

October 19, 1964

**J.S. Mehta, 'China's Bomb and Its Consequences on
her Nuclear and Political Strategy'**

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Summary:

Analysis of the recent Chinese nuclear weapon test and its strategic implications for China's diplomatic and military policies.

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EMBASSY OF INDIA
PEKING

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The Foreign Secretary
Ministry of External Affairs
New Delhi

□□ Subject: □ China's bomb and its consequences on
□□ her nuclear and political strategy.

Sir,

□□ On the afternoon of the 16th of October, the Indian Embassy was rejoicing at the birth of a son to the P.A. to the CdtA. At the precise moment of his birth, 3 PM Peking Time, somewhere in the desert of Taklamakan, probably at Lobnor, the Chinese exploded their first nuclear device. The coincidence is symbolic of the tragedy of our times.

□□ THE EXPLOSION AND ITS IMPACT

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2. □ The explosion was an atomic device using Uranium 235 fissionable material and involved a sophisticated explosion of gaseous material. It was a 'dirty', non-transportable bomb, exploded in the atmosphere from a fixed tower, estimated to be of 10 to 20 kilotons (equivalent to 10,000 to 20,000 tons TNT) capacity. The fact that the Chinese were capable of this thermonuclear device came as a surprise to many foreign observers who had thought they were at this stage only capable of a plutonium bomb. About 6 o'clock in the evening, a warning announcement was made on the Peking Radio and by telephone to accredited correspondents here that a "very important" statement would be issued shortly. The actual announcement was made about 10 o'clock and a special issue of the People's Daily was brought about 10.45 P.M. Some enthusiastic members of the Embassy were the first to collect copies of this special issue and apparently the only diplomats to do so. It will be a vivid memory to those of us who drove round the streets of Peking soon after the announcement - the manner in which enthusiastic and gleeful members of the cadres stopped all cars and thrust copies of the bulletin, as if to make known to foreigners that China had symbolically recaptured rightful destiny as a Great Power.

3. □ Something of its otherwise dramatic significance was lost because the Americans had, in the previous three weeks, set about systematically to diffuse the political impact and reduce the psychological blast of the expected explosion. On the 29th September, Dean Rusk had announced that their Intelligence had reason to believe that China was about to explode her first nuclear device. Just as the Soviet Union had sent of its first sputnik to mark the 40th anniversary of the Socialist Revolution, it was expected that China would trigger her bomb to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the founding of the PR. Speculations are rampant in which some allege that the postponement was due to a technical failure and others that it was deliberately deferred in order not to harden anti-Chinese opinion at the Non-aligned Conference. There seems more substantial basis to the reports, which have been traced to the

Djakarta Radio, that heads of governments of their particular friends, e.g. Indonesia, UAR, Cambodia, Burma (in all cases Afro-Asians) were informed of the Chinese intention to explode their first bomb during the course of the month. It seems by no means unlikely that the Chinese would have tried to soften, through the sense of shared confidence, the anticipated feelings of revulsion and awe which the explosion was bound to cause.

4. □The detracting from its impact by the marginal loss in the element of surprise because of American publicity and possibly their own diplomacy, was however fully compensated as the explosion coincided with the sudden and unexpected dethroning of their arch-enemy, "the criminal Khrushchev." Only three days previously the Chinese were publicising Albanian denunciations of Khrushchev and his clique and openly inciting the Soviet comrades to overthrow his leadership. Whether Khrushchev's resignation and the Chinese atomic explosion have any organic connection is also hard to tell. At a time when the air was heavy with anticipation, Soviet Intelligence may have had even more precise knowledge of the projected explosion and this may have accentuated the simmering feeling of dissatisfaction with Khrushchev's failures and his style of leadership and the Presidium decided to jettison Khrushchev before the Chinese crowded over their unaided technological triumph, which was bound to be a slap at Soviet Union. On the other hand, at least two East European diplomats have suggested to me that Chairman Mao - Ambassador Chervonenko had informed the Chinese leadership of Khrushchev's replacement in the small hours of the 16th morning - decided to press the button for the explosion, which presumably was already well prepared, when he heard of the confusion in the Kremlin. In any case, the fact of coincidence between the dramatic change in the Soviet leadership and the explosion of the first Asian nuclear device served to highlight the Chinese triumph and, whatever may be its consequences, it will be a memorable black-letter day in the history of our times.

5. □While there is fresh evidence of an unresolved malaise in the Soviet party - even if only of rising expectation and confirmation of the views of renegades about the "god that failed" - here in the Chinese olympus, Chairman Mao reigns supreme as a modern version of the heavenly emperor. And however much the military significance of this atomic blast may be belittled, there is bound to be awe and admiration for this break-through by an Asian power in the realm of higher science, hitherto the exclusive field of Europeans and their migrant descendants, the Americans.

6. □Having honestly conceded this, one must follow it up with the caution that one always tends to exaggerate China's achievements and therefore a cold analysis must be made along with the relevant background, to assess the military and political consequences of this development. I embark on this exercise in deference to its importance but fully conscious that I have neither the necessary equipment nor time to study and do justice to the theme. The field of nuclear weaponry is everywhere shrouded in secrecy. In the case of China even less seems to be known. The following pages have no claim of originality as they are based on a few pegs of more or less known facts and published material.

