chang-bong and Choe Gwang were instead purged with the intent of “replacing them with generals willing to support his adventurist policy (as well as Kim’s fortress-Korea domestic program.” The CIA believed that a speech by O in February 1969 hinted that “opposition to Kim had developed within the army, probably on the issue of risk-taking such as the seizure of the *Pueblo*.”<sup>185</sup> One Soviet embassy report blamed the purges on “the unsuccessful actions of the North Korean armed forces and major failures of the underground organizations in South Korea.”<sup>186</sup> A North Korean defector named Hwang Il-ho links the purges to the succession issue, arguing that Kim Chang-bong had devised a plan without Kim Il Sung’s knowledge to violently unite the two Koreas by Kim Il Sung’s 60 birthday and thereby undermine Kim Yeong-ju.<sup>187</sup> Kim Il Sung himself would later tell the director of the ROK intelligence agency, Lee Hu Rak, that the raid on the Blue House was conducted by “leftist chauvinists within our structure” and that he fired those responsible afterwards.<sup>188</sup> At present, we have no way to judge the relative merits of the “too radical,”

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cult. Therefore it is unclear if Kim Gwang-hyeop was speaking his mind or somehow playing Kim’s game. RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 412, list 229.

<sup>183</sup> “Military-political situation in the DPRK.” June 4, 1968. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>184</sup> “North Korean Strategy and Tactics: An Appraisal.” CIA Crest. CIA-RDP08S02113R000100120001-5.

<sup>185</sup> “Kim Il-sung Purges Probable Opponents of His Adventurism.” CIA Crest. CIA-RDP08S02113R000100050001-3.

<sup>186</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 462, list 248. Wilson Center Collection.

<sup>187</sup> Ken Gause, “The North Korean Leadership: System Dynamics and Fault Lines,” in *North Korean Policy Elites* (Institute for Defense Analysis, 2004), 11–22. Kim Hakjoon argues that “They may have calculated that if their ventures proved successful, their influence would expand sharply within the KWP, allowing them to challenge Kim Yong-ju in the succession struggle.” 75.

<sup>188</sup> Kim did not explain why it took so long for the firings to take place. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley PubCo, 1997), 24.

“not radical enough,” “poor display,” or “succession” hypotheses. But as the Soviets pointed out after these purges, “All key posts in the party and government are occupied by those who over many years had worked under the direct leadership of Kim Il Sung and are known here as his close compatriots even during the period of anti-Japanese partisan struggle.”<sup>189</sup>

### *The Relationship Between History and Authority*

The purges of 1967 to 1969 are interesting for another reason: not only did they occur parallel to an even greater intensification of pro-partisan propaganda, but that propaganda was increasingly restricted to a smaller set of individuals within the leadership. The extent to which the authority of the top leadership revolved around their history as partisan heroes is striking. Japan’s top North Korean scholar, Wada Haruki, describes this time period as the moment when fighting in Manchuria becoming “the state mythology.” Henceforth, the nation would be portrayed as one single guerrilla unit under Kim Il Sung’s leadership.<sup>190</sup>

The removal of Pak Geum-cheol led to a further narrowing of the historical case for which figures in the leadership had sufficient martial prestige to have an influence on political affairs. Pak was considered a member of the partisan clique, but his role was special: Pak played a role in the creation of the Kapsan Operation Committee. This was an underground group that existed in Korea near the Manchurian border and helped supply the partisans with resources. Crucially, the Kapsan group assisted Kim Il Sung in his attack on Pochonbo in June 1937.<sup>191</sup>

In a major Presidium meeting that set the stage for the August plenum in 1956, Choe Chang-ik “accused Pak Geum-cheol of factionalist activity, supporting a study of the history of the KWP according

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<sup>189</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 462, list 248. Wilson Center Collection.

<sup>190</sup> Wada Haruki, “The Structure and Political Culture of the Kim Jong Il Regime: Its Novelty and Difficulties,” in *North Korea in Transition and Policy Choice: Domestic Structure and External Relations*, ed. Jae Kyu Park (Seoul: Chungang Ilbosa, 1994), 60–61.

<sup>191</sup> Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, Studies of the East Asian Institute (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 35.

to which Kim Il Sung created a party outside the DPRK, and under his, Pak Geum Cheol's, leadership, a communist party was created within the country."<sup>192</sup> In May 1958, Kim told members of the Soviet embassy the following about Pak: "When the Japanese were in power he had been imprisoned for a long time, and his wife was our messenger/mediator between our comrades in the underground and the guerrilla unit."<sup>193</sup> Therefore, the Kapsan faction was united with Kim both in their real, but perhaps somewhat limited, connections during the 1930s and the useful propaganda implications they provided to in some way, however fleeting, connect Kim with the situation within Korea. Yet the tensions are obvious: how could Kim accept the idea that he was only the leader of the revolution outside of Korea?

According to an official English publication of Kim's speech in March 1967, Pak Geum-cheol was accused of "individual heroism." This referred to Pak's alleged attempt to have a film commissioned about the role of his wife in the Kapsan group, and also have his birthplace rebuilt.<sup>194</sup> According to the Chinese charge d'affaires in Pyongyang, the roots of Pak's troubles with Kim were related to the cult of personality and its implications for his own revolutionary achievements: "It is perfectly reasonable for Pak Geum-cheol, the only leader from the current structure who during the harshest years of anti-Japanese fighting operated and endured with great heroism inside Korea, not to accept that all the credit for the revolutionary and socialist construction in the DPRK goes to Kim Il Sung, who spent the entire period of the revolution in China and in the Soviet Union, in much milder conditions."<sup>195</sup>

In mid-1967, the East German embassy wrote a report that since the purge of Pak and Ri "the role of anti-Japanese partisans in Korea's recent history and Kim Il Sung's role as their leader have been elevated to a legendary level."<sup>196</sup> In February 1968, a GDR report concluded that "[r]ecent speeches of Kim Il Sung himself arguing continuity between the 1930s and the origins of the DPRK, show that some

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<sup>192</sup> RGANI, fond 5, opis 28, delo 410, list 354.

<sup>193</sup> AVPRF. "1958-2". Wilson Center physical copy.

<sup>194</sup> Jae-Cheon Lim, *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 39.

