

## Chinese Support for Communist Insurgencies in Southeast Asia during the Cold War<sup>+</sup>

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### Abstract

After 1949, the PRC was eager to support ideologically related movements in Asia as part of its general strategy to lead global class war. Southeast Asia was chosen as a centre of PRC's revolutionary activities because of its strategic location, geographical proximity, lesser presence of major powers, and still weak colonial or newly independent governments. From China's opening to America in 1972 and with a general shift to more accommodating foreign policy under Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, the support for communist insurgencies was significantly scaled down by the CCP. The PRC's role in the insurgencies should be seen as a result of shifting Chinese foreign policy preferences. Insurgency support was a tool used to cement China's international status among the socialist countries as well as to weaken non-communist regimes, alongside the superpowers backing them. In periods of more revisionist foreign policy, one of the key influences upon decision making was Mao's idea of revolution and mass mobilisation. Since the opening to non-communist countries and Deng's rise to power, communist insurgencies became more of an embarrassment to the CCP.

**Keywords:** *Chinese foreign policy, Cold War, communist insurgency, Southeast Asia*

### 1. Introduction

In the early period of the Cold War, Southeast Asia was in a state of political and social disorder. Returning colonial powers had problems to retain the control of their former colonial possessions and newly independent countries in the region were struggling with many internal difficulties. The power vacuum in Southeast Asia of the late 1940s was thus conducive for various interventions of great powers, including support for communist insurgencies. Soon after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in

October 1949, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) became the centre of a revolutionary struggle in Asia by providing ideological, economic and military support to various communist parties across Asia. Despite lack of sufficient contacts between the CCP and other Asian communist parties prior 1949 (except Indochina), Beijing quickly became the hub of revolutionary activity in this part of the world. As one of the key communist countries, China was eager to support ideologically related movements in Asia as part of its general strategy to lead global class war, where poor countries of the Third World would become the leading force for overthrowing colonial and capitalist forces. Southeast Asia was chosen as a centre of PRC's revolutionary activities because of its strategic location, geographical proximity, lesser presence of major powers, and still have weak colonial or newly independent governments. However, from China's opening to America in 1972 and with a general shift to more accommodating foreign policy under Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) in the late 1970s, the support for communist insurgencies was widely scaled down by the CCP.

In this paper, I will explore the motifs behind Chinese foreign policy in relation to PRC's support of communist insurgency and anti-government movements across Southeast Asia during 1949-1989. Was it caused by strongly ideological nature of Chinese foreign policy, or was it the result of China's search for security in unstable Cold War Asia environment? Or was it the result of both? Using the liberal theory of international politics, this paper argues that the PRC's role in the insurgencies should be seen as the consequence of shifts in Chinese foreign policy preferences. Until the 1970s the PRC understood *revolutionary* communist ideology as one of the main components of a state's identity. Insurgency support was a tool used to cement China's international status among the socialist countries as well as to weaken non-communist regimes, together with the superpowers backing them (the USA in the 1950s, both the USSR and the USA in the 1960s and the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s). Both military and ideological rivalry between the two superpowers was seen crucial by Chinese leaders, and their support for communist insurgencies followed larger international strategy. Since the opening to non-communist countries and Deng's rise to power, communist insurgencies became more of an embarrassment to the CCP. The reason was not the abandonment of ideology, but rather it took a new form, with presenting new goals as well as new enemies (Vietnam and the USSR instead of the USA, see He 1994).

First part of this paper will describe the liberal theory of international politics. Second part will show overall trends in the development of Chinese foreign policy since 1949 until the end of the Cold War. The third part then deals with the characteristic of the post-Second World War Southeast Asia and its relations with communist China. Finally, part four will go in more detail

through some cases of the PRC support of communist insurgencies in two countries (Thailand, Burma) in the region.

## **2. Method**

To answer the question why China has supported various anti-government movements in Asia, I will first present my own analytical framework. Every attempt to explain foreign policy behaviour of a certain state could be theoretically understood by (a) systemic constraints on rational actors' behaviour and distribution of material capabilities, or (b) preferences generated by domestic politics. Structural realism and liberal institutionalism can be counted as cases of (a). Both theories see states as unitary actors pursuing security and other goals with fixed preferences in an anarchic international system. Theories falling under (b) were for a long time out of favour in international theory mainstream. Indeed, one of the highlights of realism has been the idea that those who give primacy to domestic politics are "reductionists", those who reduce the inevitable power relations of international politics to ad hoc domestic factors (Waltz, 1979: 29; see Zakaria 1992). It is therefore ironic that most of the realist writings in the past 30 years attempted to incorporate various domestic variables to explain state behaviour deviating from structural realist predictions and rationality (see Legro and Moravcsik, 1999; Vasquez, 1997; Rose, 1998; Walt, 1998). This is especially the case with explanations relating to events during the Cold War, when foreign policy decisions were influenced by strategic as well as ideological reasons. Describing states as unitary actors in an anarchic system interested in security and relying only on themselves does not provide us with enough explanatory power. For example, the reason why certain states are seen as allies or enemies, and which phenomena are deemed as threatening, cannot be inferred from the distribution of military and economic power. Another issue is that the capacities and their potential use in foreign policy are dependent on domestic political situation and the configuration of political institutions. It is not simply enough to suppose that a particular state can mobilise its resources at will, because those resources have to be "extracted" from society, and that usually involves incentives or coercion (for this argument see Zakaria, 1999). Focusing solely on the issue of state capabilities has also the disadvantage of treating states usage of its capacities as an easy and potentially automatic task (Moravcsik, 1997: 524).

To answer the research questions raised in this paper, I therefore adopt the liberal theory of international relations as developed by Andrew Moravcsik (1997, 2002, 2008). The liberal theory of foreign policy agrees with realists that primary actors in international politics are states (having monopoly on coercive power) interacting in an anarchic international environment. Unlike

the neo-realist theory, which must assume fixed and conflicting preferences, the liberal theory holds that state preferences are generated by domestic politics and therefore susceptible to change (Moravcsik and Legro, 1999: 13-16). For neo-realism, state behaviour is influenced by variations in state material capabilities, which are more important than differences in domestic preferences among states. In liberal theory, on the other hand, variation in preferences is the key independent variable. Thus, according to Moravcsik, most contemporary international relations theories lack coherent theory of the state. As explained above, seeing the state as unitary is too simplistic and does not provide us with enough explanatory power. He writes that “in the liberal conception of domestic politics, the state is not an actor, but a representative institution subject to capture and recapture, construction, and reconstruction by coalition of social actors” (Moravcsik, 1997: 518; see also Keohane, 1990: 174; Stein, 1982).

