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**Report, 'My Observations on the Soviet Union,' Zhou
Enlai to Mao Zedong and the Central Leadership
(Excerpt)**

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai comments on the weaknesses of the Soviet Communist Leadership in terms of problem-solving strategies and tactics, international relations, and general effectiveness of the Party leaders.

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□ Having already spoken considerably about the achievements of the Soviet Communist leadership in public, now let [me] illustrate again the major mistakes it has made: [\[1\]](#)

□ (1) In my view, the mistakes of the Soviet Communist leadership arise from erroneous thinking. They often set the interests of the Soviet Communist Party ahead of their brotherly parties; they often set their own interests as the leaders ahead of those of the party. As a result, they often fail to overcome subjectivity, narrow-mindedness, and emotion when they think about and resolve problems; they often fail to link together the interests of the above-stated sides in an objective, far-sighted, and calm fashion. Although they may correct one mistake, they are not free of making others. Sometimes they admit that they made mistakes; but it does not mean that they fully come to grips with their mistakes for they merely take a perfunctory attitude toward these mistakes.

□ For instance, the dispatch of their troops to Warsaw was clearly interference with the internal affairs of a brotherly party by armed forces, but not an action to suppress counter-revolutionaries. They admitted that they had committed a serious mistake, and they even stated in our meetings this time that no one should be allowed to interfere with other brotherly parties' internal affairs; but in the meantime, they denied that [their intervention in Poland] was a mistake.

□ When we had a general assessment of Stalin, analyzing the ideological and social roots of his [mistakes], they kept avoiding any real discussion. Although they seemingly have changed [their view] in measuring Stalin's achievements and mistakes, to me, such an alteration was to meet their temporary needs, not the result of profound contemplation.

□ We immediately sensed this shortly after our arrival in Moscow. At the dinner party hosted by Liu Xiao [\[2\]](#) on the 17th [of January], Khrushchev again raised the Stalin issue. Spelling out a good deal of inappropriate words, however, he made no self-criticism. We then pushed him by pointing out that, given the development of Stalin's authoritarianism, ossified way of thinking, and arrogant and conceited attitude over twenty years, how can those comrades, especially those [Soviet] Politburo members, who had worked with Stalin, decline to assume any responsibility? They then admitted that Stalin's errors came about gradually; had they not been afraid of getting killed, they could have at least done more to restrict the growth of Stalin's mistakes than to encourage him. However, in open talks, they refused to admit this.

□ Khrushchev and Bulganin claimed that as members of the third generation [of Soviet] leadership, they could not do anything to persuade Stalin or prevent his mistakes. During [my visit] this time, however, I stressed the ideological and social roots of Stalin's mistakes, pointing out that the other leaders had to assume some responsibility for the gradual development of Stalin's mistakes. I also expressed our Chinese Party's conviction that open self-criticism will do no harm to, but will enhance, the Party's credibility and prestige. Before getting out of the car at the [Moscow] airport, Khrushchev explained to me that they could not conduct the same kind of self-criticism as we do; should they do so, their current leadership would be in trouble.

□ About the Poland question [\[3\]](#) It is crystal-clear that the Poland incident was a result of the historical antagonism between the Russian and Polish nations. Since the end of [the Second World] War, many [outstanding and potential] conflicts have yet to be appropriately resolved. The recent [Soviet] dispatch of troops to Warsaw caused an even worse impact [in Poland]. Under these circumstances the Polish comrades have good reason not to accept the policy of "following the Soviet leadership." The Polish comrades, however, admitted that they had yet to build a whole-hearted trusting

relationship with the Soviet Comrades. For that purpose, [Wladyslaw] Gomulka^[4] is trying his best to retrieve the losses and reorient the Polish-Soviet relations by resolutely suppressing any anti-Soviet acts [in Poland]. Regardless, however, the Soviet comrades remain unwilling to accept the criticism that [they] practiced big-power politics [in resolving the Polish crisis]. This kind of attitude does not help at all to convince the Polish comrades.

□It is safe to say that although every public communiqué [between the Soviet Union and] other brotherly states has repeatedly mentioned what the 30 October [1956] declaration^[5] has announced as the principles to guide the relationship among brotherly parties and governments, [the Soviets] seem to recoil in fear when dealing with specific issues and tend to be inured to patronizing others and interfering with other brotherly parties' and governments' internal affairs.

□(2) About Sino-Soviet relations. Facing a [common] grave enemy, the Soviet comrades have ardent expectations about Sino-Soviet unity. However, in my opinion, the Soviet leaders have not been truly convinced by our argument; nor have the differences between us disappeared completely. For instance, many leaders of the Soviet Communist Party toasted and praised our article "Another Comment on the Historical Lessons of the Proletarian Dictatorship."^[6] Their three top leaders (Khrushchev, Bulganin, and Mikoyan), however, have never mentioned a word of it. Moreover, when we discussed with them the part of the article concerning criticism of Stalin, they said that this was what made them displeased (or put them in a difficult position, I can't remember the exact words). . . . Therefore, I believe that some of the Soviet leaders have revealed a utilitarian attitude toward Sino-Soviet relations. Consequently, at the last day's meeting, I decided not to raise our requests concerning the abolition of the long-term supply and purchase contracts for the Five-Year Plan, the [Soviet] experts, and [Soviet] aid and [Sino-Soviet] collaboration on nuclear energy and missile development. About these issues I didn't say a word. It was not because there wasn't enough time to do so, but because [I wanted to] avoid impressing upon them that we were taking advantage of their precarious position by raising these issues. These issues can be raised later or simply dropped.

