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Continuing Conflict over Taiwan: Mao, the Great Leap Forward, and the 1958 Quemoy Crisis

The motivations for Mao's 1954 attack on the offshore islands are fairly clear and have been explored in detail both in the United States and in China: Mao hoped that by attacking in the straits he could dissuade the United States from including Taiwan in new multilateral defense arrangements in Southeast Asia (specifically, SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization). The attack was essentially a test of American resolve toward the defense of Taiwan. Mao was warning that any nation signing a defense pact with Taiwan ran a risk of war with Beijing.5 Mao's attempt backfired. If anything, the attack caused Eisenhower and Dulles to make a clearer and earlier commitment to Taiwan's security than they otherwise would have preferred.

But the simple strategic probe explanation for China's 1954 attack cannot explain the 1958 crisis in the Taiwan Straits. This crisis occurred after the Americans already had made clear commitments to Taiwan. Below I first offer a brief overview of the history of the crisis and the domestic political setting in China at the time. I then present and test various explanations for Chinese behavior during the crisis, including my own two-level explanation.

THE 1958 TAIWAN STRAITS CRISIS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Military and Diplomatic Events

On August 23, 1958, the PLA forces in Fujian Province began a three-day intensive shelling of the heavily fortified, KMT-held islands of Quemoy and Matsu (Jinmen and Mazu), the former just two miles off the mainland port of Amoy (hereafter Xiamen), the latter near Fuzhou. The initial artillery attack was rather ferocious, with tons of thousands of shells falling on the islands in the first few days. On August 24 and 27, the PLA broadcast calls for surrender to ROC troops on the islands. Shelling decreased markedly in the following days, but it became apparent that the PLA was attempting to use its artillery and navy to blockade the island. The PLA attack had clearly been planned well in advance: troop levels and air assets were increased rapidly in the Xiamen area starting in the middle of July.6

The Chinese attack triggered a two-month crisis with the United States during which American war planners prepared for some hair-raising contingencies, including tactical nuclear strikes against Chinese airfields near

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1 Foot, A Substitute for Victory.
2 The American internationalist policy was, however, continuously challenged throughout the 1950s in traditionally isolationist sections of the Midwest and South; see Snyder, Myths of Empire, chap. 7; Also see Letcher, Uncertain South; and Hero, The Southerner in World Affairs.
3 For a comprehensive review of Eisenhower's New Look doctrine, see Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, chap. 5.
4 For coverage of the 1954-55 crisis, see Stolper, China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands, chaps. 1–7; Xu, Jinmen Zhi Zhan, chap. 4; He, "Evolution of the People's Republic of China's Policy"; Lewis and Xue, China Builds the Bomb, chap. 2.
5 See, for example, works cited in note 4 above.
6 For details, see Halperin, "The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis"; Pollack, "Perception and Action in Chinese Foreign Policy," Vols. 1–2; Lin, Yi jiu Wu Ba Nian Taiwan Hua jia Weiji Qijian Meiguo Dai Hua Zhengce; Xu, Jinmen Zhi Zhan, chap. 5; and Ye, Ye Fei Huiyi.
Xiamen and as far up the coast as Shanghai. One early-August State Department document describes Joint Chiefs' plans to defend Quemoy and Matsu with "nuclear strikes deep into China," which, while designed to destroy military targets, would also lead to "millions of non-combatant casualties." Given Chinese restraint and very good American analysis of Chinese deployments and military plans, the risk of such horrific escalation was limited and short-lived. But because the United States had such aggressive contingency plans and the Chinese were allied with the Soviets, the crisis was obviously extremely dangerous for China and the United States alike. Military errors or misreadings of the other's motives or maneuvers could have led to significant escalation both regionally and globally. In fact, American leaders at the time feared that the American public had little idea how dangerous the standoff was and therefore was unprepared for the implications of escalation.

The initial American military response to the attack was quick, though politically ambiguous. Having observed the buildup of PLA forces over the preceding weeks, the United States was not caught entirely off guard by events in the area. Fearing the reputational consequences both in Taiwan and elsewhere if America failed to assert its ally, Eisenhower ordered an increased American naval presence near Taiwan. Not only did Eisenhower upgrade the combat readiness of the Pacific Seventh Fleet, he augmented the local fleet with ships from the Sixth Fleet, recently deployed in the Middle East during the July 1958 crisis over Lebanon and Iraq. Within two weeks the United States had assembled in the region the largest nuclear navy witnessed to date.

Despite the military muscle sent to the region, Washington did not initially announce any plans to assist in the defense of the islands, which had an ambiguous status under the 1954-55 Mutual Defense Treaty. That treaty allowed for American defense of the islands only if an attack on them was considered part of a phased attack on Taiwan. Fearing that the KMT might exploit a stronger American commitment by dragging the United States into a war with China, the United States did not commit publicly to defending the islands until September 4, when Secretary of

State Dulles made a firm statement of American resolve at Newport, Rhode Island.

On September 6, the Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, publicly agreed to hold ambassadorial-level talks with the United States in Warsaw. In this period, September 5–8, the Soviets weighed in on the side of the Chinese Communists. Their foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko traveled secretly to Beijing, and the Soviets made various public and private warnings to the United States about the dangerous consequences of an attack on the Soviets' ally. The degree and timing of Soviet support has been a source of controversy. Some have been impressed with Soviet allegiance to China, while others, including Chinese historians, argue that Soviet bluster and offers of military assistance came only after the worst danger had passed.

The Sino-American meetings in Warsaw, begun on September 15, were the first direct discussions between the two governments in several months. With the resumption of direct talks, the crisis seemed to be winding down. Washington became increasingly convinced that the PLA was not attempting to take the islands by force. Beijing was clearly taking measures both diplomatically and militarily to avoid escalating the conflict. The remaining immediate challenge for the Americans was to break the blockade. This would ensure that KMT forces on the island would not be choked off from their supply base in Taiwan. The United States adopted naval convoys and successfully broke the blockade by the end of September, delivering hundreds of tons of cargo to the islands in a matter of days.

While this success solved the immediate crisis for the Americans, the volatile conditions that could lead to future crises remained. As a proposal for a more permanent solution to the problem, the United States urged the KMT to withdraw its forces from the islands once it could do so without appearing to retreat under duress. The islands were considered symbolically important to Eisenhower but militarily unimportant to the defense of Taiwan. As long as the KMT was not physically driven from the islands, Eisenhower believed that neither reputational nor military damage would be suffered by the KMT or the United States.

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7 Halperin, "The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis," pp. 55–84. During the crisis a conventional plan for such attacks was also developed; see pp. 140–143. One apparent problem from the Western side was that Washington was not certain whether the Chinese Communists had acquired atomic weapons from the Soviets.


9 Elades, "Once More unto the Beach," p. 353.


11 Ibid., pp. 200–204; and Elades, "Once More unto the Beach," p. 350.

12 Arguing that the Soviets gave minimal assistance and did so late in the crisis is Zagoria, Sino-Soviet Conflict, pp. 211–217. For a counterargument, see Segal, Defending China, pp. 130–132. For a critical Chinese review of Soviet policy, see Wei, "Gromyko's Recollections of Talks with Chairman Mao concerning the Taiwan Situation Are Incompatible with Reality," in Xin Zhongguo Waijiao Fengyun, pp. 135–138.

13 For reviews of the talks, see Young, Negotiating with the Chinese Communists; and Wang, Zhongmei Huanan Jiujian Huigui.


Because his party's legitimacy on Taiwan was largely based on the notion of reuniting China under KMT rule in the future, and because the offshore islands were a salient link to the mainland, Chiang Kai-shek predictably rejected the American plan. More surprising was the CCP response to the American efforts. The CCP declared a lengthy ceasefire in early October and, later in the month, adopted a merely symbolic policy of shelling every other day. But the Chinese Communists firmly rejected overtures from the United States about demilitarization of the islands. Late in the crisis, not only did Beijing take a belligerent diplomatic position at Warsaw, it even took active diplomatic and military steps to **help ensure that the KMT stayed on the islands.** (These actions are discussed further below.) Mao clearly feared that a KMT withdrawal would assist the United States in implementing a “two-China policy,” under which Taiwan would be secured permanently from the mainland’s control. There was one crucial issue on which Mao and Chiang agreed: Taiwan was an inseparable part of China.

For all intents and purposes, by the middle of October the crisis ended without any significant change in the pre-crisis status quo. KMT forces remained on the island, as they do to this day, and for many years China sporadically shelled the islands. Although new crises would heat up in 1962 and 1996, the level of tensions has never again reached the level that it did in 1958.

**The International Context**

The crisis occurred in a volatile two-year period in regional and international politics. In the spring and summer of 1957 the KMT increased force levels on the tiny offshore islands to 110,000, while the United States decided to introduce nuclear-capable Matador missiles to the area. The KMT troops used their bases on the islands for sporadic blockades of ports and other harassment of Chinese assets in the coastal region, espionage against the CCP, and propaganda warfare designed to weaken the CCP’s hold over the coastal population.

In 1958 Sino-American relations were also rocky. Talks at Geneva, established in 1954, had broken off ostensibly over the attempt by the United States to replace a U.S. ambassador with a subambassadorial representative. In a late June ultimatum, the Chinese threatened to break off talks permanently if the United States did not restore ambassadorial-level representation within fifteen days. In a complex turn of events, including a conscious effort by China to ignore American conciliatory moves, no agreement was reached and talks broke off until mid-September 1958.  

If Sino-American relations appeared as icy as ever, Sino-Soviet relations, at least on the surface, appeared quite positive. Mao had severe reservations about Khrushchev’s 1956 de-Stalinization speech, but in the same year he publicly supported Khrushchev in the suppression of uprisings in Eastern Europe. Mao also tacitly supported the Soviet leader against rivals within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) during Khrushchev’s 1957 struggle with the so-called Anti-Party Group. In November 1957 the Soviets celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution by hosting Communist leaders from around the world. In the few months before the conference, the Soviets demonstrated their ability to launch a multistage intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and to place a man-made satellite in space (Sputnik). Attending the festivities in Moscow, Mao hailed the Soviet achievement, praising Soviet leadership of the Communist camp, and proclaiming confidently that the United States was a “paper tiger” and that “the East wind prevails over the West wind.” For their part, in November 1957 Soviet leaders signed an agreement to help the Chinese develop nuclear weapons, complete with a promise to transfer a sample bomb sometime in the future.

It is doubtful that Mao ever felt as confident about relations with the Soviets as his 1957 rhetoric suggested, but his reservations were hidden by optimistic statements and diplomatic congratulations on Soviet achievements. By August 1958, however, relations had become strained, and diplomatic niceties were put in the closet. Relations had soured markedly in the spring and early summer of 1958 when the Soviets refused to transfer key weapons systems, suggested a joint Sino-Soviet naval fleet, and requested the construction, on Chinese soil, of radio transmitters for Soviet submarines. Arriving on July 31 for four days of consultation, Khrushchev met an icy reception in Beijing. The meetings between the two Communist leaders were extremely rancorous. Mao interrogated Khrushchev about the joint fleet issue and other Soviet policies that the chairman viewed as unacceptable infringement on Chinese sovereignty.