<sup>195</sup> "Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, TOP SECRET, No. 76.247." July 28, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>196</sup> "Information about Some New Aspects on Korean Workers' Party Positions Concerning Issues of Domestic and Foreign Policy." August 18, 1967. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

historical factors from the years antedating the liberation and the origins of the Korean Democratic People's Republic have not yet ceased to be effective and are still problems that are being addressed internally by the Korean party."<sup>197</sup>

Some South Korean analysts believe the purge of the Kapsan group related to the succession issue and different interpretations of historical legitimacy. The apparent successor at the time, Kim Yeong-ju, was Kim Il Sung's younger brother. However, Yeong-ju had not been a major figure in the Korean revolutionary movement. This displeased Pak Geum-cheol, a man who had spent several years in prison and helped found the Kapsan group.<sup>198</sup> According to South Korean analyst Kim Hakjoon, the Kapsan group believed that Kim's brother's "anti-Japanese career was suspect":

Since Pak was a renowned anti-Japanese activist who had been sentenced to life imprisonment in 1937 and released from prison only after Korean liberation, and Ri was not only a famed anti-Japanese activist himself but the elder brother of Ri Che-sun, a leading anti-Japanese activist who had been executed in prison just a few months before liberation, their opposition could not be disregarded. Pak and Ri were aiming for Pak himself to be considered successor.<sup>199</sup>

Historical legacies also played a role in the fall of Kim Gwang-hyeop. Kim was the only living Korean other than Kim Il Sung and Choe Yong-geon who had a prominent leadership position in the party organizations created among the exiles in the Soviet Union in the early 1940s. Moreover, Kim was a member of the Second Route Army, which meant in Manchuria he had served separately from Kim Il Sung's First Route Army.<sup>200</sup>

The 5<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in February 1970 showed the extent of the purges over the previous three years. Twelve members elected to the Central Committee at the previous 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress did not appear on the new roster. Eleven of them had been purged. Six of the purged were associated with the Second Front Army, one was associated with the Third Front Army of the First Route Army, two were

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<sup>197</sup> "Report from East German Ambassador to North Korea, 'Some Aspects of the Political Line of the Korean Workers' Party after the January Events'" February 15, 1968. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>198</sup> Lim, *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea*, 38–39.

<sup>199</sup> Kim Hakjoon, *Dynasty: The Hereditary Succession Politics of North Korea*, 64.

<sup>200</sup> Huang, *Dongbei Diqiu Chaoxian Gongchanzhuyizhe de "Shuangchong Shiming" Yanjiu [The Research on "Dual Mission" of Korean Communists in the Northeast]*, 178.

associated with the Fifth Division of the First Front Army, and one was associated with the Third Front Army. Of the 13 new members of the Central Committee, all were attached to Kim Il Sung's First Route Army. At least ten came from Kim's own Second Front Army. Most of these had been child soldiers. Of the 31 members of the Central Committee, 26 were associated with the First Route Army, and of those 26, 17 came from the Sixth Division of the Second Front Army. Therefore the leadership of North Korea was no longer dominated by the Manchurian faction, but by a small subset with only the closest ties to Kim Il Sung.<sup>201</sup>

Interestingly, historical disputes were connected with the Chinese threat as well. The DPRK press in 1968 emphasized that the Koreans had fought for the liberation of the Chinese people in Manchuria, and one museum argued that Chinese communists in the second half of the 1930s had engaged in "leftist" opportunism in a dispute with the Koreans about how to fight the Japanese.<sup>202</sup> In one especially bizarre incident, the Chinese created a powerful dam to make the river cover the part of the Korean riverbank that had a major monument to the Korean partisans who fought at Pochonbo at 1937.<sup>203</sup>

### **Third Episode: The Installation of Kim Jong Il**

The purges of the late 1960s cleared the way for Kim Il Sung's ultimate decision to install his son as successor.<sup>204</sup> That process is once again strong evidence for hypothesis 1b: the succession plan was

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<sup>201</sup> Wada, *Kin Nichisei to Manshu konichi senso*, 378–379.

<sup>202</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, list 6. Wilson Center collection.

<sup>203</sup> RGANI fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, listy 187-188. Wilson Center collection.

<sup>204</sup> Hwang Jang-yop claims that the Kapsan group had strong ties with Kim Il Sung's brother and apparent successor at the time Kim Yong-ju. He also claims that Kim Jong Il even played a role in the purge of the Kapsan group. Hwang Jang-yop, *Na-Neun Yeoksa-Eui Jinri-Reul [I Saw the Truth of History]*. Another defector claims that the 1968 purge of the military partisans took place because Kim Il Sung doubted their support of Kim Jong Il as successor (See *Founding of a Dynasty*, pg 203). However, we have no direct evidence that Kim Jong Il had been nominated as successor by that time, let alone any evidence that the purges had any relationship with his rise to power, although one INR report from the Department of State believed that the campaign to establish Kim Jong Il "probably was conceived in the 1960s." "North Korea: Kim Chong-il's Succession Prospects". National Security Archive Online Database. Most CIA reports, however, date the decision to groom Kim Jong Il as the successor around 1973. For example, see "The North Korean Succession." CIA Crest. CIA-RDP81B00401R002100110012-7. Kong Dan Oh believes the preparation for the succession started in June 1971 when Kim Il Sung made a speech about the importance of the "post-liberation" generation to lead the revolution. Dan Oh Kong, *The Leadership Change in*

entirely dependent on the elites, and the selection of Kim's son was obviously the result of a decision that only a family member could be trusted as successor.

Kim's power by the early 1970s was overwhelming. The CIA concluded in October 1978 that Kim's ability to install his son as successor was high because of Kim's great personal power, the lack of any obvious challengers, and political indoctrination. The younger Kim was portrayed as the man who could best interpret his father's thoughts.<sup>205</sup> The earliest identified possible case of old partisan involvement in supporting the succession is provided by Kong Dan Oh, who believes that major partisan figures Kim Il and Choe Yong-geon proposed that Kim Jong Il be the successor. Kim Il allegedly justified this choice by pointing to the succession crises in the Soviet Union after Stalin and Lin Biao's fall in China.<sup>206</sup> Dae-sook Suh, a leading scholar of North Korean politics, even claims that the partisans proposed Kim Jong Il as successor even though Kim Il Sung at first thought his son was too young.<sup>207</sup>

Kim Jong Il seemed a better prospect to the old marshals than Kim Il Sung's wife, Kim Song-ae. Jae Cheon Lim believes that the partisans supported Kim Jong Il because they were afraid of her growing power, whom they saw as similar to Mao's wife Jiang Qing: a woman who brutalized Mao's marshals and generals.<sup>208</sup> Kim Hakjoon, another South Korean analyst with access to defector accounts, believes that in contrast to Kim's wife, "who attempted to reduce privileges to the old partisans, Kim Jong Il doggedly took care of them... Sin Kyong-wan [a defector] reports that elders of the first generation of the revolution pushed for Kim Jong Il to be chosen as the successor."<sup>209</sup>

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*North Korean Politics* (Rand, 1988), 7. In any case, it is Kim may or not have been considering succession issues during the purges in the late 1960s, but the purges certainly clearly smoothed the playing field.