□□BACKGROUND

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Confused Attitude towards Nuclear Weapons - 1949-57

7. □The first known reference to the military implications of the atom bomb, as seen by the Chinese communist leadership, is contained in a speech delivered by Chairman Mao Tse-tung to the cadres in Yen-an on the 13th August 1945 - one week after the bombing of Hiroshima. He disparaged the idea that the atom bomb was responsible for the Japanese defeat. The allied victory in the East was attributed to Soviet participation in the Far-Eastern war. It was in the following year, 1946, in an interview with Anna Louise Strong, that Mao first christened the bomb which killed or maimed

365,000 persons at Hiroshima as a "paper tiger". He predicted that it would never be used again and said that it was man and not his weapons which finally determined the outcome of any armed conflict.

8. □ In the period after the proclamation of the People's Republic, and right up to 1954, the Chinese leadership either disparaged nuclear weapons or tended to ignore them. It was a period of consolidation at home, and they seemed not to have been exercised in the least in reassessing military doctrines appropriate to the revolutionary change in the instruments of war. It was only after the experience of the Korean war that military experts, like Marshal Peng Teh-huai, began to realise that the tactics of guerilla warfare, in which the Red Army was schooled during the civil war, were inadequate as concepts for a government responsible for national defence and interested in the protection of strategic areas, large cities and industrial complexes. During and after the Korean War, the PLA was reorganized and retrained to appreciate the importance of positional warfare, the necessity of quick decisions as against protracted struggle, the requirements of superior fire-power and building up of a trained professional elite for a modern army.

9. □ According to the painstaking research of the experts of the Rand Corporation of U.S., it was only after 1945 that the Chinese became aware of the implications of nuclear warfare and this may well have started with the first thermonuclear explosion and when the Chinese found open and earnest discussion in the Soviet military journals and among Soviet professional officers on the subject of a military doctrine appropriate to the weapons. The Chinese refused to acknowledge for a long time that swift and sudden attack could settle the outcome of the war. But, learning from the Soviet appreciation, the Chinese seemed to have also recognized that despite the great advance made by the Soviet Union, the United States still had a nuclear advantage over the communist bloc. China also became aware that despite her strength in conventional weapons she was surprisingly vulnerable to a sudden attack from Taiwan. This education into the terrible implication of the nuclear weapons to her own security may have been part of the reason why in this period - 1954-57 - the Chinese gave a twist of

Peaceful Coexistence to their foreign policy. The compiled evidence of experts clearly suggests that about 1954-55 the then Defense Minister, Peng Teh-huai became of the view that the ultimate strength of China must depend on her economic progress and scientific research and the temptations for military adventures must be resisted to pursue the long-term revolutionary objectives. Consequently military expenditure was reduced and appropriations for science and technology were increased. Before the P.R.C. in 1957, Chou En-lai underlined the importance of new branches of technological and scientific research for the defence of the country. The Chinese had never fully accepted the thesis put forward in 1956 by Khrushchev at the 20th Party Congress that world war was neither inevitable nor essential for the triumph of communism, but they were restrained in precipitating a conflict.

The Search for Nuclear Capability - 1957-59

10. □ The crucial period in the Chinese quest for an independent nuclear deterrent, a period which Alice Hsieh, the foremost expert on Chinese nuclear strategy, calls "the Search for a Decision" was from the second half of 1957 up to 1959. It was in this period that the Soviet Union launched the first earth satellite and developed the first inter-continental ballistic missile and showed she had the bombs and the means of delivery of a direct onslaught on North American cities. Intense discussion on the overall bloc strategy took place just prior to and during the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, when Mao visited Moscow and was followed by a Chinese military delegation to the Soviet capital. The important fact is that the conclusion which the Russians derived from the same data of triumphs was different from those which the Chinese reached. Moving away from the time when they disparaged nuclear weapons, the Chinese felt that these epoch-making achievements made the entire communist bloc, including China, not only safe against predatory

attacks but gave them the backing for an aggressive military, economic and political strategy without any fear of Dulles' massive retaliation. It was in this context that Mao declared that the "East wind had begun to prevail over the West", that a final shift in the balance of forces had taken place. Khrushchev, on the other hand, while boastful and satisfied at these achievements had become gradually sensitive to the terrible destructive capacity and suicidal dangers of using the nuclear weapon; he still viewed the U.S. nuclear power with healthy awe and became interested in disarmament and détente on economic and humane grounds. The Soviet Union tried, in Berlin and elsewhere, to test Western reaction in specific and limited situations, but shirked always from direct confrontation.

11. □ It was in the Moscow discussions that Mao is supposed to have tried to ascertain how the Soviet power could be invoked to cover Chinese military and political objectives such as the liberation of Taiwan; he also probably sought to acquire immediately for China some kind of finished nuclear weapons under her own control (as against merely stationing of Soviet batteries in China) and at the same time as a long-term project, asked for technical and material assistance to develop China's own nuclear weapons production programme. It must be recalled that in 1957 - the year after the revolts in Poland and Hungary - Khrushchev was somewhat beholden to China and had sought to oblige her, if not actually woo her support in intra-bloc affairs, and Mao hoped to get all he wanted. There is evidence to suggest that up to January 1958 the Chinese were planning their training programme and strategy on the assumption that modern nuclear weapons and advanced Soviet experience would be available to them.