As 1958 progressed, Chinese foreign policy rhetoric and behavior to-

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16 For a brief overview of the 1957 buildup, see George and Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, p. 372.
17 See Young, Negotiating with the Chinese Communists, pp. 139–141; and Wang, Zhongmei Huatian Jiu Nian Huigu.
18 For coverage of Sino-Soviet relations 1956–58, see Zagoria, Sino-Soviet Conflict; for Chinese accounts see Han and Xue, eds., Dangdai Zhongguo Waijiao, chap. 10. Relevant Chinese memoirs include, Li, Waijiao Wutasihong de Xin Zhongguo Lingceu; and Liu, Chushi Sanlian Ba Nian. Li was the Foreign Ministry translator during the 1950s. Liu was China’s ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1955 to 1963.
ward other countries became increasingly harsh. In the spring the Chinese delegation suddenly withdrew from Yugoslavia and Beijing accused Tito of revisionism. During the July–August Middle East crisis, the party-controlled media railed against American and British intervention in that region and promised Chinese support for the Arab peoples. In the press the CCP directly linked American imperialism in the Middle East with American policy toward Taiwan, calling for American withdrawal from both regions. In July and August tensions in the straits increased when Mao ordered a beefing up of artillery and air power in Xiamen and the KMT military went on alert and increased its air activities over the mainland.

The Domestic Context

In 1958 Mao adopted a radical new domestic economic and political agenda, the various aspects of which fall under the umbrella term “the Great Leap Forward.” Although it was implemented in different phases, the plan in its entirety amounted to a second revolution in China. By the end of 1958 all agriculture was comminized, wage and other incentives were abolished in the rural and urban sectors of the economy, massive industrial drives with fantastically high targets and bizarre production methods were launched, women were sent to work in the fields and factories, and labor was militarized through the enrollment of half the Chinese population in the “people’s militia.” The stated goal of the movement was for China to surpass leading Western economies, such as Great Britain, in a matter of several years.

The Great Leap Forward started out more mildly in the winter and spring of 1958 and then became much more radical through the summer and early fall. In the earliest phase, which occurred between harvests, the party mobilized idle labor to work on large construction projects, such as the erection of dams and irrigation systems. In July 1958 Mao launched the first large-scale production drive, focusing on steel output. Also in early summer 1958, a new form of agricultural organization, “the people’s commune,” was tested in selected areas of the country, mainly in Henan province. At the Beidaihe Party Conference in August, Mao decided to launch the most radical phase of the Leap. With the Henan model as a guide, in early September he ordered the nationwide commu-

19 For coverage of Sino-Yugoslav relations in 1958, see Wu, Zai Waijiabo Bu Nian de Jingli. Relevant to the thesis here, Wu, former ambassador to Belgrade, surmises that his removal from office was related to domestic politics in China rather than to any grand strategic vision.

20 See the various front-page stories to this effect in the Renmin Ribao in the second half of July 1958.

21 For excellent and concise coverage, see Xu, Jimen Zhi Zhan, pp. 211–215.

22 For a detailed discussion of the Great Leap strategy, see Schoenhals, Salvationist Socialism. For frank Chinese accounts see Xie, Dayuejin Kuanglan; and Liu and Wu, eds., Dayuejin he Tiuzheng Shiqi de Guomin Jingji.
was to minimize or destroy the KMT military presence off China’s shore and to send a tough message to Washington about Beijing’s outrage over recent American policies. A corollary to this hypothesis is that the militia drive was consistent with Mao’s fear of invasion. The “everyone a soldier” campaign was not cynical manipulation for domestic purposes but a further manifestation of Mao’s perception of an increased threat from the United States and the KMT.

THE STRATEGIC PROBE: TESTING AMERICAN RESOLVE

An almost opposite argument about Chinese goals and risk analysis is provided by the strategic probe thesis. In this thesis, held by the Eisenhower administration itself at the time, Mao is portrayed as probing American resolve, which he viewed as unclear or weak. After Sputnik, Mao may have been so encouraged by the Soviets’ perceived lead in the strategic arms race that he felt the Americans would not dare counter Beijing’s attempts to settle the Taiwan question. As a result, Mao sought to test the American commitment to Chiang by attacking the offshore islands. The offshore islands were a good place to begin a probe because American commitment to them was not clearly spelled out in the 1955 Mutual Defense Treaty. If the Americans backed down, then China would continue to push until it had “liberated” the offshore islands and then, perhaps, Taiwan. If, however, the Americans supported the KMT claims to the islands, then China could still back down and avoid war. In this account, the strong American response surprised and disappointed Mao and led him to abandon a more aggressive military posture.

THE SOVIET FACTOR: MAO SEeks TO DEMonstrate INDEPENDENCE AND GAIN MORE ASSISTANCE

Another possibility is that Mao had become anxious that the Soviets were taking China for granted, so Mao needed to demonstrate his independence in foreign affairs by creating a crisis without Moscow’s permis-

23. Chen, “Paoji Jinnem Neimu”; Gurtov and Hwang, China under Threat, chap. 3. Gurtov and Hwang argue that Mao wanted to weaken KMT forces on the island, not to seize the islands themselves. Also see Zhang, Deterrence and Strategic Culture, chap. 8. Zhang argues that, seeing a longer-term threat from Taiwan and the United States, Mao adopted an “active deterrence” strategy, so as to warn Chiang and the United States about the consequences of future attacks on the PRC.


25. For a carefully researched review of the administration’s position throughout the crisis, see Elades, “Once More onto the Breach.”


27. See, for example, Ullman, Expansion and Coexistence, pp. 617–618.

28. My determination of this line is based partially on my interview research in 1990–91. For published versions, see Li, “The Politics of Artillery Shelling,” pp. 36–38; Ye, Ye Fei Huiyiku, pp. 656–657; and Liu, Chushi Duihui Ba Nian, p. 72; also see the entry in Yan, ed., Shiji Zhengzhi Jingji yu Guoji Guanzhong Cidian. For a somewhat revised version of the argument, see Xu, Jinnem Zhizhan, pp. 202–220; and Liao, “1958 Nian Mao Zedong Juece Paoji Jinnem de Lishi Kaocha.” Xu argues that Mao initially planned the attack on Quemoy in July largely in order to help solve the Middle East crisis, but that by the time he actually ordered the attack in late August, the crisis had dissipated. In late August, Xu argues, Mao was mostly interested in the domestic mobilizational value of renewed tensions with the United States in the Taiwan Straits.

29. Those I interviewed in China sometimes raised the possibility that Mao had lost touch with both domestic and international realities during 1958. For a qualified version of the “overconfident Mao” thesis, see He, “The Evolution of the People’s Republic of China’s
Also consistent with this position are Mao’s pie-in-the-sky targets for the Chinese economy during the Great Leap. The Chinese leader may simply have been in a manic, optimistic frenzy that manifested itself in both the international and domestic arenas.

**Domestic Political Explanations**

**FACTIONAL AND BUREAUCRATIC STRUGGLE**

In official Soviet history it was argued that the Taiwan Straits crisis was pushed by a radical faction in the Communist Party who preferred international tension and radical economic strategies. This group was purportedly battling more realistic party elements who preferred peaceful coexistence and moderate economic strategies. Such a factional analysis would be consistent with some Western analyses of the Great Leap Forward, which argue that the campaign resulted from the ascendence of a radical planning group within the CCP and the decline of more moderate party elements.

**THE TWO-LEVEL MOBILIZATION THESIS**

My thesis is that international and domestic factors were integrally related and, in combination, led Mao to seek tensions short of war with the United States. Because of his growing fear of abandonment or exploitation by an increasingly powerful Soviet Union, Mao believed that China needed to increase its own power in relation to both the West and the Soviet Union. The Great Leap Forward, particularly its most radical phases in the summer of 1958, was an effort to transform China, over the course of several years, into a great power with nuclear weapons and an advanced industrial base.

The problem for Mao is that his earlier attempts in 1955–56 to gain popular acquiescence to increased government control of the economy had largely failed. Mao therefore attempted to replicate the wartime conditions of the anti-Japanese and civil war period, during which common people sacrificed greatly for the communist cause without much material reward. To mimic those hearty, nationalistic days, Mao needed international tension and a sense of national danger. Although Mao certainly did not want war with the United States in the short term, he saw benefit in a carefully controlled crisis environment within which he could mobilize the Chinese people to sacrifice for the Great Leap. Therefore Mao launched a circumscribed attack on KMT positions in the Taiwan Straits, creating a crisis atmosphere. But from the onset, Mao was careful to avoid escalation. While the Great Leap itself was an economic and humanitarian disaster, Mao’s careful manipulation of conflict with the United States and the KMT was actually a great political success. During that crisis Mao successfully communized agriculture and mobilized the Chinese masses to work harder for less remuneration.

Below I separate the explanation here into distinct parts. First I analyze the connection between the international challenges facing China and Mao’s decision to launch the Great Leap Forward. Then I analyze the political hurdles facing Mao in attempting to mobilize the Chinese people behind the massive self-strengthening effort. I conclude this section with a discussion of how Mao exploited and manipulated international tensions in order to get over those domestic political hurdles.

**The International Challenge and the Origins of the Great Leap: Mao’s Growing Fears about Soviet Power and Chinese Backwardness**

From 1950 to 1958, the PRC had adopted a grand strategy that relied heavily on the Soviets for economic and military aid. The Soviets had apparently asked for too much in return. During the 1954–55 Taiwan Straits crisis the CCP leadership was uncomfortable relying on Soviet assistance to counter American threats. While continuing to seek aid from the Soviets, in 1955 Mao advised the Chinese military to develop its own modern weapons capabilities. It was at this time that Mao also launched the Chinese atomic weapons program.

For Mao the continuing decline of China in relation to both Western and other socialist bloc countries dictated change in China’s grand strat-
egy. By early 1958 Mao had become disillusioned with the Sino-Soviet alliance and Soviet assistance programs. As the Soviets recovered from World War II and assumed a more equal position with the United States, Mao believed that China was able to rely less, rather than more, on its Soviet ally, which was seeking cooperation with the United States on issues such as nuclear proliferation. As a developing, nonnuclear power, the Chinese would not benefit from a superpower condominium. By 1958 the Chinese clearly feared that, if they fell further behind, the Soviets might then cut separate deals with the United States without regard to their weaker ally. Moreover, in 1958 Mao also worried that the Soviets would treat China as they had their Eastern European satellites. The fears of abandonment and exploitation underpinned Mao’s critique of strategic concepts promoted by Khrushchev, such as “nuclear non-proliferation” and “peaceful coexistence.”

In addition, Soviet assistance and economic strategies were proving increasingly unsuitable to Chinese conditions. The trademark Soviet overemphasis on centralized heavy industry had created bottlenecks and had only exacerbated the problem of capital accumulation shortages in the countryside, where some 80–90 percent of the Chinese population resided.

Evidence from the mainland demonstrates that, despite public enthusiasm about the Sino-Soviet alliance, Mao was extremely disillusioned with Moscow before the more radical phases of the Great Leap Forward were implemented. Despite his optimistic rhetoric about the prevailing east wind, Mao feared that the Soviets’ new Sputnik delivery capabilities would marginalize China as a Soviet security asset. As Vice Minister of Defense Xiao Jinguang recalls, when the Soviets demonstrated their “shocking” new capabilities to a Chinese military entourage in late 1957, the Chinese felt relatively backward and resolved themselves to “struggle hard” to close the gap between China and its ally.

Beijing had apparently been skeptical from the start about the Soviets’ 1957 agreement to transfer atomic weapons. In his memoirs, the former Chinese ambassador to Moscow, Liu Xiao, states that in 1957 Beijing viewed the nuclear agreement with Moscow as a side payment for support of Khrushchev in his struggle against the Anti-Party Group. Mao must then have doubted that the Soviets would honor the agreement after Khrushchev won his internal struggle and after Sputnik marginalized the

Before 1958, Khrushchev’s [domestic] political position was not secure, and the East and West [blocs] had entered a Cold War posture, so Khrushchev paid the utmost attention to Sino-Soviet relations, struggling to obtain the support of the CCP and Mao for himself [Khrushchev] and the CPSU... [By New Year’s Day 1958] Khrushchev was already completely consolidated in his [domestic] position and the Soviets had also created an intercontinental missile. Under these conditions, Khrushchev assumed the attitude that he needn’t have many misgivings about China and Mao. The Western media openly recognized that “the Soviet Union had become a country immune to other nations’ attack; it no longer mattered that it was communist, socialist, or anything else, attacking it would be unwise.” Thereupon, Khrushchev wanted to create detente with the US; [but] toward China he was anxious. From the time of these developments on, Khrushchev and Malinovsky both made statements disadvantageous to Sino-Soviet friendship.

