CHINA AND THE PALESTINIANS

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Only an insider — Palestinian or Chinese — would be able to tell the full story of the intimate relationship between the Palestinian resistance movement and the People's Republic of China, a relationship which has important implications for the world as well as for the Middle East. But in the present state of evidence an outside analyst may venture some basic observations and conclusions.

First of all, it is clear that Peking, from its new global vantage point in the United Nations, and the important Middle East diplomatic and logistical base it has acquired through its decision to open an embassy in Beirut, is determined not to appear as "just another superpower," manipulating Palestinian hopes and aspirations to its own advantage. Chiao Kuan-hua, chief Chinese delegate to the United Nations, spelled this out in his maiden speech in New York in the autumn of 1971:

> The intrinsic nature of the Middle East question lies in the aggression against the Palestinian people and the other Arab peoples committed by Israeli Zionism, with the support and connivance of the superpowers. The Chinese government and people give their resolute support to the Palestinian people and the other Arab peoples against aggression and are convinced that, in persevering in their struggle and maintaining unity, the heroic Palestinians and the other Arab peoples will surely be able to recover their lost territories and re-establish the Palestinian people in its national rights.
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> No one has the right to seek to conclude political deals behind the backs of the Palestinians and other Arabs so as to injure their right to existence and their other national interests.[1]

This was a repetition of China's constant rejection of "imposed," "compromise" and "superpower" solutions backed by Soviet and United States policy, such as the ill-fated UN Security Council resolution of November 22,

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[1] Agence-France Presse (AFP), November 16, 1971.

1967. Chiao's statement was followed by China's refusal of a French suggestion that China might wish to join the four-power talks on the Middle East. Peking has always stressed that it aided the Palestinians, not as a big power helping a liberation movement, but as one "revolutionary people" helping another, with both sharing similar backgrounds and similar experiences.

The comparison certainly has some validity in historical terms. Like the upheavals in Palestine in the twentieth century, those beginning in China in the nineteenth and ending in the Communist victory of 1949 — the year when Israel's first victory over the Arabs was sealed by the Rhodes armistice agreements — profoundly shook society and administration in China. Like Palestine and most of the rest of the Arab world, China was invaded, attacked and humiliated by foreigners. The result in both cases was a profound case of culture shock. The victors, armed with their new technology, came from the industrial West. In neither China nor the Arab world could the traditional weapons, tactics, rulers or values cope with the intruders. Their new machines and manufactured goods disclosed the huge gap between the new industrial world of the West and the old agricultural one of the East. The result in both cases was violence, in some instances xenophobia, and a situation of permanent conflict.

In China as in the Arab world, Western manners, ideas and techniques seemed to challenge the very moral basis of society. There was a sectarian clash of religious values. Among the Palestinians and other Arabs, as in China, a debate began on how to adapt to the new situation. This debate still rages. In 1948 and since 1967 some Arab leaders, like some Chinese during the last days of the Manchu Empire in 1911, have argued that all that needs to be done is to acquire Western skills and equipment, especially in the military field. These, it is argued, can then be used to expel the alien forces from the traditional community, which will then continue on the basis of its unchanging traditions.

In both China and the Arab world the conservatives have argued that traditional institutions should be strengthened and innovation discouraged. In China the conservatives lost, but in the Arab world the argument goes on. In both cultures, most younger men support revolutionary change: China's younger men of the 1920's and 1930's, the generation of both Mao Tse-tung and Sun Yat-sen, have become the elders and the rulers of today. In both China and the Arab world younger men, though by no means all of them in the case of the Arabs, have adopted Leninist doctrines about the nature of imperialism and what should be done about it.

The common experience of China and the Palestinian Arabs has been expressed in neat political terms. One of the clearest rhetorical expressions of Peking's view was Mao Tse-tung's address to Ahmed Shuqairy and the

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) delegation which visited Peking to sign its first military and diplomatic agreement in March 1965:

> Imperialism is afraid of China and of the Arabs. Israel and Formosa are bases of imperialism in Asia. You are the front gate of the great continent, and we are the rear. Their goal is the same . . . Asia is the biggest continent in the world, and the West wants to continue exploiting it. The West does not like us, and we must understand this fact. The Arab battle against the West is the battle against Israel. So boycott Europe and America, O Arabs![2]

