CHAPTER II

THE CASE OF LIN BIAO

The Cultural Revolution and Lin Biao's abortive military coup have probably been the most significant and dramatic developments in the political system of China since 1949. In the context of these colossal political upheavals, the down-fall of Liu Shaoqi in the sixties and the purge of Lin Biao in the seventies are particularly challenging.

Liu and Lin were different in many ways with respect to their political orientations and career backgrounds, yet they had one thing in common: Each was officially designated by Mao at one point as his successor, the man to be entrusted with the future of China, yet each was subsequently found to be a "revisionist" and "sham Marxist". Each was at one stage of his political career regarded as the most loyal follower of Chairman Mao and the best pupil of Mao Zedong thought, yet each allegedly became a "traiter" and "careerist" who plotted against his leader.¹

What are the factors that contributed to such a perplexing development? Was it caused by the "struggle between two lines "over policy and ideological matters," as the Maoists would argue? Or was it prompted by other variables

such as the power struggle, the quest for political security, and the anxiety over the uncertainties of political succession? It is hoped that a close examination of the case of Lin Biao will shed some light on these important questions in this chapter.

The Rise of Lin Biao and His Army

Even before the nation-wide victory in 1949, Lin's brilliant military career had already made him well known. Some highlights of his early career are worth-noting. He was appointed commander of the communist-led first Army Corps as early as 1931, when he was only twenty-four years old. Later between 1934 and 1936, he took part in the historic Long March along with Mao. During the Yanan period he served as President of the prestigious Anti-Japanese Military and Political University. In the last stage of the Civil War in the late 1940's, the Fourth Field Army under his command scored a series of impressive victories from Northeast to Central China. In the early 1950's he was reported to have commanded the Chinese "Volunteers" in


3 "Chairman Mao's Successor - Deputy Supreme Commander Lin Biao" (V.P., n.d.), p.1. (translation in Current Background [CB] (U.S. Consulate General, Hong Kong), no.894, 27 October 1969.)
in the Korean War. However, owing to poor health, he became relatively inactive politically throughout the fifties.

But Lin's big political advance came immediately after the stormy Lushan Politburo Conference (July 2-August 1, 1959) and the Eighth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (August 2-16, 1959). When Peng Dehuai openly challenged Mao on the issues of the Great Leap Forward and the commune movement, Peng was purged as minister of national defence, and Lin was appointed to replace him. From then on, Lin became identified as the foremost student of Mao's thought, the Chairman most loyal follower, and the man who had faithfully put into effect the Maoist line of army building. In retrospect, there is no doubt that Lin deserved that reputation and honour. No sooner had he resumed control of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1959, then he began to overhaul and reinvigorate the entire Party structure within the military and to re-establish the priority of Party control and leadership in the army in accordance with the "political work system" was soon applied to mobilizing the army to carry out a series of mass movements designed to strengthen and politicize the PLA. As vividly revealed in the secret military journal, Bulletin of Activities (Gong Zuo Tongxun),

it was clearly at Lin's personal initiative and under his close guidance that "Give Prominence to Politics", "Living Study and Application of Mao Zedong Thought", "Four Firsts", "Three Eight Work Style", "Five-Good Company", "Five Good Soldier", and other such slogans became fully animated in the early 1960s and were vigorously applied in the army's daily life.5

By 1962, when the process of internal overhaul and reinvigoration had been completed, the army began to turn outward, exerting conspicuous influence in society at large. Army heroes like Wang Jie, Lei Feng, and Mai Xiande, were one after and other, hailed as revolutionary models for the whole nation to emulate. People all over the country were mobilized from 1964 on to take part in the "Learn from the PLA" movement.6 Between 1964 and 1966

5 The "Four First's mean: the human factor first in handling the relationship between men and weapons, political work first in handling the relationship between various kinds of work and political work, ideological work first within political work and living ideology first within ideological work. The "Three-Eight Work Style" refers to three phrases and eight charactersenunciated by Mao, "a firm and correct political direction, a persevering and simple style of work, and flexible strategy and tactics", and "unity, intensity, solemnity, and liveliness". The "Four Goods" stress "good in political and ideological work, good in the "three-eight work styles", good in military training, and good in management of army livelihood." The "Five Goods" emphasize "good in political ideology, good in military techniques, good in the "Three eight work style", good in carrying out assigned tasks and good in physical training.