<sup>205</sup> "The North Korean Succession." CIA Crest. CIA-RDP81B00401R002100110012-7

<sup>206</sup> Kong, *The Leadership Change in North Korean Politics*, 8. Oh believes that this account makes sense, but reminds the reader that "neither the authenticity of this statement nor the content of the secret session can be documented from available North Korean sources."

<sup>207</sup> Dae-Sook Suh, "Kim Jong Il and New Leadership in North Korea," in *North Korea after Kim Il Sung*, ed. Dae-Sook Suh and Chae-Jin Lee (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 23.

<sup>208</sup> Lim, *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea*, 54.

<sup>209</sup> Kim Hakjoon, *Dynasty: The Hereditary Succession Politics of North Korea*, 79.



A crucial figure in Kim Jong Il's rise to power was the partisan O Jin-u. By October 1973, O Jin-u [sometimes spelled O Chin-U] was being described by the diplomatic corps as the second most powerful man in Pyongyang.<sup>210</sup> In 1976, an INR report concluded that Kim Jong Il "probably is dependent on O Chin-u," and O was described as "a particularly loyal ally of Kim Il-song and Kim Chong-il." That same report indicated that another major partisan figure, Kim Il, "is reputed to be an early booster of Kim Chong-il."<sup>211</sup> In 1982, the INR referred to information that "defense minister O Chin-u, widely believed to be the most influential leader after the two Kims, is on very good terms with Chong-il." The report concluded that "the role of O Chin-u is regarded as crucial because his support would solidify military backing for the succession and reduce the possibility of a military coup after Il-Sung dies."<sup>212</sup> In 1983, the CIA concluded that "There seems little doubt now that the son has crossed the first hurdle- the veteran guerrilla leaders of Kim Il-song's generation. O Chin-u, one of the most active and powerful among this group, has clearly endorsed the succession through both word and deed. Senior Vice President Kim Il- the only veteran with anything approaching an independent stature- has deferred to the son in the highly symbolic leadership rankings."<sup>213</sup> In 1986, a CIA report again noted that O "reportedly is Kim Chong-il's leading factotum."<sup>214</sup> In 1993, partisan figures Choe Gwang and Kim Gwang-jin pledged their loyalty to Kim Jong Il in major speeches. When O died in 1993, Kim replaced him as defense minister with Choe Gwang.<sup>215</sup> Kim also relied on Ri Eul-seol, another partisan comrade of his father from the Manchuria days.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Hungarian Embassy in the DPRK, Telegram, 31 October 1973. Subject: Personal Changes in the Korean Leadership." October 31, 1973. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>211</sup> In 1976, the time the report was written, O was promoted to Minister of Defense. "North Korea: Kim Chong-il's Succession Prospects". National Security Archive Online Database. Kim Il was one of Kim Il Sung's closest comrades from the partisan era. According to a document in a collection from the Soviet archives, Kim Il served in the 8 regiment of Kim's 2n napravlenie in the First Army. He served as Prime Minister from 1972 to 1976. VKP(b), Komintern i Koreia, pgs 740, 744.

<sup>212</sup> "North Korea: Succession Plans". National Security Archive Online Database.

<sup>213</sup> "North Korea: The Party Elite and the Succession Issue." CIA Crest. CIA-RDP84S00928R000100120003-7.

<sup>214</sup> "North Korea: Kim Chong-il in Charge." CIA Crest. CIA-RDP86T01017R000606160001-1.

<sup>215</sup> Ken Gause, *North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point* (Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 15-16.

<sup>216</sup> Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 208.

Kim understood the importance of achieving the support of the old guard to ensure his succession. According to defector Kang Myong-do, O Jin-u wanted a first generation veteran to become commander of the First Infantry, but he was opposed by the head of the General Political Department Yi Yong-mu. It should have been Yi's decision, but Kim Jong Il not only opposed Yi but convinced his father to give O Yi's job in the GPD.<sup>217</sup> Kim Jong Il was smart enough to respect the old guard, declaring that "to respect the revolutionary seniors is a noble moral obligation of all revolutionaries" and that "the revolutionary achievements of old guards must be inherited and protected." In the transition period, old revolutionaries were generally left untouched. Kim cleverly kicked old revolutionaries upstairs to honorary positions while giving close friends from his own generation real power.<sup>218</sup> At least two North Korean military defectors claimed O Jin-u wanted Kim Jong Il to wear a marshal's uniform on the day Kim was promoted to that rank, but Kim responded: "it's not suitable to wear a clean marshal's uniform. That uniform should be torn with shrapnel."<sup>219</sup> If the phrase is accurate, it would show a strong sensibility to the attitudes and feelings of the old guard.

Although loyalty to Kim Il Sung and concern over a stable succession probably contributed to the old partisans supporting a familial dynasty, Kim Jong Il showed a deep appreciation of both the potency of martial prestige as a propaganda tool and the emotional sensitivity the old generals felt to how their martial accomplishments were portrayed. Kim helped establish a propaganda system in which the partisan experience and familial succession were fundamentally intertwined.<sup>220</sup> In 1971 Kim established the P'ibada Opera Group to produce revolutionary operas extolling the Manchurian experience. One opera

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 277. According to Kang, "Kim Jong-il considered O Jin-u not so smart, but he wanted somebody from the first generation on his side."

<sup>218</sup> Jei Guk Jeon, "The Politics of Mourning Ritual in North Korea (1994–97)," *World Affairs* 162, no. 3 (January 1, 2000): 126–36.

<sup>219</sup> Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 484.