12. □ Khrushchev readily assured Mao that the Soviet nuclear shield would continue to protect China against unprovoked attacks, but Khrushchev hesitated and hedged to pledge the use of Soviet weapons in the pursuit of purely Chinese objectives. Khrushchev however could not refuse promise of technical assistance. Agreements were signed providing for joint research in scientific and technological fields, including a commitment to provide advisers and equipment for the indigenous development of China's own atomic weapons. A draft programme was also circulated to the higher ranks in advance, which included the study of blasts and fall-outs from atom bombs, chemical warfare and guided missiles. The training programme was never heard of since. Chen Yi first mentioned China's intention to build her own bomb around spring 1958. Piecing together information from subsequent dirty linen polemics, it is clear that the Soviet Union, when pressed, said that the control and use of nuclear rockets could only be made available if China, like other Warsaw Pact countries, placed all her forces under Soviet command. The Chinese state flatly that Russia refused to even give a sample bomb for technological training and presumably imitation purposes. It was then that the emphasis certainly switched from implicit dependence on external assistance to the long-term programme of industrial and scientific research, and boasts of self-reliance started surfacing. Frustrated in the endeavour of getting ready-made weapons or their use, there reappeared the assertion of the crucial role of the People and the importance of Mao's teaching and the decrying of the purely professional demands as against the political programme.

Nuclear-free Zone for Asia - 1958-59

13. □ One interesting political sidelight of this period of secret negotiations is brought out by the idea then mooted, of a nuclear-free zone for Asia. The Soviet Union when advocating the Rapacki Plan (December 1957) suggested mutual pledge for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons in the two Germanys and Central Europe. This suggestion was extended by our late Prime Minister, on January 30, 1958, in the context of reports of U.S. atomic weapons being given to Pakistan, in a plea that no nuclear weapons should be stationed on the continent of Asia. Chou En-lai on February 10 welcomed the proposal and Chen-Yi supported it in conversations with some visiting West German correspondents three months later. But when, because of their frustration and suspicions of Russian cooperation, the Chinese were compelled

to initiate their own nuclear programme, they modified the proposal and talked only of a "Nuclear-Free Zone for the Far East and the Pacific". This verbal change implied that they did not want any political embarrassments in regard to the Sinkiang area where they had started their research. The area was roughly in the same longitude as the Soviet Union and not normally considered a part of the Far-East. Khrushchev had also endorsed the idea of a nuclear-free zone in Asia and he may have done so as much as embarrass the U.S. (if not to secure the withdrawal of their nuclear fleet from the Sea of Japan and Taiwan) as to stall on the Chinese demand for the transfer of Soviet weapons.

Off-Shore Island Crises of 1958

14. □The mental reservations in the two partners were fully illustrated during the off-shore islands crisis in the autumn of 1958. The Chinese hoped not only to divert concentration of attention on the Lebanon crisis (when Khrushchev had proposed a summit meeting which would have included India but excluded China), but to prove that the US would capitulate in the face of provocations for fear of the Soviet nuclear power. It was then that Khrushchev made a sudden visit to Peking and cautioned the Chinese not to persist in the adventure and, it is alleged, secretly tipped off the Americans that USSR would not make available her own nuclear weapons for "an attack", but only for the defence of China. This enabled the United States to keep her nerve and she made no withdrawals, and it was Chou En-lai who first hinted at resuming negotiations.

15. □The Chinese threats were unable to dislodge the Americans from the offshore islands: they could not vindicate that the U.S. would not use tactical nuclear weapons. So the thesis that the preponderant Soviet power could be used to realise military or political objectives without provoking a full-scale war remained unsubstantiated. From the autumn of 1958 onwards, the small Sino-Soviet fissure in understanding and tactics widened into a gulf making any restoration of the breach well-nigh impossible, and nuclear weapons became the real and undoubted bone of contention in their polemical dog fight. From then onwards every man was to be a soldier and a militia of 200 million was to be forged, big industrial Leap Forward was planned and the Communes launched to create a fantastic accumulation and surplus, possibly to sustain the military as much as the economic ambitions. From then onwards China militarily was never aggressive but realised that for her political purposes she must press ahead as best as possible, even if it be alone, to develop her own nuclear deterrent.