6 Their significance is well elaborated in "The Whole Country Must Learn From the PLA", RMRB (People's Daily), February 1; The Diary of Wang Jie, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1967.
the organisational structure of the army's "political work system" was introduced into schools, enterprises, factories, and even party organs throughout the nation, and large numbers of army cadres and demobilized service-men, in particularly notable way, were transferred to man the newly organized "political work departments" in all sectors of civilian life.  

The power and influence of the military grew still further during the Cultural Revolution. As the regular Party apparatus and state bureaucracy were paralyzed by the Red Guards' violent assaults to seize power from the "power-holders" and "capitalist-roads", the military emerged from early 1967 on as the "main-stay of the dictatorship of the proletariat". Mao finally called on the military to intervene to impose military control and maintain law and order when chaos and armed conflict among factions and groups seriously threatened the state. Since then, the army's formidable influence and presence have been


8 The theme was elaborated in Hongqi, no.14, 1967, and BR, no.36, 1967, pp.5-7.

9 See "Decision concerning the PLA's Resolute Support of the Revolutionary Masses of the Left", issued jointly by the four major central organs, Chinese Law and Government, Fall-Winter 1971, pp.325-327.
maintained in every walk of life through the nation-wide "three-support and two-military" campaigns (i.e., support the broad masses of the left, support industry, and support agriculture; and carry out military control and military training). 10

The influence of the army was even formally institutionalized when military representatives came to dominate the composition of the provisional organs of power (known as revolutionary committees), taking the form of the "three-way alliance", of the military, the revolutionary masses, and the revolutionary cadres. Later, in the reorganized party committees, the military continued to play the most dominant organizational role which will be taken up later for discussion.

It was also during the Cultural Revolution that Lin Biao reached the peak of his political career. Described in August 1966 as Mao's "comrade-in-arms" and sole Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the Party, by 1969, without precedence in Party history, Lin was officially proclaimed as Chairman Mao's successor as in the new Party Constitution (approved at the Ninth Party Congress, April 24, 10)

The campaign amounts to an effort to impose military control and discipline for law and order. A revealing article may be found in "New Contributions to the Consolidation of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat Made by Three-Support and Two-Military Personnel of PLA", GMRB, 28 July, 1970.
1959), the Constitution explicitly stated:

Comrade Lin Biao has consistently held high the great Red Banner of Mao Zedong thought and has most loyally and resolutely carried out and defended Comrade Mao Zedong's proletarian revolutionary line, Comrade Lin Biao is Comrade Mao Zedong's close Comrade in-arms and successor. 11

The Making of a Military Coup:

As Lin's prestige and influence reached a pinnacle in the political arena and his army rapidly expanded its power and dominance in every sector of society, tensions began to emerge between Mao and Lin and between military and the civilian leadership. Each side appears to have increasingly perceived the other as the competitor for power and influence. An abrupt turning point in this tense relationship occurred during the second Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee held at Lushan, August 23 to September 6, 1970. At this meeting some specific disagreements between Mao and Lin came to light. Mao was apparently shocked by the unexpected "surprise attack" launched to challenge his authority between August 23 and 25 by Chen Boda

11 For the full text see BR, no.18, 1969, pp.36-39.
and seven top military leaders, probably acting on Lin's initiative.\textsuperscript{12} The gist of the surprise attack was an attempt to reverse Mao's previous instruction of March 1970 that preparations be made for convening the Fourth National People's Congress and that in the new state constitution a state chairmanship should not be provided for. The incident apparently prompted Mao to re-evaluate Lin's loyalties and policy orientations. Mao was later to describe the events at the Lushan Plenum as "a struggle between two headquarters."\textsuperscript{13}

The struggle that followed the Lushan confrontation may be broadly divided into stages. In the first stage, September 1970 to January 1971, Mao manoeuvred rapidly in an attempt to break-up Lin's power bases in the Central Committee, the Military Affairs Commission (MAC) and the Beijing Military Region by taking three preemptive measures. In Mao's own words:

One was to throw stones, one was to mix in sand, and the third was to dig up the cornerstone. I criticized the material Chen Boda had used to deceive many people, and I commented on reports