<sup>220</sup> This concept is most clearly symbolized by the two red pistols wrapped in red cloth given to Kim Il Sung by his grandfather: the violent struggle for national independence would continue through the bloodline. Heonik Kwon, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics, Asia/Pacific/perspectives* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 59.

allegedly moved the old guerrillas to tears.<sup>221</sup> In 1974 Kim Jong Il introduced the slogan: “Let us Produce, Learn and Live in the Style of Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Unit.” Kim Il Sung praised the slogan a year later and it ultimately became the slogan of the DPRK.<sup>222</sup> According to Japanese scholar Takashi Sakai:

The emphasis on the anti-Japan revolutionary tradition... played an important role in strengthening Kim Jong Il’s leadership. That is, such an emphasis is thought not only to have stabilized the support for Kim Jong Il among the participants of the anti-Japan combat who occupied the majority of army leaders but also to have expanded the support for him among the children of the participants of the anti-Japan combat, so-called “the children of the revolution heroes,” many of whom are thought to have been in the middle stratum of the army.<sup>223</sup>

Unlike any other communist regime, Kim Jong Il ultimately decided to rule with the military as his primary source of power, introducing the concept of “military first politics.” North Korean analyst Ken Gause writes that “Under Kim Jong Il, the party has been replaced by the military.”<sup>224</sup> Kim, therefore, made very different decisions than Khrushchev and Deng. Khrushchev’s model of rule relied on deriving political capital from successful reforms. His military reforms, intended to free up resources for economic development, cost him the support of his former kingmakers in uniform and left his only possible source of support the Central Committee. Deng also reformed the military, but his prestige as a revolutionary-era military figure still allowed him to use the PLA as a base of support. Kim Jong Il, who was installed in the military thanks to the backing of his father and the other partisans but did not have a military background, used the military as his primary power base and further guaranteed their support by favoring it with political and economic perquisites.

Evidence of resistance to Kim Jong Il’s rise to power is scanty. In November 1974, a GDR report noted that “slandorous remarks” about the Kim family were being made among “our inner circles of [North Korean] friends” around the time that party meetings started swearing loyalty to the younger

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<sup>221</sup> Sung Chull Kim, *North Korea under Kim Jong Il: From Consolidation to Systemic Dissonance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 39–40.

<sup>222</sup> Haruki, “The Structure and Political Culture of the Kim Jong Il Regime: Its Novelty and Difficulties,” 61.

<sup>223</sup> Takashi Sakai, “The Power Base of Kim Jong Il: Focusing on Its Formation Process,” in *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy*, ed. Han Park (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 118.

<sup>224</sup> Gause, *North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point*, 2.

Kim.<sup>225</sup> In February 1978, Kim Jong Il's birthday celebrations were more modest than in other years.<sup>226</sup> According to one account by Mansourov, Vice President and KWP CC Secretary Kim Tong-gyu claimed in June 1976 that younger cadres loyal to Kim Jong il were being promoted too quickly at the expense of old partisans and argued that the masses had to be prepared for the succession more slowly. O Jin-u, Kim Il, and Choe Hyun opposed him, but Kim Il Sung agreed to slow the succession. Kim Tong-gyu, however, was purged in late 1977 and the succession was put back on track.<sup>227</sup> In the early 1990s, army defectors reported dissatisfaction within the military that the successor would be an individual who had never served.<sup>228</sup> In 1992, a group of military officers, mostly graduates of Soviet military academies who had seen the freer Eastern bloc states, apparently attempted to overthrow the North Korean leadership as a response to the continuing economic problems.<sup>229</sup> Yet Kim was able to weather these threats. Support from the older partisans and intense propaganda justifying the succession left no apparent alternative to Kim Jong Il, and Kim used economic and political perks, as well as fear, to further supplement those basic strengths.<sup>230</sup>

### **How *Did* Institutions Matter?**

The North Korean cases are similar to the others presented in this dissertation in the sense that Kim, no matter how dominant he became in the political establishment, never completely ignored or destroyed the party as an organization. He sought to wrap his decisions in at least some form of

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<sup>225</sup> "GDR Ambassador Pyongyang to Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Berlin." November 12, 1974. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>226</sup> "Hungarian Embassy in the DPRK, Telegram, 24 February 1978. Subject: Celebration of Kim Jong Il's Birthday." February 24, 1978. Wilson Center Digital Archive.

<sup>227</sup> Alexandre Mansourov, "Inside North Korea's Black Box: Reversing the Optics," in *North Korean Policy Elites* (Institute for Defense Analysis, 2004), IV-7. Mansourov does not provide a source for this account, but CIA accounts did notice a change in the pace of the succession around this time period.

<sup>228</sup> Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 483-484.

<sup>229</sup> Gause, "The North Korean Leadership: System Dynamics and Fault Lines," II-22.

<sup>230</sup> Kong Dan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 124.

legitimacy. For example, although he delayed the August 1956 CC plenum, he still ultimately allowed it to meet.

However, in one important sense, institutions were even weaker in the North Korean case. In 1956, some of Kim's challengers did not accept their defeat at the August plenum but decided instead to flee to China. This was unpredicted in the theory chapter, but perhaps the lack of loyalty to the party as an organization was the result of its creation at such a late date and the profoundly factionalist nature of Korean communism at the time.

Finally, despite the obviously dominant role of the partisans, it would be incorrect to say that Kim used naked force to keep his competitors in line. It would be more accurate to say that Kim's dominance of the military meant that ultimately his position was untouchable, not that he simply used the armed forces to round up his opponents for execution.

## **Conclusion**

North Korea did not begin with a personality cult. Kim's absolute dominance over the rest of the leadership was the result of a decades-long process that began with the defeat of those individuals whose political careers had been mostly in Russia, South Korea, and China (outside Manchuria) and ended with Kim relying on only those members of the partisan group with whom he had the very closest relationships and his own family. The gradual winnowing of the leadership to an exceedingly narrow core can only be understood by appreciating the implications of a system without robust institutionalization.

This chapter provided traction for understanding how this was possible. But another interesting question is whether events in the Soviet Union and China led Kim to take these steps in the first place. In Moscow, Kim saw how Stalin's successors not only fought desperately for dominance but also criticized the dead leader for his "cult of personality." In Beijing, Kim could not have failed to notice how Mao had ultimately decided against a multitude of potential successors - Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, Wang Hongwen, and Deng Xiaoping. The case of Lin was perhaps the most shocking, as he had served as Mao's loyal

lieutenant in the PLA but died in a plane crash in Mongolia fleeing from China in 1971. But the news after Mao's death was perhaps even more of a surprise for Kim. Not only was Mao's wife arrested, but his chosen successor was moved out of the top position. Although Mao was not soundly rejected, the 1981 historical decision did admit to his mistakes in the Cultural Revolution. These events may have led him to choose his own son as successor, solidify that decision in his own mind, and help him convince others in the elite of the advantages of such a situation.