One key to the continued cordiality of the Sino-Arab relationship lies in Peking's total rejection of Israel. This has continued despite Israeli feelers to overcome it and establish links with China. Most of these feelers have been on a trivial level, as in March 1971, when Israeli Transport Minister Shimon Peres claimed proudly that ships belonging to an Israeli company were carrying oranges between China and the Soviet Union.[3] Some, however, indicate more important aspirations, such as Israel's break with precedent in the fall of 1971 by voting to admit China to the United Nations and to expel Taiwan (to the intense annoyance of the US government). In July 1971 Elie Ben Gal, Paris representative of the Israeli Mapam party, admitted he had been meeting Chinese diplomats "in an absolutely unofficial way and at a low level" since 1968. When the newspaper *Maariv* disclosed this, both the Israeli and Chinese governments denied the story, but Ben Gal insisted that it was true. There were other stories of talks between Israel, certain African states friendly to China, and the Rumanians, those perennial intermediaries for Peking. The *Jerusalem Post* even reported that Prime Minister Golda Meir had expressed interest in opening diplomatic relations. The stories were all denied, but there had obviously been some fire behind the smoke.[4]

There was a historical precedent for these Israeli feelers to China dating back to the first weeks after the victory of the Communists in 1949. At this time Peking's future stand on the Palestine question was unclear. Most of the Arab regimes in the Middle East were under Western influence, and the main Arab League members, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon had decided to recognize Taiwan as China's legal government. On January 6, 1950, on the other hand, Israel became the first Middle Eastern government to announce formal recognition of Peking. At the time non-alignment was still official Israeli policy and Washington itself was still hesitating between recognition of Peking and trying to overthrow its new Communist regime. But Peking did

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[2] In *al-Anwar* (Beirut), April 6, 1965, as received from New China News Agency (NCNA).

[3] Speech to the Haifa Chamber of Commerce, reported by AFP, March 25, 1971.

[4] *Jerusalem Post* and Israel Radio, July 27, 1971; *Haaretz*, August 3, 1971.

not respond to the Israeli overture. Moreover, the United States, which in 1948 had been Israel's co-benefactor with the Soviet Union, was rapidly becoming its principal one, since Joseph Stalin was then already turning away from his earlier support to the Jewish state. When the Korean War broke out, Israel aligned itself with the United States.

The Korean War ended in 1953 and the Chinese-Israeli flirtation, frozen for the duration, was thawed out and nearly developed into a sustained affair. Israeli policy makers saw this as a possible opportunity to overcome a disturbing isolation in Asia, whose states had generally been reluctant and slow to recognize Israel: none did in 1948; only Ceylon, Taiwan and the Philippines and Burma in 1949; and India and Thailand in 1950. Although Israel had opened consulates in the Philippines by 1950 and in India by 1951, it was only in 1955 that the first Asian diplomatic missions — from Burma and Japan — reached Israel.[5]

In December 1953 the Israeli Ambassador to Burma, David Hacohen, began talks with the Chinese Ambassador in Rangoon, Yao Ju-ming. By Hacohen's own account, this led to a meeting between himself and Premier Chou En-lai while Chou was passing through Rangoon on his way back from the Geneva conference on Indo-China in 1954. In January of that year, reports Hacohen, Peking formally proposed trade relations with Israel. The Soviet Ambassador in Burma, he adds, took part and proposed a triangular route passing through Odessa and Siberia in case the United States should object to direct trade relations between China and Israel.

Israel responded favourably and Peking invited an Israeli delegation to China to discuss trade and diplomatic relations. Chou En-lai told Hacohen he hoped the talks would end favourably. At the end of 1954, discussing China's foreign relations in Peking, Chou En-lai said steps would be taken to open diplomatic relations with Israel and Afghanistan.[6] An Israeli delegation did visit Peking in February 1955 and was received by the Chinese Under-secretary of Trade, who said: "The Chinese people and their government are great friends of Israel and the Jewish people."[7] This was long before the brewing Sino-Soviet dispute emerged into the open. But it was only two months before the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung and the historic meeting there between Chou En-lai and Abdul Nasser, at which time Chou apparently

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[5] Godfrey Jansen, *Zionism, Israel and Asian Nationalism* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1971), pp. 203-204.

[6] Mordehai Nahumi, "China and Israel," reprinted from *New Outlook* (Tel Aviv) IX, 6 (1966), pp. 40-48, in Irene Gendzier (ed.), *A Middle East Reader* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), pp. 269-70.

[7] Radio Peking in English, February 13, 1955.

promised Nasser to intercede with the Soviets to obtain Soviet arms for Egypt.[8]

Peking's shift to active support of the Arabs began at Bandung, nearly five years later than Moscow's. The Chinese delegation there voted for the return home of the Palestine refugees, but even then did not condemn Israel as a state. David Hacohen says in his *Burma Diary* that even after Bandung the Chinese Ambassador in Rangoon told him China still wanted friendly relations with Israel. Then came the beginning of what Hacohen calls "friendly American pressure." John Foster Dulles, then US Secretary of State, visited Rangoon and some of his aides told Hacohen that "it wasn't worthwhile" for Israel to establish ties with a regime which was "about to fall." One Israeli commentator says: "If that was the situation in Rangoon, we can imagine the pressure on the Israeli government in Jerusalem."[9] In any case that was the end of the affair, or the flirtation, between China and Israel.