\textsuperscript{12} These military leaders were Huang Yongsheng, Wu Faxian, Ye Qun, Li Zuopeng, Qiu Huizuo, Li Xuefeng and Cheng Weishan. See "Summary of Chairman Mao's Talks to Responsible Local Comrades During His Tour of Inspection", commonly known as Document No.12 (1972) of the Central Committee of the CCP, Issues and Studies (IS), (Taipei), May-September 1972.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
of the Thirty Eighth Army and of the Jinan Military Region on opposing arrogance and complacency. I also made critical comments on a document of the long forum of the Military Affairs Commission which did not criticize Chen at all. My method was to get hold of these stones and give critical comments, and then let everyone discuss them - this was throwing stones. When dirt is too tightly packed, no air can get through, but if a little sand is mixed in, air can circulate. When work groups of the Military Affairs Commission did not have enough people mixed in, more were added - this is called mixing in sand. Reorganizing the Beijing Military Region is called digging up the cornerstone. 14

Indeed on September 15, 1970, Mao issued "A letter to the whole party" demanding the launching of a "Criticize Chen (Boda) Rectification Campaign", obviously aimed indirectly at Lin and his followers within the Central Committee. Next, he convened the Enlarged Politburo Conference at Beitaile (also known as the North China Conference) in December, insisting on open criticism and self-criticism for the seven "big generals", Lin's key supporters in the MAC. And finally, in late January 1971 Mao successfully reorganized the high command of the Beijing Military Region by transferring the Thirty-Eighth Army, a unit loyal to Lin, out of Beijing and by relieving both the commander Chen Weishan,

14 Ibid.
and the second political commissar, Li Xuefeng who were known to be Lin's followers.

The Context of Struggle: Policy Differences

The abrupt downfall of Lin Biao from the pyramid of power, surrounded by a cloud of mysterious intrigue and conspiracy. For three years after his death, without his name being mentioned, he was attacked as a "political swindler like Liu Shaoqi", a "traitor" and an "ambitious careerist". He was accused of having secretly plotted to assassinate Mao, to split the party and to seize power through a military coup d'etat. In addition, he was alleged to have committed a wide variety of ideological and policy errors.

Since the Tenth Party Congress of August 1973, Lin has been publicly identified by name as "the bourgeois careerist, conspirator, double-dealer, renegade, and traitor." A nation-wide campaign to "criticize Lin and Confucius" was launched soon thereafter designed to totally discredit Lin as a Confucius of the modern age, an agent of the slave owning landlord-bourgeois class, and a counter-revolutionary plotting to restore the "rites" of capitalism.


The "crimes" Lin is alleged to have committed seem to fall into two broad categories:

1. Lin's deviations from the policy and line set by Mao and the Party, and

2. His personal ambition and drive for power through conspiracy and military coup d'etat against Mao and the Party.

The documentation of the case to-date, however, does not convincingly support the argument that the attempted coup by Lin against Mao was prompted chiefly by a profound divergence in policy orientation between the two. The thrust of the case instead appears mainly to have been the power struggle among the key individual political actors and competing institutional forces led by Mao and Lin respectively. However, policy divergences seem to have played a role which provided an ideological and policy context for power struggle and thus facilitated the generation of a military coup, even if the coup itself may have actually been triggered by other causes.

Policy differences between Mao and Lin may be inferred from two separate sets of documents: the alleged plot outline and the criticisms of Lin Biao. The plot documents are particularly revealing on policy stand in order to justify their action against the existing leadership. Their attacks on Mao range from his poor management of economic policy and foreign affairs to his periodic purges of cadres and his theory of continuous revolution.
In the outline of "Project 571" the economy is described as stagnant, the standard of living as falling, and the masses as dissatisfied. The peasants lacked food and were short of clothing, while the workers felt exploited because their wages had been frozen. The "571" plot called for a policy of "a prosperous people and a strong country" to replace "a prosperous country but an impoverished people" and for making people "happy with their homes and content with their work".