In Beijing’s view, the Soviet acquisition of a secure, second-strike capability and the relative decline of Chinese power within the alliance carried a dual danger: the Soviets were less likely to support China and more likely to treat China like a weak satellite.

The Chinese fears were well founded. From late 1957 Khrushchev seemed less willing to buy Chinese support through direct assistance. In their November 1957 meeting in Moscow, Khrushchev discussed with Mao the return of Soviet experts working in China. By March 1958 the Soviets had decided to renge on their promise to transfer atomic weapons to China. They began employing delaying tactics to mask this secret decision. Even when the Soviets honored weapons transfer commitments, they shared only technology at least two generations behind their own.

As John Lewis and Xue Litai argue, in June 1958 when Mao predicted Chinese atomic capability within ten years, he still hoped for and would have happily accepted Soviet assistance. In fact, China received Soviet

14 For Mao’s criticisms, see ibid., pp. 67–68; also see Clemens, The Arms Race and Sino-Soviet Relations, pp. 33–34.
15 Zagoria, Sino-Soviet Conflict, passim.
16 Relevant memoirs include Li, Wutaishang de Xin Zhongguo Lingxin; and Liu, Chushi Shulan Ba Nian.
18 Liu, Chushi Shulan Ba Nian, pp. 45–46.
19 Li, Wutaishang de Xin Zhongguo Lingxin, pp. 177–178.
20 Ibid., p. 151.
21 Lewis and Xue, China Builds the Bomb, p. 61.
22 For this general Soviet policy in the 1950s, see Lewis and Hua, “China’s Ballistic Missile Programs,” p. 13.
23 Lewis and Xue, China Builds the Bomb, p. 71.
military assistance, including gaseous diffusion equipment and naval vessels, through the early part of 1959. At the urging of Soviet experts in China, the Chinese military even requested submarine technology from the Soviets in June 1958. But while Mao still harbored hopes for Soviet assistance, he relied less and less on their coming to fruition. In January 1958 he is reported to have stated that the Soviet nuclear deterrent was an "unreliable" factor for Chinese security and referred bitterly to the ungenerous terms of Soviet assistance during the Korean War. In February 1958 CCP meetings, Mao is said to have pushed for more independence from the Soviets in weapons production. In the spring Chinese military leaders argued that China would obtain nuclear weapons only when its own scientists and technicians could develop them. The new push for independence in nuclear weapons programs was consistent with an overall theme of the Great Leap Forward, self-reliance (zili gengsheng).

By July, when Mao apparently created the final guidelines for the enlarged Chinese nuclear program, disillusionment with the slow pace and limited scope of Soviet assistance was clearly evident. Mao reportedly stated to his military leaders: "In the process of developing nuclear weapons we should not imitate other countries. Instead our objectives should be to 'catch up with world levels,' and to 'proceed on all phases [of the nuclear program] simultaneously.'" As summer progressed, the Chinese seemed even more cynical about the value of future Soviet assistance. After the Soviets refused simply to transfer nuclear submarine technology and instead suggested a joint production plan, Mao exploded at the Soviet ambassador to China, P. F. Yudin. He summed up his displeasure with the Soviets dating back to the 1930s. Focusing on the period 1957–58, he claimed that his discussion of a fraternal relationship between the CCP and CPSU in October 1957 was "merely talk"

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44 The Chinese made the request for nuclear subs on June 28. The request was denied by the Soviets at the same time that they requested the creation of a joint Sino-Soviet fleet. This sparked an angry reaction from Mao, who called in the Soviet ambassador for a dressing down on July 22. For evidence of the Chinese requests, see Mao Zedong Waijiao Wenxuan, p. 634, n. 177. For the minutes of the Mao–Yudin meeting of July 22, see "Discussion with the Soviet Ambassador to China, Yudin," in ibid., pp. 322–333. For a discussion of these matters in English, see Lewis and Xue, China's Strategic Snappower, chap. 1.

45 Quan, Mao Zedong yu Heluxiaofu, p. 97. The Soviets asked for repayment, at "market prices," for their weapons transfers.

46 Clemens, The Arms Race and Sino-Soviet Relations, p. 32.

47 Zagoria, Sino-Soviet Conflict, p. 170.

48 "The Guidelines for Developing Nuclear Weapons," point 4, in Lewis and Xue, China Builds the Bomb, p. 70. The document is not dated, but Lewis and Xue deduce persuasively that it was drafted during the May–July 1958 meeting of the Central Military Commission.

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(zhibuguo shi koutoushang shuoshuo). He stated that in fact relations between the parties were more like "a father and a son, a cat and a mouse." He complained bitterly that the Soviets never believed in the Chinese and that they would not give up control of nuclear technology to the Chinese because they "only trust Russians." After canceling the request for nuclear submarines, Mao summed up his disdain for Soviet arrogance by saying: "[You think that] naval nuclear subs are sophisticated technology and contain secrets. [You think that] Chinese people are clumsy. If you give it to us, problems could emerge... You have never trusted the Chinese. Stalin was very untrusting of us. Chinese people are viewed [by you] as... a backward people. You say Europeans look down on Russians, I think Russians look down on the Chinese." A week later, on Army Day (August 1), Marshal He Long spoke with regret about China's past tendency to solve its problems "purely from the military point of view and [by hoping] for outside aid instead of relying on the mobilization of the masses." 50

Mao's fear of being looked down upon by the Soviets was surely important in his decision to accelerate the Chinese nuclear program in summer 1958. In a June 21 meeting with the Central Military Commission, Mao previewed his general plan for an accelerated development of atomic weapons, including hydrogen bombs and intercontinental missiles. His justification for such a massive effort was made not in military terms but in political ones. He argued: "If you do not have such [big] things, others say you do not count for anything." 51 It is important to note his use of the general term "others" (renjia), rather than "the United States" or "the imperialists." In the context of the budding disputes with the Soviets over joint military cooperation, Mao seemed to be including the Soviets among those who glorified such capabilities and looked down upon those who did not have them.

Perhaps more important than Soviet duplicity in arms transfer agreements was Mao's fear that the Soviets would begin treating China as a puppet regime or satellite. As the gap between Soviet and Chinese power grew in the 1950s, the Soviets also increased their demands on their Chinese allies. These intensified Mao's concern about Soviet "greater power chauvinism," which dated back to his initial meetings with Stalin in 1949–50. 52 Mao's fears peaked in the first half of 1958, when the Soviets


52 Han and Xue, eds., Dangdai Zhongguo Waijiao, pp. 30–32. The book points to the
requested a joint naval fleet and the stationing of Soviet submarine radio stations on Chinese territory.\textsuperscript{53} In their meeting with Yudin, Mao, Peng Dehuai, and Zhou Enlai treated these requests as violations of Chinese sovereignty.\textsuperscript{54} During their summit in early August 1958, Mao accused Khrushchev of using the proposal for a joint naval fleet as an opening wedge in an attempt to seize the Chinese coastline. Mao chastised Khrushchev: “What do you mean by a joint navy? . . . What do you consider mutual consultation? Do we still have sovereignty? Do you plan on seizing our entire coastal region? . . . Go ahead and seize all of it”\textsuperscript{55} Mao is reported to have feared that by demanding bases at Chinese ports, Khrushchev wanted to “kill two birds with one stone: vying with the United States for the Pacific and encircling China.”\textsuperscript{56}

On the issue of the submarine radio stations, Mao also took a stubborn line: the stations could be built on Chinese soil only if the capital for the project were supplied by China. Mao’s concern was clear. He stated: “The money has to come from the Chinese side, it can not come from the Soviet side. [The transmitting station] can be jointly used. . . . If the Soviet side puts on a lot of pressure, then do not answer [the Soviets], delay a while and then speak, or we will discuss it for a while at the [Party] Center and then respond.”\textsuperscript{57} Although he was not averse to Soviet technology transfers, he wanted no strings attached. He feared Soviet proposals to provide the bulk of the capital for the project. For the construction to be acceptable to Mao, ownership and control had to be Chinese.

Soviets' duplicity in negotiations over the Manchurian railways and port facilities in 1949–50. The authors argue that China had to accept this humiliation at this time because of the clear and present hostility that America was demonstrating toward Beijing at the time. For evidence that the initial meetings between Stalin and Mao were rocky at best, see Shi, Zai Libi juren Shenbian, chaps. 13–14. Mao later claimed that Stalin had asked for a joint naval fleet in 1950. Mao refused and argued with Stalin. See “Discussion with the Soviet Ambassador, Yudin,” July 22, 1958, in Mao Zedong Wenzuan, p. 331.\textsuperscript{58} For a review of Soviet requests for basing rights, see Li, Wutai shang de Xin Zhongguo Lingxiu, pp. 167–168; Han and Xue, eds., Dengtai Zhongguo Wenzao, pp. 112–114; and “Discussion with the Soviet Ambassador, Yudin,” July 22, 1958, in Mao Zedong Wenzuan, pp. 328–333.\textsuperscript{59} For early Western discussion of the tensions in Sino-Soviet relations that preceded the mass communication drive, see Zagoria, Sino-Soviet Conflict, chaps. 4–6; Griffith, The Sino-Soviet Rift, esp. pp. 16–18; and Clemens, The Arms Race and Sino-Soviet Relations, pp. 40–41.

53 “Discussion with the Soviet Ambassador, Yudin,” July 22, 1958 in Mao Zedong Wenzuan. For further discussion of the Yudin meeting, see Lewis and Xue, China’s Strategic Seapower, pp. 13–14; and Cong, Quhe Fazhan de Suiyue, pp. 348–350.
54 Li, Wutai shang de Xin Zhongguo Lingxiu, p. 170.
55 Mao as paraphrased by Zhu, “Soviet Strategic Inferiority,” p. 30; also see Quan, Mao Zedong ye Huxiuweifei, pp. 124–130.
57 We should not underestimate the importance of the Soviet requests in Mao’s assessment of China’s security environment. In a September 1959 analysis, Mao reviewed the rocky history of Sino-Soviet relations dating back to 1949; about Sino-Soviet relations in 1958 he wrote: “At the Sino-Soviet talks in Beijing in August, there occurred the incidents related to the [proposals for] a joint navy and 70% [Soviet] capitalization of the radio transmitter. We resisted this assault.”\textsuperscript{58} It is clear that by using the term “assault” (jin gong, sometimes translated as “offensive”), Mao viewed Soviet pressure with the utmost seriousness. This is not to say that the Soviets became China’s number one enemy as early as 1958, but rather that Soviet weapons advances appeared to increase Soviet demands on China and reduce dangerously China’s importance in the Sino-Soviet alliance. As a political history of China points out, the combination of fast-paced Soviet economic growth (in relation to that of the United States) and the development of the ICBM “seriously endangered” Sino-Soviet relations.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Mao’s Grand Strategy}

With its emphasis on long-term industrial and military modernization, the Great Leap Forward was viewed by Mao as the best way to launch China into the league of self-sufficient nuclear and industrial powers.\textsuperscript{60} This would help China improve relations with both the West and the Soviets. As one Chinese history puts it: “At this time [early 1958] all Chinese Communist Party leaders urgently felt that only by raising economic performance and closing the gap with America in military science and technology could [China] establish forces effective in expelling American imperialists, and [avoid] falling under the control of the great power chauvinism of the Soviet leadership.”\textsuperscript{61}