China's Entry into the Arab World.

The later 1950's saw decisive moves towards the establishment of firmer relations between Peking and Arab governments. Cairo and Damascus established relations with China in 1956, continuing the rapprochement which began at Bandung. At the same time, during the tripartite Israeli, British and French attack on Egypt in 1956, Israel became one of the targets of Peking's wrath against the West. The establishment of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) in 1957 also opened up the possibility of contacts with the Palestinians. Peking had by now obtained secure bases for the Arab world and Africa through its Cairo and Damascus embassies and it branched out further into the two monarchies at opposite ends of the Arab world: Yemen and Morocco. Its first significant aid agreement with an Arab country was with the medieval regime of the Imam Ahmad in Yemen. Diplomatic relations with King Mohammed V's monarchy in Morocco next gave Peking an entrée to Algeria's revolution, and China became the first non-Arab country to recognize and officially aid the Algerian revolution. At Sanaa, China had its first base for subsequent aid to the revolutionaries in South Arabia, Oman and the Arab Gulf area.

The new relationship with the Arab world passed through a somewhat chilly first decade. Nasser quarrelled with Peking in 1959 after Nasser had backed the Khampa rebels in Tibet, and when breakaway pro-Chinese Iraqi

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[8] Cf. John K. Cooley, *East Wind Over Africa: Red China's African Offensive* (New York: Walker, revised edition, 1966), pp. 10-12. This has since been confirmed by Mohammed Hassanein Heykal in his memoirs of the Nasser regime published in the London *Sunday Telegraph* and appearing *shortly* in book form.

[9] Nahumi, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

Communists became involved in the bloody uprising at Kirkuk. The increased Soviet presence in Egypt and Syria did not strengthen Peking there. Egyptian officials whispered that the Chinese Embassy in Cairo and Chinese journalists had been implicated in several anti-Nasser plots (notably in 1965 and 1969). Huang Hua, then China's senior diplomat and now at the United Nations, the only Chinese diplomat not to be recalled during the turbulent phase of the Cultural Revolution in 1966-67, left Cairo in June 1969 at a low point in Sino-Egyptian relations. The possibility of Chinese nuclear support to Egypt, mentioned in 1965, was soon quietly dropped.

The Chinese had nevertheless developed and maintained a growing interest in the Palestine cause. This was stressed during Chou En-lai's trips to the Arab world in 1963-64, 1965 and 1966. His words associated Arab governments and the Palestinians in what Peking apparently chose to consider was a concerted Arab interest in Palestine: "We are ready to help the Arab nations to regain Palestine. Whenever you are ready, say the word. You will find us ready. We are willing to give you anything and everything; arms and volunteers."[10] In January 1964 Peking was the first non-Arab government to send greetings to the first Arab summit conference in Cairo and to stand with the Arabs on the question of Israel's diversion of Jordan river water. Arab opinion was already disappointed by Soviet Premier Nikita Khruschev's New Year message disclosing Soviet hesitancy to become involved in a "conflict increasing the danger to world peace."[11] Two Palestinians of AAPSO, Mohammed Khalil and Mohammed Rif'at, attended mass rallies in Peking in March 1964 at which the Chinese leaders blamed the United States for the failure of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, and reminded their Arab auditors that China did not bear the stigma, as did Russia, of having voted for the creation of Israel.[12] On May 1, 1964, just before Khruschev's first visit to Egypt, the Chinese government announced it would carry out all the decisions reached by the Arab Office for the Boycott of Israel and would prohibit any blacklisted ship from entering Chinese waters or ports.[13]

In accordance with this policy of favour to the Palestinians, Chinese aid to al-Fateh, then an underground Palestinian organization unknown to most of the world, had already begun. These preparations and the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization by the first Palestine National Council in 1964 enabled China to bring its support of the Palestinians out into the open. On March 16, 1965, a PLO delegation headed by Ahmed Shuqairy arrived

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[10] Information Bulletin, Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China (Cairo), December 24, 1964.

[11] As broadcast by Moscow Radio, January 1, 1964.

[12] NCNA, March 7, 1964.