Further evidence of Lin's dissatisfaction with economic policy may be inferred from the accusation that Lin attempted to "overturn the three agenda items of the second plenary session of the Ninth Central Committee." It is not entirely clear what the exact nature of the three agenda items was, but the second Plenum communique suggests that one was the state Council Report on the National Planning Conference and the National Economic Plan for 1970. Moreover, at the Tenth Party Congress, convened in August 1973, Lin was formally accused of having produced for the Ninth Party Congress, held in April 1969, in collaboration with Chen Boda, a draft political report that stressed the priority of economic production over the task of continuing the revolution and class struggle. Indeed, such accusations

17 For the text of the communique, see BR, no. 37, 1970, pp. 5-7.

18 See n. 15.
against Lin are consistent with the theme emphasized in the campaign of "criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius", which identifies Lin as a representative of the capitalist-landlord class and a reactionary Rightist, rather than "Leftist" as he was sometimes branded in the press before 1973. 19

The foreign policy line of the conspirators was not very explicit, but several points suggest that there may have been an appreciable difference between Mao and Lin on the most important foreign policy issue of the sixties, namely, the attitude toward the potential security threat posed by the Soviet Union. The "Project 571" outline does state that the conspirators would have the support of the Soviet Union. It is possible that "illicit relations" or at least some tacit agreements existed between the conspirators in China and individuals in the Soviet Union. This was not necessarily the case, however. Indeed, Soviet support would most likely be available to any faction plotting against Mao regardless of whether or not any pre-arrangements had been made. Lin's alleged attempt to escape to the Soviet Union on September 13, 1971, is indicative of, at least, the plotters' perception of the likely Soviet attitude toward a coup against Mao. More significantly, the plot outline states that the "confrontation between China and the Soviet Union is giving the

Soviet Union a hard time." This would suggest that in Lin's view the Soviet Union was at least as much on the defensive as China. From the accusation that Lin neglected the policy of military training and preparedness one may infer that Lin also perceived the Soviet threat as being less serious than Mao's assessment of it. This possibility is reinforced by the fact that a second agenda item of the 1970 Lushan Plenum which Lin sought to overturn appears to have been a report of the MAC on "Strengthening the work for preparedness against War". 20

The most vehement expressions of dissatisfaction in the "Project 571" outline are related to the method of periodic rectification and purge campaigns and in particular to Mao's leadership style. Mao's theory of continuing the revolution and class struggle was denounced as being nothing more than Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. The conspirators objected to Mao's "merry-go-round" style of engaging successive groups in political struggle. The Lin group attacked:

Their socialism is, in essence, social facism. They have turned China's state machine into a kind of meat grinder for mutual slaughter and strife, and they have made the Party and the

20 See No.17, the accusation on his "illicit contacts" in betraying the Party is particularly revealing in Qi Bing, "Zhangwo shehuizhuyi shiqi jieji douzhengde guilu" (Grasp the Law of Class Struggle in the Socialist Period), HQ, no.8, 1972, pp.6-10.
whole country's political life into a patriarchal life of the feudal, dictatorial, and autocratic type. 21

As to Mao himself, the conspirators felt:
He abuses the trust and status given to him by the Chinese people. In an historical sense he is going backward - actually he has become a contemporary Qinshihuang (the first emperor of the Qin-dynasty) - - - He is not a true Marxist-Leninist, but rather one who follows the way of Confucius and Mencius, one who dons Marxist-Leninist clothes but implements the laws of Qinshi Huang. He is the biggest feudal despot in Chinese history. 22

The close associates of Mao were described as "corrupt, muddled, and incompetent, opposed by the masses and deserted by their followers":
A small gang of officials has become remorseless and despotic; moreover they control military power and make enemies on all sides. Their heads are swelling and they overestimate themselves. 23

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
On the whole, these criticisms of Mao are closer to personal attacks than to clearly argued policy differences. Furthermore, these criticisms were made when Lin and his supporters were already under fire. The reason behind Lin's opposition to "merry-go-round" revolutionary struggle was undoubtedly his realization that he was the next target. In this light it is not difficult to see why the attacks became so personal and bitter. From Lin's perspective, as explicitly stated in the plot outline, "the coup (by Mao) is presently developing in a way that will benefit the pen (civilian forces)."\textsuperscript{24} Such a statement shows that the plotters perceived the conflicts very much in terms not only of the personal animosity and distrust between Mao and Lin but also of the power relationship between the Party and the army. On the subject of military policy, the plot outline itself does not reveal any policy dispute. In the Maoists' charges made against him, however, Lin is accused of having turned the PLA into a "cultural (wenhua) army", engaging only in civil (wen) training and neglecting military training.\textsuperscript{25} It should be noted that the balance between military and political work, like the balance between "democracy" and "centralism", for instance, is a delicate one, difficult to assess, particularly as it is

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25} See, n.12.
subject to change with shifting objective conditions, given the difficulty of evaluating the "correct" balance, disagreement with Mao is a likely occurrence.

