

## CHAPTER 17

# POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN COMMUNIST STATES

BALÁZS SZALONTAI

## INTRODUCTION

As Martin Mevius aptly remarked, it is a ‘popular myth’ that ‘nationalism and communism are wholly antagonistic and mutually exclusive.’<sup>1</sup> Yet a fusion of the two was hardly ever a smooth process. From the beginning, communist foreign policies were torn between ideas of internationalism and nationalism. On the one hand, the Bolshevik revolution, like the French and Iranian revolutions, was based on a universalist ideology that its followers deemed to be widely applicable. Consequently, desires and fears of an ‘export of revolution’ were far stronger in the wake of these three revolutions than after the essentially nation-centric revolutions of 1910 and 1911 in Mexico and China. In particular, the Soviet practice of creating client ‘people’s republics’ abroad—which started in Mongolia as early as 1921—had much in common with the twenty-plus ‘sister republics’ that revolutionary France established in the occupied European countries in the second half of the 1790s. The internationalist component of its ideology allowed the new Soviet regime to disassociate itself from the old fixations of tsarist diplomacy and initiate an unprecedented alliance with Turkey, yet at the same time to involve itself in revolutionary activities in regions far beyond Russia’s traditional geopolitical spheres of interest, such as Latin America and South East Asia.

On the other hand, following the Romanian and Polish annexation of Bessarabia, Western Ukraine, and West Belarus, the USSR was, at least potentially, an irredentist power. Pursuing a sophisticated nationalities policy of indigenization (*korenizatsiia*), Soviet leaders were aware that divided ethnic groups could play the role of a ‘Piedmont’ both in respect of Soviet designs on neighbouring states and in respect of the anti-Soviet designs of hostile powers. Due to its conflicting political objectives,

the Kremlin often vacillated between supporting ethnic separatism and eschewing it, until the Second World War enabled it to annex the disputed territories. The new borders of the post-1945 USSR were drawn partly in accordance with ethnic principles and partly on the basis of continuity with the tsarist empire, but hardly in the spirit of internationalism. Just as Soviet ethnic minorities were expected to accept the leadership of the Russian nation, the communist regimes created in neighbouring countries were expected to subordinate their own national interests to Soviet ambitions.

This combination of ideological and irredentist expansionism gave rise to the idea that Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe constituted a new empire, rather than a 'socialist commonwealth' (as the Kremlin preferred to call it). Such views were expressed not only in older publications inspired by theories of totalitarianism but also more recently by scholars such as László Borhi, Prasenjit Duara, Andrew C. Janos, Vojtech Mastny, Alexander J. Motyl, and Vladislav Zubok, who called the Soviet bloc a 'revolutionary empire' (Janos), a 'totalitarian empire' (Motyl), an 'empire by imposition' (Mastny), and an 'empire by coercion' (Borhi).<sup>2</sup>

This chapter aims to broaden the scope of the aforesaid analyses by investigating the relations not only between the USSR and its East European 'satellites' but also between other communist states, such as China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Mongolia. It partly relies on the typologies of empire used by Alexander Motyl, Robert S. Santley, and Rani T. Alexander,<sup>3</sup> but seeks to refine Motyl's concept of 'totalitarian empire' by making occasional comparisons between communist and fascist practices of domination. Instead of regarding the principles of 'internationalism' and 'national sovereignty' as mere rhetorical devices to conceal the imperial nature of communist foreign policies, it argues that the relations between the various communist states were influenced by both internationalist and nationalist conceptions.

## EXPORT OF REPRESSION VERSUS EXPORT OF DE-STALINIZATION

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In the light of the emphasis that theories of totalitarianism placed on the role of terror in communist regimes, it is worth starting our analysis of communist imperial policies with the subject of repression. The repressive acts that communist regimes committed in controlled (but non-annexed) foreign states reflected the fact that communist ideology was based not on the idea of racial superiority/inferiority but on internationalist concepts. Under fascist-type regimes and 'classical' colonial administrations, the political restrictions that colonized populations had to endure were usually distinctly harsher than the conditions in the core countries (even if the latter were ruled by dictatorships). However, there was no such pattern in communist practices of domination. In some peripheral states, the magnitude of Stalinist repression was fully comparable to the