[13] *Idem*, May 1, 1964.

in Peking and received an uproarious welcome by flag-waving crowds beating drums and gongs. Shuqairy was greeted almost like a visiting head of state. The Palestinians were received by Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai, and Liu Shao-chi (whose public disgrace had not yet begun) and they attended a mass public rally of 100,000 persons or more, a spectacle which since then has been repeated on every May 15, decreed to be "Palestine Solidarity Day" in China. Besides his words comparing Israel and Taiwan, cited above, Mao told the delegation:

> You are not only two million Palestinians facing Israel, but one hundred million Arabs. You must act and think along this basis. When you discuss Israel keep the map of the entire Arab world before your eyes. An Algerian delegation under Krim Belkacem once visited us and told us that their country lost one million people in the struggle for independence. I told them that peoples must not be afraid if their numbers are reduced in liberation wars, for they shall have peaceful times during which they may multiply. China lost twenty million people in the struggle for liberation. Today, China is tackling the problem of increase in population, which means the country is now suffering because of the loss during the war....
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> Do not tell me that you have read this or that opinion in my books. You have your war, and we have ours. You must create the principles and ideology on which your war stands. Books obstruct the view if piled up before the eyes. What is important is to begin action with faith. Faith in victory is the first element of victory — in fact, it may mean victory itself.
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> We were only 70 persons when we started the (Chinese) Communist Party. Only I and another person are now left. Many deviationists had appeared among us — and there are many deviationists still among the Communists, as you know. Just the same, we achieved victory. And we are confident that we shall achieve victory in all the battles we are now fighting, especially in Vietnam. America cannot defeat us in a non-nuclear war. Days of nuclear war are gone.[14]

The final communiqué on the visit contained attacks on Zionism and imperialism and assured the "resolute support" of China for the Palestine cause.

The most important development of the visit was Shuqairy's signature of a pact for Chinese diplomatic, economic and military support. Chinese arms aid was to be channelled through the PLO to other resistance organizations (though there was already a small direct pipeline to al-Fateh), an arrangement which apparently remained in effect until 1971 (and which has drawn criticism from such organizations as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who felt they were largely left out). Rashid Jarbou was appointed first PLO envoy in Peking, with what amounted to diplomatic status. China thus became the first non-Arab country in the world to recognize the PLO as an independent entity.

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[14] *al-Anwar, op. cit.*, April 6, 1965.

According to a Chinese source, Shuqairy thanked his hosts in these terms: "In fact the Palestinians should feel grateful not to other Arabs but to the gallant and generous Chinese people, who helped our revolution movement long before the Arab heads recognized the PLO. It is not, as some seem to think, propped up by Nasser or any other Arab leader."[15] Yasser Arafat voiced similar sentiments during a visit to Peking in March 1970: "I would be revealing no secrets," he said then, "If I tell you that China was the first outside power to give real help to Fateh."[16]

SUPPORT FOR THE GUERRILLAS.

Israeli and Western sources have probably been inclined to exaggerate the size and details of Chinese military training and arms aid in the absence of published figures from either of the two sides. It is difficult to estimate the extent of Chinese military training given the Palestinians, both in China itself (mainly at the Whampoa Military Academy) and by Chinese instructors in Syria, Algeria and perhaps Jordan. During a period of unusually warm Sino-Syrian relations in 1966-67, some 185 Chinese officers were reportedly seconded to train some units of the Syrian army.[17] It is not an unreasonable assumption that some of these worked with the PLA's Hitteen Brigade in Syria. Shuqairy said publicly in Gaza on May 20, 1966 that arms and training were being continually supplied by Peking. The main arms, shipped to various Arab ports and brought overland to the first training camps, have been Kalashnikov and AK-47 assault rifles and other light arms. Israeli sources claimed other Chinese arms were stockpiled in Gaza and Sinai by the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) before the war of 1967. The Israeli military command announced on June 25, 1967 that it had found at Gaza and el-Arish "a large quantity of Chinese arms including anti-tank and anti-vehicle artillery, decontamination chemicals and carloads of poison gas."[18] Later, the Chinese appear to have supplied the fedayeen with 81 mm. mortars (also sent to the guerrillas of the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf, fighting the British-officered Royal Omani Army in Dhofar). Before the Jordan civil war in September 1970, after Nasser had closed Palestinian broadcast facilities in Cairo, they sent heavy-duty field radio equipment and anti-tank rockets and launchers. Most of this equipment has probably been paid for in cash.

Fateh also sought, and may have received, the portable rocket launcher called the Short Blowpipe. Weighing less than 40 pounds, this was originally developed under a joint US and British patent by Short Brothers and Harland,

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[15] *Peking Review*, 69, p. 19.
[16] AFP, March 22, 1970.
[17] *The Jewish Observer* (London), September 1967, pp. 23-25.
[18] *Japanese Journal of Asian Politics*, 36 (1967), p. 35.