It is possible, as mentioned earlier, that the cause of Lin's deviation of giving greater emphasis to political work at the expense of military training was related to a difference between the two men in assessing the military threat of the Soviet Union. Lin may have disagreed with Mao on the necessity of stepping up military training because he did not see the great urgency that a Soviet threat would entail. It is also possible that he viewed the issue in terms of the balance of power between two competing groups within the PLA. A policy slightly toward more military training might work in favour of those generals who wanted to further professionalize the army and withdraw the military from political involvement, which in the context of his ambition for and ascendance to power, Lin was not prepared to adopt. Considering the political developments of the sixties in China, it is highly unlikely that Lin would have been able to carry out such a thorough reorganization and politicization of the army for as long as ten years if Mao had truly disagreed with him on basic policy matters. 26

If the cause of the attempted military coup by Lin Biao against Mao cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of policy divergence and dispute between Mao and Lin, it can be viewed more fruitfully in terms of struggle for power and quest for political security and survival. This is not to say that it should be assumed that all political actors in China always seek to maximize their power and security to the extent of resorting to a coup d'etat. The development of Lin Biao affair seems to have resulted from a rather special power relationship at the top in the late 1960's and from a peculiar process of the escalation of power struggle that developed from the Cultural Revolution. In historical retrospect, the record is clear that before and during the Cultural Revolution Mao cultivated Lin and his army to support him in his struggle to regain the power he had lost to Liu Shaoqi. But at the same time Mao also created a dilemma for himself: Lin and the military expanded their power far beyond what Mao had anticipated at the outset. Under such circumstances, Mao became overtly sensitive to and jealous of his precarious authority, status, and power under the shadow of the increasingly powerful military and Lin Biao.  

27 For an elaboration, see ibid.
In retrospect again there is little doubt that since 1959, Lin and the army under his command had consciously and systematically taken advantage of Mao's setbacks to expand their power and activity into every sector of society. Organizationally, as discussed earlier, they infused the army into the administrative and leadership structure from the top echelons down to the production units. This infusion took place in three steps. First between 1965 and 1966 the organizational structure of the army's "political work system" was introduced into schools, factories, enterprises, and even party organs throughout the nation. Large numbers of army cadres and ex-army personnel were transferred to their newly organized "political work departments" in virtually all sectors of civilian life. Second, during the Cultural Revolution the military emerged as the "mainstay of the dictatorship of the proletariat", and the military representatives became legitimate and prominent partners of the three-way alliances" of the "provisional organs of power" ("revolutionary committees", which were formed at the provincial level between January 31, 1967 and September 5, 1968). Finally, as the reconstruction of the Party began after the Ninth Party Congress

28 For a detailed analysis of the structural relationship between the party and the army, see Ying Mao-kau et al., The Political Work System of the Chinese Communist Military, (East Asia Language and Centre, Brown University: Providence, 1971).
(Provincial-level Party Committees were re-established between November 24, 1970 and August 19, 1971), the dominant position of the army persisted. As shown in the table below, the representation of the PLA in the provincial Party committee leadership was even greater than in the earlier provincial revolutionary committees. Statistically, the power of the Army clearly surpassed other institutions such as the Party and the State bureaucracy.

**MILITARY REPRESENTATION IN THE NEW POWER STRUCTURE, 1969-71**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Total membership (number)</th>
<th>Military representation %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politburo(1)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Committee(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Members</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate Members</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Revolutionary Committee(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairmen</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chairmen</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Party Committee(4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Secretaries</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Secretaries</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Issues and Studies, October 1971, pp. 23-27. These data are also reported in Ying Mao-kau, "The Case Against Lin Biao", Chinese Law and Government, Fall-Winter 1972-73, p. 8.*
To Mao, the excessive expansion of the power of the military constituted a gross violation of the fundamental principle of military line that he had advocated since 1979: "The Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party." Even worse, the growing power and arrogance of the PLA posed a serious threat to the status and strength of the Party and State which he represented. By the late 1960s, therefore, the relationship between the Party and the army, between Mao and Lin, began to change from the traditional bonds of "the Party in Command" to a new situation of rivalry and competition.

As revealed in the "top-secret" documents of the Central Committee, Mao complained bitterly during his inspection tour to the provinces in September 1971:

Local Party Committees had already been established, and they should have exercised unified leadership. Wasn't it just confusing if matters already decided upon by local Party Committees were still taken to army Party committees for discussion.