Great Terror, whereas in others the number of victims remained far lower. For instance, in Choibalsan's Mongolia as many as 20,396 persons were executed for political reasons in 1937–9, and the simultaneous purges carried out by Sheng Shicai in Soviet-dominated Xinjiang seem to have been on a comparable scale. In contrast, in Stalinist Hungary the number of political executions reached about 500 in 1946–56; in Czechoslovakia, 178 in 1948–52; and in Romania, 137 in 1945–64.<sup>4</sup> Since neither Stalin nor Choibalsan reverted to the policy of mass executions after 1945, these wide divergencies in the scale of terror probably reflected different phases of Soviet policy, i.e. the extreme severity of the purges in Mongolia and Xinjiang resulted from their synchronization with the Great Terror, whereas the 'selective repression' in Eastern Europe corresponded to the policy practised by Stalin in 1943–53. In the light of these examples, it is justified to describe the Stalinist repression perpetrated in the peripheries as an 'export of terror' (a term coined by Claudia Weber), rather than as a discriminatory system devised specifically for the purpose of expansion and colonization.<sup>5</sup>

In the post-Stalin era, the 'export of terror' was replaced by an 'export of de-Stalinization' (1953–62), during which the Kremlin compelled most East European leaders to re-examine the earlier show trials, and release a number of political prisoners. The consequences of this were again diverse. In Eastern Europe Moscow was never prepared to allow the 'satellites' to abandon the Soviet model altogether, as the suppression of the East German uprising (1953), the Hungarian revolution (1956), and the Prague Spring (1968) showed. On the other hand, the Kremlin's failure to maintain a grip over China, Albania, and North Korea enabled these regimes to pursue domestic policies that were more, rather than less, repressive than contemporaneous Soviet practice.<sup>6</sup>

## INTER-PARTY CONTROL VERSUS MILITARY OCCUPATION

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The 'internationalist' system of relations between ostensibly independent communist parties was crucial to the maintenance of Soviet control over Eastern Europe and Mongolia, as well as to Vietnam's exercise of hegemony over the communist movement in Indochina. It distinguished communist states from fascist practices of domination, for in the East European countries formally allied with the Third Reich, the Nazis cooperated with the existing authoritarian regimes, bringing the local fascist parties to power only when other options failed. The communist system of control was Janus-faced. If it operated smoothly, it enabled the core state to act as an efficient informal empire, in which, according to Motyl's definition, the appointment and dismissal of peripheral elites was influenced but not formally conducted by the core elite. That is, the dominant communist power could oust a recalcitrant peripheral leader without the need to inspire a military coup, stage an assassination, or launch an invasion.<sup>7</sup> Thus Gomulka (1948), Chervenkov (1956), Rákosi (1956), Ulbricht (1971), and Tsendenbal (1984) were all

simply forced to resign by their fellow Politburo members who followed a signal from the Kremlin (although they often also had their own motives for doing so). But if this system of inter-party influence did not function (as occurred in Moscow's conflicts with Tito, Mao, Hoxha, and Kim Il Sung), the core state—unable to find alternative pressure groups in the monolithic party-state now under the control of its opponents—often had no other option but to invade the peripheral country or accept its inability to engineer regime change.

The military option appeared feasible in some cases. Moscow permanently stationed divisions in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Afghanistan, as did Hanoi in Laos and Cambodia. These could be used to suppress local resistance movements. Elsewhere, however, the presence of Soviet ground forces was of a temporary nature (Tuva: 1921–9; Mongolia: 1921–5, 1932, 1937–56, 1967–91; Bulgaria: 1944–7; Romania: 1944–58; North Korea: 1945–8; Czechoslovakia: 1968–91). But even in the absence of military units, Soviet or Vietnamese advisers instituted a form of direct political control, enabling Stalin, for example, to organize murderous purges in Tuva, Mongolia, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. By contrast, where communist states hosted no Soviet ground forces (Yugoslavia, Albania, China, North Korea, and post-1958 Romania) these countries were eventually able to break free from the USSR. This suggests that in the last analysis the core communist states functioned more like territorial empires which, according to the definition of Santley and Alexander, dominate the periphery by means of a military presence, and not as informal empires, where dominance is based more on the threat of armed force. Nonetheless, military intervention, though widely used to bring subordinate communist parties to power, was never the preferred option of Moscow and Hanoi to deal with established communist regimes. On the contrary, it was a sign of crisis, a measure to be taken only when inter-party communication channels no longer functioned—either because the other party was controlled by an intractable hard-line leadership (Pol Pot's Cambodia, 1978), or was seriously disrupted by factional struggles (Afghanistan, 1979), or was unable or unwilling to maintain a strong grip over society (Mongolia, 1932; East Germany, 1953; Hungary and Poland, 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968; and Afghanistan, 1979).<sup>8</sup> That military domination was not primary is also suggested by the fact that during the Stalin era Soviet ground forces were stationed in the four Eastern European countries that had been in military conflict with the USSR during the Second World War, whereas they were absent from Albania, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia.