□□THE SCOPE OF CHINA'S NUCLEAR RESEARCH

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16. □As I said, though the Sino-Soviet cooperation in the field of atomic research may date back to 1954⁰⁵⁵, we know on the authority of one of the Chinese polemical publications ("The Origin and Development of Differences Between The CPSU And Ourselves") that the agreement on "New Technology for National Defence" was concluded in October 1957. In 1958, the Soviet Union provided the first nuclear reactor which was established in the north of Peking. This was a heavy water type of 10,000 KW capacity and this is the reactor which has been visited by some foreigners. Only three weeks ago, Prof. Blackett was taken to this reactor and he told me that it seemed to be used for research purposes only with no indication that it was devoted to weapon research. Incidentally, he was impressed by the scientific and technological skill as well as the administrative competence of the Chinese personnel but he also told me that as a pure research station it was limited in scope compared to the Trombay laboratories. There have been various reports regarding the number and location of other nuclear reactors in China. The figure generally mentioned is four, but there is some confusion and ambiguity, which it is difficult to resolve. A large reactor was promised at the same time as the Peking reactor by the Soviet Union, to be established in Manchuria and may be the one alleged to be located near Shenyang. The other reactors were supposed to be indigenously developed. One reactor is

supposed to be located near Chungking on the Yangtze and another is Sian. A 500,000 KW capacity nuclear weapon station is supposed to exist in Sinkiang near Kashghar, and Professor Blackett, I hear indirectly, was also taken to another nuclear power station. More recent reports say that only two reactors for producing fissionable material are functioning and these are at Paotow in Manchuria and Lanchow in Kansu (the last one may be same as the one reported earlier near Sian). Even if only three are operating and their annual capacity is 10 to 20 kgs of fissionable material, it may be that they have accumulated enough for at least two blasts in fairly quick succession. As regards heavy metals, according to Edgar Snow, the first uranium discoveries were made by Soviet experts in Sinkiang in 1944. Subsequently uranium has been found in other places in Sinkiang and Szechwan, and all studies are agreed that there is no shortage of this basic material. In fact earlier this year the Chinese had boasted that Soviet assistance had not been one-sided because from their side the Chinese had provided valuable ores required for nuclear production.

17. □The most thorough research on China's nuclear capacity is contained in a memorandum prepared by Biberet and published by the General Electric Corporation under the heading "Science and Technology in Communist China". I regret to say that I have not so far been able to lay my hands on this publication but I have seen several references to it. This memorandum was categorical that there were no technical problems which the Chinese could not solve, in fact it was surprisingly accurate in forecasting that the first explosion would take place in 1963; but that was made before the withdrawal of Soviet technicians in 1960. Edgar Snow, after his free-wheeling interviews with top Chinese leaders, estimated that the explosion would be in 1964 or early 1965 and has proved to be right. It has been alleged that the real drag on China's programme was not so much the material but the diversion of highly skilled technical personnel and scientists from other branches of research and industry. In this connection, the CEC publication estimated that in 1960 China had 210,000 engineers and 44,000 scientists and of these only 0.65 per cent of the scientists were required to be deployed on work for the production of nuclear weapons. The driving genius behind the nuclear programme was supposed to be Dr. Tsien Hsen-shen, a brilliant Chinese who spent twenty years in USA and was known to have had access to highly classified jet propulsion research projects.

18. □What is more immediately relevant today is to estimate how long it will take China to develop a reasonable arsenal of nuclear weapons and her own delivery system. There is no agreed point of view among the so-called experts on this. Estimates vary from three to ten or even twenty years, depending on what one's assessment of China's objectives is - a few simple rocket carriers in the short range or a powerful and sophisticated system to match the Soviet Union and the United States. Edgar Snow, their closest apologist, expects that she would reach her targets in 1967 or 1968. It is the delivery system which is the unknown factor. At present they have only a handful (12?) obsolescent Soviet heavy bombers. It is generally known that the Chinese have in hand an elaborate intermediate range (1500-2000-mile) missile programme, but no evidence is available regarding their achievement in this field to-date. On the dimensions of the bomb itself, there is no reason to distrust what according to the Pakistani Ambassador, he was told by Chou En-lai last year. Chou En-lai was definite that China would not make any explosion unless it exceeded or at least equaled the Hiroshima bomb in capacity. In fact, the present explosion is of the Hiroshima yield, probably because for political reasons the Chinese lowered their sights as they did not want to delay the detonation. Against this should be placed the fact that, while the actual dimension of the bomb is modest enough, its mechanism revealed a much more advanced state of technology than was suspected; the ability of the Chinese to trigger off a thermonuclear device, and not merely a plutonium bomb, came as a total surprise to most experts. Their possession of a gaseous diffusion plant indicates that they are already in a position to produce much larger number of bombs than earlier estimated and that they are on the way to the production of hydrogen bombs. What is important to note here is that the stress in their programme is on demonstrating an unexpectedly rapid rate of

advance which would dazzle the Afro-Asian audience.

CHINESE MOTIVATION AND THEIR STRATEGIC THINKING

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19. □So far I have dwelt on the background of Sino-Soviet discussions and manoeuvres which led to the Chinese decision and the present conjectures of the scope of Chinese research in nuclear weapons. This is of course of great interest but now that China has achieved her primary ambition and the bomb has been exploded, it would be of historical interest only. What now matters is what she will now do with the bomb, as an admittedly independent great power. Here what we have to go by is the thinking and practice of Mao Tse-tung and the Communist Part of China during the past thirty years. All his dicta on warfare during the long years in the wilderness and after Liberation, indicate that Mao Tse-tung is essentially a prudent and realistic military thinker. His famous dictum that one must have "contempt for the enemy strategically but respect for him tactically" is merely a manner of underlining caution against military adventures. Mao harks back to the saying of Sun Wu-tzu, the Chinese thinker who lived 2,000 years ago, when he said: "One hundred battles, one hundred victories". In other words, never attack unless one is 200 per cent certain of triumph. It is this ingrained habit of caution in military matters which has led to Mao's conviction that politics must be sternly in command and purely professional attitudes in the army should be discouraged. Even in the military essay of 1929, he ridiculed those who thought that the Red Army was only to fight. It was the same supremacy of the political attitude and the reassertion of the Party which led to the fall of professionals like Peng Teh-huai and the process of humiliation through rustication and service in the ranks to wash dishes, which was prescribed for the generals and senior officers whose thinking was influenced by Soviet strategists or Soviet example.