Mao clearly perceived that the army was reluctant to relinquish its political power and administrative authority and restore them to the Party Committees even after the Party

31 See n. 12.
was being rebuilt at the local levels. Moreover, as Mao put it, the army also became "arrogant and complacent", and the tradition of giving emphasis to the mass-line style of leadership was disregarded. Mao's great dissatisfaction with the army was clearly reflected in his strong demands in 1969-71 to carry out campaigns requiring "the PLA to learn also from the people of the whole nation", and the army to observe strictly the three main rules of discipline and eight points for attention.32

Although the development of the power and working relationship between the Party and the army since the Cultural Revolution was definitely not to Mao's liking, Mao and Lin appear to have managed to maintain with restraints their symbiotic relations and tensions without open confrontation. Yet, the strains in their relationship erupted dramatically at the Second Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee in September 1970 over the issue of state chairmanship in the new draft state constitution which was then under discussion. It was to the conflict over this particular question that the chain of events leading to the alleged coup attempt can be traced.

After Lin's formal designation as the successor-to-be at the Ninth Party Congress in 1969, his followers apparently began to initiate definitive measures to consolidate his newly gained status in order to ensure an orderly and predictable

32 See for example, "Learn Humbly from the Masses", Hongqi, no. 4, 1971.
political succession when Mao passes from the scene. To Lin and his followers, to minimize the ambiguities in succession was a way to maximize their political security and guarantee the nation's continued stability. It was probably with that blend of spirit and motives that Lin's followers, acting against Mao's previous instruction, reopened the issue of creating a state chairmanship in revising the state constitution at the Lushan Plenum of August 1970. But Mao's reaction was immediate and outraged:

Do not establish a state chairman and I will not be state Chairman - I said this six times - and each time was just one sentence, wasn't it? Even if there had been six thousand sentences they wouldn't listen. My words aren't even worth half a sentence; they aren't worth anything. 33

Mao apparently quickly concluded that Lin wanted to occupy that position himself for reasons of personal political ambition. Mao said: "A certain person was very anxious to become State Chairman to split the Party and to seize power." 34

What also particularly irked Mao was the way in which Lin attempted to promote his own status and ideas. Political

33 See no. 12.
34 Ibid.
style and work methods seem to have been as important in Mao's mind as policy. Evidence of this is the strong wording used by Mao in his August 1971 accusations and the campaign calling for all political opposition to be "open and above-board" and to "intrigue conspire". The method Lin adopted at the Lushan Plenum was probably one not very different from the style of politics usual in other countries, e.g., lobbying and caucusing behind closed doors before an open meeting. But to Mao this type of behaviour was totally unacceptable:

At that (Lushan 1970) Conference they engaged in surprise attacks and underground activities. Why weren't they brave enough to come out in the open? It was obvious they were upto no good. First they concealed things, then they launched a surprise attack.... Their coup didn't just last a day-and-a-half, but went on for two-and-a-half days, from August 23 and 24 to noon on the twentyfifth. They certainly had a purpose in doing all that.

The incident apparently crystallized Mao's sense of the adverse political situation surrounding him. He even perceived it as a definite indication that the PLA was not being completely loyal to him. Mao bluntly asked: "He (Lin)

36 See no. 12.
also said that the People's Liberation Army was founded and led by me, but personally commanded by Lin - why can't the founder also command? In fact, Mao cast the entire Plenum in the extreme context of a "struggle between two lines" and explicitly ranked Lin with his principal enemies from Chen Duxiu, Wang Ming, and Zhang Guotao to Peng Dehuai and Liu Shaoqi.

After the Plenum, however, Mao did indicate that the current case differed from the nine previous major struggles in the history of the Party: The opposition had not yet been dealt with conclusively and still had the opportunity to rehabilitate itself:

What should we do with these people? We must still adopt the policy of education, that, "Learn from past mistakes to avoid future ones" and "cure the sickness to save the patient". We still want to protect Lin. No matter who one is, if one makes mistakes and ignores unity and line it is never a good thing. When I return to Beijing I will again seek them out to talk things over. If they won't come to me, I will go to them. Some can probably be saved, some not - we must observe their actions.

---

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
This was the reason, according to Mao, that the plenum decided, contrary to normal practice, to postpone an official "summing up" at the end of the session, thereby leaving the door of mercy and reconciliation ajar for Lin and his associates.