Ltd., a firm in Belfast, Northern Ireland. According to Palestinian sources, Chinese ordinance men succeeded in copying it, and fitted it with infra-red proximity fuses. It was then sent to the North Vietnamese army and the Viet Cong, who used it effectively against low-flying US planes. The guerrillas did not, however, claim any kills of Israeli planes through use of the weapon during the period before the August 1970 ceasefire when the Israeli air force still flew strike missions against guerrilla bases and other areas in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

China also contributed to the verbal escalation that preceded the June 1967 war. Shuqairy met Ambassador Huang Hua and the military attaché of the Chinese Embassy in Cairo, who reportedly attended at least one of the frenetic public rallies of Palestinians in Gaza which the Israelis later used as evidence of Arab belligerency.[19] On May 25, 1967, after Egypt had mobilized its forces in Sinai and moved the PLA to forward positions in the Gaza Strip, the Peking *People's Daily* reported that "the Soviet revisionists and the US imperialists are plotting at the expense of the Arab people." Over 10,000 people, it added, had attended a rally in Peking "to voice their resolute support for the struggle of the Palestinians and other Arab peoples against US imperialism and its tool of aggression, Israel."[20] As the war fever mounted, Peking on May 27 denounced the Soviets for "peddling the sinister ware of the Tashkent spirit," a reference to Soviet mediation in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. Chou En-lai's messages of support, on the eve of the Israeli attack, went to Nasser, Shuqairy and President Noureddine al-Attassi of Syria.

After the Arab defeat, Radio Peking assured its Arab listeners that "700 million Chinese and the revolutionary peoples of the whole world" backed Arab unity. "Plunge into long-term, fierce struggles!" the powerful Radio Peking relay station in Shiaku, Albania, urged the Arabs. In a special message from Chou to Shuqairy, the latter was urged not to lay down his arms (the shattered remnants of the PLO and PLA in Gaza had, in fact, not done so) but to emulate the Vietnamese and "fight on unflinchingly to final victory."[21]

After the talks on the Middle East between President Johnson and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin at Glassboro, New Jersey, on June 28, the New China News Agency denounced them as part of the "world-wide Soviet-American collaboration." For the *People's Daily* of July 16, Kosygin and Soviet Communist Party First Secretary Leonid Brezhnev had become "incurable traitors" to the Palestinian cause. Peking repeatedly charged treason and said the "Soviet

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[19] *Idem*, p. 39.
[20] Cairo Radio, June 11, 1967.
[21] Radio Peking, June 10, 11 and 13, 1967 (monitored by author).

revisionist clique had been speedily exposed to the Arab world." Johnson and Kosygin, said one Chinese Communist Party organ, had apparently made a secret "package deal" which included both Palestine and Vietnam.[22]

DIFFERENT SOVIET AND CHINESE ATTITUDES TO THE RESISTANCE.

After the June war, Sino-Soviet friction in the Middle East was expressed in different attitudes towards the Palestinian resistance movement. Soviet support for the UN Security Council resolution of 1967 and the idea of a negotiated political settlement was fundamentally antipathetic to Chinese strategic and tactical doctrine. The Soviets in some commentaries attacked Shuqairy and his supporters in the PLO by identifying their rejection of the UN resolution with the "extremist" Chinese position. During the Arab summit conference in Khartoum in August 1967, one Soviet commentator charged that the "airy ways" of Ahmed Shuqairy[23] had been discredited and that Shuqairy was denied funds he had received from Arab states prior to the June war. Moscow also contended that "destroy-Israel" slogans "could only play into the hands of the imperialists and Zionists who seize irresponsible statements of this order to justify their conquests."[24] Moscow Radio welcomed the ouster of Shuqairy with this rebuff to the Chinese theses:

> In the movement Ahmed Shuqairy behaved like an extremist of extremists, rejecting all means save that of armed struggle for the liberation of the Arab peoples. For this unscrupulous politician, any sober and scientific analysis of political situations in the Near East, any appraisal of the strength of classes and the relative strength of the ethnic groups and any consideration of the actual possibilities in the liberation struggle were out of place.[25]

Throughout 1968, as new fedayeen organizations emerged and the popularity of the fedayeen grew in the Arab world, the Soviets showed signs of great nervousness about Chinese aid. In August, one month after Arafat had accompanied Nasser on a trip to Moscow, *Pravda* found that ". . . The call of the exponents of this reckless trend to separate the Palestine issue from the Arab national liberation movement is entirely incorrect and, consequently, so is the slogan that Palestinians fight their battle alone on the same pretext that Palestinian movements are 'independent' and need no 'patronage'."[26]

One Soviet observer of the September 1968 Palestine National Council in Cairo told me that the PLO was "not very efficient at first, since its leaders

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[22] *Hong Gi* (Peking), September 16, 1967.