20. □Corroborative evidence about the continuing caution in the military thinking of the Chinese communists was provided in the secret military documents which were captured in Tibet in 1961 and eventually found their way to the Americans who have made them available to scholars. These bulletins, intended for the senior ranks of the PLA, show clear recognition on the Chinese part about China's military vulnerability against US attacks and her total dependence on the Soviet Union for defence in the event of nuclear attack. These confidential documents repeated what the Chinese leaders have been saying in public - that a nuclear war is unlikely. However, contrary to what they state openly, these documents fully recognize the possibility and danger of limited political military activities escalating into a larger war. Last, but not least, there is constant emphasis on self-preservation. In these papers the assessment of China's military capability is equally realistic. For years to come China must involve itself only in conventional and close hand-to-hand or night fighting to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, even tactical ones, against her forces. It becomes evident that the reiteration of the supremacy of man over weapons is only for the purpose of bolstering internal morale within the country and amongst the lower ranks and to reinforce the party control over the professional soldiers. China's only advantage was in ground forces where their numbers gave them edge in defensive as well as offensive contingencies. The possibility of the strategic use of nuclear long distance weapons is barely considered while the contemplated study of tactical use is marginal to the strategy of prudence and caution. There is equally no confidence that even in a defensive situation they could depend on the Soviet Union and therefore every move would have to be cautious even in exploiting her conventional forces in situations near her own frontiers.

21. □So much for strategic theory. The concrete study of Chinese military practice over the last fifteen years after Liberation confirms that she has sought to use her military superiority only when it is preponderant and has always shirked from any adventures which may jeopardise her security and expose her to destruction. This is the pattern which emerges in all the major adventures in which she has been involved - in the off-shore islands episode in 1958 and, more recently, during the developments in

Indo-china. The Chinese have not openly intervened in Laos, except through a covert diplomatic-cum-military advisory and liaison mission, even after US surveillance flights in Laos. But nothing so exposed how hollow were her threats as her reaction to the Tonkin Gulf incident where she was in fact provoked by a brief but massive retaliation against a neighbour which she had declared was under her protective shield. It is also this refusal to take any risks which has led her into the rather ludicrous situation of 325 serious warnings against US intrusions into Chinese territorial waters.

22. □ There have in fact been only two occasions when Chinese forces have actually taken part in military adventures beyond her frontiers - Korea and India. In Korea, certainly it was the working of a defensive psychology; as far as attack on our frontiers is concerned, it would be a major digression to recapitulate the motivations, but militarily the objective was a limited one; she was confident that there was no risk to her homeland and she quickly arrested the offensive when faced with the possibility of its escalation.

23. □ Against this should be placed China's denunciation of Russian capitulationism in Cuba and Mao's arrogant boast to Prime Minister Nehru in 1954 and to the Yugoslav Ambassador in 1957, about how China was not worried even at the prospect of a thermonuclear war; enough Chinese would any way survive to build a fresh and glorious communist civilization. It is also true that China continues to pledge her support to violent revolutions in national liberation and anti-colonialist struggles and she is following the precept in practice by pumping military support in the Congo and possibly Angola. But in Cuba it must be remembered, the Chinese have criticized Khrushchev not merely for capitulationism but also for the adventurism which led to it and Mao Tse-tung's remarks on the thermonuclear holocaust are more in the nature of a rhetorical outburst rather than a nice calculation of risks. The other situation in which China has been so lavish with her advice and support - Congo and Angola - are all in distant continents involving no risk of nuclear confrontation. Nearer home, even in an advantageous military and political situation such as at Vietnam, her support has been indirect and she hopes the coup de grace will be a diplomatic victory at a conference table. She even tolerates anachronistic imperialist relics such as Hongkong and Macao because of the lucrative economic advantage. Under a barrage of verbal bravado, she has always cautiously calculated the risks and never shown contempt for the teeth of the "Paper Tiger."