Attempting to become state Chairman was not Lin Biao's only effort to ensure his political security and guarantee his succession, however. Lin also promoted the "theory of genius." The theoretical issue is that of the role of the individuals such as Mao Zedong and by implication denigrates the historical role of the masses and of leadership organizations such as the party. The practical issue, however, involves the symbolic manipulation or "deification" of Mao Zedong. Whatever Lin's motives may have been for elevating the status of Mao and his works before and during the Cultural Revolution, the motives surely took on a new dimension following his official designation as Mao's successor in 1969. Since an explicit line of succession had been made between Mao and Lin, and since Lin had established himself as "the best pupil of Mao Zedong Thought", Lin could only stand to gain from increasing the symbolic charisma and legitimacy of his

---

40 See for example Lin's May 18, 1966 speech "Address to the Enlarged Session of the Politburo of the Central Committee" in Li Tso peng et al., About Comrade Lin Biao, 1969.

41 Tien Zhisong, "The Masses are the makers of History", BR, no.29, 1972, pp.7-11.
predecessor-to-be. Mao asserted that this was indeed the true motive of Lin. "He wanted to build me up but in fact I don't know who he had in mind - the truth is that he built himself up." Furthermore, the "theory of genius" underscores the importance of having a single dominant political leader. If this theory gained widespread acceptance, it would clearly give legitimacy to one-man succession by Lin Biao rather than to the formation of a collective leadership.

According to Mao, Lin also relied on factional loyalties to build up his personal and organizational kingdom and split the party. This was widely practiced in key organizations such as the MAC, the military region and district commands, and provincial party committees and became evermore conspicuous particularly after the purge of Chief of Staff Yang Chengwu in March 1968. At the Lushan Plenum of 1970 Lin Biao had apparently even won the support of Chen Boda, the foremost ideologue of the nation and Mao's closest associate for over thirty years, although the precise nature of their complicity remains obscure. As a special case of personal loyalty Mao singled out the role played by Lin's wife Ye Qun: "I have never approved of one's wife leading the administrative office of one's work unit.

42 See no.12.
At the Lin Biao's place, Ye Qun is the director of the administrative office.  

One of Mao's major concerns with the building up of personal loyalties was that it would generate mountain-topism, an independent kingdom, and factionalism within the party and army. In speaking to local party leaders during his inspection tour in 1971, Mao accused Lin of having attempted to split the party, and he demanded, that "the party must be unified, must be put in order." He also called for a campaign to study the spirit of the "Internationale" with a special stress on the subject of party unity:

The Internationale "tells us to unite and march into tomorrow.... To study Marxism is to emphasize unity not splittism." We have sung the "Internationale" for fifty years, yet some people in our party have tried to split the party ten times.

The mysteries surrounding Lin's coup attempt will probably never be completely reconstructed and understood. A careful reading of all the available documentation on the case, however, conveys a distinct impression that,

---

43 See no.12. This certainly raises the question of how Mao viewed the role of his own wife, Jiang Qing.


45 See no.12.

46 Ibid.
policy and ideological divergence and tensions notwithstanding the thrust of the life-and-death struggle was most likely triggered by the struggle for power and security between Mao and Lin and between the party and the army. Its major impetus flowed from the chain of actions and reactions, challenges and responses which stemmed from the dynamics of the balancing and struggle for power. In the absence of a well-defined or institutionalized process of political succession, the successor-designate was forced to consolidate his power base, and such efforts ran counter to Mao's jealously guarded authority and style of operation.

In this chain of events, the incident over the issue of the state chairmanship at the 1970 Lushan Plenum apparently constituted the watershed from which the tensions between Mao and Lin made a leap from the realm of policy disputes to that of personal distrust and hostility, and from the domain of reconcilable "non-antagonistic" contradictions to that of irreconcilable "antagonistic struggle".