One final point deserves mentioning. The North Korean case differs from the Soviet Union and China in this dissertation because it is a story of how a personality cult was formed, not how it ended. But the Soviet Union and China might provide lessons for what might happen if the Kim dynasty ever ends and a new authoritarian regime takes its place. First, almost certainly the new elite will have been sullied by its role serving the Kim dynasty. *Kompromat* will therefore be an especially powerful political weapon. Second, a new leader may succeed in temporarily achieving dominance, but this leader will certainly first face opposition from those who desperately want a more collective leadership after the terror of the Kims. Third, the damaging Kim legacy might cause the leadership to be united by common recognition that reform is necessary to not only save the North Korean state but also to prove the new leadership can improve the previous situation. Finally, the new leadership will be faced with the question of how much of the legitimacy of the North Korean regime is intrinsically tied to the Kim family. If the young Kim is removed someday, the regime would almost certainly have to justify not only this change but the potential rehabilitations, as well as any political and economic reforms. But can only one member of the dynasty be criticized? Will regular citizens simply read the news in the paper and accept shocking revelations about the Kims? What will happen among the highly-indoctrinated soldiers of the Korean People's Army? These questions are very speculative, but we have every reason to believe that the Kim legacy would be extremely challenging to any future leadership and such potential difficulties would make any move against him less likely.

## Chapter 11: Conclusion

### Review

The hundred year anniversary of one of the greatest political experiments in human history, the Russian revolution, rapidly approaches. Lenin's stunning victory in the streets of Petrograd signified the beginning of numerous other attempts to fundamentally reshape political orders according to Marxist principles. The centennial of communism's first great victory provides an opportunity to evaluate the triumphs and tragedies of these revolutions.

My dissertation contributed to this broader agenda by examining one crucial piece of the puzzle: the nature of authority in the Soviet Union, People's Republic of China, and Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the elite level. To gain traction on this question, I compared two models for understanding elite power struggles in one-party Leninist regimes. According to the economic model, such struggles are shaped by material and policy interests, clear rules for leadership selection among a defined group of individuals, and the absence of coercion. I argued that this model assumes a high-level of institutionalization. The implications of low levels of institutionalization are manifested in the authority model, which emphasizes personal prestige, an ambiguous inter-relationship among multiple decision-making bodies, and a politicized role for the military and secret police.

Using cases of intense political contestation from Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean history, I demonstrated the greater utility of the second model. The dissertation also explored how institutionalization, although weak, did explain the attempts by leaders to not pointlessly and unnecessarily violate ambiguous rules, why losers rarely defected from the party or resisted decisions after they lost, and why the power ministries never blatantly wielded force against united civilian leaders.

However, the historic failure of the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea to truly institutionalize politics even within their own ruling parties is best understood as one of the tragedies of these three great political projects. Certainly, a complete evaluation of why these three states ultimately took such different

trajectories will require much more synthesis across the economic, international, and ideological factors that shaped leadership choices. But weak institutionalization at the elite level and its effects on power struggles are very clearly an important piece of this story.

In none of these three regimes was the ideal of collective leadership ever truly reached. In the Soviet Union after Stalin's death, the new leadership's failure to foster internal cooperation meant the elimination of such capable and authoritative leaders as Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, and Zhukov. Neither Khrushchev nor Brezhnev had the strong personal prestige or control over the armed forces that would have helped them securely dominate a weakly institutionalized system, nor did they have the rational-legal authority that would have existed in a system with robust institutionalization. Although Brezhnev felt his own move against Khrushchev was extremely risky, his own experience showed that a small group of co-conspirators could potentially remove him if he was not exceedingly careful.

Just like in the Soviet Union, some of Mao's successors initially hoped for a real system of collective leadership. Yet the figure who was picked by Mao precisely because of his consensual leadership style, Hua Guofeng, was ultimately replaced by a man with clearly dictatorial tendencies. To what extent Deng's sole dominance was necessary for the success of the economic reforms demands a much closer examination of the 1980s than was provided in this dissertation. But it is certainly clear that according to all available evidence Hua was no less interested in economic reforms than Deng, and that Deng's rise squashed hopes for a more collective leadership.

By the late 1980s, it is clear that liberal, reformist tendencies were present within the CC and shared by the party secretary, Zhao Ziyang. The imagination and openness that many even at the very top levels of the party thought about both economic and political reform in the 1980s is striking. Those reforms included greater institutionalization within the party. Whether or not such reforms would have ultimately been possible is of course an open question. But June 4 very obviously set back discussions of political reform for at least a generation. Moreover, weak institutionalization meant the choice to use



violence against the citizenry of Beijing could be made despite opposition to such a choice among powerful segments at even the very top of the party.

In North Korea, Kim Il Song was able to lay the foundations of a multi-generational personality cult. This dissertation provided leverage on the question of how this was possible by looking at exactly those moments in which Kim removed potential detractors from among the leadership. Very clearly, low levels of institutionalization played an important role in making those victories possible.

But the implications of weak institutionalization are not only important with regards to their long-term effects on these regimes. In many ways, low institutionalization meant a sullyng of the political process and tragic personal outcomes for men and women who devoted their lives to making their countries rich, strong, just, and free of foreign dominance. Leaders were unable to freely market their ideas in an open policy environment. Instead, elites were often subjected to the use of *komproamat* that led to misunderstandings of their historical role for generations. The nature of elite politics in these societies meant that the individual who very obviously cheated or heavily relied on the forces of coercion was able to emerge victorious. Such political conditions also forced friends to betray one another for the good of the party even when they profoundly disagreed with the criticisms.

### **Foreign Policy**

What import do the findings of this dissertation have on the study of foreign policy? Recently political scientists have grown increasingly interested in how the structure of elite politics in dictatorships affects decisions on war and peace. The basic insight of this literature is that dictators, just like leaders in democratic regimes, might be punished politically if they fight a losing war. Weeks argues that authoritarian leaders in certain types of systems are more susceptible to domestic pressures than others and that this helps explain whether or not they choose risky or ambitious policies.<sup>1</sup> Although this dissertation was not specifically about the connection between domestic politics and the international

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica L. P. Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

system, its focus on power struggles has clear relevance for this question. The fine-grained, in-depth examination of these contests reveals surprising, perhaps counter-intuitive dynamics previously unappreciated by the political science literature.