Comparison between China's Strategy and that of de Gaulle

24. □ Though superficially the quest for an independent deterrent by France and China seems similar, it would appear that there is a basic difference because of the geographical location of declared potential enemies. From France the Russian targets are about 2,000 to 2,500 miles while from the Chinese mainland even the US west coast targets must be 8,000 to 9,000 miles away. For all his protestations, de Gaulle's strategy is still based on the assumption that in the last resort United States nuclear umbrella extends over Western Europe. Indeed, the French force de frappe is merely intended as a tripwire to guarantee the involvement of the USA, should the USSR overrun Western Europe with her superior conventional arms. The French weapon would be initially a deterrent and in the last resort a guarantee against independent defeat, because, by attacking targets in the USSR, she could drag the USA into the war. With a more developed industrial base and a greater likelihood of being able to create a delivery system to carry nuclear warheads in the intermediate range, the de Gaulle strategy can, at least theoretically, have a military significance. At least in Khrushchev's time, Chinese strategy had no assumption that it could implicate USSR; it must have been more truly based on lone wolf strategic contingencies. Recently USSR had hinted that China could not count on USSR discharging her obligations under the 1950 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, unless she harmonized her actions. The mutual suspicions aroused, including persistent provocations along the border, were so serious that no tactical rapprochement could restore the position where

China could count on Soviet retaliator in a conflict precipitated by China herself for her own ambitions. With her small bombs and obsolescent bombers, China could never threaten the USA itself - at least for a decade. Until she develops a delivery system, she would be vulnerable without having actually the means of attacking the U.S. homeland. If therefore China thinks of USA as the potential enemy, then the creation of her own nuclear weapons does not add anything to her strategic propensity. If there is a miraculous rapprochement with Soviet Union and China is promised bombs for her own use, then of course the whole effort will become redundant. Therefore, apart from the instinctive dislike of a 'have' power for proliferation, the illogicality of the Chinese endeavour must have accentuated Soviet fears that an independent deterrent with a neighbour may well be a greater menace to Russia itself than it would be, for a long time to come, against the alleged imperialist enemy. There could be slightly greater military justification for developing tactical nuclear weapons for her ground forces as this could strengthen the defensive shield in operations in the neighbouring countries and prevent the US from deploying them. But one must also assume that unless in an absolute desperate contingency, China would be loath to use any nuclear weapons on the Asian continent. Any such use would be politically suicidal and undermine the fundamentals of her foreign policy which is to prove her special claim to lead Asia and Africa against the Europeans and Imperialists and Soviets alike.

Politics in Command

25. □ This very brief analysis of China's strategic thinking and practice leads to the conclusion that in developing their own nuclear weapon, her motives were primarily political and symbolic, while military considerations were of secondary importance. By exploding her own bomb, she sees herself as presenting her credentials as a great power; at the same time she is serving notice to her socialist friends that she alone cannot from now onwards be considered as under the umbrella or protection of another socialist power. More immediately relevant than these two considerations is the fact that, by this definitive repudiation of the superiority of the white man in his own chosen field, technology, China sees herself as having fulfilled the quest to lead to lead the Afro-Asian world.

□□ THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE CHINESE EXPLOSION

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Internal

26. □ Whatever other consequences there may be, it has to be reckoned that as far as the Chinese people are concerned, the explosion of this nuclear device will be hailed by the people throughout China and secretly by the Chinese people living overseas. A nation which for 3,000 years has harboured a sense of superiority over the rest of the world will find the atomic bomb, however small, highly flattering to the national ego. From the only first-hand reaction which one can gauge, albeit only from our cooks, amahs, students and interpreters, there is an emotional sense of satisfaction and pride. At the grassroots level the cadres are explaining that this vindicates the validity of Mao's teachings and ensures protection of the homeland and of peace as it will deter the Americans from attack.

□□ International

27. □ The immediate consequences of these symbolic explosions are obviously in the field of international relations. The fact that self-reliant China, after her break with Russia, should have made this break-through will immensely bolster her Afro-Asian diplomacy. China no longer belongs, as it were, to the poor nations, but to the group of technologically advanced countries. She can assert with greater confidence that since the conditions in China were similar to those of other emerging countries, her experience and achievement prove that she is worthy to lead and chart the course for

the developing south of the world. One must honestly recognise that the sophisticated appreciation of the dangers of China as embarking on this expensive and unnecessary adventure will escape all but an infinitesimal section of the Afro-Asian audience. Had the Test Ban Treaty not been signed by 107 countries, many governments would have hailed the Chinese bomb. In more distant Africa or even Latin America the impact will be greater and more unequivocal than in countries which traditionally have an apprehension of China's strength and intentions. This break-through will evoke mixed feelings amongst the intellectuals and thinking people in Burma, Indo-China, Indonesia and even Vietnam and Korea. But next to India the greatest revulsion is bound to be in Japan where it would recommence the debate between the pacifistic and the traditional jingoistic elements. Initially, except within the communist party, the Japanese people are bound to feel a revulsion of yet another reminder of Hiroshima, this time from the neighbouring Mainland. The likelihood is that it would, at least immediately, strengthen the links with the United States though this is unlikely to damage or disturb the present tendencies towards greater mutually profitable commercial exchanges.

28. □The proliferation of nuclear weapons - the nth power argument - could give encouragement to many other countries who have a better technical know-how for nuclear research. This includes confirmed neutrals like Sweden and Switzerland, but it also includes Israel, the UAR and, finally, as Khrushchev warned, it all but destroys the plank of peace, which was such an important part of the propaganda of socialist front bodies. It would become hard indeed to justify the Chinese bomb and frown on the idea of West German nuclear rearmament. Most countries with a scientific base recognise the futility of such weapons and are not interested in the political advantages of acquiring them. It would be interesting to watch the reactions in France. England with its remarkable capacity of hypocrisy will, of course, condemn it without seeing any contradiction between the condemnation and their own practice. But apart from India, the real challenge would be posed for the USSR and the USA. Both for USSR and USA the great problem would be, as it is for India, to minimise the political effect and elaborate the futility and dangers in the eyes of the Afro-Asians.