## STATE SOVEREIGNTY VERSUS DEMOGRAPHIC EXPANSION

The absence of a self-proclaimed link between population policy and external expansion distinguished communist practices of domination from those of fascist-type regimes. The leaders of the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and military-dominated Japan all

advocated pro-natalist policies on the grounds that high demographic growth was an essential precondition of military power and 'racial virility', even as they also insisted that population pressure threatened the economic sustainability of the regime. They thus sought to resolve this dilemma by a method frequently used by territorial empires, namely, the creation of settler colonies in Eastern Europe, Africa, and North East Asia, that is, in regions well beyond the areas they sought to annex on ethnic grounds. Communist states whose demographic and military conditions would have allowed them to pursue a similar policy vis-à-vis their weaker neighbours usually refrained from this course of action, both in propaganda and practice. Ideologically, under the influence of Marx's critique of Thomas Malthus's population theory, they rejected the alarmist scenarios that were assumed to follow from demographic expansion, tending to see population growth as a manageable problem. In 1949, for instance, Mao Zedong, having dismissed the Malthusian argument as 'absurd', declared: 'It is a very good thing that China has a large population. Even if China's population multiplies many times, she is fully capable of finding a solution.'<sup>9</sup> The Chinese case, however, reminds us that this anti-Malthusian stance could inspire pro-natalist policies which, influenced as they were by military considerations and backed up by coercive measures, showed certain similarities with fascist practices.<sup>10</sup> The connection between pro-natalist policies and national defence seems to have been strongest in the USSR (1936–55) and in post-1953 North Korea, both of which had experienced massive demographic collapses before their leaders fully embraced pro-natalism, not least by prohibiting abortion. In general, however, the desire to build military power by means of active pro-natalist policies was not perceived to entail the creation of settler colonies abroad. One reason for this may have been the spatial distribution of the Soviet and Chinese populations, which had little in common with densely populated Germany, Italy, or Japan. It was the vast, sparsely populated areas of Siberia, Central Asia, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang that became the destination of state-induced (and often coercive) migration waves both before and during the communist era.

Still, the evident readiness of Stalin and Mao to use massive population transfers for purposes of political control within their respective national boundaries raises the question as to why this method was not used to reinforce Soviet domination over Eastern Europe, Mongolia, and pre-1942 Xinjiang in the same way as the Third Reich and imperial Japan had aspired to do in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the General Government of Poland, Manchukuo, and elsewhere. Another factor may have been that communist leaders, unlike their Nazi and Japanese counterparts, seem to have favoured policies based on clear-cut definitions of state sovereignty rather than on a hotchpotch of colonial and semi-colonial structures whose legal status hovered between outright annexation and the fiction of full sovereignty. The subordinate status of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia or the absence of a nationality law in Manchukuo, for example, created a legal gateway for the immigration of settlers from the core countries. Probably this, too, is a reason why immigrants did not follow in the footsteps of Soviet troops and advisers in migrating to the 'outer empire' (Eastern Europe, Mongolia, and Xinjiang), and why in the Tuvan People's Republic the number of Russian settlers—whose earlier

influx had played a decisive role in the tsarist takeover of Tuva—did not increase significantly during the period of de facto Soviet rule (1921–44), undergoing an explosive growth only after the country's annexation.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, ambiguous situations did exist. In 1944–6, for instance, the Kremlin suddenly granted Soviet citizenship to 120,000 Russian and Central Asian exiles living in Xinjiang, presumably as a means of putting temporary pressure on the Guomindang government. However, in June 1949, Stalin advised the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to settle a large number of Han Chinese in Xinjiang, and in 1954, the USSR agreed to repatriate the majority of Soviet nationals from the region.<sup>12</sup> In Vietnamese-occupied Cambodia, Hanoi basically condoned a massive influx of Vietnamese migrants, but it seems not to have managed this migration in the same systematic way that it had pursued internal colonization in the minority-inhabited areas of Central Vietnam. From the 1960s Hanoi tried to curb demographic growth. After 1979, emigration to Cambodia from Vietnam, overpopulated and ridden with unemployment, went largely unregulated, many emigrants being economic refugees or even criminals wanted by the Vietnamese police, and neither citizenship nor the right to own land were at issue.<sup>13</sup>