It was actually during Mao’s 1957 trip to Moscow that the term “Great Leap Forward” began appearing in CCP newspapers.\textsuperscript{62} In his reflections on the early decisions leading to the Great Leap policies, then-finance minister Bo Yibo remembered that, particularly after his November 1957 trip to Moscow, Mao decided that China needed to stand up more actively against American imperialism. While not defending the di-

\begin{footnotesize}
60 For all its disasters, the Great Leap did succeed in mobilizing tens of thousands of peasants for uranium prospecting and mining. These projects provided the raw materials for China’s first nuclear bomb. See Lewis and Xue, China Builds the Bomb, pp. 87–88.
61 Xu, Jinren Zhi Zhan, p. 223.
\end{footnotesize}
sastrous form that Great Leap policies took, Bo still states that, given China’s backward place in the international balance of power, the general notion of a Great Leap was basically a good one.63

From its initial and less radical phases through the high tide of August and September, the CCP argued that the Great Leap was necessary for international security reasons. The initial stated goal of the economic drive was to surpass Great Britain within fifteen years on key industrial indicators, especially steel production. The People’s Daily of February 3, 1958, stated that China had to compete successfully with capitalist countries if it were to stand up to imperialism.64 Mao certainly saw the West as his biggest enemy, but his strategic concerns were not limited to the West. As Marshal Liu Bocheng reported, by late June 1958 Mao was not only discussing surpassing the British and the Americans economically and militarily but was also explicitly listing the Soviets as a rival that must be overtaken by China.65 Fearing that China was lagging behind both the West and the Soviet Union, in July and again in August Mao upgraded his plan for fast-paced industrial growth. Mao’s grand strategy was designed (however poorly) to launch China into the class of great world powers.66

In order to develop an advanced industrial base and modern weapons, Mao would need capital, something China sorely lacked. Although the Great Leap strategy suffered from various utopian ideological assumptions and poor planning, the basic notions of substituting peasant labor for capital when possible and accumulating significant capital through rural taxation were possible, in and of themselves, economically irrational.67

In 1950 the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (hardly poisoned by communist utopianism) expected China eventually to try just that. CIA analysts predicted that China would seek capital from the countryside when

64 Xie, Dayuejin Kuanglan, p. 36. Xie quotes the first reason for the Great Leap given by the Feb. 3 Renmin Ribao: “If we do not employ the fastest pace in implementing (national) construction, and if we do not energetically surpass the economies of the developed capitalist countries in the shortest time possible, then we cannot view our national security as completely guaranteed.”
65 Liu Bochong Zhuan, p. 664.
66 In each phase of the Great Leap, improving China’s international position was a major impetus for Mao’s policies. He felt that both the United States and the Soviet Union were “looking down” (kan buji) at China. See Pei, “Yi Ji Wu Ba Nian Ba Da Er Ci Huij,” p. 240. For Mao’s growing disappointment with Soviet “great power chauvinism” throughout the 1950s, see Han and Xue, eds., Dangdai Zhongguo Waijiao, esp. pp. 30–32 and 111–114.
67 Riskin, China’s Political Economy, pp. 118–119. Riskin traces the basic notions of the Great Leap to rejection of Soviet-style planning and the influence of respected international development economists such as Ragnar Norske. Also see Cheng, China’s Economic Development; Xie, Dayuejin Kuanglan; and Liu and Wu, eds., Dayuejin he Ti azheng Shiqi de Guomin Jingji, chap. 1.

Soviet assistance proved wanting. These analysts only wondered how the CCP would muster the necessary political consensus for such a program when its traditional political base was in the rural areas.68

Along with nuclear weapons, Mao’s leading national power indicator was steel production. In mid-July 1958 Mao launched a massive drive to increase steel output. At the August Beidaihe conference, Mao called for a doubling of Chinese steel output in one year. This second push for increased steel production led to the infamously wasteful policy of creating backyard furnaces in rural areas in order to produce iron and steel locally.

In late August and early September Mao launched the most radical phase of the Great Leap Forward: the nationwide commination of agriculture and the militarization of the work force. Mao’s program called for the ultimate sacrifice for the greatest percentage of Chinese citizens: surrender of their remaining small, private plots and household property. Because most of China lived in the countryside and China was short of capital, Mao needed the peasants to work harder for less. In an August edict, implemented in early September, the peasants were ordered to form communes and work brigades that would perform labor-intensive capital construction as well as tilling. In addition, “bourgeois” incentive programs such as providing small private plots and piece-rate wage systems were abolished.69 To further control consumption under the new “supply system,” peasants were required to eat in public mess halls. As one Chinese history puts it, Mao believed that a technologically underdeveloped China needed to answer the Soviet launching of Sputnik by first launching an “agricultural Sputnik.”70

The Domestic Hurdles to Mobilization: The Great Leap Forward as Social Revolution

If one employs the standards offered in Chapter 2, the description of Mao’s strategy as novel and controversial should raise little debate. Al-

68 In January 1950, CIA China analysts seemed impressively prescient. See “Review of the World Situation: CIA 1–50,” Jan. 18, 1950, in Intelligence Files, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 250, HSTL. They wrote, “During this period, [1950–60] progress in industrialization will depend on extensive capital accumulation. Assuming that the bulk of it does not come in the form of Soviet or other foreign investment, which seems likely, most of this capital will have to come from the scanty surpluses of China’s small-scale agriculture. Consequently...... Chinese Communist Administration efficiency and peasant loyalties will be severely tested by the problem of extracting this agricultural surplus and using the proceeds as capital for industrialization.”
69 For a detailed discussion of the Great Leap strategy, see Schoenhals, Salvationist Socialism; Xie, Dayuejin Kuanglan; and Liu and Wu, eds., Dayuejin he Ti azheng Shiqi de Guomin Jingji.
70 Quan, Mao Zedong yu Heluxiaofu, p. 116.
most every aspect of the Great Leap communization was unprecedented in Chinese history. The militarization of civilian life, the mobilizing of women into the work force, and the creation of public mess halls are just a few of its novel aspects. The Great Leap Forward was nothing short of a social revolution. But it was more than a social oddity; it was an enormous physical and economic burden on the average Chinese citizen. There is no evidence that Mao actually knew the program would lead to tens of millions of hunger-related deaths, but he did know that the communization program would require massive sacrifice by the majority of Chinese. He said that “three years of hard struggle” were necessary so that China could become a leading economic and military power in the longer term.71

HIGHER TAXES IN PEACETIME

For the pre-Deng era, the best indicators of tax burden on the Chinese citizenry are the accumulation rates of state capital. This figure represents not only what percentage of output the government took in but also how much of that revenue was used on investment rather than consumption. State capital accumulation rates rose sharply from 24.9 percent of total production in 1957 to 43.8 percent in 1959 (the 1958 jump was smaller because the most radical phase of the Great Leap did not begin until the 1958 fall harvest).72 In a country underdeveloped as China in the 1950s, such an increased burden is almost unconscionable when one considers the marginal value of the added taxes on poor peasants and workers.

Compounding the burden on the average citizen, the newly accumulated capital was directed toward heavy industry, capital construction, and atomic weapons development, budgetary items that do not quickly improve the average citizen's standard of living.73 This investment strategy was consistent with Mao's hope that, within a decade, the Great Leap would make China a power to be reckoned with in both the Western and socialist camps. A review of Chinese economic statistics for the period shows that the Great Leap was designed to increase heavy industry, not consumer-oriented light industries (see Table 6.1). These statistics are not accurate because they do not capture the poor quality and exaggerations of local reporting during the Great Leap. They do, however, accurately represent the skewing of government policy toward heavy industry because government targets largely guided the patterns of exaggeration.

Earlier, less ambitious efforts to increase state control of production in 1955–56 led to urban strikes and a drop in rural economic growth.74 This “Little Leap Forward” involved the collectivization of agriculture and the reduction of wage incentives. Although relatively few people went on strike or lashed out directly against the party in this period, a large number simply refused to work as hard without the normal material incentives. As one Chinese expert reflected on early 1956: “In a country like China [in the 1950s] there are two ways to protest government policy: one is to rise up, the other is to sit down. In 1956 relatively few people rose up, but relatively many sat down.”75 Such behavior did not threaten the state directly, but it did undercut the state's goal of increasing capital accumulation.

In the second half of 1956, after the economic slowdown was evident, particularly in the countryside, small private plots were returned to the peasants and additional material incentives were offered to rural and urban workers. While production rose, so did consumption, non-taxed income, and the percentage of state revenues paid out in wages. As a result, state expenditures for capital construction fell in 1957.76 Openly frustra...
In fact, it was the lack of a direct threat from the West that allowed China to concentrate on its internal long-term construction, including a ten-year nuclear program. From 1956–58 military spending on standing forces dropped 18 percent in absolute terms and shrank 40 percent as a share of budget expenditures, as Mao emphasized long-term economic and technological investment over immediate buildups. However, the average Chinese citizen was not to benefit from the peace dividend. Although as early as 1955 Mao called for a cut in current military expenditures, he did so to increase long-term research and development, most of which is not included in the official defense budget. Obtaining the bomb alone was expensive. By one estimate, in order to develop its first atomic bomb, by 1964 China had spent more on the bomb than on the entire defense budget for 1957 and 1958 combined.

Manipulating Conflict, Militarizing Society, and Selling the Program

The political problem for Mao was that he needed to mobilize capital and labor for the industrial and atomic programs. Since the nation was not under direct threat, it should have been difficult to justify such heavy burdens on China's impoverished citizenry. The Great Leap Forward was designed to solve this problem by combining an intensified version of the 1955–56 “Little Leap” economic program with the militant political fervor of the anti-Japanese and civil war period. To imitate that period, the communization process in the majority of areas involved the militarization of village life. The threat to China and the related need for vigilance, unity, and sacrifice was used to justify land seizure and extremely high government accumulation rates. As one party history describes the communes: “The entire commune work force was drawn up along military lines, organized into work units with squads, brigades, platoons, barracks, etc. Under the commune’s united command, industrial and agricultural production was carried out implementing the methods of large organized armies fighting a war.” The commune program was painted as part of a national war effort built on the notion of local militias and a “people’s war.” By winter 1958, 300 million Chinese had enrolled in the people’s militia.

The “everyone a soldier” campaign was the linchpin of Mao’s two-level strategy. By militarizing labor, the movement linked the threat of foreign invasion with less dramatic agricultural and industrial goals. The movement was not designed to prepare China for war but to create the siege

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77 At the August 1958 Beidaihe conference Mao made reference to the need to bring back the selfless spirit of this earlier period and to abolish “bourgeois” incentives. For a cogent discussion of this trend in Mao’s thinking, see Shi, “Mao Zedong Dui Shehuizhiyui Fazhan Jieduan Lilun de Gongxian he Shiwo”; and Zhou, “Remnin Gongshe he Shehuizhiyui Jianshe de Kongxiang Lun.”

78 Quoted in Shi, “Mao Zedong Dui Shehuizhiyui Fazhan Jieduan Lilun de Gongxian he Shiwo,” p. 49.

79 Schoenhals, Salussionist Socialism, pp. 90–100; For data on worker dissent, see p. 107–108; Liu and Wu, eds., Daoyejin he Tuosheng Shiqi de Guomin Jingji, chap. 1; and interview research conducted by the author.

80 Mao’s draft speech for the August 17 session of the Beidaihe Party Conference in MacFarquhar, Cheek and Wu, The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao, pp. 401–402.