29. □The Chinese themselves are fully conscious of the revulsion to their policies, but like de Gaulle, are cynical about it having a lasting effect. Their diplomacy now would be very much akin to the actions after the massive attack on our frontiers. Having demonstrated their capacity they will follow it up by dramatic gesture to re-establish their peaceful image. In our case it was the extraordinary declaration of ceasefire and unilateral withdrawal and in this case it is a pledge never to use the bomb and to initiate immediate steps for the total destruction of all nuclear weapons and explain it away as an attempt to destroy the present nuclear monopoly. These propaganda cards will be played astutely; harping on anti-imperialism, the necessity to break thoroughly the power of blackmail of the exclusive club; using the bomb to pledge support to the national liberation movements and to prove, in a new sense, that the East wind of Afro-Asians has really turned to prevail over the West.

□□Economic

30. □What the poor Chinese people can never know is the price which each one of them is paying to create this expensive and useless national toy. I have been unable to get any estimates of the amount of real resources which were diverted towards the making of this bomb. As I hinted earlier, one wonders whether the gigantic efforts which went into the Great Leap Forward and the creation of communes in 1958 - launched at the same time when China embarked on the course to produce atomic weapons - were not partly because the Party set this target of an independent nuclear arsenal. The life and conditions in China today are better certainly than before Liberation and they have recovered from the chaos created by the Great Leap. But I have even seen estimates that 25 per cent of the total national income is being diverted towards national defence and research for atomic weapons. In a socialist country, traditionally accustomed to economical and subsistence living, devoid of the

same pressure for higher standards as in Eastern Europe and told in advance of ten generations of austerity before arriving at the communist El Dorado, many of the adverse consequences such as inflationary pressures, have only a marginal relevance. Sinophiles like Joan Robinson explain that the real cost to China of her nuclear weapons is not in material or labour - for she has the uranium - but in the diversion of technical skills. But the deployment of resources for the development of the first atomic weapon is bound to be relatively modest when compared to the massive effort which will be necessary before an arsenal of even twenty bombs is created an efficient and effective delivery system of even intermediate range, let alone inter-continental, ballistic missiles fully developed. France with all its advanced industrial base, six years after its first explosion, does not have the delivery system even for the intermediate range. It has been estimated that the cost of a militarily significant system of delivery may approximate ¥ 500 million a year and about ¥ 15 to 20 billion until it is achieved. The choice between "bombs and trousers" will always be there as a nagging problem. Objective experts (an opinion not shared by Sinophiles like Joan Robinson or Edgar Snow) do not believe China, with all her success, can really keep very much ahead of population growth through self-reliance and commercial trading. Can she afford to persist in the waste of resources on useless nuclear weapons if it is at the sacrifice of her own growth and incidentally inhibits her capacity to replace Soviet Union and USA and carry the under-developed world on her back?

CONCLUSION

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31. □All the evidence which has been collected in the foregoing survey of China's quest of nuclear weapons, her traditional military doctrines and the revelations of her present day confidential strategic assessments, the record of her present day confidential strategic assessments, the record of her behaviour in explosive international situations around her frontiers, point to basically political, as distinguished from military, motivation as guiding her efforts. No other theories can satisfactorily explain her apparently paradoxical behavior. She pretends to a blasé indifference to a nuclear conflagration but is wary of provoking any nuclear onslaught on her own soil; she belittles peaceful coexistence and any compromises with the imperialists and denounces the spirit behind the Test Ban Treaty, but works on the assumption of a continuing peace based on a balance of terror. In fact even the summit approach now being made by Chou En-lai borrows from the very appeal made by the original signatories, which was earlier criticised as a sellout. The dominating political consideration in her decision to embark upon her nuclear bomb was the fact that an outright military victory for the Socialist Soviet Union will be as harmful to what she conceives to be her national interest as the triumph of imperialism. China could never conceive herself as a permanent satellite of another power. The great-power status conferred on her at Dumbarton Oaks in 1945 by making her a permanent member of the UN Security Council was largely through American sentimentality, but she has now been able to give substance and content to this merely titular position. Now that she has achieved this through "self-reliance", she will maneuver to reject the discipline of fetters of subscribing to a disarmament treaty and may not even strive too hard for the membership of the U.N. but merely exploit her exclusion diplomatically. To Mao, power only comes from the barrel of a gun and the assumption is that only power and violence impress both the powerful and the weak. So she would maintain her bellicose and fearless posture as far as the Western and the Socialist world is concerned, but will cover it all in the coating of sweet reasonableness for the benefit of the Afro-Asians. Consistent with her past record, her actual military strategy would remain prudent and cautious. She would hope and manoeuvre that her own burst into the nuclear club would not in any way arrest the wasting drain of resources in the arms race between the USA and the USSR for more and more sophisticated nuclear toys.

