

PAPER TIGERS

The excerpt below comes from an interview that American journalist Anna Louise Strong conducted with Mao Tse-tung in August 1946, three years before the Communist takeover of China.

Strong: Do you think there is hope for a political, a peaceful settlement of China's problems in the near future?

Mao: That depends on the attitude of the U.S. government. If the American people stay the hands of the American reactionaries who are helping Chiang Kai-shek fight the civil war, there is hope for peace. . . .

Strong: If the American people ask why the Communist Party is fighting, what should I reply?

Mao: Because Chiang Kai-shek is out to slaughter the Chinese people, and if the people want to survive they have to defend themselves. This the American people can understand.

Strong: What do you think of the possibility of the United States starting a war against the Soviet Union?

Mao: There are two aspects to the propaganda about an anti-Soviet war. On the one hand, U.S. imperialism is indeed preparing a war against the Soviet Union; the current propaganda about an

anti-Soviet war, . . . is political preparation for such a war. On the other hand, this propaganda is a smoke-screen put up by the U.S. reactionaries to cover many actual contradictions immediately confronting United States imperialism. . . . At present, the actual significance of the U.S. slogan of waging an anti-Soviet war is the oppression of the American people and the expansion of American forces of aggression in the rest of the capitalist world. As you know, both Hitler and his partners, the Japanese warlords, used anti-Soviet slogans for a long time as a pretext for enslavement of the people at home and aggression against other countries. Now the American reactionaries are acting in exactly the same way. . . .

Of course, I do not mean to say the U.S. reactionaries have no intention of attacking the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is a defender of world peace and a powerful factor preventing the domination of the world by the U.S. reactionaries. I think the American people and the peoples

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Mao Tse-tung before the Communist takeover



of all countries menaced by U.S. aggression should unite and struggle against the attacks of the U.S. reactionaries and their running dogs in these countries. Only by victory in this struggle can a third world war be avoided, . . .

Strong: That is very clear. But suppose the U.S. uses the atom bomb? . . .

Mao: The atom bomb is a paper tiger which the U.S. reactionaries use to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn't. Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapon.

All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful. . . .

Take the case of China. We have only millet plus rifles to rely on, but history will finally prove that our millet plus rifles is more powerful than Chiang Kai-shek's aeroplanes plus tanks. . . . The day will come when these reactionaries are defeated and we are victorious. The reason is simply this: the reactionaries represent reaction, we represent progress.

1. (a) What two sides were fighting China's civil war (page 702)?

(b) Which side was the United States aiding?

2. According to Mao, what is the only hope for a peaceful settlement of China's problems?

3. Why, according to Mao, were the Communists fighting Chiang?

4. According to Mao, do American reactionaries really have something to fear from the Soviet Union or are they promoting anti-Soviet propaganda as an excuse for something else? If so, what?

5. (a) A paper tiger looks terrifying but in reality has no power. What weapon does Mao call a "paper tiger"?

(b) At the time Mao made this statement, the United States was the only power to possess this weapon. Why might Mao have felt the need to downplay its effectiveness?