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mentality necessary to extract massive sacrifices from the Chinese public. As Mao stated cynically at Beidaihe about the militia drive: "Producing that many guns is probably a waste, since we are not at war. But a little waste is still necessary. 'Everyone a soldier' helps build morale and courage." Rather than a response to new international realities, the militarization of society was designed explicitly to replicate the selfless domestic political climate of the anti-Japanese war period. Needless to say, it is difficult to militarize an entire society without the clear presence of an enemy. So Mao chose to legitimize the campaign to the public by reference to the "American imperialists." In July 1958 the

CCP orchestrated massive rallies ostensibly to denounce American imperialism in Lebanon and to call for a renewed struggle to "liberate" Taiwan from the "American puppets," the KMT. During these rallies, speakers linked economic production goals with the nation's ability to fend off American imperialism. Typical of the media coverage of the rallies, a daily newspaper reported: "The Shanghai workers, possessing a glorious history of opposing imperialism, will use outstanding production achievements to fulfill the production goals of the Great Leap ahead of schedule, to increase the forces of peace, and to assist the Arab people." When the Middle East crisis wound down in mid-August, Mao conveniently created new tensions in the Taiwan Straits to replace it as a cause for public mobilization. In late August, at the same party conference that created nationwide communication policies and radically increased production and capital accumulation targets, Mao ordered a limited assault on KMT positions in the Taiwan Straits. Mao knew at the onset that he was indirectly attacking the United States. Although there was no change in the previously existing status quo, the true victory was won when the United States came to the aid of KMT forces. In September Mao could add salience to the anti-Chiang, anti-U.S. campaign begun in July by pointing to joint U.S.-KMT operations in the straits.

Mao did not want war, just conflict. Conflict short of war would guarantee popular consensus for his broad economic strategy without wasting the mobilized resources on actual warfighting. As a Chinese military history argues about Mao's decision to attack in late August: "Based on the [international and domestic] situation from late August on, the military activities adopted by the People's Liberation Army toward Quemoy flowed mainly from considerations of the internal political struggle, the needs of economic construction, and Chinese-American bilateral relations." Consistent with the position taken here, the author, Colonel Xu Yan, argues that Mao needed to legitimize his radical economic construction plan. In order to form communes and increase both production and accumulation he formed the people's militia. In order to form the people's

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64 Mao, Aug. 18, 1958, in MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu, eds., The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao, p. 404.
65 See Mao's August 30 speech at Beidaihe, in ibid., pp. 430–441.
66 I surveyed CCP propaganda from various sources, including national and local newspapers and provincial party journals (see bibliography for a listing). A major propaganda theme during the early communication movement was the need for military organization to increase production and thereby, repel American invasion and liberate Taiwan. See, for example, the Sept. 7, 1958, Renmin Ribao, with the heading, "All the Nation's People Mobilize, Struggle to Resolutely Oppose the American Military Provocation!" Articles include reports that workers and peasants were forming militias and promising to increase production as a means of countering American threats. They were employing slogans such as, "Whatever the motherland needs, we will provide!" and "Each additional ton of steel means more power to liberate Taiwan!"; also see Xie, Dayejin Kuanglan, pp. 100–106; and Pollack, "Perception and Action in Chinese Foreign Policy," Vol. 1, pp. 220–227.
67 Wenbin Bao, July 19, 1958, p. 1. One can turn to any national newspaper and find similar reporting of rallies in major cities around the country. These rallies were clearly carefully organized and manipulated by the party to mobilize support for concurrent demands for increased production.
70 Xu, Jinmen Zhi Zhan, pp. 220–221.

militia and to mobilize the peasants and workers, he exploited conflict with the United States.91

Secret speeches published in the West reveal that, before the assault on Quemoy, Mao strongly desired tensions with the West in order to mobilize the public. At the Beidaihe conference in August, Mao ordered both the commune drive and the attack in the Taiwan Straits. During the August 17 session Mao stated baldly:

In our propaganda, we say that we oppose tension and strive for detente, as if detente is to our advantage [and] tension is to their advantage. [But] can we or can’t we look at the situation the other way around: is tension to our comparative advantage [and] to the West’s disadvantage? Tension is to the West’s advantage only in that it will increase military production, and it’s to our advantage in that it will mobilize all [our] positive forces. . . . [Tension]

91 Ibid., pp. 215–224. Xu argues that, from its inception at the July military conference, the notion of the people’s militia was “subordinated” to the “more important” goals of the commune drive and the Great Leap Forward.

can help us increase steel as well as grain production. It’s better if the United States and Britain withdraw from Lebanon and Jordan later [rather than sooner], Don’t make the Americans seem kind-hearted people. Every extra day they stay is an additional advantage to us. [We can] capitalize on the United States’ mistakes and make an issue of it. American imperialism will become a target of public criticism, but in [our] propaganda we can’t talk like this. We still have to say [they] should withdraw immediately. . . . As for the embargo, the tighter the better; the longer the UN refuses to recognize us the better. We have experience [in this]. During the anti-Japanese war, Chiang Kai-shek and He Yingqin [KMT minister of war, 1930–44] refused to give us supplies and money. We raised [the slogan of] unity and self-reliance, developing production on a large scale. . . . It was like that then, so it’s to our advantage now to have various countries put an embargo on us. . . . To have an enemy in front of us, to have tension is to our advantage.”92

Mao would arrange to keep an enemy in front of China by attacking in the straits one week later, drawing massive American naval forces into the region. In fact, the final order to attack was made at the same time (August 21) that the Middle East crisis was finally being resolved in the UN.93 Clearly Mao needed a new conflict to replace the Middle East crisis as a mobilizing theme.

On the first day of shelling and during the ensuing crisis, which lasted until late October, Mao adopted the same tone he used in his August 17 speech. Wu Lengxi, then head of the Xinhua News Service, claims that, on August 23, Mao underscored the sections of his August 17 speech that are quoted above. He paraphrases Mao as saying: “The bombardment of Jinmen [Quemoy], frankly speaking, was our turn to create international tension for a purpose.”94 On September 5, the day after the United States first publicly committed itself to defending the offshore islands, Mao told the State Supreme Council: “War mobilizes the people’s spiritual state. . . . Of course we do not now have war, but under this type of

92 “Talks at the Beidaihe Conference (Draft Conference): August 17, 1958” in MacFarquhar, Cheek and Wu, eds., The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao, pp. 402–403 (emphasis added). Words in brackets are in the original translation.

93 On August 21 a political settlement of the Middle East crisis was found, and Dag Hammarskjold arranged for the phased withdrawal of Western forces from the region. On this day, Mao met with the Fujian regional commander, Ye Fei, at Beidaihe and ordered the August 23 attack in the straits. For the influence of events in the Middle East on Mao’s decisions, see Xu, Jinmen Zhi Zhan, p. 220. For a discussion of the August 21 meeting between Mao and Ye, see ibid., pp. 224–226; and Ye, Ye Fei Huiyuan, pp. 654–655.

94 Wu, “Inside Story of the Decision Making during the Shelling of Jinmen,” pp. 208–209. Wu states that Mao’s immediate purpose was to “teach America a lesson” and that his deeper purpose was to “make the Americans nervous and mobilize the people of the world to join our struggle.” While mobilization is central to Wu’s account of Mao’s strategy, he portrays Mao as more of an internationalist than a nationalist.
British forces in the Middle East, he said: "If you want to oppose aggressors, it is difficult to [do] if you do not have a [concrete] object, target, and opponent." Mao's September statements have been interpreted as a retrospective attempt to find something good about an imprudent decision to attack in the straits. But the consistent themes in Mao's statements before, during, and after the initiation of the crisis belie this interpretation. It appears that mobilization of the population behind increased production was precisely Mao's goal in attacking in the straits.

Further evidence that Beijing was manipulating conflict for domestic mobilization is provided by Zhou Enlai's October 5 discussion of the Sino-American crisis with the Soviet attaché in Beijing. Zhou said:

"The Quemoy artillery rang out, it served to mobilize the people of the world and especially the people of China. In every corner of the globe a wave of anti-Americanism was uncovered that surpassed in width and scope that of the Lebanon Incident... Chiang Kai-shek's remaining on Quemoy and Matsu and America's continuing intervention carry great benefits. They can serve to educate the people of every country, especially our own Chinese people."

Such statements by Mao and Zhou are consistent with mass media propaganda that constantly drew connections between American imperialism generally, the American threat to China in particular, and the need for China to fulfill the production goals of the Great Leap Forward. For this purpose, in September and October central and provincial party...
journals called on local cadres to militarize the work force behind an anti-American theme. 101
Perhaps the most convincing evidence that threat manipulation was central to the commune program comes from Henan province, where the early mass communes were created in July. If the use of the militia movement and anti-Americanism were central to Mao's mobilization strategy during communication, we would expect anti-American propaganda to have been particularly militant in Henan as early as July, and this is precisely what a review of the Henan Daily at that time reveals. While in July mass rallies protesting U.S. intervention in the Middle East were taking place all over China, in Henan the protests were much more closely tied to production goals and the transformation of rural society than in other areas, where steel production was more often the focus of mobilization. The July 27 front-page story read:

We Chinese are bearing the burden of protecting world peace. If the imperialists do not stop their invasions, we will resolutely launch movements to strike them back. In the autumn farm management movement, the hoe is our weapon, the weeds are comparable to the American and British imperialist armies, we will resolutely eradicate all weeds. Achieve an even bigger autumn bumper crop, speed the socialist Great Leap Forward on all fronts, support our Middle Eastern brothers. 102

At the "July 1" commune, one of the first in all of China, the link between international tension, military social organization, and increased production goals was very clear. The Henan Daily reported:

The "July 1" agricultural cooperative . . . unanimously decided to form immediately a great labor army from the entire cooperative's labor force of 9,000. Everyone also passed a resolution stating that the entire body of collective members will now adopt a combat style of work, striving to achieve a thousand jin of ginned cotton and three thousand jin of millet per mu . . . . [Depending on the] immediate strategic necessity (yiding xingshi xinyi), our labor army is also a staunch combat army, coming to counterattack invaders, and protecting peace. 103

101 The Sept. 1, 1958, edition of Hongqi, the Party Central Committee journal, likened the Great Leap to a war on nature in which workers would be militarized. A mass army prepared for American attack would have the proper organizational skills to carry out this economic war in peacetime. In 1958 the Party Central Committee of each province and autonomous region created a monthly journal for party cadres (see bibliography for a complete list). For examples of the use of the American threat to mobilize the masses in these, see the September and October issues of Shangyou (Guangdong Province) and Qianjin (Shanxi Province).


103 Ibid.

These mobilizational tactics in rural Henan presaged similar nationwide propaganda during the concurrent crisis in the straits, the national communication drive, and the "everyone a soldier" campaign in early September. In fact, in its September 1 issue the national party journal, Hongqi (Red flag), referred directly to the Henan communes as national examples, and in particular to their military organization and anti-imperialist fervor. During the nationwide "everyone a soldier" campaign, the propaganda at the local level closely resembled the earlier Henan model of using the American threat to increase production and sacrifice. As Roderick MacFarquhar reports from eyewitness accounts in far off Yunnan province, in early fall communication and production drives were "interwoven with the Taiwan Straits crisis in the minds of Chinese cadres," creating an "overheated atmosphere of militance and nationalism." 104 In light of this clear pattern of mobilizational propaganda both before and after the outbreak of conflict and Mao's own critical statements at Beidaihe, it seems hardly coincidental that the most radical phases of the Great Leap coincided with the Taiwan Straits crisis.

THE TWO-LEVEL THESIS VERSUS THE ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESES

China under Threat?