## ECONOMIC DOMINATION VERSUS ECONOMIC NATIONALISM

In the field of international economic relations, communist strategies of domination were also substantially different from the policies of fascism or 'classical' colonialism. To be sure, direct resource extraction from the occupied states, such as the Soviet dismantling of factories in Eastern Europe and Vietnam's acquisition of Cambodia's raw materials at below-market prices, did occur on a significant scale. Apart from the obvious financial benefits, this reinforced the core state's control over the peripheral areas, and prevented the latter from forging links with alternative economic partners.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, these measures did not constitute a long-term policy of forcible deindustrialization akin to the Nazi *Generalplan Ost*. The central role ascribed to industrialization in communist doctrine, combined with strategic concerns, meant that the Soviet policy of removing industrial plants from Eastern Europe was only a short-term measure. In the longer term, Stalinist Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria, all allocated more than 70 per cent of industrial investment to heavy industry, the most privileged sector of a Soviet-type economy, despite marked differences in their relative capacities.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, the Kremlin's decision to impose industrialization on its East European periphery had more in common with the policies of military-dominated Japan after 1931 when it sought to develop heavy and chemical industries in Manchukuo, Korea, and Taiwan. Military considerations played a crucial role in the Soviet-enforced industrialization of Eastern Europe, as a buffer region separating the USSR from its NATO adversaries. In 1951, Stalin's decision to launch a rapid military build-up in

Eastern Europe led to a dramatic increase in the industrial plan targets of the 'people's democracies'.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the Soviet dictator found it less pressing to stimulate industrialization in the Asian communist states. On the contrary, he repeatedly advised Mao not to pursue too radical economic policies.<sup>17</sup>

This emphasis on heavy industrialization, like the earlier phase of crude exploitation, proved only temporary. From the mid-1950s, aware of the adverse effects of Stalin's autarkic policies, Khrushchev started to prod the Eastern European states to adopt more specialized roles in the 'socialist international division of labour'. From a Ricardian perspective of comparative advantage, it certainly appeared rational to entrust East Germany and Czechoslovakia with the task of producing sophisticated industrial equipment, and encourage the less developed 'people's democracies' to concentrate on sectors based on their rich natural resources, such as petroleum and gas chemistry (Romania), agriculture and mining (Albania), mining and metallurgy (North Korea), and livestock farming (Mongolia). Still, this plan, instead of reinforcing internationalist cooperation, provoked economic nationalism in those peripheral communist states that were unwilling to accept the roles the core assigned to them.<sup>18</sup> This was hardly surprising, given that Leninist-Stalinist doctrine suggested that if a country lacked a heavy-industrial sector its credibility as a full-fledged socialist economy was questionable. This is why in 1961 the Mongolian leadership declared the planned construction of a blast furnace, which Khrushchev considered uneconomical and had managed to scuttle, a 'political issue'. Still clinging to the project in the late 1980s—at which time Gorbachev similarly rebuffed their requests—the Mongolian leaders finally managed to persuade Japan to build the furnace in the city that had been selected for this purpose in 1960.<sup>19</sup> Predictably, such manifestations of Soviet unhelpfulness, even if they were motivated by reasonable economic arguments, provoked suspicions that Moscow wanted to perpetuate the inferior status of the peripheral states by preventing them from creating a diversified economic structure. While the Mongolian leaders confined their criticism to confidential talks, their Albanian, Romanian, and North Korean comrades publicly expressed their discontent. Kim Il Sung and Ceaușescu even introduced major modifications into communist theories about the nation so as to justify their independent course.