First, for audience costs to have an effect, there must be real policy differences within the elite. As this dissertation shows, this is very often a rather large assumption to make. It should not be assumed that the pressures of the international system are so ambiguous as to make foreign policy decisions continuous matters of dispute. After Stalin's death, the Soviet leadership was united in the hope for better relations with the West. One of the most crucial foreign policy decisions of the Khrushchev era, the decision to invade Hungary, was a consensus position within the elite and was not an issue at the 1957 June plenum that saw the defeat of the "anti-party group."

Second, for audience costs to be important, policy differences not only have to exist: they also have to *matter*. This dissertation is full of examples in which the individual with even the less popular policy position was ultimately able to emerge victorious through some mix of personal prestige, rule manipulation, and reliance on the coercive organs. Even when foreign policy "mattered" in the sense that it somehow damaged a leader's political position, it must be considered in conjunction with other factors as well. When he was removed from power, Khrushchev was criticized for the debacle of the Cuban Missile Crisis. But to say that this was the single most decisive factor would be historically inaccurate. At best it was a small contributing factor. Deng's political position was damaged by the disastrous war in Vietnam. But he continued as the most powerful leader for many years after.

Third, researchers should be very careful about interpreting policy differences when revealed as part of a political power struggle. For example, Khrushchev very obviously over-stated his foreign policy differences with Molotov as a political weapon to weaken his opponent. Strikingly, the creation of any sort of political cleavage was so useful to Khrushchev that it hardly mattered the formulation he used probably made Molotov's position seem closer to the general sensibilities of the CC. As suggested

throughout the dissertation, when leaders are removed, the victors have every incentive to lie and exaggerate about the crimes of their predecessor so as to make their own victory look more legitimate.

Fourth, martial prestige was identified in this dissertation as an especially important political phenomenon. This is a very obvious case of “second-image reversed,” or in other words, the international system having an effect on domestic politics.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, because the usefulness of martial prestige is so prominent, we might expect that some leaders would adopt deliberately risky and ambitious policies so as to contribute to their status in this regard, especially when other forms of authority are particularly weak. No cases of such behavior were identified within this dissertation, but some analysts believe North Korea’s recent behavior might be partially explained by this thinking.<sup>3</sup>

Fifth, the case of China’s invasion of Vietnam is potentially an important example of a leader pursuing an unpopular decision precisely because the adoption of such a position would be a clear indicator of his dominance. This is a concept that has not previously been identified within the literature on audience costs, and indeed strongly differs with the themes emphasized in that literature.

Sixth, loyalty to the party as an organization is a clear theme throughout the dissertation. Removing a leader either during a major international crisis, or in the aftermath of one that had a disastrous outcome, would very obviously be a damaging blow to party unity. In such conditions we would much more likely see unity a primary concern. As noted in the chapter on the “anti-party group,” Marshal Konev identified the dangerous international situation as a primary reason why a move against the head of the party was deeply inappropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Gourevitch, “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,” *International Organization* 32, no. 4 (October 1, 1978): 881–912.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Ken Gause identifies the sinking of the *Cheonan* as “critical to the succession” and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island as “designed to bolster Kim Jong-un’s credentials as a military leader.” Ken Gause, *North Korean House of Cards: Leadership Dynamics Under Kim Jong-Un* (Washington, DC: Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2015), 32. See also *North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability*, Asia Report No 230 (International Crisis Group, 2012).

Finally, the nature of elite politics can have extremely important effects on the long-term trajectory of nation-states. Who wins political struggles and the nature of their authority can determine military doctrine (seen most obviously in the transition between Khrushchev and Brezhnev) and the sustainability of economic reform. Elite politics can also impact human rights and therefore dramatically affect relations with the West. North Korea's human rights situation is a crucial component of American foreign policy towards the peninsula, and Washington's relationship with Beijing was also of course deeply changed by the events of June 4.<sup>4</sup>

### **Lessons and Future Directions**

For those interested in understanding authoritarian regimes today, this dissertation suggests important lessons and useful questions. First, the chapters point to the importance of being extremely cautious about drawing sweeping conclusions about contemporary elite politics. For reasons described throughout the dissertation, elite politics in closed regimes are marked by the false attribution of policy positions and personal slander. Deng Xiaoping returned to power after Mao's death almost forty years ago, but only recently have we begun to realize that the consensus view of elite politics at the time was very seriously flawed. Incidents like the unexpected fall of Chongqing party boss Bo Xilai show just how little we understand about politics in today's China.<sup>5</sup>

Second, scholars should be careful when applying terms such as "factions." Teiwes distinguishes between "the ties that bind the members of the groups concerned" and "the status and prestige derived from revolutionary achievements which has sustained individual leaders well beyond their particular

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<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Public Affairs, Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, "Release of the Report with Respect to Human Rights Abuses and Censorship in North Korea," Press Statement, *U.S. Department of State*, (July 6, 2016), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/07/259384.htm>; Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of US-China Relations 1989-2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> John Garnaut, *The Rise and Fall of the House of Bo* (Melbourne: Penguin, 2012); Pin Ho and Wenguang Huang, *A Death in the Lucky Holiday Hotel: Murder, Money, and an Epic Power Struggle in China* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013).

‘factions.’”<sup>6</sup> This dissertation decisively supports the greater value of Teiwes' understanding of the role of personal prestige. The authority of individuals like Molotov or Deng very clearly extended beyond defined groups that had worked with them directly.

This dissertation suggests another reason to be careful with the term “faction”: the absence of coherent groups united by similar policy positions. The “anti-party group”, the “whateverists,” and the critics of Kim Il Sung in 1956 were identified as factions post facto to imply that they were a highly-organized group. Such a label implied a greater cohesion and unity of political position than was appropriate in each of those cases.

Third, both the onset and outcome of power struggles can sometimes be difficult to determine and extremely contingent, especially if the leader suffers from both weak personal prestige and no personal control over the armed forces. Up until the moment of Khrushchev's removal, his colleagues in the Presidium and the CC were highly differential, if not sycophantic. Brezhnev's victory was from far guaranteed, as only Kozlov's death created an opening that made the move possible. Identifying portents for a coup can be hard for leaders, let alone foreign observers.

The opaque nature of authoritarian regimes, the need for caution when identifying competing groups, and the often highly contingent nature of power struggles make predictions difficult. However, because Russia, China, and North Korea are still systems marked by low levels of institutionalization, this dissertation at least allows us to appreciate the political environment in which their elites find themselves. Moreover, it points to the most useful questions for analyzing whether or not a particular leader's authority is robust and suggests future directions for research.