□(3) In assessing the international situation, I am convinced that they spend more time and effort on coping with specific and isolated events than on evaluating and anticipating the situations thoroughly from different angles. They explicitly demonstrate weakness in considering and discussing strategic and long-term issues. As far as tactics are concerned, on the other hand, lacking clearly defined principles, they tend to be on such a loose ground in handling specific affairs that they will fail to reach satisfactorily the strategic goals through resolving each specific conflict. As a result, it is very likely that some worrisome events may occur in international affairs. For instance, this time they conceded to our conviction that in today's world there existed two camps and three forces (socialist, imperialist, and nationalist) and agreed to our analysis. But the communiqué drafted by them included only vague statements about the union among the Soviet Union, China and India, as well as [about] possible Sino-Soviet collaboration on the production of atomic and hydrogen bombs. We regarded these statements as swashbuckling, which is not good, and they were finally deleted from the communiqué. As a result, we did not use the Soviet draft. The published communiqué was largely based on our draft.

□(4) In spite of all of the above, however, Sino-Soviet relations are far better now than during Stalin's era. First of all, facing the [common] grave enemy, both sides have realized and accepted the necessity of promoting Sino-Soviet unity and mutual support, which had been taken as the most important principle. Second, now the Soviet Union and China can sit down to discuss issues equally. Even if they have different ideas on certain issues, they must consult with us. The articles by the Chinese Party are having some impact on the cadres and people in the Soviet Union, and even on some [Soviet] leaders. Third, the previous dull situation in which the brotherly parties and states could hardly discuss or argue with one another no longer

exists. Now, different opinions can be freely exchanged so that unity and progress are thereby promoted. Fourth, the majority of the Soviet people love China and feel happy for the Chinese people's achievements and growth in strength. Their admiration and friendship with the Chinese people are being enhanced on a daily basis. However, while [Russian] arrogance and self-importance have not been completely eliminated, an atmosphere lacking discipline and order is spreading. This time the [Soviet leadership] gave us a splendid and grand reception which indicated its intention to build a good image in front of its own people and the peoples all over the world. Fifth, on the one hand, extremely conceited, blinded by lust for gain, lacking far-sightedness, and knowing little the ways of the world, some of their leaders have hardly improved themselves even with the several rebuffs they have met in the past year. On the other hand, however, they appear to lack confidence and suffer from inner fears and thus tend to employ the tactics of bluffing or threats in handling foreign affairs or relations with other brotherly parties. Although they did sometimes speak from the bottom of their hearts while talking with us, they nevertheless could not get down from their high horse. In short, it is absolutely inadvisable for us not to persuade them [to make changes]; it is, however, equally inadvisable for us to be impatient in changing them. Therefore, changes on their part can only be achieved through a well-planned, step-by-step, persistent, patient, long-term persuasion.

[1] Zhou Enlai led a Chinese governmental delegation to visit the Soviet Union from 7 to 11 and 17-19 January 1957 (the delegation visited Poland and Hungary from January 11 to 17). During the visit, Zhou had five formal meetings with Soviet leaders, including Nikolai Bulganin, Nikita Khrushchev, and Anastas Mikoyan. After returning to Beijing, Zhou Enlai prepared this report for Mao Zedong and CCP central leadership, summarizing the discrepancies between the Chinese and Soviet parties.

[2] Liu Xiao was Chinese ambassador to the Soviet Union from February 1955 to October 1962.

[3] On 11-16 January 1957, Zhou Enlai visited Poland. This trip was arranged after Zhou had decided to visit the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong personally approved Zhou's Poland trip. Mao Zedong sent a telegram to Zhou on 4 December 1956 (Zhou was then making a formal state visit in India): "The Polish ambassador visited us, mentioning that their congress election is scheduled for 20 January, which will come very soon. There exists the danger that the United Workers' Party might lose the majority support. He hoped that China would offer help by inviting a Chinese leader to visit Poland before the election. They hoped to invite Comrade Mao Zedong. When we told the ambassador why it is impossible for Comrade Mao Zedong to make the trip at this time, and that the Soviet Union had already invited you to Moscow, we mentioned that if time allows and if you agree, perhaps you can make the trip. Now the struggle in Poland has changed into one between the United Workers' Party and other parties (with bourgeoisie character) over attracting votes from the workers and peasants. This is a good phenomenon. But if the United Workers' Party loses control, it would be disadvantageous [to the socialist camp]. Therefore, we believe that it is necessary for you to make a trip to Poland (the Polish ambassador also believes that this is a good idea). What is your opinion? If you are going, the trip should be made between 15 and 20 January, and it is better to make it before 15 January. If so, you should visit Moscow between 5 and 10 January, which will allow you to have four to five days to have the Sino-Soviet meetings, issuing a communiqué. Then you can travel to Poland to hold Sino-Polish meeting and also issue a communiqué, thus offering them some help." (Shi Zhongquan, Zhou Enlai de zhuoyeu fengxian, 299-300).

[4] Wladyslaw Gomulka was the leader of the Polish Communist regime.

[5] This refers to the "Declaration on Developing and Further Strengthening the Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and other Socialist Countries" issued by the Soviet government on the evening of 30 October 1956. As a response to the Hungarian crisis, the Soviet Union reviewed in the declaration its relations with other communist countries and promised that it would adopt a pattern of more equal exchanges with them in the future.

[\[6\]](#) This article was based on the discussions of the CCP Politburo and published in the name of the editorial board of Renmin ribao (People's Daily) on 29 December 1956.