The anomalies of the controlled price system that existed in the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) also stimulated economic nationalism. In the commercial transactions between socialist countries, raw materials were often—though not always—sold below world market prices, whereas mechanical equipment could be disproportionately expensive. For instance, in 1972 North Korea had to sell 8 metric tons of zinc to purchase a Soviet-made Volga car, while a Mercedes would have cost only 5 tons. No wonder that the North Koreans felt cheated by their 'fraternal' partners, and started to export their valuable minerals to Japan at higher prices.<sup>20</sup> Still, these anomalies were not invariably disadvantageous to the peripheral states. For instance, the USSR usually purchased Cuban sugar at well above world prices.<sup>21</sup> Owing to the prominence of raw materials in Soviet exports (an unusual phenomenon in core-periphery economic interactions), the terms of trade between Moscow and the more industrialized East

European states underwent substantial fluctuation. In some periods, such as the late 1960s, they certainly turned against Moscow.<sup>22</sup> What made the system biased in favour of the USSR was the Kremlin's capacity to manipulate it for political ends. For example, in the wake of the 1973/9 oil crises, Moscow refused to sell oil to independent-minded Romania and North Korea at preferential prices, but provided loyal Bulgaria with large amounts of cheap oil for re-export.<sup>23</sup>

The Soviet model of integration, despite its promises of industrialization and the massive amounts of aid provided to the poorest 'people's democracies', tended to perpetuate, rather than eliminate resource dependency—a problem usually associated with capitalism—in Albania, North Korea, Cuba, Mongolia, and Indochina. While Bulgaria's participation in Comecon brought about a substantial structural transformation, its shift from agricultural to industrial exports (mainly transport equipment and computer parts) merely modified the form of dependency. For Sofia's guaranteed access to the vast Soviet market, combined with the relative lack of competition within Comecon, acted as a disincentive to develop high-quality industrial products that would be marketable outside the USSR.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that in 1963 the East European leaders successfully thwarted Khrushchev's attempt to introduce supranational planning in Comecon indicates that the charges of Soviet colonialism were overstated. The principle of national sovereignty so influenced the operation of Comecon in the post-Stalin era that until the early 1970s, the organization rarely managed to gain the required consent of every member state to any given joint project, and thereafter it preferred to allow dissenting members to opt out of a project so as not to face their veto.<sup>25</sup> Enver Hoxha's acerbic words colourfully illustrate the less-than-internationalist atmosphere of some Comecon meetings:

Ulbricht, Novotny, Ochab, Dej, Kádár, Gomulka, Cyrankiewicz, Zhivkov, and the others, were at one another's throats; each of them complained that he was in dire straits; ... they tried to dodge their obligations and to grab as much as possible at the expense of others. Meanwhile Khrushchev or his envoys would get up, deliver lectures on the 'socialist division of labour', support one or the other, according to their own interests in a given situation, and demand 'unity' and 'understanding' in the 'socialist family'.<sup>26</sup>

## INTRA-BLOC CONFLICTS VERSUS INTERNATIONALIST BROTHERHOOD

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These scenes revealed that in the Soviet bloc, the disruptive potential of nationalism was by no means directed solely against the USSR. On the contrary, the deeply rooted nationalist conflicts between the peripheral states, most of which had ethnic minorities linked to one or other neighbouring country, proved so persistent that the Kremlin



could not afford to ignore them. The very same communist leaders who readily professed their internationalist loyalty to the USSR were often most unwilling to make concessions to another peripheral communist state in matters of national interest, lest they be seen as unpatriotic.<sup>27</sup> While the Soviets were not averse to a policy of divide and rule, the principles of internationalism and national sovereignty—combined with the need to maintain intra-bloc harmony—precluded the option of granting long-term, institutionalized privileges to one nation-state at the expense of another, in the way the Habsburg emperors or colonial officials had once relied on certain selected ethnic groups or ‘martial races’. Hitler, anxious as he was to play Hungary and Romania against each other, found it sufficient to prevent an armed conflict between his quarrelling allies and made no effort to make them love each other. In contrast, the Soviet leaders eventually felt it necessary to enforce at least a modicum of ‘internationalist brotherhood’ between the peripheral states, even against their wishes. Far from being a withdrawal from empire (as Motyl’s thesis of ‘disassemblage’ would imply<sup>28</sup>), the Stalinist policy commanding the peripheries to engage with each other constituted an effort to reinforce imperial control. As early as January 1945, Stalin warned his Yugoslav allies to moderate their territorial ambitions.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in 1946–7 he impatiently urged the reluctant Czechoslovak and Polish leaders to set aside their disagreements over Silesia, and conclude a treaty of mutual assistance.<sup>30</sup>