In Moravcsik’s view there are three main types of liberalism: “*Ideational* liberal theories link state behaviour to varied conceptions of desirable forms of cultural, political, socioeconomic order. *Commercial* liberal theories stress economic interdependence (...) *Republican* liberal theories stress the role of domestic representative institutions, elites and leadership dynamics and executive-legislative relations” (Moravcsik, 2008: 234-235). It is mainly the first type that is the most illuminating for foreign policy during the Cold War, because it could be described as a “clash of social systems”, when both superpowers compete to spread ideas and influence in the Third World. “But in fact the competitive logic of international politics does *not* lead to this solution. The most prominent IR theory, Waltz’s neorealism, argues that because the superpowers were so much stronger than everyone else and able to balance against the adversary by mobilizing internal resources, they did not pay much attention to the Third World” (Jervis, 2012: 33). Various states pursued strategies seemingly inconsistent with their ideological goals, but their most basic foreign political distinction was to discern which state is the enemy and which one is not was heavily influenced by ideological beliefs.

Moravcsik’s version of liberal theory is not just another variant of the statement that domestic politics simply determines foreign policy behaviour. In his view, liberal theory is also systemic, because state preferences in the international system are interdependent (Moravcsik, 1997: 524-527). Liberal theory is not reductionist, because foreign policy of a particular state depends on its preferences taken together with the preferences of other actors. The configuration of preferences in the international system is the key structural determinant of foreign policy behaviour (Moravcsik, 2001: 6-9). For example, liberal theory does not try to explain foreign policy of China by looking only at Chinese preferences, but takes into account preferences of others. Unlike neo-realism, liberal theory does not hold these preferences as

constantly conflicting or convergent (Moravcsik, 1997: 520). It is also crucial to differentiate between strategies and preferences. Preferences deal with ends, strategies with means to achieve those ends (goals). It is not surprising for liberal theory if states compromise its welfare or sometimes security, because this could be explained by shifting state preferences (Moravcsik, 1997: 520). Furthermore, liberal theory also covers the behaviour of non-liberal states. It is consistent with states such as the early PRC, where foreign policy was under control of a handful of actors, predominantly in the person of Mao Zedong (see Moravcsik, 1997: 518).<sup>1</sup>

In the liberal model of Chinese foreign policy-making, the PRC's preferences were international propagation of international communist revolution, securing that China's neighbours are comprised of friendly regimes and strengthening communist rule over China. In the case of the first decades of the PRC, foreign policy guidelines and strategic decisions were made by a handful of top CPC leadership, mainly Mao Zedong. However, even Mao needed support of the Party and larger social forces and he needed to mobilise these in order to fulfil his goals in domestic and foreign policy. In most cases, Chinese leadership exploited the periods of international tensions for gains in domestic legitimacy and prestige.<sup>2</sup> Returning to our main question, the PRC's support for particular communist movements abroad in their fight against its own government was a result of converging of ideological and security preferences. The divergence occurred only in some cases and when it did, the result was either radicalisation of foreign policy or more accommodative posture towards non-communist states. The support for rebel groups varied according to the "usefulness" of a particular insurgency for satisfying China's preferences in foreign policy. In times of radicalisation of Chinese foreign policy (such as during the Cultural Revolution), ideological factors prevailed with heavy costs for China's prestige abroad as well as national security interests. Furthermore, material support was granted by Chinese leadership only when it was logistically feasible (Thailand, Vietnam, Burma). Otherwise their actual willingness to provide anything beyond moral and ideological guidelines was low. When China changed its posture in 1970s, economic modernisation and peaceful international environment were seen as a better way to achieve Chinese goals. This should not be interpreted as complete abandonment of communist ideology in favour of some kind of unrestrained one-party state capitalism, but the communist ideology itself was to a large extent imbued with different meaning. The USSR took the place of the USA as the principal enemy of the PRC and even the late Mao himself was slowly changing his preferences from further domestic political radicalisation to defending China's revolutionary achievements (see Jian, 2010: 239-245).

Therefore, the role of ideology and security interests in PRC's foreign behaviour was not mutually exclusive (Hunt, 1995/96: 131-134; Christiansen

and Rai, 2013: 164-167). We cannot use simple dichotomy of national interests and the ideological interests while explaining behaviour of states in the international system (see Jervis 2012). Ideology, domestic and international goals were connected and played important roles in guiding Chinese foreign policy. Mao and his comrades wanted to transform Chinese state and society and thus improve China's status in international society (Jian, 2010: 7-8). Following Young Deng, by status I understand "(...) the state's concerns over its material wellbeing and international treatment with the goal to engineer mutually reinforcing growth in both" (Deng, 2008: 2). China's support for revolutionary communist movements in Southeast Asia was therefore a function of the PRC's willingness and preference to be a *status quo* or revisionist (revolutionary) power in international society. On the other hand, international politics served the communist elites as means to mobilise domestic support. Thus, for Mao, revolutionary foreign policy was conducted when there was a sense of international weakness or leadership split in the PRC (Jian, 2010: 11-12). That radicalisation tends to happen in times of insecurity and is further illuminated by the fact that in the Cold War era the PRC resorted to use force in bilateral disputes when its sense of insecurity was especially high (see Fravel, 2007/8).

We can concur with the realist scholars that the reasons behind the PRC's decision to support friendly political movements in Southeast Asia or attempts to install them to power, was a search for security, but this cannot be the only explanation. China's sense for security was itself formed by domestic and international environment.<sup>3</sup> In order to see these points in more detail I am now going to turn to a basic outline of PRC foreign policy in the Cold War.

### 3. Chinese Foreign Policy, 1949-1989

Chinese foreign policy during the Cold War was influenced by two main factors, ideological and security preferences.<sup>4</sup> These two sets of preferences were linked and mutually supporting. The combination of both was influenced by the state of domestic politics and by shifts of power in the international arena. The first decade of the PRC until 1958 is marked by Sino-Soviet cooperation and attempts to counter balance the United States. To achieve this goal, Mao saw the USSR as a crucial part of his domestic and international strategy and decided that one need to "lean to one side" (Mao, 1949; see Hunt 2008: 159-163; Liu 2000). China went through a period of isolation between 1958 (1960) and beginning of the 1970s and was in a situation where it has to face both superpowers concurrently. During this time, there were periods when ideological zeal prevailed over traditional power calculations. In spite of the fact that China under Mao was a revolutionary revisionist power *vis-à-vis* the international society, its foreign policy switched between phases of

more aggressive and reassuring Chinese diplomacy. China's use of force in international relations was much more prevalent in this era than during the Republic of China (1912-1949) or since the 1990s. Finally, since 1972 there has been a growing trend in Chinese foreign policy to normalise diplomatic relations with major and minor powers first in Asia and then elsewhere. After the brief domestic interlude, when China after the death of Mao was led by Hua Guofeng, Deng Xiaoping as the paramount leader directed PRC's foreign policy out of the revolutionary trajectory.