[23] Radio Moscow in Chinese, January 15, 1968, cited in Radio Liberty Research Report No. CRD 46/70, Munich, February 13, 1970, p. 1.

[24] *Novoye Vremya*, 39, January 22, 1967, p. 11, in *Idem*, p. 2.

[25] Radio Moscow in Chinese, January 15, 1968, in *Idem*, p. 3.

[26] *Pravda*, September 26, 1968.

spent much time quarrelling with one another and making uncompromising, irresponsible statements." But, he added, the fall of Shuqairy had "helped to remedy this." Later, when Yasser Arafat became PLO chairman at the National Council of Feburary 1969, it was the Popular Front of George Habbash which became the target of Soviet criticism. This contrasted sharply with the attitudes of the Chinese, who made no public criticism of any of the guerrilla organizations or leaders.

The military showdown between the guerrillas and the Jordan army in September 1970 gave a sharp illustration of the two different attitudes. Radio Peking in Arabic urged the guerrillas to "fight on against the Jordanian military clique and their American militarist masters until final victory." On September 21, a day after PLA and Syrian tanks had entered Jordan from Syria, a situation arose in which both the United States and Israel were weighing the possibilities of intervention to prevent Hussein's overthrow.[27] American troop units from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, all the way to West Germany and Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, were on red alert for possible air drops to seal off Amman from the advance of the Syro-Palestinian forces. On that day, an official Chinese government statement supporting the Palestinians attacked the "pro-US military clique in Jordan" which it said had "set up a reactionary military government" on September 16 and next day had "ordered post-haste the launching of an all-out attack against the Palestinian freedom fighters." Peking also broadcast some accounts of the fighting which, whether real or imaginary, were so detailed and circumstantial as to convince any listener that Radio Peking had a correspondent on the spot,[28] as indeed it may have had.

Meanwhile the Soviet Ambassador in Damascus, Noureddine Mohieddinov, was urging the Syrians to withdraw lest they bring on American intervention. While Mohieddinov talked with the Syrians, a Palestinian speaker of the PLO central committee proclaimed on Baghdad Radio: "The front of struggle reaches today from Amman in flames to Peking the Red . . . We are digging the common grave of all the imperialists, their lackeys and their neo-imperialist allies" (a Chinese euphemism for the Soviets).[29]

The Syrians withdrew, the crisis subsided, and in Cairo President Nasser succeeded in bringing about the truce between Hussein and the guerrillas, his last effort before he died. As shock waves of anguish swept over the Arab world, Radio Peking called on the Arabs to "turn your mourning into strength, and strike the imperialists with an iron fist!" Chairman Mao's personal envoy,

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[27] For a detailed discussion of this see William Quandt, "The Middle East Conflict in US Strategy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Beirut), I, 1 (1971), pp. 39-52.

[28] Radio Peking in French, September 21, 1970.

[29] Baghdad Radio, "Voice of the Central Committee," September 22, 1970.

Kuo Mu-jo, attended Nasser's funeral and, in his message of condolence to the Egyptian government, promised continued "firm support" to the Palestinians.[30] After the ceasefire in Jordan, King Hussein told Jean-François Chauvel of *Le Figaro* that his soldiers had found "real underground cities stuffed full of arms" and in these bases all kinds of foreign experts, including Chinese ones.[31]

Neutral diplomats present in Peking at the time nevertheless reported that the Chinese privately took up George Habbash, visiting China and North Korea at the time, for "tactical errors." Habbash, these diplomats said, had been told by the Chinese that the time was not ripe for attempted revolution against the Jordanian regime. One of Mao's principles, he is said to have been told, had always been to work with your enemy's enemies, as the Chinese Communist leaders had done with Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang against the Japanese invaders. Attacks against religion and reactionary governments had also proven disastrous for the Communists in Indonesia, who were slaughtered. Unity of ranks, as well as unity of purpose against Israel, was what the Palestinians needed most, the Chinese are said to have warned.

Through the first months of 1971 Peking continually gave public warnings to the Palestinians that Hussein's "lackey regime, with the support of American imperialism," was plotting their total liquidation, a prediction that came true in Jordan in July with the expulsion of the guerrillas from their last Jordanian bases. Sniping continued at the Soviets' position in the Middle East. In April 1971, only a week after an American table tennis team had entered China and begun a process climaxed by President Nixon's scheduled visit in 1972, and during a worldwide Jewish campaign on behalf of Jewish emigration from Russia, Peking-inspired media took up this question. The Albanian Telegraph Agency charged that Soviet opposition to the emigration of Soviet Jews was "only apparent." The Kremlin, said the Tirana release, "is itself inciting the Jews to leave the USSR in order to go and populate the occupied Arab territories. The Brezhnev-Kosygin clique is pretending to take a position in favour of the Arab countries. But in reality, it is only helping the Zionists to preserve their domination of the occupied Arab territories. This is why the Soviet revisionists are following a policy of inciting the Jews to emigrate to Israel." The number of emigrants, Tirana pointed out, was rising every year; the majority of them were aged 30 to 40 years and certain among them were "military experts."[32]

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[30] Radio Peking in Arabic, October 1, 1970.
[31] *Le Figaro* (Paris), October 15, 1970.
[32] AFP from Tirana, quoting the ATA, April 20, 1971.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF CHINESE POLICY.