The emergence of the bipolar order of the Cold War created new complications in the Kremlin’s oscillations between nationalism and internationalism. On the one hand, in 1949–54 Soviet diplomacy sought to torpedo West European plans for economic and political integration (which it labelled a form of cosmopolitanism) by appealing to local nationalist sentiment. At certain times, the Soviets emphasized the threat that a resurgence of West German militarism posed to France; at other times, they openly took a pro-German stance in the disputes over the Saarland and the Dutch–West German boundary.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Moscow became increasingly impatient with those manifestations of nationalism that could destabilize its own ‘outer empire’. Thanks to Soviet pressure, the German Democratic Republic and Poland signed a treaty in 1950 recognizing the long-disputed Oder–Neisse border; while in 1952, reluctant Romanian leaders finally established a Hungarian Autonomous Region.<sup>32</sup> In 1949–50, Stalin arbitrated between Choibalsan, who persistently sought to incorporate Chinese-held Inner Mongolia into Mongolia, and Mao, who wished to reannex Mongolia. Stalin rejected both plans, leaving neither leader satisfied.<sup>33</sup> Such deeply-rooted nationalist enmities could not be transformed by fiat into internationalist brotherhood. Under the surface of public harmony, discord (what Sheldon Anderson aptly described as ‘a Cold War in the Soviet bloc’, in the case of relations between Poland and the German Democratic Republic) continued to exist. Paradoxically, in Czechoslovakia and Romania it was Stalinist terror that enforced certain long-denied minority rights, whereas in the post-Stalin era, these rights were gradually reversed as nationalism became a major source of legitimation for the regimes of Husák, Gheorghiu-Dej, and Ceaușescu.

## DISLOYAL HEGEMONS VERSUS AMBITIOUS PERIPHERAL LEADERS

If intra-bloc disputes carried the risk of destabilization, this was doubly true for those situations where the Kremlin failed to support the territorial ambitions of a communist ally against a non-bloc state. From Moscow's perspective, the reluctance of a peripheral state to subordinate its own aspirations to Soviet global policy was a sign of narrow-minded nationalism, whereas from the viewpoint of the peripheral state, Soviet unwillingness to take the side of a communist ally against a non-bloc state often appeared as a betrayal of socialist internationalism. To be sure, unresolved territorial disputes with a neighbouring country did not necessarily alienate a peripheral state from Moscow. On the contrary, they could even generate requests for incorporation into the Soviet Union. Such appeals from Mongolia and Bulgaria may not have been manifestations of slavish adherence to socialist internationalism (as their detractors claimed) so much as a peculiar form of competition with other states for Soviet favour. In September 1949, Choibalsan told Stalin that in case of unification with Inner Mongolia, the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) might join the Soviet Union. Yet the next year, he vetoed a new proposal for incorporation made by a group of Mongolian party leaders, having failed to gain Stalin's support for his territorial claim against China.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the Zhivkov regime made requests in 1963 and 1973—it is unclear how far these were in earnest—that Bulgaria be incorporated into the USSR, both times because Sofia, having engaged in bitter polemics with Belgrade over Macedonia, feared a Soviet–Yugoslav reconciliation at its own expense. In 1963, following the Russian patriarch's recognition of the autonomy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian leaders openly declared that there was no 'historic Macedonian nation'.<sup>35</sup> In the post-Stalin era, Bulgaria calculated that a policy of unswerving loyalty to the Kremlin would ensure that it remained more valuable than non-aligned Yugoslavia or NATO-affiliated Greece. By contrast, Albania, too small to outcompete its Balkan rivals, shifted from exaggerated displays of loyalty to Moscow in 1948–53 to exaggerated displays of loyalty to Beijing in the 1960s, only to break violently with each when Tirana concluded that its loyalty was not sufficiently appreciated.

In reality, the reluctance of a core communist state to support the nationalist aspirations of a peripheral one was far more likely to create tension than to inspire requests for incorporation. Kim Il Sung's preoccupation with Korean unification, for example, frequently clashed with the diplomatic priorities of the post-Stalin Soviet leadership. In 1960 an East German delegation visited Pyongyang to 'make the leading Korean comrades understand that today the main threat to peace is not in the Far East but... in West Germany', while in August 1970 Soviet Politburo member Kirill Mazurov, overriding Kim's objections, declared that it better suited Soviet interests to cooperate with Japan than to confront it.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the Khmer Rouge felt extremely aggrieved after the