China possessed a more revolutionary ideology than the USSR in the 1940s. One of the reasons was that the CCP's leadership had won in the civil war and established a truly sovereign political regime on Chinese soil in decades – at least – if not after the “century of humiliation” (see Hess, 2010; He 1994: 187-188). Mao's China was eager to show its negative view of current status of the international system right from the start. Long term Chinese struggle with Western “imperialist” powers also made possible growing attractiveness of Chinese ideas and achievements to countries around the world that were going through decolonisation. According to Mao's theory of intermediate zone of oppressed countries between the two superpowers (Strong and Kayser, 1985), it was necessary for China to support revolutionary and anti-colonial movements in Asia. Therefore, during a meeting between Stalin and prominent Chinese leader Liu Shaoqi in summer 1949 there was an agreement on “division of labour”, where it was agreed that the USSR will be the leading socialist power internationally and China will become responsible for leading communist revolution in East Asia (see Shen and Xia, 2014). Judging this Chinese strategy, Barry Buzan writes that it was an “antithesis of peaceful rise” in the international society, when China alongside other communist states competed with the West over “future shape of international society” (Buzan, 2010: 11).

After the end of the Korean War and Stalin's death in 1953 the PRC pursued a more cautious and conciliatory foreign policy. Before and after the Bandung conference of the non-aligned states (taking place in 1955), the Chinese leadership wanted to secure stable international environment for devoting more resources to domestic issues, achieving better position in dealing with the West during the Geneva conference (1954), and finally improving their status with developing countries (see Zhai 1992). However, after a few years Chinese insecurity began to rise again because of the Sino-Soviet split (see Robinson, 1991; Whiting, 1987; Jian, 2010: 49-84; Radchenko, 2012; Li and Xia, 2014). The importance of the split for Mao's thinking and subsequent Chinese foreign policy shows how we need to take both national and international preferences into account in order to explain this particular behaviour. Since 1956, when Khrushchev openly criticised Stalin and his past policies during the 20th congress of the CPSU, we have

been witnessing growing ideological and political tensions in Sino-Soviet relations with a significant impact on Chinese strategic and ideological thinking. Mao became more suspicious of Soviet leaders' search for détente with the USA. He was well aware of US military might and regarded this accommodating posture towards the biggest capitalist state a sign of Soviet weakness. On the other hand, Mao started to sense a growing importance of the PRC as the true leader of the communist countries, instead of the USSR.

The bilateral relationship with the USSR quickly deteriorated at the onset of the 1958 Great Leap Forward. It made the communist republic even more vulnerable than before due to the withdrawal of Soviet economic and technical assistance in 1960. Mao and Zhou felt encircled by political regimes friendly to the USA and bellicose towards China. Chinese sense of insecurity worsen again after a short border war with India (backed by Soviets) in 1962 (see He, 1994: 185-187). For Mao, Soviet abandonment during the Great Leap Forward was a sign of "revisionism" on the part of the Soviet leadership and clearly displayed their "big power chauvinism". But this revisionism in Soviet policy also presented a threat to domestic politics of the PRC, because it could affect even the CCP itself (Yahuda, 2011: 146). Once again it was shown that alliance policy towards the USSR is integral to Mao's goal to transform Chinese foreign and domestic policies (Jian, 2010: 49-52).

From the beginning of the 1960s, Mao has been claiming that Soviet revisionist policies are not able to fight western imperialism (Radchenko, 2012: 351-355, 360-362). The 1962 Cuban crisis only confirm the Chinese leaders' view that the Soviets are in fact weak and could not withstand American pressure. Furthermore, Soviet erratic diplomacy and lack of policy coherence only fed Chinese suspicion towards Kremlin. The escalation of the Sino-Soviet split was caused by ideological as well as power politics, with one of the most important being Beijing's effort to take the lead in the international communist movement. To a large extent, the PRC was successful in persuading many communist parties in the world to criticise the Soviets and support the Chinese position. From around 1962, Mao's foreign policy was based not merely on anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism, but with attempts to become the leading player among the newly decolonised countries of the Third World (see Jun, 2005). The PRC tried to take over the initiative to support progressive political forces abroad, including pro-communist forces in Cuba and the African continent where it devoted considerable resources, albeit on a smaller scale than the superpowers (see Cheng 2007; Schmidt 2013). The PRC was also seen as ideologically closer by many Third World governments, as it focused on the revolutionary role of rural masses (instead of stressing the role of urban proletariat, as the Soviets did) and promote the idea to achieve developed state of society by skipping some phases of modernisation, if the masses possess true revolutionary consciousness (Schmidt 2013: 268-269).

However, during 1963-1966 the Chinese met with a series of foreign policy failures (in Indonesia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Cuba). Some of the reasons for the failure of Mao's dealing with the Third World governments were narrowly stated goals, lack of actual capabilities and the support of insurgent movements in precisely those countries which Beijing wants to lead in the global war against imperialism (Robinson, 1991: 228). Also, Mao did not want to sustain high levels of foreign aid, as he needed crucial resources elsewhere. Fearing that China faces imminent security threat, Mao launched a massive program of reallocating China's industrial base to the country's interior (so-called "Third Front", *san xian*, see Naughton, 1988; Radchenko, 2012: 364; Fenby, 2009: 480). This step proves how concerns over security and ideology were inevitably linked in the PRC's decision making.

Nevertheless, in 1965, with the onset of the Cultural Revolution, there has been an even deeper radicalisation of China's domestic as well as international politics. Attempts on export revolution to underdeveloped countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa were intensified. The Cultural Revolution upheaval resulted in deterioration of almost all previously coordinated foreign policies. During this time China was in complete isolation – even among the countries of the communist bloc. Sino-Soviet rift, dating from the beginning of the 1960s, resulted in border clashes on the Ussuri River in 1969. During 1966-1969, "China purposely went into diplomatic isolation, kept foreigners out of the country, lowered the level of commercial intercourse with other countries, steered clear of international institutions, and substituted Maoist rhetoric for more tangible means of policy" (Robinson, 1992: 218). There were several places where the revolutionary violence spilled over (Hong Kong, Indonesia, Burma); however, these were results of domestic disorders than following consolidated Chinese foreign policy (see MacFarquhar and Schoenhlas, 2008: 224-227). In Southeast Asia particularly, revolutionary zeal and support for violent struggle to establish socialism proved Chinese lack of foreign political realism, along with a little understanding for the local environment (Boyd, 1970: 179-180).

After the end of the most violent phase of the Revolution in 1968/1969, Chinese foreign policy became more benign. Since the early 1970s, there were several significant changes observed in China's foreign policy. Most importantly, China normalised its relations with its long-time enemy the USA, starting with Nixon's visit to China in 1972, when both states issued the Shanghai communiqué (see Pollack, 1991; Kissinger, 2012: 202-274; Fenby 2009: 496-507).<sup>5</sup> This was followed by normalisation of relations with other non-communist nations. Second, with Mao dead in 1976 and the Gang of Four ousted shortly after, a constant reduction of class-based strategy in foreign policy followed with the political rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping. China abandoned its ideological self-reliance and widespread consensus

within the CCP emerged that economic development should take precedence in domestic and foreign policies. Third, the USSR replaced the USA as the most dangerous state for China.