32. □All this, however, does not answer the question about the manner in which in the future she will continue her nuclear development or use the skills already acquired. The fact is that after this great triumph she will run into a host of difficult complicated

decisions, with no easy answers. Her declared policy is bound to be an endeavour to break nuclear monopoly more thoroughly. She must also know that a bomb which can be exploded on one's head only can in the long run have no political or military value. Obviously she would not abandon the momentum to acquire a reasonable nuclear arsenal and some means to deliver them - and all this will require considerable industrial infrastructure. But my own feeling is that it would be surprising if these leaders who have shown such instincts of realism and self-preservation would accelerate the efforts into a crash programme to catch up with the Soviet Union or the USA or go for a delivery system to reach the "imperialist targets". Some small blasts will continue as reminders of her achievement and as an indication of her potential and her determination, but future blasts can yield only sharply diminished political returns, if at all; in fact the repetition of such explosions after the initial first or second ones will radically increase the Asian anxiety, if only because of the pollution of the Asian atmosphere, when the other powers continue to respect their obligations as signatories of the Treaty. A delivery system which can be used only on the Asian mainland, Taiwan, Japan or Soviet Union could be politically an albatross round their neck. China may well reconcile herself to a permanent, if not increasing lag between the level of her nuclear armoury and those of the senior nuclear powers. After all, once a power joins the nuclear club, with all the efforts of intelligence, it never can be certain of the secret advances or the comparative level of proficiency of the other members. Whatever she does or does not do, it will be necessary for her to maintain the highest cloak of secrecy about both her achievements and her failures in her nuclear programme, as deception will be absolutely essential either for capitalising on the surprise element in further achievements or to minimise, both before the world and her own unfortunate people, the economic consequences of her folly.

33. □ Sinophiles will not doubt point out that this nuclear programme has been achieved simultaneously with a radical improvement in the economic situation, and despite the far-reaching adverse effects consequent on the withdrawal of Soviet technicians, the succession of natural disasters and dislocation after the Great Leap Forward campaign. But even after conceding all this, the most earnest Sinophiles recognise that China does face a clear choice between a rapid industrialisation at home with the minimum effort on non-productive purpose like Defence on the one hand and an economy in which the trappings of a nuclear power have the first priority. The reason why China is likely to choose the former is not only because a long and ambitious economic march lies ahead but also because of her serious interest and purposeful determination to assist the developing countries and displace the Russians as well as the Americans and the West in Africa. She cannot build an Aswan Dam for Egypt for a long time to come, but if her present policy is to be sustained she will have to undertake bigger projects than constructing textile and cigarette factories. In other words, if the objective of the bomb was to acquire the symbolic qualification of a big power and so to impress the Afro-Asians, then it will be politically more important to aid the Afro-Asians than to throw all the efforts in the improvement of the crude antiquated nuclear devices which cannot yield much dividends for a long time. The chances are she would rely on modernised conventional forces for defence but maintain a small investment to continue her nuclear effort at a modest level but concentrate on the development of her economy to carry the burdens of her clients on her shoulders.

34. □ Up to now China has rejoiced in the license and irresponsibility of a have-not power. She has yet to fully face the headaches of having realised the coveted ambition of a superpower. An interesting foretaste of this problem which lies ahead for her unwittingly occurred just a few days after the Chinese explosion. The Kenyan Ambassador here, probably without his government's authority, hailed the Chinese explosion as a triumph for Afro-Asian scientific advance but added naively that he was confident that China would make available these secrets, if need be, in the interest of Afro-Asian countries. The Chinese were delighted at this first congratulation from an official representative of an African country, but quietly omitted to publicise the pious hope expressed by the Ambassador. The Chinese, of

course, will state that their bomb is to support the national liberation struggles in Asia and Africa but their instincts, interests and reasons will be as much against proliferation as those of the Soviet Union. This aspect would equally underline, as part of our counter-strategy, to develop the programme of making available know-how in the peaceful uses of atomic energy to as large a number of scientists from Africa and Asia as our resources would permit.

35. □It would suit China if the awe created by their achievement would generate a demand for more resources to be diverted towards non-productive defence purposes in India. Fortunately, the Chinese have educated the second largest nation in the world, India, not to be taken in by their pretensions or their threats. But we have to watch out that the nuclear mushroom may only conceal her determination for more rapid development at home, increasing aid and sustenance to the Asian and African countries and a revitalised peace offensive. Our diplomacy can meet and defeat her challenge. She may be militarily realistic but politically ambitious and aggressive, but what is crucial is that she is basically an irresponsible power, disinterested in stability and callous of the desires of smaller nations to grow according to their own genius. If this is so, it only underlines the importance, for the foreseeable future, to our continuing with our programme of disarmament, vindicating our moral leadership, maintaining our faith in collective security and the pledges of our powerful friends, keeping a confident but modest military posture in conventional weapons but sparing every iota of resources for economic development at home and economic cooperation abroad to achieve real stability in a poly-centralised world, and so achieve a peaceful coexistence which may not be based on trust, but will not also be shaken by blackmail.

□□□□□□Yours faithfully,

□□□□□□□(J.S. Mehta)
□□□□□□ Charge d' Affaires

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