First, what are the potential sources of personal prestige or other sociological ties for the current members of the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean elites? In the Russian case, President Vladimir Putin

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<sup>6</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes, “The Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition: From Obeying the Leader to ‘Normal Politics,’” *The China Journal*, no. 34 (1995): 55–94.

certainly enjoys martial prestige for his role in the Second Chechen War, the fight against terrorism, and of course the seizure of Crimea, which sent his approval ratings into the eightieth percentile.<sup>7</sup> The North Korean regime's legitimacy still revolves around the partisan experience, thus demonstrating the continued potency of military accomplishments and sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

Although this dissertation focused primarily on the importance of a bright history as a revolutionary activist or military leader, these are hardly the only two sources of sociological forms of authority. The offspring of old revolutionaries, known as princelings, are an extremely important group among the current ruling elite in China. Their dominance is supposedly the result of a decision by the Chinese elder Chen Yun, who allegedly reasoned that at least their own children would not dig up the graves of their ancestors. But the political ambitions of these individuals were apparent as long ago as the Cultural Revolution, when as Red Guards they were known to shout slogans like "the father took political power, the son therefore will take over next" and "in twenty years the world will be ours, the sons of cadres."<sup>9</sup>

As Lankov points out, in today's North Korea "the elite is held together by an unusually close network of blood relations. A very substantial part of the Pyongyang rulers are either members of the extended Kim family or descendants of the former guerrilla fighters who fought under Kim Il Sung's command in 1930s Manchuria."<sup>10</sup> In March 2009, Vice Director of the General Political Department of

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin*, Reprint edition (Vintage, 2016); Roy Medvedev, *Vladimir Putin* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Kim Jong'un recently stated that "Sports officials and coaches must implement the tactics of anti-Japanese guerrilla-style attacks in each sport event in order to take the initiative in every game and triumph. "North Korea Leader Urges 'guerrilla-Style' Tactics in Sport," *The Japan Times Online*, March 26, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/26/asia-pacific/north-korea-leader-urges-guerrilla-style-tactics-sport/>. See also

<sup>9</sup> Qian Liqun, "Dui Hongweibing Dangzheng de Danyou [Worry about the Red Guards Running the Government]," October 10, 2012, <http://www.boxun.com/news/gb/pubvp/2012/01/201201100818.shtml>; Youyu Xu, *Xingxing Sese de Zaofan: Hongweibing Jingshen Suzhi de Xingcheng Ji Yanbian [Different Forms of Rebellion: The Formation and Transformation of the Emotional Nature of the Red Guards]*, vol. 3 (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Andrei Lankov, "Pyongyang: Rules of Engagement," *The Pacific Review* 16, no. 4 (December 2003): 616.

the armed forces Kim Jong-gak said “Let us use guns to defend the Mangyongdae bloodline and the Paektusan bloodline.”<sup>11</sup> According to Kim Jong Il’s oldest son Jong-nam, his father originally opposed a third generation of dynastic succession but ultimately changed his mind because of its ideological power:

I believe that originally the man who most opposed a third generation succession was my venerable father. It was certainly that some reasons internal to the regime [统治内部的原因] forced him to change his mind. My own understanding is that for the Korean people who only trust and serve the so-called Paektusan bloodline, if someone’s ‘blood’ is not ‘pure’ enough, it is possible that it will cause the nation much trouble. I judge that even if in the future Korea moves toward a collective leadership system, if its core is not the ‘Paektusan bloodline,’ then the ruling elite will not be able to continue.<sup>12</sup>

Even in Russia, the growing wealth and power of the sons and daughters of the current leadership, including Putin’s own daughters, led one Reuters special investigative report to conclude that “The phenomenon bears similarities to the ‘princelings’ of China.”<sup>13</sup>

While appreciating these sociological forms of authority may help us determine whether a leader’s authority is strong, understanding the importance of manipulating party rules will be important for determining the direction of a crisis as it is unfolding. If a move against competitors in the elite is successful, we will see the losers failing to rally support and summon a political decision-making body in which he or she might have a better chance of winning. A successful *fait accompli* will make any resistance to the plot dangerous for party unity and create an environment in which the plotters can isolate and pressure potential doubters. As any political crisis unfolds, the most important clues will be those that shed light on how power might be shifting among different political bodies and which elites are more successfully isolating and pressuring their own opponents.

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<sup>11</sup> These names refer to the birthplaces of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Yoji Gomi, *Fuqin Jin Zhengri yu wo: Jin Zhengnan dujia gaobai [My Father, Kim Jong-Il, and I: Exclusive Interviews with Kim Jong-nam]* (Hong Kong: Xin shiji chuban jichuanmei youxian gongsi, 2012), 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 83–84. According to a report by the International Crisis Group, signs that Kim Jong-il was grooming his son for succession appeared as early as April 2000. However, the plan was only officially announced in January 2009, soon after the leader had a stroke in August 2008. *North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability*, Asia Report No 230 (International Crisis Group, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Grey, Andrey Kuzmin, and Elizabeth Piper, “Putin’s Daughter, a Young Billionaire and the President’s Friends,” *Reuters*, November 10, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/russia-capitalism-daughters/>.

Finally, the authority of leaders can be evaluated by their relationships with the power ministries. Putin's relationship with the former members of the KGB, known as the *siloviki*, has been well-documented.<sup>14</sup> His recent establishment of a National Guard has led to concern that it will serve as a personal army.<sup>15</sup> Xi Jinping has formed a new National Security Commission, introduced a personalized Central Military Commission Chairman Responsibility System, brought major reforms to the PLA, and adopted a new title of commander-in-chief.<sup>16</sup> He has also brought significant changes to the PRC's political police, although in a slow and deliberate way intended not to frighten other members of the elite.<sup>17</sup> The new North Korean leader continues to rely on the military, although he has somewhat shifted his attention away from the armed forces to the party.<sup>18</sup>

Russia, China, and North Korea have clearly not reached truly robust institutionalization, and therefore the authority model will continue to have explanatory power. But as discussed in the theory chapter, institutionalization can be understood as a spectrum: rules can be more or less ambiguous. Where Russia, China, and North Korea fit on this spectrum today is a question of crucial importance, and unsurprisingly also one that is hotly debated. For example, Minzner argues that Xi Jinping "appears to

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<sup>14</sup> Andrei Soldatov, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010); Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Konstantin Gaaze, "Putin's National Guard Gambit," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, April 13, 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=63315>.