The official version of Lin Biao's demise was altogether too pat and fitted Mao's political needs neatly to be accepted entirely. It justified the purges that followed and that allowed Mao to regain a secure position. There is little question that Lin Biao lost out in a struggle with Mao and that he perished, but there was no reason for Lin to attempt a coup d'etat against Mao, unless in self-defense. Lin had already won control of the provincial
party apparatus, had a majority in the politburo, and was Mao's officially designated successor. Rather, the evidence suggests that the situation was reversed. It was *Mao* who needed to eliminate Lin in the only way left open to him after having failed to beat Lin in the game of organizational politics. Mao himself later periodized the final stage of the struggle against Lin Biao in his "A summary of Chairman Mao's Talks with Responsible Comrades of various places during his inspection tour, mid-August-September 12, 1971". Mao's "inspection tour" was undoubtedly a last ditch effort to marshal support for the decision to purge Lin and his supporters. The grounding of all aircrafts and the cancellation of all military leave immediately prior to the purge insured that Lin and his supporters would be isolated and enable Mao to remove them from power without undue interference.

The immediate results of the Lin Biao incident were extremely beneficial to Mao, particularly within the central power structure. Lin's demise left Mao apparently in complete command of the polit-standing committee and the politburo itself. Although Ye Jianying was shortly promoted to membership in the politburo standing committee, Mao, Zhou and Gang Sheng had a majority vote. The situation in the politburo was even better. Lin had held a twelve to nine majority before the "incident", now, with his removal and that of his five supporters and Chen Boda,
Mao's minority position was transformed into a commanding nine-to-five majority. On Mao's side were the same nine men who had made up his group at the Ninth Party Congress, except for Chen Boda, only Dong Biwu, Liu Bocheng, Zhu De, Ye Jianying and Xu Shiyu remained in position. The story of the central military apparatus was equally dramatic. Of the thirty-two officers purged, twenty-five had clear ties to Lin Biao.

The summary of Chairman Mao's talks with responsible Comrades was issued as a Central Committee document on 17 March 1972 in the wake of the Lin Biao purge and constituted yet another signal to Deng. As a Central Committee document the summary reflected the sentiments of the party leadership as well as Mao personally and made Deng's acceptability clearly apparent. Referring to the party's "ten major line-struggles", the document mentioned the names of all of Mao's major opponents since the establishment of the CCP in 1921 except Deng, only an indirect reference made to Deng in the phrase "Liu Shaoqi and company". In the conclusion of the summary yet another gesture was made: "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution dragged out Liu Shaoqi, Peng, Luo and Yang, which was a great achievement. But there were

47 One of Mao's men, Xie Fuzhi, died in March 1972, leaving the balance at eight to five.

losses. Some good cadres have not yet been rehabilitated... It is the tradition of our party that when a person makes a mistake, he must conduct self-criticism and be criticized, mistakes are allowed to be corrected.49

The obvious question was this: with Lin gone, why did Mao still need Deng? True, Mao had succeeded in purging Lin and retaining the majority in the politburo as well as removing many of Lin's men from the central military apparatus. He had not yet, however, been able to regain command of the provincial party structure. For this task Deng's support remained vital. Mao would probably succeed in removing many if not most of the military from the party apparatus on the grounds of association with Lin's allegedly traitorous behaviour. But it would be impossible to administer the provincial apparatus effectively without the cadres, the revolutionary masses were still incapable of performing this function by themselves, if indeed they ever would be given the opportunity. The net effect of changes in provincial party committees was to reduce the influence of the military as a homogeneous bloc in the provincial party apparatus, in particular virtually eliminating that of the fourth field army (Lin's old command). In other words, by the early spring of 1973, the conditions had been created for Deng's return to power. What was

49 See no. 12, p. 71.
required was the opportunity. It came about as a result of the apparent failure of Mao's policy of cooperation with the U.S. in Southeast Asia.

It was the Russians, however, who definitely linked Lin and the plane. In a news release on January 1, 1972, Soviet medical experts stated that they were "reasonably certain" that two of the bodies aboard the crashed jet were those of Lin Biao and his wife, Ye Qun. They also noted that all nine of the bodies aboard the aircraft were "bullet-riddled", raising doubts about the obvious deductions to be made concerning the events.

At first glance it would appear that Lin and his generals attempted to flee and seek refuge in the Soviet Union - that they were traitors. But the Soviet report stating that all the nine bodies were bullet-riddled implies that all were dead before the crash. Was there an argument in flight among the passengers? Or were they placed aboard the aircraft dead? Even more mysterious is the report - unconfirmed that not one but two aircrafts penetrated Outer Mongolian airspace on the evening of September 12-13 and that one returned to China. Whatever the facts, there is sufficient ambiguity about the plane crash to cause serious misgivings about the all-too-obvious deduction that Lin had turned traitor.