#### 4. Rebellion, Communism and Southeast Asia

Generally speaking, after its founding in 1949, the PRC wanted to pursue two goals which did not seem to be in contradiction to the Chinese leadership, but together they led in practical politics to inevitable discrepancies in dealing with Southeast Asia. These goals were to achieve independence in foreign policy and improve international status and security through promoting communist revolution.

The Southeast Asian region immediately after the Second World War consisted of various states and territories controlled and governed by colonial powers: the British (Malaya, Burma), the French (Indochina), and the Dutch (Indonesia). The Japanese, who were occupying much of Southeast Asia during WWII, granted independence to Philippines and Burma in 1943 and to Indonesia and Indochina in 1945. However, returning colonial powers have not yet been ready to cede sovereignty and tried to maintain their present territorial interests after the Japanese surrender in September 1945. The British, the Dutch, and the French all attempted to maintain what was left of their empires. The return of the imperial powers clashed of course with the interests of a plethora of pro-independence movements. Over time, the growing inability of colonial powers to control their dependencies became clear, and by mid-1960s the majority of Southeast Asia countries gained their independence.

Southeast Asian states faced similar challenges of a newly acquired statehood, ethnic and religious tensions within its population, disrupted economies and mostly westernised indigenous elites with a little knowledge of administration (Yahuda 2011: 32-33). Only some countries could draw upon the pre-imperial sources of common political and social identity; Vietnam and Thailand disposed of such traditions, but many others did not. New Southeast Asian states were established on the basis of former colonies with only marginal changes from the territorial boundaries that existed in the post-war period (Turnbull, 1992: 589). Different paths to independence had important consequences for foreign policies of the Southeast Asia countries, as the whole process was taking place during the beginning of the Cold War. Various natures of struggle for independence profoundly shaped the identities of the new Southeast Asian countries, which led to differences in their domestic and foreign policies. Subsequently, this placed them in different positions *vis-à-vis* the two superpowers (Yahuda, 2011: 55).<sup>6</sup>

Post-war Southeast Asia witnessed widespread political, social and economic unrest, but most of the population did not identify with their class in

political terms. One of the reasons why communist revolutionary movements were so weak around the region was that the solidarity was mainly to local social and political groups, not national or international groupings (Owen, 1992: 522). Reflecting their lack of support and limited aid from abroad, Maoist groups were small, underfunded and confined to certain geographical areas. National governments were usually successful in putting them down without the need to make concessions. Communist movements were less able to react to the environment of modernising Southeast Asia economies and their ideological appeal was growingly undermined by improvements in welfare (*ibid.*: 523). Even if the guerrillas were capable to fight for a sustained period, their capability to attract any popular appeal was marginal (Boyd, 1970: 186, 188, 193). Economic and political shortcomings of communist regimes in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, or China decreased the appeal of insurgencies around Southeast Asia; even more closing to the year 1989. Not only were the insurgencies led by communists unsuccessful in achieving their goals, but fostered authoritarian nature of many Southeast Asian regimes by legitimising autocratic and military rule (Turnbull, 1992: 600).

Southeast Asia was in contact with imperial China for centuries as a part of the Middle Kingdom's Sino-centric tributary system, but after Western powers took initiative in China in the 19th century, China was not able to sustain its strategic presence until achieving full independence under the communists in 1949. On the other hand, commercial relations between China and the Southeast Asian political units go far back into the history of this region and resulted in populous Chinese minorities in Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and elsewhere. With the fall of the Qing dynasty and the birth of Republic of China nascent Chinese nationalism became very important for facilitating the rise of indigenous nationalist movements around Southeast Asia. This trend only exacerbated long-term tensions between overseas Chinese communities and other ethnic groups. The overseas Chinese were seen as politically suspect by the colonial interwar governments, because, apart from the growth of Chinese nationalism among them, the Guomindang's overseas policy was strictly anticolonial (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 131-132). Also, a number of overseas Chinese have joined the ranks of communist parties some already during the interwar years and others later during WWII, and this trend was supported by the CCP propaganda (see Stockwell, 1992: 329-341).

Around 1949, the Chinese leadership believed that the victory of the CCP is just a first step towards general victory of socialism in Asia. Communist parties in Southeast Asia mostly participated in united fronts in 1947, but almost all resort to violence to achieve their goals in 1948 (Hack and Wade, 2009: 442). Ideologically speaking, the support for communist insurgencies was the result of socialist internationalism; on the other hand Mao and his

followers never let the strategic implications of the struggle over political systems in Asia out of mind. Thus, for much of the Cold War period of the PRC, but with different levels of intensity, Chinese leaders followed “dual-track” diplomacy towards countries in Southeast Asia, supporting ideologically close movements and trying to have friendly state-to-state relations at the same time. The support for communist rebels was strongest in Thailand and Burma with lesser involvement in the Philippines and Malaysia. Even when China favoured “neutralism” in international politics (around the Bandung conference for example), it did not abandon ties to communist parties in Asia and claimed these ties to be of a different matter than the state-to-state relations (Yahuda, 2011: 144). This kind of diplomacy was problematic mainly because it fed the suspicion of countries in Southeast Asia regarding Chinese foreign policy fundamentally double-faced. China’s dual-track diplomacy was also only arranged in Southeast Asia. The CCP leadership was much more careful about supporting anti-government forces in Latin America or Africa and gave priority to building cordial state-to-state relations. When Mao was alive, the ideology of armed struggle was deemed as the core of revolutionary thinking. During its revolutionary phase in the 1960s, Chinese foreign policy verbally supported all the movements fighting imperialism, colonialism and Soviet “hegemonism”, but the application of this policy was even in this period of highly ideological decision-making quite selective (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 177). Most of the crucial material assistance went to communist insurgencies in former Indochina, Thailand and Burma, and only a meagre support went to Malaysia and the Philippines.

What is rightly seen as China’s aggressive stance towards non-communist countries until the 1970s was in fact a result of defensive strategy aimed at the USA rather than the result of ideological optimism and hope for quick victory in global communist revolution (Porter, 2005: 28-29). The revival of CCP backed insurgent activities in Southeast Asia was a direct result of domestic radicalisation during the Cultural Revolution. The impulse was thus exogenous to the movements themselves. Material support often denied by the CCP prior to the late 1960s was now distributed in much larger quantities; the same can be said about the direct involvement of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officials and advisors. Non-communist countries were suspicious of Chinese intentions and created the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in August 1967, which aimed at fulfilling national security goals – mainly as a defence against domestic communist insurgencies and growing Vietnamese threat (see Weatherbee, 2009: 72-75; Simon, 2008: 198).