One feature of past Chinese foreign policy is that China has not been consistent in supporting all "liberation" movements when to do so has seemed to conflict with its national interest. Though it has shown interest in the Eritrea Liberation Front, it has also steadily improved relations with Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, who visited Peking in 1971. China did not side with the abortive Sudanese Communist coup of July 1971, and immediately after Major General Jaafar al-Numeiry crushed it, with assistance from Egypt and Libya, Peking and Khartoum announced new commercial and aid agreements. More recently, Chinese national interest led Peking to cold-shoulder the Bengla Desh fighters of East Pakistan and to offer support, short of war, to the West Pakistani military regime.

Are the Palestinians different? Can China be expected to continue refusing all contact or relations with Israel? Will the disgrace and apparent death of Lin Piao, former Chinese War Minister, one-time heir apparent of Mao, and the theoretician of revolution, have any effect on Peking's Palestinian policy? Most of all, will the Sino-American rapprochement reach a stage where it might weaken Chinese support for the Palestine cause?

Here and there, it is true, Chinese leaders have cast some admonitory straws of caution into the revolutionary winds they are popularly supposed to fan everywhere. Former Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi warned in 1963:

> The question of world revolution is one for the countries concerned. If countries are not ripe for revolution, then China can't do anything about it. However, China will support revolutions against imperialism and oppression. This is not to say that we are behind all revolutions. Castro in 1959 had no relationship with us . . . China is not the arch-criminal behind all revolutions. China cannot pour revolutions on or off when she wants to. China can only manage her own affairs. But China will support foreign revolutions both morally and politically. We are Marxists. We must support them . . . But, it must be noted, Chinese troops will not cross our borders to advance revolutions.[33]

To try to determine China's future policy toward the Palestinians, it may be a useful exercise to try to see the Arab world through Chinese eyes. A reading of Chinese policy statements suggests that Peking classifies the Arab governments into three main groups. First is the "socialist" group: Egypt, Syria, Algeria, North and South Yemen and Iraq, and, in terms of activism if not socialist doctrine, the non-governmental Palestine Liberation Organization. All of these have had diplomatic relations with Peking since the 1950's or 1960's

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[33] Transcript of an interview by Chen Yi with John Dixon, Australian film producer, quoted in Arthur Huck, *The Security of China* (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970), p. 52.

as well as growing trade with China. All, however, are not necessarily on the best of political terms with Peking at all times.

Second is a group with which Peking also has growingly fruitful commercial relations and which it seems to regard as "neutrals": Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauretania, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Lebanon, all of which now have diplomatic relations with Peking, or are in the process of acquiring them. Libya, outside this category until the Libyan revolution of September 1969, might have been placed in this category too. However, Colonel Kazzafi's mistrust of Communism and his Islamic puritanism have held him back from rapidly forming ties with China. At the same time Kazzafi and his associates have repeatedly said they would determine their relations with all foreign countries in terms of how they stand on the Palestine question. If Libya went to war against Israel with Egypt and the Palestinians, in Peking's eyes it would become a militant.

In the third category have been the "reactionary" states of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, which before 1972 refused contacts with China though they had some trade. At time of writing, Peking seemed unlikely to violate pledges which some Palestinian leaders believed it had made not to accept any Jordanian feelers as long as King Hussein persisted in his policy of rejecting the Palestinian organizations and relying on US support.

The twin bases of China's action in the world outside are ideology and national interest. The two are often interdependent, but sometimes they seem to clash. A China acting on purely ideological motives alone, for example, would never have opened relations with regimes like those in Yemen in 1957 or Morocco in 1958; or, for that matter, the Gulf States in 1971, though the three are not fully comparable. But neither would a China which acted only according to selfish economic or military interest continue to avoid all contact with Israel.

For the first wellspring of Chinese action, which is ideology, the basic documents and charts have long been public knowledge. A map, for example, published by the *Peking Review* in 1968 and lettered with commentaries, shows "excellent revolutionary situations" in twelve areas: Palestine, Angola, Yemen, India, Burma, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia and Latin America. Palestine is classed as one of the twelve "revolutionary" zones of interest to China despite the fact that it lies outside China's direct geographical sphere of influence, and even beyond what the map calls the "outer Asian Zone" including Iran, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Japan.[34]

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[34] Map reproduced in Morton Ginsberg, "On the Chinese Perception of a World Order," in Tang Tsou (ed.), *China in Crisis*, Vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 77.