Vietnamese communists signed the Geneva and Paris agreements without wresting any concessions for their Cambodian comrades, and likewise after Moscow failed to recognize Norodom Sihanouk's government in exile following Lon Nol's coup.<sup>37</sup> Such interne-cine conflicts were most dramatically exposed in the Soviet–Yugoslav and Sino-Soviet splits, not least because both Yugoslavia and China had aspirations for regional hegemony. Stalin was reluctant to give full support to Tito in respect of Trieste, Carinthia, the planned Balkan federation, the Greek insurgency, and Albania. Similarly, Khrushchev proved unwilling to side with China against India, and sought rapprochement with Washington regardless of Mao's objections.<sup>38</sup> These two major conflicts revealed how far Belgrade and Beijing were prepared to go in subordinating the principle of socialist internationalism to national interests, each eventually cooperating with the Western powers against the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia became a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, while China tried first to compete with Moscow for leadership of the global communist movement, and then proclaimed its commitment to a non-ideological 'independent foreign policy'.

## CHINESE VERSUS VIETNAMESE AMBITIONS FOR DOMINATION

China's post-1963 attempt to establish an alternative communist universe produced a network very different from the Soviet bloc, which Beijing denounced as a tool of the Kremlin's 'social-imperialism'. The communist states which cooperated with China at one time or another—Albania, Romania, North Korea, North Vietnam, and Pol Pot's Cambodia—did not establish an institutionalized framework for multilateral collaboration. Unlike the Albanians who proposed a more formal alliance, the CCP leaders preferred to deal with their allies on a bilateral basis, presenting themselves as champions of smaller countries' right to pursue independent and self-reliant policies. In any case, the divergent national interests of the pro-China peripheral states constituted an obstacle to multilateralism. Romania played a major role in the Sino-US rapprochement—the latter welcomed initially even by Pyongyang—whereas the Albanian and Vietnamese leaders considered it a betrayal of socialist internationalism.<sup>39</sup> Ceaușescu saw no reason to confront the US as aggressively as North Korea, while Albania resented Romania as a competitor for Chinese aid.<sup>40</sup> The North Korean–Cambodian partnership was the only one to survive the crises of the 1970s and 1980s without serious tension.

Geographical distance also worked against cohesion. During the 1960s and 1970s, China lacked the military capability to project its power beyond the contiguous areas of its 'outer empire' (North Korea, Vietnam, and northern Laos), and was therefore unable to offer effective protection to its distant Albanian, Romanian, and Cambodian allies. To overcome this obstacle, China could only propose cooperation between Yugoslavia, Romania, and Albania and between Cambodia and the Association of South East

Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a solution.<sup>41</sup> Except for an earlier treaty with Pyongyang, the People's Republic of China (PRC) never made comprehensive security commitments to its allies. The military agreement that Beijing concluded with Hanoi at the latter's request in May 1965 was confined to the deployment of Chinese engineering and anti-aircraft units in a limited area of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) for road construction (an activity China later extended to northern Laos), and thus only partly served functions of control and deterrence.<sup>42</sup> When in 1968 and 1978, the North Vietnamese and Laotian governments respectively asked China to withdraw its troops, Beijing complied, though deliberate acts of vandalism by the departing soldiers indicated strong Chinese dissatisfaction.<sup>43</sup>

Mao's China thus operated more as a fragile hegemonic empire than a territorial one, but it was not averse to more intrusive modes of political control. In addition to the influence exerted by Chinese advisers, Beijing conducted an aggressive propaganda campaign in North Vietnam in 1967–8 (a campaign in which the Chinese embassy also involved the local Chinese community), to demand the replacement of Võ Nguyên Giáp and other 'revisionist' leaders.<sup>44</sup> Such actions only alienated Hanoi. Despite the temporary ascendancy of a few pro-Chinese cadres such as Hoàng Văn Hoan, and the dismissal of some anti-Chinese figures such as Ung Văn Khiêm, China could not maintain effective informal control over the composition of its allied communist leaderships.