As discussed above, just one week before the attack on the straits, Mao saw little threat from the United States or its allies in Asia. He viewed America's alliances as "defensive" in nature. At the Beidaihe Party Conference Mao stated plainly that the CCP must portray the United States as threatening in its propaganda but that there was little reason to believe this was the case. Moreover, Mao said that although the CCP should continue to preach the language of detente, Beijing actually preferred tension as a mobilizing tool to increase production. Rather than being threatened by America's actions in the Middle East, Mao seemed to welcome the intervention because it supplied a domestically exploitable international issue. Moreover, exploitation of the Middle East crisis came at low cost and risk to China because it was occurring far from the East Asian region. 105

By the middle of 1957 the KMT had finished most of its significant strengthening of forces on Quemoy and Matsu, and the United States had already announced its intention to introduce Matador missiles to the area. This makes one wonder why Mao did not attack earlier if KMT


105 See Mao's August 17-20 speeches at the Beidaihe conference in MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu, The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao.
buildup was his concern. The KMT did use the offshore islands in blocking the port of Xiamen, but these largely naval operations could be carried out easily from bases on Taiwan.106 Moreover, American military operations in the region before the shelling could hardly be seen as threatening to China.107 As Jonathan Pollack argues, the "U.S. response to the [PLA's Fujian] buildup . . . could not have been construed as evidence of substantial increases in the U.S. military presence."108 We know from his statements at the Beidaihe conference that Mao did not believe the Americans were preparing for an offensive against China in 1958. His cutting of the current 1958 defense budget is also consistent with his analysis at Beidaihe.

Perhaps most damning to the "China under threat" thesis is Mao's telegram to Peng Dehuai on July 27, delaying a planned attack on Quemoy. In this telegram Mao states that he has decided that China should be patient and cautious in choosing a time for attack. But rather than fearing an attack from the KMT on military grounds, Mao in fact welcomed that attack on political grounds. Mao states: "The Middle East situation will take time to be resolved, so we have time. What is the need for anxiety? We will temporarily not attack. Eventually the day of attack will come. If the enemy attacks [first] at Zhangzhou, Shantou, Fuzhou, and Hangzhou, that would be most wonderful."109 In the document Mao also claimed that Chinese strategists must keep "politics in command" (zhengzhi guashuai).

Another piece of evidence against the threat thesis is Mao's handling of the issue of restoring ambassadorial-level talks in June and July. On June 30, China leveled an ultimatum stating that if the United States did not restore ambassadorial-level talks within two weeks all talks would be broken off. Dulles responded affirmatively to the Chinese request on July 1, one day after the two-week ultimatum was made. He secretly made detailed arrangements for Jacob Bean, an American ambassador, to meet with the Chinese in Warsaw. In his internally circulated memoirs, a high-level foreign ministry official admits that Beijing simply refused to recognize the American response, which fulfilled all of Beijing's requests.110 Beijing's refusal to accept the American conciliation supports the thesis that Mao preferred tension with the West and undercuts the notion that he would have preferred a reduction in tensions. Moreover, it shows that Mao's strategy of conflict manipulation preceded both the Middle East and Taiwan Straits crises.

Mao may have wanted to reduce the number of KMT troops on the offshore islands because he saw large deployments as threatening to China in the long run. Mao almost certainly would have welcomed some reduction of KMT forces on the islands. But Mao's dismissive statements about the threat from America and his hopes that the KMT would attack first in the crisis suggest that a threat from the KMT was not a primary force behind Mao's decision to shell and that reduction of KMT forces on the offshore islands was, at best, a secondary goal of Mao's strategy.

A Strategic Probe?

As Pollack argues, it seems highly unlikely that the CCP was engaged in a strategic probe in August and September 1958.111 The probe hypothesis implies that Mao believed that China or the socialist camp as a whole was ascendant in 1958 and that China was in a position to exploit the West's strategic decline by escalating in the straits if Washington backed down. But the military details of the straits crisis do not support this thesis. The timing and pattern of the attacks and the balance of forces in the region are not consistent with the probe hypothesis. Even if the Americans had abandoned Chiang in the fall of 1958, there was little the PRC was prepared to do to exploit that eventuality. Moreover, rather than probing for America's reaction by attacking until America responded, Mao sought to avoid Sino-American escalation at the outset by limiting the duration and type of attacks leveled on Quemoy.

The first key issue is the timing of the attacks. The period from late August through early September is the heart of typhoon season, the worst time for Beijing to initiate a probing strategy. This fact was not overlooked by the local military commander, Ye Fei, who from the middle of August had encountered great difficulty with transportation and logistics because of typhoons.112 Although artillery positions were relatively unaffected by the wind and rains in August and September, these conditions greatly complicated the preparation of air, sea, and land operations necessary to seize the offshore islands, let alone Taiwan. Moreover, even in the best of weather, the PLA lacked landing equipment sophisticated enough

106 Stolper, China, Taiwan and the Offshore Islands, p. 125.
110 Liu, Chushi Siuan Ba Nian, pp. 65-71. Liu was ambassador to Moscow at the time.
112 Ye, Ye Fei Huiyi, p. 651; Xu, Jimmen Zhi Zhan, p. 216.
to ensure an easy breach of the formidable KMT defenses on the offshore islands.\textsuperscript{113}

Second, the pattern of attacks in the straits suggests that Mao’s goals were not altered by American behavior. Morton Halperin reveals that Mao restrained his forces within three days of the initial shelling. Halperin’s report on the pattern of shelling fired from the mainland in the first eight days is reproduced in Table 6.2.\textsuperscript{114} As Pollack points out, this deescalation occurred a week before any firm American diplomatic or military response to the crisis. It was not until September 4 that Dulles delivered the Newport Declaration, linking the security of the offshore islands with that of Taiwan. Pollack argues that, although Chinese restraint came decidedly early in the crisis, “there is, however, no known instance of an early and authoritative American threat having been communicated either privately or publicly to the PRC [by Washington].”\textsuperscript{115} It is clear from American sources that Washington consciously avoided sending any clear deterrent warnings to Beijing in the first days of the conflict. Washington feared such a commitment might encourage either foot-dragging or rash behavior by the KMT.\textsuperscript{116}

For his part, Mao was clearly afraid of American reprisals even after the initial attacks. We now have Chinese evidence that PLA restraint in the early days of the crisis was planned on August 21 during Mao’s meeting with Commander Ye Fei. It was at this meeting that Mao decided upon a three-day limit on the fiercest shelling. In fact, the CCP leaders were so concerned about America’s becoming involved that Lin Biao even suggested warning Washington in advance so that American advisers might not be killed in the initial assault (a suggestion Mao rejected).\textsuperscript{117}

Table 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Shells Fired Daily at the Offshore Islands, August 23-30, 1958</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 23</td>
<td>40,000 (shells)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 24</td>
<td>36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 25</td>
<td>3,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 26</td>
<td>3,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 27</td>
<td>11,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 28</td>
<td>12,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 29</td>
<td>16,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 30</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Mao’s military telegrams also demonstrate extreme caution. On August 18, Mao strongly warned Peng Dehuai that China’s air force must not fly past the offshore islands (\textit{jinMa xian}).\textsuperscript{118} In the Chinese sources the confident Mao of prevailing east winds is nowhere to be found.

Of course, Mao was acutely interested in how the United States would respond to the shelling. In this sense he clearly was probing America’s commitments to the KMT. Wu Lengxi states that Mao intently watched reports of American naval and diplomatic activities and adjusted his military and propaganda strategies accordingly. Early in the crisis he instructed Wu not to begin the media propaganda campaign until America had responded to the initial shelling. But far from hoping that America would not stand firm in the crisis, Mao appeared pleased that the United States intervened in late August and early September. Mao was not trying to determine just how much land the United States would allow China to seize but was probing for the best and safest way to create tensions short of war to further his political goals.\textsuperscript{119}

Did Mao Intend to Take the Islands?

In both the strategic probe and the China under threat theses, one potential motive for the PLA attack might have been to wrest the offshore islands from KMT control. The goal of such an action would have been to eliminate the military threat from the islands or to move one step closer to the eventual recovery of Taiwan, or both. Mao may have backed away after observing America’s response to the initial shelling. This scenario seems logical and consistent with a broad overview of the history, but the evidence from China suggests that, while Mao considered recovering the islands, it was not his primary goal in attacking in the straits.\textsuperscript{120} Therefore, China’s failure to recover the islands should not be seen as a great defeat for Mao or a great victory for American deterrence.

Mao at least considered the seizure of the islands when he ordered the

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\textsuperscript{113} Xu, \textit{Jinmen Zhi Zhan}, p. 218.

\textsuperscript{114} Halperin’s account, based on the CINCPAC Taiwan Diary, is corroborated by Ye, Ye Fei Huiyi, and by Lin, Yi jiu Wu Bu Nian Taiwan H scenery Wei ji Qijian Minjiazi Dui Hua Zhen.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{115} Pollack, “Perception and Action in Chinese Foreign Policy,” Vol. 1, p. 139.


\textsuperscript{117} Ye, Ye Fei Huiyi, pp. 650–656.

\textsuperscript{118} See “Comments concerning the Cessation of Military Exercises at Shenzhen and Preparation for Attack on Quemoy,” Aug. 18, 1958 in ji guo Yiliai Mao Zedong Wengao, Vol. 7, p. 348. In this same telegram Mao also orders the halt to military exercises near Canton for fear of frightening the British.

\textsuperscript{119} Wu, “Inside Story of the Decision Making during the Shelling of Jinmen,” pp. 209–210. On September 4, Mao and the Central Committee believed that America’s response was perfect given their mobilizational goals. Although they had sent forces to the region, American leaders had made it clear that they were not eager to fight a war over the offshore islands. While Wu’s account of events fits the mobilization model almost perfectly, it should be noted again that Wu saw Mao’s mobilizational efforts as aimed at “the people of the world,” not just the Chinese people.

\textsuperscript{120} See Zhang, \textit{Deterrence and Strategic Culture}, chap. 8.
initial massive attack on Quemoy in August.\textsuperscript{121} A military history paraphrases Mao as saying: “After the first period [of attack], the enemy might decide to withdraw troops from the islands or, under great duress, continue to struggle; at that time, based on our view of the situation, we will decide whether or not we will consider landing on the islands to do battle.”\textsuperscript{122} In this portrayal, Mao clearly considers seizing the islands. However, the highly circumscribed language about the option of amphibious attack suggests that recovery of the islands was not a primary goal at the onset of China’s military operations.