In the 1970s, China’s attitude towards Southeast Asian countries changed dramatically compared with its previous predominantly confrontational strategy. It happened via a slow abandoning of the revolutionary rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution and finding the *modus vivendi* with America.

Another major reason was the unification of Vietnam under the independent and primarily Soviet-supported Vietnamese Workers' Party in 1975. After the US withdrawal from Southeast Asia, the international struggle for power was reduced to Sino-Soviet competition – with Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia on one side, and China with ASEAN states on the other.<sup>7</sup> Vietnam became more suspicious of China and criticised its self-centred foreign policy, the Chinese on the other hand feared a strong Vietnam being instrumental to expansion of USSR's political influence in Asia. This trend became even more visible after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, which was ruled by the deadly and virulently anti-Vietnamese Khmer Rouge regime led by Pol Pot. The PRC steadily shifted its attention from communist insurgencies to achieve the normalisation of diplomatic and other relations with the states in Southeast Asia from 1975 to approximately 1981. In turn, domestic communist insurgencies in the region were further weakened by the governments' harassment and internal divisions over the ideology. This trend enabled closer cooperation of the non-communist ASEAN block as well as the normalisation of diplomatic relations with the PRC (Turnbull, 1992: 624).

As the USA was seen as a potential balance to the USSR, more friendly relations with countries in Southeast Asia were instrumental for the PRC in tackling the problem of potential Vietnam hegemony in Southeast Asia. Since then, we observe the PRC's foreign policy slowly downgrades the material support for communist insurgencies (moral support lasted until the 1980s) and to normalise its relations with non-communist Southeast Asian countries. After the return of Deng, ties with communist insurgent parties in Southeast Asia were not completely cut off but the material support was diminished, and the insurgents were being pushed by the PRC to negotiate with their respective governments. However, this was a long term process, and the PRC was unwilling to give up all relations with fellow parties in Asia, not even in exchange for a higher level of trust from the ASEAN states. Nevertheless, as China improved its relations with the USA and independent Vietnam backed by Soviets being more of a threat in Southeast Asia, Chinese "dual track" diplomacy was slowly abandoned. After 1982, the PRC proclaimed an "independent" foreign policy, which was supposed to be pursued apart from the interests of both superpowers (see Yahuda, 2011: 154-157; Sutter, 2013: 67-69; Deng, 2008: 5). One reason for a lessening of tensions in diplomatic relations between the PRC and non-communist states was decreasing sense of insecurity by Chinese leaders. Mao was constantly concerned about the insecure China's environment and proposed bellicose and chaotic foreign policies. From the end of the 1970s the Chinese leadership saw its foreign security environment as much more benign. Thus, Deng Xiaoping said that "it is possible that there will be no large scale war for a fairly long time to come and that there is hope of maintaining world peace (cited in Jian, 2012: 188).

Despite some suspicion and security issues between the PRC and the ASEAN countries, the 1980s saw steady improvements in political and mainly economic relations. During his visit to several Southeast Asian countries in August 1981, the CCP Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang stated that relations between CCP and other communist parties are only “political and moral” and that the CCP will not interfere with region’s internal affairs (Heaton, 1982: 779, 781). Deepening China’s political and economic ties with the ASEAN states nevertheless did not immediately transpose into full and immediate acceptance on the side of China’s neighbours. Until the end of the Cold War, remnants of historical animosities undermined non-problematic diplomatic relationship between China and the ASEAN countries.

The shift in Chinese policy towards communism after Mao’s death did not prove that Chinese diplomacy encouraging communist movements to revolt against their governments was hypocritical to that point – the state’s preferences have rather shifted. From the 1970s to the 1980s, communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia had to face three negative developments: the withdrawal of external support, more effective government responses and fragmentation of internal party structures (Ladd Thomas, 1985: 18). From the late 1970s until 1989, Beijing had been switching its material support to communist movements that could have been helpful in fighting Soviet and Vietnamese “hegemonism”, primarily the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (Heaton, 1982: 796); and later abandoned the policy of supporting insurgencies abroad completely.

## 5. The Case Studies

To support the arguments presented thus far, I now turn to present two case studies of the CCP supporting communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia. In each country analysed here, I would like to show when and how communist insurgencies broke out and to what extent they were supported by the CCP. I will focus on how the communist insurgency support was influenced by domestic situation in China and the international Cold War environment. Due to limited space, only three of the relevant countries with communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia can be analysed here. I choose the cases of Thailand and Burma for similar reasons. Both countries witnessed direct material and ideological involvement of the PRC in domestic communist insurgencies, but unlike some other countries in the region (Indochina) there was small involvement by other communist powers, or was negligible.

### 5.1 Thailand

Thailand was the only country in Southeast Asia without colonial presence and was also endowed with high level of ethnic and cultural homogeneity apart from hosting a large community of overseas Chinese. Anti-Chinese

policies, based on supporting Thai identity and restricting Chinese commercial activity, were adopted already in the 1930s. Anti-communism ingrained in the thinking of Thai elite predated 1949 because communist ideas had become suspect already in the 1930s with the birth of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Thai elites before and after the war were in favour of capitalism, monarchy and Buddhism, ideas antithetical to communist ideology (Storey, 2011: 125). Also, one of the obvious results of pre-war Thai independence was that the CPT could not rest on any credential coming from anti-colonial resistance, neither could the communist parties in other Southeast Asian countries (Rousset, 2008).

Unlike other countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand was not occupied by Japanese forces during WWII. Instead, Thailand chose to bandwagon with Japan in WWII and kept its independence in exchange for economic and political support. This behaviour, however, did not later lead to any significant punishment by the victorious powers. Initially Thailand was not deemed much of an importance by the USA and the USSR. Then due to the Cold War, it became too important to be punished by its wartime collaboration. Nevertheless, Thailand had to revise its anti-communist policy because of Soviet pressure for some time (it needed the approval of the USSR to become a member of the UN) resulting in significant clandestine communist activity in the country (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 141; Rousset, 2008). After the Thai military had taken power in 1948, there was a growing sense of danger coming from communist China, which was only exacerbated as the CPC took over mainland China in October 1949.

Thailand did not recognise the PRC, but established diplomatic relations with Chiang Kai Shek's regime in Taiwan instead. For nearly three decades, Thailand saw communist China as an existential threat, both internally and externally. Not only was the PRC supporting rebel groups on Thai territory, but Chinese communist were also supporting radical movements in other Southeast Asian countries, who could in turn present a threat to Thailand. In a search for security, Thailand pursued a strict anti-communist strategy in domestic as well as in foreign policy and sought defence guarantees from the USA. Thailand devoted troops to the UN contingent fighting against North Korea and the PRC in the Korean War (1950-1953) and was instrumental in providing aid to anti-communist KMT groups based in North Burma. Growing willingness to support communist insurgencies in Thailand by the PRC only resulted in increase of American influence in Thailand and cemented their bilateral security relationship. Thailand finally achieved the security guarantees in the South East Asia Organization (SEATO), signed by its member states in 1954. Nevertheless, SEATO did not present a system of collective security comparable to NATO, for example. Later, in 1962, when Thailand was facing an upsurge of communist activity on its territory

(see below), the USA and Thailand declared in Rusk-Thanat communiqué that the Manila Pact could effectively function as a bilateral security pact (Weatherbee, 2009: 66). During the Second Indochina War, Thailand was (together with the Philippines) the only Southeast Asian country allied with the United States.