The closest approximation to a bloc that the CCP leaders called for was the 'united front of the five revolutionary Asian countries' (China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the last being represented by Sihanouk's exile government). This concept was first outlined in the wake of Lon Nol's coup in Cambodia, during the visits which Zhou Enlai and the deposed Sihanouk paid to Pyongyang in April and June 1970.<sup>45</sup> While North Korea enthusiastically welcomed the plan, it soon foundered on Hanoi's opposition. Having realized that such a front (which a Vietnamese diplomat sarcastically dubbed 'an Asian Warsaw Pact') would exclude the USSR and implicitly challenge the leadership role that North Vietnam had arrogated to itself in Indochina, the Vietnamese leaders declared that all communist states should join forces against 'American imperialism'.<sup>46</sup>

The issue of Vietnamese versus Chinese hegemony over Indochina greatly influenced the attitude Hanoi adopted towards Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s. During the Cambodian civil war (1970–5), the Soviet leaders, ready as they were to acquiesce in Hanoi's dominance over Laos and Cambodia, actually insisted on sending their aid shipments to the Khmer guerrillas through the DRV, whereas China flatly said no when Hanoi proposed that Chinese aid to Cambodia be sent via North Vietnam. Facing Chinese competition and Soviet acquiescence, the Vietnamese leaders evidently found the Soviet option more advantageous to their interests. However, Hanoi jealously guarded its Laotian and Cambodian fiefdoms against any Soviet interference even at the zenith of the Soviet–Vietnamese alliance (1979–85). Consequently, Gorbachev's efforts to achieve a Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia led to a rapid deterioration of Soviet–Vietnamese relations.<sup>47</sup>

The Vietnamese communists' decades-long commitment to 'Indochinese unity', influenced as it was by French colonial administrative traditions, constituted a special

combination of internationalist and nationalist motivations. As a vision of internationalism, it was clearly a limited one, for Hanoi never showed the same determination to support the Thai and other non-Indochinese guerrilla movements as it did to maintain its foothold in Laos and Cambodia.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, in 1954 and 1973 Vietnam decided to reduce its involvement in Cambodia in order to pursue specific national goals. Paradoxically, both policies elicited complaints from the Cambodian comrades, who alternately accused Hanoi of 'hegemonism' and 'betrayal'.

Vietnam's 'regional internationalism' stood in peculiar contrast to the foreign policy of North Korea after 1971. While Hanoi, overburdened by its own wars, could not conduct any substantial activity on other continents, Pyongyang—unable to achieve unification by a struggle fought on domestic soil—sought to outcompete Seoul in the global diplomatic arena.<sup>49</sup> Anxious to gain external supporters for its cause, North Korea extended its military assistance programmes to Africa, the Middle East, and other regions far beyond the ordinary geopolitical sphere of interest of a small North East Asian power. The essentially nationalist, rather than internationalist, motivation of this policy clearly manifested itself in North Korea's readiness to cooperate with any Third World leader who could be expected to vote in favour of Pyongyang in the Non-Aligned Movement, including such rightist dictators as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and General Gnassingbé Eyadéma of Togo.<sup>50</sup> This approach had much in common with China's post-1970 strategy but differed sharply from Hanoi's Marxist-internationalist preferences for radical regimes, such as Algeria, Guinea, and Congo-Brazzaville.

## CONCLUSION

Reflecting both internationalist and nationalist inspirations, a peculiar feature of communist imperial policies was that the core elites selected the nominally sovereign state as the basic unit of their 'outer empires', rather than simply annexing the occupied countries or creating various semi-sovereign structures. In practice, this principle by no means prevented the imposition of modes of control over peripheral states that were highly intrusive even in comparison with 'classical' and fascist empires, but it still distinguished the communist states from the latter regimes. In particular, it seems to have precluded such techniques of domination as demographic expansion, external repression that was more severe than domestic repression, and the institutionalized privileging of one client state at the expense of another. These distinctive features of communist imperial policies contradict definitions of totalitarianism such as those of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski that consider communist and fascist regimes to be fundamentally alike and similarly expansionist.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the considerable differences between Stalin's USSR and Mao's China indicate that there may not have been a generic communist imperial policy, either.

In the policies of the communist states, internationalism and nationalism did not appear as mutually exclusive forces. On the contrary, peripheral communist states often showed

‘internationalist’ loyalty towards the core state and nationalist hostility towards another peripheral state, whereas the Kremlin simultaneously encouraged nationalism in the Western camp and suppressed it in its own empire. In the light of this ‘ideological schizophrenia’, many observers doubted if the peripheral communist leaders were motivated by genuine nationalist feelings. Still, the fact that even such outwardly subservient leaderships like the Mongolian one could harbour a strong ethnic and economic nationalism indicates that such emotions were partly channelled but not extinguished by internationalism.

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