Mao’s military strategy also suggests that, in late August, invasion of the islands was not Mao’s primary military goal. As Pollack argues, Mao never brought his most effective forces (including air power) to bear in the conflict. Mao demonstrated such restraint even before America’s September 4 commitment to assist Chiang in defending the islands.\textsuperscript{123} Ye Fei’s account corroborates Pollack’s analysis. Ye argues that in late August commander Han Xianchu suggested to him that he should use bombing runs to attack the islands. Ye replied that Mao had never mentioned “landing on and liberating” the islands as a military goal, so such bombing runs were unnecessary. Moreover, since bombers would need fighter escort, such attacks might risk confrontation with American planes over the straits, which Mao had warned against on August 21.\textsuperscript{124}

It is of course possible that Mao hoped that shelling alone would compel KMT withdrawal from the islands and make armed invasion unnecessary. The PLA did broadcast two surrender calls to the islands on August 24 and 27 and successfully blockaded shipments to the island in early September.\textsuperscript{125} There is little doubt that Mao would have accepted the

\textsuperscript{121} For Mao’s initial orders, see Xu, \textit{Jinmen Zhi Zhan}, p. 215.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Dangdai Zhongguo Jundui de Junshi Gongzuo} (Shang), p. 394. Also see Wu, “Inside Story of the Decision Making during the Shelling of Jinmen,” pp. 211–212. Wu also portrays Mao as considering the recovery of the islands, but not as particularly eager to do so. He says, “Mao told me we were not unwilling to take over Jinmen [Quemoy] and Matsu [Matsu].”
\textsuperscript{123} Pollack, “Perception and Action in Chinese Foreign Policy,” Vol. 1, p. 211. Pollack writes, “For example, there was virtually no effort (outside of a few isolated strafing incidents) to employ air power against the garrison, even though MIG’s on August 24 had proven their capability to deliver 500 pound bombs. . . . The longest range PLA artillery pieces, with capabilities up to 16 miles, were not even used until Sept. 17.”
\textsuperscript{124} Ye, \textit{Ye Fei Huiyi}, pp. 656–663.
\textsuperscript{125} We should consider the sincerity of the surrender calls however. The second surrender call included Taiwan as an area that the PLA was sure to liberate in the near future. Linking the territorial issues probably only made the forces on Quemoy and Matsu more resolute than if the PLA had only targeted Quemoy and Matsu, barren islands to which the KMT troops likely had no allegiance. Moreover, whereas by September 2 the PLA shelling had successfully halted all KMT shipments to the islands, some American officials and military officers in the region complained to Washington that this was not so much the result of PLA

islands if they were abandoned by the KMT and that he would have tried to get the most propaganda mileage possible from the PLA victory. As one military scholar explained, as an institution the PLA would have liked to seize the islands as a symbol of its contribution to the Great Leap Forward. Moreover, Mao could have used seizure of the islands to demonstrate to his people that China’s stock was truly on the rise.\textsuperscript{126} Even if China had successfully recovered the islands, the atmosphere in the straits still would have been tense and Mao could have attempted to use the ensuing crisis to mobilize the public.

A quick military victory would have carried various political and security benefits. But there are reasons to believe that it would not have served Mao’s purposes as well as the actual outcome. Given his broader political objectives, the value of a quick victory was no match for the domestic political value Mao tapped from the extended international crisis that followed the PLA attack. In the domestic political environment, a weak and irresolute enemy is less likely to mobilize the public than a more stubborn and powerful one. Moreover, recovery of the offshore islands would have carried real international costs for the PRC. Available data from August do not demonstrate that Mao was concerned about the negative repercussions of recovering the islands at the very beginning of the crisis, but Chinese actions and statements show that such concerns were paramount in September and October. A KMT retreat from Quemoy and Matsu would move the Civil War enemy much further (100 miles) from the mainland, making it harder to attack in the future. Whether it destroyed Chiang Kai-shek’s legitimacy on Taiwan or not, the delinking of Taiwan from the mainland would only further the cause of Taiwanese separatism. Because this factor was ignored, Chinese behavior during the crisis puzzled observers in China, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the United States. These analysts wrongly assumed the attack was designed, at a minimum, to compel Chiang’s forces to abandon the offshore islands.\textsuperscript{127}

Late in September, after the Americans successfully assisted the KMT in breaking the artillery blockade of the offshore islands and Sino-American talks had been reestablished in Warsaw, the Americans offered what they considered conciliatory proposals on a settlement of the

\textsuperscript{126} For Chinese confusion, see Ye, \textit{Ye Fei Huiyi}, pp. 656–657. For Soviet confusion, see Talbott, trans. and ed., \textit{Khrushchev Remembers}, pp. 262–263; for East German confusion, see Liu, \textit{Chushi Sulian Ba Nian}, p. 65; for American confusion, see Young, \textit{Negotiating with the Chinese Communists}, pp. 188–190.
crisis. They suggested either demilitarization of the offshore islands under UN supervision or a World Court decision on the future of the islands. The Americans were trying to find some face-saving way to get Chiang to remove his army from the offshore islands so as to prevent him from dragging the Americans into an all-out war with the CCP. Beginning on September 30, the Chinese responded to these proposals with increasingly hostile rhetoric and demands for complete American withdrawal from the Taiwan region. Rather than trying to weaken the American conditions for KMT withdrawal from the offshore islands, the Chinese became confrontational and made sweeping demands on the United States. This behavior puzzled Kenneth Young, an American foreign service officer at the time. Young could not understand why the Chinese seemed to be refusing KMT withdrawal from the islands precisely at a time when the American bargaining position was so strong. Such a hostile posture by the Chinese Communists was not consistent with Young’s perception of Beijing’s major goal in the crisis: to destroy the threat posed by KMT forces on the islands.

Beijing’s refusal to accept a compromised settlement is, however, consistent with the domestic politics thesis offered here, which argues that Mao did not so much want territory as he did military tensions short of war. There is documentary and other evidence to support this conclusion. According to Khrushchev’s memoirs, Mao denied that the PLA ever intended to liberate the islands. Mao is reported to have said: “All we wanted to do was show our potential. We don’t want Chiang to be too far away from us. We want to keep him within our reach. Having him [on Quemoy and Matsu] means we can get at him with our shore batteries as well as our air force. If we’d occupied the islands we would have lost the ability to cause him discomfort any time we want.”

On October 5, Zhou Enlai informed the Soviet military attaché that, for reasons related to popular mobilization, Beijing hoped that the crisis might be prolonged without a change in the status quo ante. Zhou said: “After discussion in the Party Central Committee, we still consider it best to make Chiang Kai-shek continue to remain on Quemoy, Matsu, and the offshore islands. The United States wants to remove itself from Quemoy and Matsu, but we will not allow this... In this way, when we want to create a period of tension we can attack Quemoy and Matsu a bit.” To conclude the conversation, Zhou stated: “If America is unable to persuade Chiang’s military to withdraw, we will have achieved our objective.”

Still, we must consider the possibility that the Chinese Communists might not have objected to KMT withdrawal from the offshore islands as much as they opposed an American role as broker in what was considered a “domestic conflict.” But Mao’s statement to Khrushchev and Zhou Enlai’s discussion with the Soviet attaché do not reflect any such conditionality in the CCP’s desire to prolong the conflict. Moreover, there is even stronger evidence that Beijing wanted the KMT to remain on the islands, no matter what the circumstances of withdrawal. In early October, the Chinese defense minister, Peng Dehuai, unilaterally announced a one-week ceasefire. As long as American boats did not bring supplies to the offshore islands, the PLA would not attack the islands. He stated that, as of October 20, the PLA would shelve only on odd days of the calendar. Finally, and most important, Peng asked the KMT forces on the islands to remain and even offered to send supply boats from the mainland to ease their living conditions. Xiao Jinguang cites the fear of a two-China outcome as driving Peng’s actions. This behavior strongly supports the thesis that Mao preferred prolonged tensions and Chiang’s remaining on Quemoy and Matsu to all other outcomes.

Was Mao Trying to Draw the Soviets into the Conflict on Beijing’s Side?

There is significant evidence that Mao neither expected nor wanted Soviet assistance in the crisis. Consistent with earlier analyses, Chinese evidence suggests that Mao already strongly mistrusted the Soviets by August 1958, so his attack can hardly be considered a test of the alliance. Moreover, Mao’s entire propaganda line about the crisis was that it was a Chinese domestic political affair in which the American imperialists were meddling. Russian sources suggest that, short of retaliation for a full-scale American strategic nuclear attack on the mainland, Soviet military

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128 Talks were reestablished on September 15. Zhou Enlai agreed to talks in a speech on September 6, which was laced with accusations of American imperialism. Zhou managed to agree to talks without reducing the domestic war wage mentality. In his speech he said: “To make a further effort to safeguard peace, the Chinese Government is prepared to resume the ambassadorial level talks between the two countries. But the danger of war created by the United States is not lessened thereby.” For an English translation of Zhou’s speech, see Young, Negotiating with the Chinese Communists, pp. 150–151.
129 Ibid., pp. 182–190.
130 Ibid.
135 Gurtoo and Hwang, China under Threat, p. 91.
intervention in the crisis would have been viewed by Mao as unwarranted interference in China’s internal affairs.\textsuperscript{136}

As early as November 1957, Mao had warned Khrushchev against interfering in Chinese foreign policy without an explicit request from Beijing. Mao’s interpreter recalls the following argumentative exchange between Khrushchev and Mao at that time:

Khrushchev: “Whatever socialist country might receive attack by the imperialists, we will quickly retaliate against them.”

Mao: “This way of talking is incorrect. Every country is independent. You must first see if they have invited this or not.”\textsuperscript{137}

As discussed above, Mao’s concern about Soviet interference in China was heightened in the spring and summer of 1958.

During the Taiwan Straits crisis Mao’s ambassador in Moscow warned Beijing that Khrushchev might use the crisis as a pretense to increase Soviet involvement along the Chinese coast. This would allow the Soviets and the Americans to continue to split the Asian Pacific into superpower spheres of influence. Fearing this, Ambassador Liu Xiao cabled Beijing:

The current Soviet position toward the tension in the straits and the goal of the military measures they are considering have become clear. Khrushchev wants to exploit the tense situation in the Taiwan Straits in order to bring the question of the Taiwan Straits within the scope of Soviet-Western and, in particular, Soviet-American hegemony and to alter the balance of military power between the United States and the USSR in the Asian Pacific region.\textsuperscript{138}

Chinese officials seemed more worried about increased Soviet involvement than they did desirous of increased Soviet support. In fact, Mao rejected a mid-September Soviet offer to station Soviet interceptor squadrons near the Taiwan Straits, accusing Khrushchev again of compromising Chinese sovereignty.\textsuperscript{139}

While stirring his own population into a war-scare mentality, Mao made no effort to play up the international significance of the straits crisis abroad, something one would expect if he were hoping for more allied assistance. In fact, Chinese leaders played down the possibility of escalation with China’s nervous allies. On September 10, Mao telegraphed Ho Chi Minh, stating: “The Americans fear fighting a war, so as for now, it is very unlikely that large-scale fighting will start up. Accordingly, your country can carry out business as usual.”\textsuperscript{140} In early October, rather than trying to increase Soviet concern, Zhou tried to reassure Moscow that the United States and China would not become involved in war. On October 5, Zhou said: “The situation has already become clear. The United States knows that we are not preparing to do battle with it. . . . Not only will we not attack it [the American military], we do not even intend to liberate Taiwan in the near future. We also know that America is not preparing to do battle with us over [the] Quemoy issue.”\textsuperscript{141} Clearly, the Chinese were not trying to exaggerate the tension in the straits in order to receive more military and economic assistance from the Soviets.

In February 1988 the \textit{New York Times} reported Andrei Gromyko’s recollections of the 1958 Taiwan Straits crisis. Gromyko claimed that he made a secret trip to Beijing on September 5, where Mao revealed a bizarre and dangerous plan in the event of American attack. Mao supposedly told the Soviets that, in such an instance, the Chinese would withdraw troops deep into the Chinese heartland. This would draw American forces inland, where they would be exposed to Soviet air power and perhaps even nuclear attack. Gromyko’s report seems fantastic. Chinese Foreign Ministry reports of the straits crisis verify only that Gromyko made the secret trip. The Chinese dispute all the other claims by Gromyko, stating that Mao merely thanked the Soviets for warning the United States against invading China. Mao did not ask for any additional Soviet assistance beyond Moscow’s general warning to the United States, which, in the Chinese view, came only after the most dangerous period of the crisis had ended.\textsuperscript{142}

Rather than drawing the Soviets in, Mao was more likely trying to demonstrate his foreign policy independence from Moscow by attacking in the straits. This probably was one of the secondary goals of Mao’s attack. But Mao did not need to attack in the straits to demonstrate Chinese independence. Mao had argued cantankerously with Khrushchev in early August, rejected all of his proposals for military cooperation, and sent him packing for Moscow on the most unfriendly of terms. If Khrushchev had not yet grasped the message that Mao was not a

\textsuperscript{136} Zubok, “Khrushchev’s Nuclear Promise,” pp. 219, 226. Russian documents reveal that Mao did not want Soviet assistance even in the case of U.S. tactical nuclear strikes on the mainland. Khrushchev was angered by Mao’s attitude, which seemed to be in direct contradiction with the 1950 Sino-Soviet defense agreement.