The deepening of Thai-US military cooperation was not merely the result of the escalation of conflict in Vietnam and its spill-over to Laos and Cambodia, but was closely connected to a new period of activity of the CPT. In 1961, the third congress of the CPT “effectively marked the inception of armed struggle, although much preparation was necessary to ready the forces before battle began” (Rousset 2008). However, until the mid-1960s the CPT presented a little threat, and, in the previous decade, the support for communism in Thailand from the PRC was only ideological (Storey, 2011: 126).

This situation changed in 1965, when Chinese foreign policy underwent yet even deeper radicalisation. The CPT proclaimed the beginning of a violent phase of the insurgency with official support from the CCP (Alpern, 1975: 687). At this time, there was also an upsurge of CCP sponsorship for insurgencies in Malaysia, Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines. CPT was strongly dependent on CCP not only ideologically, but also organisationally (CIA, 1973: 56). Several hundred PLA personnel joined the insurgents in the early 1970s, acting as advisors and training instructors. During this period, the PRC also supplied the insurgents with Chinese weapons and ammunition, something they refused to do before in order to avoid compromising themselves diplomatically (CIA, 1973: 5). The CPT insurgency developed because it could operate in geographically suitable locations close to the Chinese border. “Operating along the Indochinese borders and near China, the CPT benefited from important logistical, financial, military, and food support from its neighbours. It had diplomatic representation in Beijing and the backcountry of Yunnan. It opened bases in Laos where there were hospitals, schools, and training camps” (Rousset 2008).

In the mid-1970s, Thailand went through a political crisis, which was to certain extent connected with growing Thai involvement in the Second Indochina War on behalf of its American ally. This momentary attempt on installing a stable democratic regime in the mid-1970s nevertheless contributed, together with Sino-American rapprochement and growing Vietnamese power to the normalisation of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations in July 1975. At a meeting with the Thai leaders, Zhou Enlai assured his colleagues that China will not interfere with Thai internal affairs; however, political contacts between the CPT and CCP will remain in place. Despite the fact that Thai leadership remained suspicious about Chinese intentions, both states were able to cooperate, mainly in balancing unified communist Vietnam. Between 1976 and 1978, the insurgency was thus partly reinforced

by an influx of new sympathisers following the government's violence against political dissidents (Wedel, 1981: 329).<sup>8</sup> However, this trend proved to be short-lived and the CPT governed only a small portion of its former strength in the beginning of the next decade. There were three main reasons for this: more effective government anti-insurgency measures, the split of the communist party over the Third Indochina War, and fast decreasing level of support from the CCP. Students joining the ranks of the CPT were soon dissatisfied with lack of internal party democracy, reliance on outdated Maoist strategies of political and military struggle and dependence on ethnic Chinese (see Ongsuragz, 1982; Wedel, 1981; Wedel 1982).

The signing of treaty of cooperation and friendship between the USSR and Vietnam in November 1978 and subsequent Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December that year deepened cooperation between Thailand and China. Thailand agreed to support the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia via its territory and the Chinese reduced material and ideological support to the CPT. In a very short time, the broadcast of Voice of Thai People Radio in 1979 was ended. In the same year, there was fierce internal debate over taking sides in Sino-Vietnamese dispute (see Marks, 1996: 55–57). The CPT decided to take the Chinese side and condemned Vietnamese invasion to Cambodia in 1978 and criticised the regime in Laos, which deprived the party of very valuable Vietnamese assistance and the CPT had to leave its bases in Vietnam and Laos (Ongsuragz, 1982: 369). Despite the fact that the CPT was following Chinese opinion in international politics, the CCP was slowly scaling down its support. By taking the Chinese side, the CPT lost all the support from the Communist Party of Vietnam, which was considerable from 1975 to 1978.

In a few years, the government's pressure and a lack of foreign funds doomed the CPT insurgency to failure and marginalisation. Amnesty for those guerrillas who would surrender announced by the government also significantly contributed to the weakening of the CPT. The PRC wanted to balance Vietnamese influence in Southeast Asia, for which it deemed necessary to support the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia through Thai territory. In order to achieve this goal, the PRC needed to be on good relations with Bangkok, combined with Thailand as non-communist state perceiving Vietnamese expansionism as a threat (Ladd Thomas, 1985: 19–20). Furthermore, while renouncing the support for the CPT the Chinese communist leaders were just following a general change in their foreign policy during the reform era.

As a result of this development from the mid-1970s, Sino-Thai relations were steadily improving, and since the beginning of 1980s, Thailand and China formed a *de facto* alliance against the threat of Vietnamese expansion. In November 1978, Deng Xiaoping visited Thailand where he defended Chinese strategy of improving relations and keeping ties with the communist

party at the same time (Heaton, 1982: 784). Party to party relations were a separate matter for Deng, but because the cooperation to fend off Vietnam was vital for Bangkok, they did not have a disruptive effect on Sino-Thai relations. Nevertheless, the support from the Chinese side was steadily decreasing in the following years. In a parallel motion, the number of members in the party was greatly reduced by mass defections and effective government action.

Not only was the Chinese support for CPT diminished, but the party itself became torn apart from inside by critics of heavy reliance on Chinese ideology and ethnic Chinese members (Ladd Thomas, 1985: 22-23). As the party grows increasingly isolated and its local support reduced, a withdrawal of external support from China and other countries proved to be decisive for the CPT's political survival. It is possible that even without the CCP's abandonment the CPT would dissolve under internal pressures and a lack of skills in accommodating various political and national groups under its wings. Its reliance on China in international relations and dependence on Maoist ideology proved to be unacceptable for many members of the party, who saw the party as more and more pro-Chinese rather than a Thai party. The CTP's lack of flexibility was also proved when the party stuck to its revolutionary principles while China was moving in the opposite direction. Once this ideological orientation is questioned and partially abandoned in the mid-1980s, it would be all too late (see Rousset 2008). Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been no visible activity of the CPT.