<sup>16</sup> David M. Lampton, "Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: Policy Coordination and Political Power," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 95 (September 2015): 759–77; James Mulvenon, "The Yuan Stops Here: Xi Jinping and the 'CMC Chairman Responsibility System,'" *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 47 (Summer 2015), <http://www.hoover.org/research/yuan-stops-here-xi-jinping-and-cmc-chairman-responsibility-system>; Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, "China's Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms," *Strategic Forum. National Defense University*, no. 294 (April 2016); Austin Ramzy, "China's President, Xi Jinping, Gains a New Title: Commander in Chief," *The New York Times*, April 21, 2016. For an analysis that minimizes the importance of the military in contemporary Chinese politics, see Alice Miller, "The PLA in the Party Leadership Decisionmaking System," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, ed. Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 58–83.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher K. Johnson, "Reshaping China's 'Deep State': President Xi's Assault on China's Security Services: Grasping Tightly the Key Levers of Power," in *China's Core Executive: Leadership Styles, Structures, and Processes Under Xi Jinping*, ed. Sebastian Heilmann and Matthias Stepan, vol. 1 (Merics, 2016), 58–63.

<sup>18</sup> Stephan Haggard, Luke Herman, and Jaesung Ryu, "Political Change in North Korea," *Asian Survey* 54, no. 4 (August 2014): 773–800; Choe Sang-hun, "Kim Jong-Un Seeks to Cement Power at First North Korean Congress in 36 Years," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2016.



have concluded that his only path to a breakthrough requires him to tear up the existing rules—reversing many if not all of the partly institutionalized internal Party norms that Andrew Nathan noted back in 2003.”<sup>19</sup> Miller, however, “has long been and remains skeptical of the now conventional wisdom about Xi’s surpassing power, and sees the Xi leadership as continuing to act within the constraints of institutionalized collective leadership.”<sup>20</sup>

How might the three ways institutionalization mattered as identified in this dissertation be important today? If institutions are indeed more robust than in the past, then it will be more costly for the popularity of leaders if they violate rules that are now less ambiguous. The “rule manipulation toolbox” may also be smaller than it used to be. Leaders may jump through even more hoops to make their behavior look like it was legitimate, and they will be even more likely to not go any further than is necessary to overcome their opponents. But the fact that we simply do not know the answer to these questions is strong evidence for the conclusion that the type of struggle identified in this dissertation is far from over.

With regards to the strong norm that losers accept decisions and do not defect from the party, the situation today is hard to judge. On the one hand, the strong ideological component of this behavior is probably weaker than it was in the past. The Russian Federation is of course no longer controlled by a Leninist party, and the ideological fervor of the CCP has mellowed. At the same time, however, all of these regimes are more institutionalized than other forms of authoritarianism, which would suggest defections are relatively less likely. Moreover, the incentive not to take any steps that would shake the regime as a whole remains extremely strong.

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<sup>19</sup> Carl Minzner, “China After the Reform Era,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (June 2015): 142; Andrew J. Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience,” *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003): 6–17.

<sup>20</sup> Alice Miller, “Projecting the Next Politburo Standing Committee,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 49 (March 2016): 11.

Finally, if institutionalization is now more robust than it was in the past, the conditions for judging whether using the power ministries is seen as a blatant act of coercion is now different. Leaders may feel more constrained by what they can comfortably do without being seen as seriously damaging leadership norms, and it is possible that the power ministries will be more reluctant to be involved in power struggles if they can point to clear rules justifying such reticence. However, we have no evidence that institutionalization is robust enough in any of the three countries studied in this dissertation that during a period of intense political contestation the actors would not feel a special need to work out some kind of arrangement with the most powerful coercive actors.

### **History and Power**

On August 15, 2016, the Beijing Second Intermediate People's Court ruled against an appeal by a historian named Hong Zhenkuai. Two months earlier he had been convicted of defaming revolutionary heroes who had allegedly, after killing Japanese soldiers, shouted "Long live the Communist Party!" and jumped to their deaths to avoid capture. Hong, who had concluded that the soldiers might not have actually killed any Japanese and in fact slipped to their deaths, was ordered to publicly post an apology on the internet.<sup>21</sup> A month earlier, the Chinese authorities essentially closed down a history magazine that made it possible to draw many of the new conclusions presented in this dissertation.<sup>22</sup> Although the situation in Russia for studying history is dramatically better, even there scholars have been targeted for writing on politically sensitive topics. The head of a major Russian archive left his post after a row with the Minister of Culture over the interpretation of a supposed act of martial bravery during World War II, and one Petersburg scholar saw his work on a Russian general who fought for the Nazis investigated for extremism.<sup>23</sup> Historians in North Korea of course continue to hew closely to the party line.

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<sup>21</sup> Kiki Zhao, "Chinese Court Upholds Ruling Against Historian Who Questioned Tale of Wartime Heroes," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/16/world/asia/china-hong-zhenkuai-langya.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Buckley, "Liberal Magazine, 'Forced Into a Corner' by China, Girds for Battle," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/28/world/asia/china-yanhuang-chunqiu.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Tom Balmforth, "Russian Archive Chief Out After Debunking Soviet WW II Legend," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, March 17, 2016, sec. Russia, <http://www.rferl.org/content/mironenko-state->

The historical events investigated in this dissertation are interesting for both theoretical and empirical reasons, and they provide us with traction for understanding these states of crucial interest to American scholars and policymakers today. Yet this type of theoretically-informed history is important for one final reason. Historical moments continue to serve as political totems. How the Russian, Chinese, and Koreans understand their history is intrinsically connected to how they understand politics today.<sup>24</sup> As shown in this dissertation, power struggles are often dominated by fights over how to interpret history. Scholars should make it possible for politicians interested in the lessons of their country's own history to find higher-quality treatments than the commercial ones that dominate. Certainly, historians working in their own countries will always enjoy advantages far beyond those of foreigners. But when politics at home make it difficult to draw certain conclusions explicitly, scholars from other corners of the world will sometimes have a useful role to play.

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archive-chief-removed-from-post-panfilov-legend/27619460.html; Viktor Rezunkov, "FSB I General Vlasov [The FSB and General Vlasov]," *Radio Svoboda*, March 5, 2016, <http://www.svoboda.org/a/27589967.html>.

<sup>24</sup> William Inboden, "Statecraft, Decision-Making, and the Varieties of Historical Experience: A Taxonomy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (February 23, 2014): 291–318.