\textsuperscript{137} Li, \textit{Waijiao Wutaishang de Xin Zhongguo Lingezi}, p. 152.

\textsuperscript{138} Liu, \textit{Chashi Sulan Ba Nian}, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{139} Lewis and Xue, \textit{China’s Strategic Seapower}, p. 17; Liu, \textit{Chashang Chibang de Long}, pp. 150–152.

\textsuperscript{140} “Telegram to Ho Chi Minh regarding the Taiwan Situation, etc.” Sept. 10, 1958, in Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao, Vol. 7, p. 413.

\textsuperscript{141} “The Situation in the Taiwan Straits and Our Policy” Oct. 5, 1958, in Zhou Enlai \textit{Waijiao Wenxuan}, pp. 265–266.

puppet of the CPSU, it is unclear how an attack on KMT positions would have convinced him.

Was Mao a Victim of His Own Propaganda about Prevailing Winds and Paper Tigers?

After Sputnik, Mao made his oft-cited comment about the east wind prevailing over the west wind and portrayed the United States as a paper tiger. Of course, if Mao believed the socialist camp was dominant in 1958 and that the United States was not dangerous, then he might also have believed that advancing in the straits was relatively safe and painless. There is however significant evidence that Mao did not accept his own propaganda at face value in 1957–58.

It is important to note that in November 1957 Mao viewed Sputnik only as a symbol of the superiority of socialism and a harbinger of a more advantageous balance of power to come. He fully realized that the Soviet Union and China still trailed the West in the international balance of power. This is why, in November 1957, Mao said that within ten years the Soviet Union could surpass the United States and within fifteen years China could surpass the United Kingdom in power potential. In late 1957 Mao was like a structural realist in his obsession with relative material capabilities, particularly steel production. He saw such capabilities as crucial in international politics but did not foresee the socialist world surpassing the West for at least a decade, even after implementing the most aggressive of development programs. Although his prediction for the future was optimistic, this optimism does not suggest that, as early as 1958, Mao believed he could safely challenge the United States.

In Moscow in November 1957, Mao was confronted about his paper tiger theory by the Polish leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka, who was justifiably afraid of Mao’s apparent underestimation of American might. Mao reassured Gomulka: “We are talking about the state of the people’s morale. Every day imperialism bares its fangs somewhere; if you fear it, does it then begin to behave? Therefore, we say that strategically we should show it contempt [and say] it has nothing extraordinary, it’s a paper tiger. But, in a concrete situation, you must treat it seriously, not lightly. This is respecting it tactically.” As with most of Mao’s public pronouncements and actions in international affairs at this time, it appears that Mao’s paper tiger thesis was aimed as much at domestic audiences as it was international ones.

What was the Role of Straightforward Domestic or Factional Politics?

After the founding of the PRC, there were clear differences of opinion within the CCP about development strategies and foreign affairs. But Mao’s opinion generally ruled the day. Although the ultimate disasters of the Great Leap did strain state-society and intraparty relations in the early 1960s, Mao’s dominance in August 1958 is unquestionable. During the anti-Rightist campaign of 1957, Mao had crushed or at least silenced organized opposition to radical planning within the party and the society at large. It was clear that, as in Korea, he had direct control over the early operations in the Taiwan Straits operation. Mao’s personal power was most convincingly demonstrated by his ability in 1959 to oust the top military leader, Peng Dehuai, for only mildly criticizing the already disastrous Great Leap.

Was Mao Trying to Help Middle East Nationalists?

As mentioned above, in China one increasingly popular interpretation of Mao’s motivations is that he was seeking to “grab America’s head and pull it [from the Middle East] to China.” In this account, Mao’s primary goal was to help the anti-Western forces in Lebanon and Iraq by relieving the American military pressure on them. This interpretation agrees with my thesis in one important way: politics, not straightforward military goals, were “in command” in Mao’s crisis strategy. Such an interpretation may seem incredible and might be dismissed out of hand, but there is some evidence that suggests its veracity.

Mao and Peng Dehuai first ordered air and artillery forces to Fujian on July 17 and 18, immediately following the onset of the Middle East

143 See Li, Waijue Wu taishang de Xin Zhongguo Lingxu, pp. 162–163.
144 Ibid., p. 156.
Chinese scholars and participants claim that, at this time, Mao made statements to party officials that the Chinese military must do more than back the Middle Eastern people with words; it must also take some visible action to demonstrate solidarity. The initial attacks were planned for late July and early August so as to coincide with the Middle East crisis. However, Mao delayed implementation of the attacks in early August. Citing the long-term nature of the Middle East crisis, on July 27 Mao wrote to Peng Dehuai that China need not hurry to shell the islands.

The problem with the Middle East assistance thesis is twofold. As Xu Yan points out, even if Mao’s primary objective in preparing for the shelling of the offshore islands in July was to help ease tensions in the Middle East, this could not have been his motivation for attacking in late August. By that time the Middle East crisis was, for all intents and purposes, resolved. It is, however, highly doubtful that anti-imperialist internationalism was ever Mao’s primary motivation in the straits. After all, before the shelling began, Mao stated to the Beidaihe conference that continued American intervention in the Middle East was desirable. As discussed above, he cynically argued that CCP propaganda organs must demand American withdrawal, but that in fact continued American intervention was positive for China because it would help motivate Chinese workers and peasants to work harder for less.

Another Chinese historian with access to party archives argues that Mao monitored developments in the UN emergency session on the Middle East and waited to order the shelling of Quemoy until the passage of a resolution for U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East seemed secured. According to the author, Mao did this because: “After the resolution for America to withdraw from the Middle East was passed, the [tense] Middle East situation would become relaxed. By ordering the shelling the hot spot of international attention would be transferred to the Taiwan region. This would be useful to the struggle of the Chinese people.” Although the author is a bit cryptic about the “struggle” in which the Chinese people are engaged, the available evidence suggests that the scenario below seems plausible.

The Middle East crisis was apparently linked to Mao’s thinking at the time, but not necessarily in the way postulated by most PRC scholars. The July Middle East crisis provided a cheap way for Mao to rally domestic support for the Great Leap Forward around the theme of fighting American imperialism. Exploiting this opportunity, Mao publicly linked American imperialism in the Middle East with American designs in Asia and, particularly, the Taiwan Straits. Moreover, during the July steel drive the CCP propaganda machine linked production goals with the struggle against American imperialism while, in Henan, prototype communes and people’s militias were created with propaganda referring to the Middle East, Taiwan, and the American threat.

In order to demonstrate the link between the Middle East and Taiwan and to prolong the domestic siege mentality he would require for nationwide communique, Mao ordered Chinese forces to Fujian to prepare for an attack on the offshore islands. When, in late July and early August, the Middle East crisis seemed as if it might last, Mao may have decided that he could postpone attack on the islands because the Middle East tensions still provided a potent mobilizational tool. In late August, when the Middle East crisis drew to a close, Mao reversed his earlier wait-and-see posture and ordered the shelling in the straits. This facilitated the formation of a 300 million person national militia. The militia movement in turn provided the domestic legitimacy necessary for the nationwide commune program and massive state expropriation of capital from society.

Wu Lengxi states that Mao micromanaged press coverage of the straits crisis in a way consistent with the scenario described above. Mao avoided early, high-profile coverage of the shelling of Quemoy, instead awaiting America’s response before allowing prominent coverage in the People’s Daily. This strategy assisted Mao in comparing the straits crisis to other episodes of American imperialism and in blaming the crisis on American intervention in Chinese territorial waters.

From the available evidence, it is difficult to determine with certainty whether mobilization politics were primary in Mao’s mind as early as the middle of July. As Xu Yan argues, it is possible that Mao was initially sincere when he ordered the PLA to support Middle Eastern nationalists by preparing for military action in the straits. Then, in late August, as the conflict in the Middle East wound down, Mao’s goals may have shifted, and mobilization politics may have only then become the most important factor in his decision making. The media evidence from July
demonstrated
strates clearly that Mao was using the Middle East crisis and Taiwan policy for mobilizational purposes from the outset, but it cannot tell us how high mobilization was on Mao’s list of priorities. Mao’s cynical statements about the Middle East conflict on August 17 also cast doubt on the thesis that he ever really wanted to help anti-Western forces there, but we do not have similarly convincing documentary evidence from mid-July. But resolving this particular puzzle is not central to the thesis here. Regardless of whether mobilization was first and foremost in Mao’s mind as early as mid-July, China’s policy from August 23 until the end of the crisis fully accords with the theoretical approach offered in Chapter 2. International conflict was initiated and prolonged in the Taiwan Straits to mobilize support for a new grand strategy.

Any leader’s behavior may have multiple causes, and a complicated person such as Mao is no exception. Many of the motivations listed above are mutually compatible. Still, the vast bulk of the evidence from the crisis suggests that if Mao had motives other than mobilization of the public around the Great Leap, they were secondary. Mao perhaps demonstrated his priorities most clearly by spending the second half of September touring the countryside to gain support for communication, rather than micromanaging military and diplomatic affairs, as he had done during the 1950 Korean crisis.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE STRAIT'S CRISIS

In addition to running a real risk of nuclear war on the Chinese mainland, the straits crisis of 1958 poisoned any chances of American or UN conciliation toward China for many years. Mao seemed to recognize the diplomatic costs involved in his railing against the West. At Beidaihe he seemed to anticipate that creating tensions with the West would further delay the establishment of favorable diplomatic and trade relations with Western countries. On August 17, Mao said: “As for the embargo, the tighter the better; the longer the UN refuses to recognize us the better. It would be best if they recognized us seven years from now. . . . By that time, we produce XX to XX million tons of steel.”156 Mao apparently did not reject the notion of better relations with the West in principle, but he felt that a further delay of rapprochement was justified if a current conflict could mobilize the Chinese people and allow for seven years of fast-paced economic growth. The resulting expansion of Chinese power would serve to improve Beijing’s negotiating position when it ultimately established better relations with the West.

156 MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu, The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao, p. 403. The numbers for steel targets were deleted in the written text.

If Mao indeed surmised that the attack would have diplomatic costs, he was right. In addition to terrifying Moscow and further damaging Sino-Soviet relations, the 1958 crisis had real effects on American thinking at a time when there was at least some serious reconsideration of China policy.157 The crisis reversed nascent trends in American public opinion that might have proved quite positive for China. In 1957, public opinion polls showed that a modest improvement of relations was quite possible. A majority of those polled would have approved of a meeting between Zhou Enlai and Dulles, and an increasing percentage of Americans approved of trade between the United States and the PRC.158 Before the crisis there was also a steady increase in the minority of Americans who supported PRC admission to the UN.159 This three-year trend in public opinion was halted and reversed by the Chinese attack. While the public did not want to go to war with China, let alone the Soviets, it clearly blamed Beijing for the tensions.160 Before the crisis, there also was a warming trend among certain foreign policy elites in the United States. In the mid-1950s, a high-level Rockefeller Foundation study group on America’s China policy was seriously evaluating the pros and cons of a broad range of conciliatory gestures toward Beijing, including diplomatic recognition. While not in office, members of this group, like its head, Dean Rusk, commanded respect both inside and outside the administration. But with the Taiwan Straits crisis came a change in the American domestic political climate, and these influential citizens became much less bold in their discussions and proposals.161 In this sense, Mao’s adventure carried real opportunity costs.

157 In his 1959 review, cited above, Mao stated that the attack in the straits indeed frightened the Soviets.
159 Page and Shapiro, The Rational Public, p. 246.
160 Ibid.
161 Chang, Friends and Enemies, pp. 179–182.