## **5.2. *Burma***

During WWII, the Communist Party of Burma (BCP) was a part of the anti-Japanese resistance alliance, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League.<sup>9</sup> Burma was granted independence from Great Britain in 1948; however, it had to fight many communist and ethnic insurgencies during its early years of existence, and those were dubbed "kaleidoscope of insurgencies" because of their complex political and ethnic foundations (Smith 1991: 28; see Tucker 2001: 8-26). When Burma was heading towards independence in 1946-1948, certain disagreements soon appeared between the BCP and other political forces. The BCP split into two factions (the White Flag and the Red Flag) competing over the issue of cooperation with the non-communist forces, however, both later rebelled against the newly independent government. The reason was not international circumstances but primarily the communist fear of mounting state persecution. According to the BCP Central Committee, Burma was unfit for proletarian revolution and therefore the armed struggle should focus on rural guerrilla warfare. Until the mid-1950s the communist insurgency was quite successful and it was able to control large parts of the countryside in Central Burma (Lintner, 1990: 13-14).

Fearful of the newly formed PRC (October 1949) supporting domestic communist forces, Burma as the first non-communist state recognised communist China on December 16, 1949 (Fan, 2012: 8-9). Under prime minister U Nu, Burma tried to stay neutral in the Cold War environment, mainly accommodating communist China in the North and refusing to join western security alliances or accept significant foreign aid. Burma saw not antagonising Beijing as the main goal of their foreign policy and kept that line until the end of the Cold War (see *ibid.*: 9-14). By pursuing this neutralist foreign policy the Burmese achieved *modus vivendi* with China and communist insurgency was only marginally supported by the PRC at this stage. This enabled U Nu's regime to deal with the rebellion by the mid-1950s (Turnbull, 1992: 602). Thus, "in return for strict Burmese neutrality, China limited its support for the Burmese Communist Party to a level that prevented the BCP from seriously challenging the government in Rangoon" (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 188). Despite giving the Burmese communists vocal encouragement in their revolutionary efforts, neutral Burma was strategically more important than showing international communist solidarity. Good terms between China and Burma were cemented during the Bandung period (1954-1957), when the PRC's changed its foreign policy posture and for some time saw its main goals as securing a peaceful international environment.

This situation did not change much until the mid-1960s. In 1961, General Ne Win staged a successful *coup d'état*, and Burma's Revolutionary Council launched "the Burmese Way to Socialism" in 1962; thereby further deepening the country's international isolation. As a sign of more autocratic course taken by the government, the coup brought more discontented people into the BCP and renewed efforts of other insurgency groups (Smith, 1991: 198-199). Sino-Burmese relations nonetheless had remained stable for some time, and both states ratified a treaty in 1961 that ended their border disputes. Until the start of the Cultural Revolution, the PRC had not supported the BCP materially and kept correct state-to-state relations until 1967 (see Bert, 1985).

The PRC's stance towards the domestic situation in Burma changed during the early years of the Cultural Revolution when Burma became a target of chaotic, aggressive, and strongly ideological foreign policy. The situation deteriorated after the breakout of anti-Chinese riots in Rangoon in 1967 with Mao urging the support for an armed rebellion of the BCP and ethnic Kachin and Shan minorities against the Burmese state. The PRC's policy sends "slogan-chanting ethnic Chinese onto streets. Many were arrested, others attacked and killed. Chinese shops were looted. The Chinese Teachers' Federation building was burned down. The seal is torn from PRC's embassy. An embassy official is stabbed to death. The New China News Agency's correspondent is expelled" (Tucker, 2001: 226). Furthermore, Ne

Win was openly criticised as a “fascist dictator” by Chinese media (Seekins, 2006: 142). In 1967, the PRC established the “North-eastern Command (NEC) in the Burmese North in 1968 in order to support the communist revolution. In the same year, heavily armed CPB forces invaded the Shan state in the north; at its peak, the NEC had around 20,000 troops (Tucker, 2001: 170).

Not only was there material support (food, weapons and communications equipment), PLA soldiers also took part in the insurgency organisation and strategy. Even the PRC citizens on the Sino-Burmese border were recruited as “volunteers” to fight in the insurgency (see Lintner, 1990: 26, 35). The insurgency, based in the Shan state in the north, had close geographic proximity with south of the PRC (Yunnan) – and this was used to provide material and ideological support. Also, since 1971 the clandestine Voice of the People of Burma broadcast began operating from the Chinese mainland. Unlike the communist insurgency 15 years earlier, this time it was completely dependent on Chinese material support and was mainly composed of members of north Burmese ethnic groups. The insurgency was therefore strongest in the north and had little significance in Central Burma with predominantly ethnically Burmese population.

Burma, together with Thailand, was the only country where the PLA was closely cooperative with the insurgent forces. The PLA commanders issued advices and provided battle plans for the rebels. PLA officers also participated in guerrilla training in PLA camps in south China (CIA, 1973: iii). Clandestine radio broadcast not only provided ideological support, but also delivered detailed information to the insurgents about local political and military conditions. In Burma, members of the PLA became part of the BCP commanding structure (CIA, 1973: iv). In the early 1970s, the BCP was able to control 20,000 square kilometres of territory in the Shan state (Lintner, 1990: 26). However, the communists were unable to connect new territories in the north with some of the still functioning old revolutionary bases in central Burma.

Even with the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, Burma maintained its foreign policy line and made no provocative steps towards Beijing.<sup>10</sup> After the most violent phase of the Cultural Revolution had ended, the PRC softened its approach and appropriately scaled down its support for communist insurgents in Burma (Turnbull, 1992: 623). Since Ne Win’s trip to Beijing in 1971, Sino-Burmese relations again improved markedly resulting consequently in a lowering level of support going to the BCP from the Chinese side. With the Chinese rapprochement with the USA in 1972, Burma was also losing its geopolitical importance. We can see further progress in bilateral relationship after Deng Xiaoping’s ascension in the late 1970s, when the PRC stopped its material support for the communist insurgents in

Burma altogether. The Chinese wanted to bring the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia out of isolation. Ne Win's visit was staged in Phnom Penh by the CCP and in return, the Chinese support for the BCP was being reduced (including the recall of Chinese "volunteers" from Burma, Lintner, 1990: 30). The CCP not only deprived the BCP of material support but also sharply reduced its revenues from cross border trade, having much to do with extensive opium smuggling (Tucker, 2001: chap. 7). Apart from geopolitical reasons, it also played a role when the BCP openly praised the Gang of Four in 1976 and sharply criticised Deng Xiaoping (Lintner, 1990: 29-30). From 1978, the BCP, now deprived of Chinese support, has become under heavy pressure from the military regime's forces. In 1981, Beijing helped to arrange unsuccessful negotiations between the BCP and government representatives. The Burmese communist tried several times during the 1980s to break out from their bleak political and military situation, but they did not succeed. For the rest of the decade, the BCP was isolated geographically around the Sino-Burmese border.

During the 1980s, Burma was becoming more dependent on China. This trend strengthened substantially after 1988 with the successful military coup and bloody suppression of student demonstrations. Military rule after 1988 pushed the country into an even deeper isolation, and economic and military ties with China grew in importance. As the BCP issue lost its sensitivity, both autocratic governments facing popular protests further cemented their relationship on the political as well as economic front. Lack of funds and material equipment, internal tensions and dwindling popular support resulted in inevitable decline for the BCP. "In April 1989, an uprising by ethnic Wa cadres effectively destroyed the BCP, which accompanied the Thai and Malayan communist parties into oblivion" (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 212; see Lintner, 1990: 39-46; Tucker, 2001: 175-176; 180).