Chinese theory, as developed by the now-disgraced but not yet refuted Lin Piao, has been that the future of the world lies in the "rural areas of the world," among the landless workers and poor peasants. In this sense, Israel is one of the "cities of the world," to be encircled like those of Europe and North America. Lin Piao's "four principles" are: first, to give priority to the struggle against imperialism and revisionism; second, to construct a broad anti-imperialist front; third, to establish revolutionary bases in the "new rural areas" of Asia, Africa and Latin America; and fourth, to use the people's war, as taught by Mao, General Giap and Che Guevara, as the essential ingredient of the anti-imperialist struggle, because "in the final analysis, the whole cause of world revolution hinges on the revolutionary struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples . . . ."[35]

Translated into Middle Eastern terms this means: first, undermining the positions of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and France in the region; second, setting up a united anti-imperialist front which has proven extremely difficult because of Soviet, Egyptian and other influence, and because of the area's politically fragmented nature; third, the implantation of revolutionary bases in the Palestinian and South Arabian areas to encircle imperialist and Soviet ones, break them down and finally to invest them through people's wars.

These are some of the ideological and theoretical principles involved. They are all manifest in Chinese policy. But there is yet another motive in Chinese support for the Palestinians, and one that comes more clearly under the heading of "national interest." This is oil.

Through the last three decades, mainland China has industrialized mainly with coal and electric power rather than with oil. Its own limited developed oilfields in Manchuria and Sinkiang, vulnerable to Soviet attack because they are mostly near the frontiers, apparently work to capacity, but this capacity may be no more than 15 million tons of crude oil a year for a country of 700 million people, nearly one-quarter of the world's population. Peking's main outside oil sources, both largely independent of Western oil companies, have been Burma and Indonesia. But the oil reserves of both are small, and both have had poor political relations with China. If, as part of her policy for economic development, China is to follow the example of other coal-oriented countries such as Britain and convert to the generally cleaner and more efficient means of oil, it must assure some major outside source of crude oil. In April 1971 it concluded an oil deal with Iraq which is reported to include future deliveries of Iraqi crude to China. A month

[35] Lin Piao, "Long Live the Victory of People's War," *Peking Review*, 36, September 3, 1965.

earlier, through the opening of Kuwaiti-Chinese diplomatic relations, Peking had already placed large orders for Kuwaiti petrochemicals.[36] In September 1971, the head of state of one of the largest West Asian countries told this writer he was convinced the Chinese would want to purchase large amounts of oil in the Arab Gulf region within the decade to come, and the best course was to make this commercially available, one reason being that this would discourage China from supporting guerrilla movements like the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf.

The Gulf and Arabian zones produce around 500 million tons of oil annually in 1972. If the People's Front or other revolutionary organizations could carry out their proclaimed goal of establishing a "People's Republic of the Gulf" — something the leftist Palestinian organizations, which have liaison with the Arabian revolutionaries, say they approve — such a regime might be inclined to sell oil to China as it does now to Japan and its Western markets, without losing these markets. The area between Kuwait and Oman today is the only major world oil region within practical distance of China, about 5,000 sea miles from Canton and a bit more from Shanghai. This is half the distance which tankers, with the Suez Canal closed, must travel around Africa in order to reach their European markets.

If it could raise the foreign currency required, China might charter tankers: this writer heard of at least one Greek operator who had made an offer to Peking by October 1971. But there are land routes too. Pakistan already has a gas pipeline running halfway from Karachi to the Kashmir border. Since January 1971, a new all-weather truck road, a modern version of the ancient silk caravan route, has been handling convoys of up to 150 trucks a day in China's growing Middle East trade. This is a four-lane road entering West Pakistan at Gilgit. China thus beat Russia in the race for a southern outlet to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. To keep this lifeline, which could prove to be of vital importance in China's relationships with the Arabs, Peking must stay on good terms with Pakistan: if she does, the future advantages may be political and strategic as well as commercial.

In China's support to the Palestinians, therefore, there is a singular mixture of ideology, principle and enlightened self-interest. Though the Chinese are far away and their assistance alone might never tip the scales in favour of the Palestinians, any analytical effort which ignored or belittled it might prove to be, in the words of an old Chinese folk saying quoted by Mao, "lifting a rock off the ground, only to drop it on your own feet."

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[36] Cf. *Petroleum Press Service* (New York), October 1971, which takes a cautious view of China's future oil requirements.