Burma is the only non-communist state in Southeast Asia able to keep good relations with the PRC – discounting the Cultural Revolution period in the late 1960s (Bert, 1985: 979). This was achieved by carefully reacting to China's domestic and foreign policy and preserving a low key position in international relations. On the other hand, Chinese posture towards Rangoon was determined by the need to break "the encirclement" by US-friendly regimes in East and Southeast Asia and Burma's strategic geopolitical location (Fan, 2012: 17, 21-23). As in other cases, the highest level of CCP support for communist insurgency in Burma could be seen during the Cultural Revolution. Before it had been non-existent and afterwards it was sharply reduced because of China's new preferences in foreign and domestic policy. Domestically speaking, the communist insurgency was, as in the other Southeast Asian states, used for legitimisation of autocratic and military rule.

## 6. Conclusion

Even though the communist regime in China quickly rose to be the leader of the communist revolution in Asia after 1949, security and balance of power reasons have never been abandoned.<sup>11</sup> Supporting communist parties struggling with government authorities in Thailand, Philippines, Burma, or elsewhere were not just a result of the ideological nature of the new Chinese regime, but stemmed from the complex political situation in many Southeast Asian countries, bearing in mind that favourable results of these struggles could possibly improve China's security position. Indeed, clandestine Chinese support for various communist movements around Asia was sharply reduced after the end of the violent phase of the Cultural Revolution, mainly as a result of changes in foreign policy preferences. Aiming at slow normalisation of PRC's relation with its neighbours in order to strengthen the overall security position of China, secret contacts with movements and political parties fighting legitimate governments in Southeast Asia have become unacceptable. Looking at the whole post-Cold War period of Sino-Southeast Asia relations, we could say that until about 1975 China achieved very little and did not significantly shape the political development in the region (Wang, 2008: 188-189). This is also true of Cambodia, where the CCP was supporting the Khmer Rouge insurgency until its final settlement in 1991.

Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia from the 1950s until the 1970s was influenced by ideological factors and followed the idea of international class struggle, but in many ways ideological goals were subordinated to Chinese security preferences. We could observe this in Malaysia, Burma, Vietnam or Indonesia. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, insurgencies based on the idea of violent rebellion were more in discord with how China wanted to shape its security environment, of which Southeast Asia was an important part. There were certain periods when revolutionary ideological factors prevailed (1963-1965, 1967-1972), however those years were exceptions than a rule. The support for fellow communist parties fighting their own governments was subordinated to stabilising China's *modus vivendi* with non-communist countries. The CCP's support for communist groups was verbal and ideological than material in many countries, all due to general Chinese security interests. However, security and ideological concerns were interlinked because the Chinese leadership saw ideological and security preferences as mutually supporting. Starting with China's opening to America, the CCP's ideology lost its revolutionary nature and instead started to promote regional stability and economic development as means to achieve socialism in China.

The insurgency support in Southeast Asia persisted most likely because of Mao's insistence on violent struggle to achieve communism that he

deemed separate from pursuing favourable regional balance of power. In the end, it seemed obvious even to the Chinese leadership that this strategy has failed. Thus,

the newly independent countries of Southeast Asia were faced with the unenviable task of dealing with an erratic China. While some (Thailand, Burma) drew upon historically grounded international relations cultures to respond to China, if in different ways, for others (Indonesia, Malaysia) relations with China contributed to shaping newly evolving strategic and international relations cultures. For all, China was a threatening and disruptive presence, to be placated or kept at arm's length (Stuart-Fox, 2003: 222).

Insurgency support was a political and ideological failure. Nevertheless, the support for some communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia was being sustained well into 1980s. Our liberal model of foreign policy can provide several clues why this happened. First, foreign policy preferences are long-term aims whether strategies are of short- to middle-term use. Second, revolutionary zeal is often just an expression of weakness and internal disorder rather than expansionist interest. In the case of Chinese Cold War foreign policy, radical steps were taken at times when the leadership felt especially insecure or their international status was shaken. And third, the influence of ideology plays an important role if, as in the case of the PRC, political elites tend to see ideological and security goals as linked. When the political elites see growing discrepancy between two sets of important foreign policy preferences, they are forced to make decisions to achieve at least minimum success in both sets. If that is not possible, priority is given to those preferences which are considered as essential ones.

## Notes

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- 1. The position of Mao among his closest collaborators and his style of leadership is analysed in detail by Teiwes (1988).
- 2. Mao willingly pursued aggressive foreign policy for achieving domestic mobilisations. During the 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis he made the following statement: “We are calling every day for relaxing international tensions because

it will benefit the people of the world. So, can we say that it must be harmful for us whenever there is a tense situation? I do not think it necessarily so. A tense situation is not necessarily harmful for us in every circumstance; it has an advantageous side. Why do I think this way? It is because besides its disadvantageous side, a tense situation can mobilise the population, can particularly mobilise the backward people, can mobilise the people in the middle, and can therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction” (Liu, Jian and Wilson, 1995/96: 216).

3. So, for example, the Sino-Soviet split was a result of different ideas about superpower competition, the strategy of international communist movement and the nature of proper domestic communist regime as well. Future Chinese animosity towards the Soviets was also influenced by attempts to ensure that China will never again be used against its wishes or without its consent (see Taubman, 1996/97).
4. For general accounts of this period see Jian (2010), Sutter (2013: 28-58), Yahuda (2011: 137-159).
5. For some of Mao’s ideas about revolution and international politics in the late 1960s see documents in Jian and Wilson (1998). See Hunt (2008: 163-171) for Mao’s foreign policy ideas towards the USA prior 1949.
6. For more general background of superpower policy in the Third World, see Westad (2006).
7. For ideological competition among the Asian communist states see Shaefer (2009).
8. Rousset (2008) writes that “in the beginning of 1979, at its peak, it had 12,000 to 14,000 soldiers according to government estimates; according to other estimations, there were 20,000. Guerrilla zones existed in more than forty provinces and the CPT had influence in thousands of villages with a total population of more than 3 million.”
9. The most authoritative text on CPB and evolution of its policy and organisational structure is Lintner (1990); see also Tucker (2001) for a good assessment of the post-1948 period in Burma.
10. Indeed, radicalisation of the local Chinese communities led to Burmese answer in the form of suppression of the political left and public anti-Chinese propaganda. This diplomatic break, however, lasted only for a short time until the beginning of the 1970s (see Robinson 1991: 242-244).
11. For an interesting comment on the role of ideology and security in the case of revolutionary regimes’ foreign policy see Herz (1950).

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