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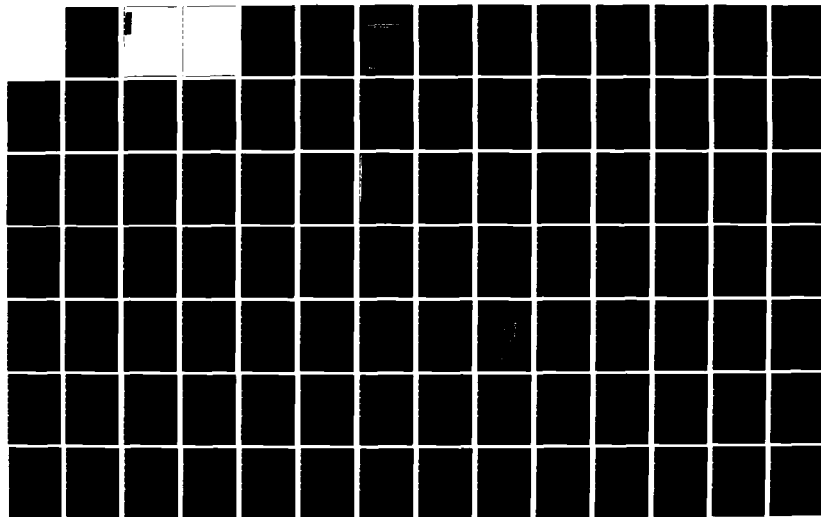
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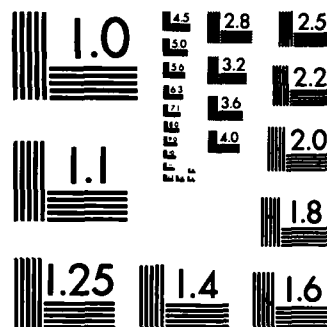
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→ This report examines

9 An examination of factors that have influenced the evolution of the Soviet force buildup in Siberia, Central Asia, and the Soviet Far East under the Brezhnev regime. The report also tracks the changing Soviet view of the risks involved in the use of force against the People's Republic of China during the buildup, the development of Chinese military programs, the changing Chinese political scene, and China's evolving relationship with the United States. To this end, the study examines Soviet behavior and probable calculations in the three short Asian military crises of the Brezhnev era in which the security interests of the United States, China, and the Soviet Union most sharply interacted: the 1969 Sino-Soviet border crisis, the 1971 India-Pakistan war, and the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese hostilities. Probable assumptions the Soviets hold regarding their present and future force structure in the Far East are outlined. The report concludes by weighing the security implications of three broad alternatives for Sino-U.S. relations over the next decade: the relations remain unchanged, sharply decline, or significantly improve. 138 pp. (JH)

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The Soviet Far East Buildup and Soviet Risk-Taking Against China

August 1982

**A Project AIR FORCE report
prepared for the
United States Air Force**

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PREFACE

This report examines factors that have successively influenced the evolution of the Soviet force buildup in Siberia, Central Asia, and the Soviet Far East under the Brezhnev regime. It also seeks to track the changing Soviet view of the risks involved in the use of force against the People's Republic of China (PRC) in light of the progress of this buildup, the development of Chinese military programs, the changing Chinese political scene, and the evolving PRC relationship with the United States. To this end, it closely examines Soviet behavior and probable calculations in the three short Asian military crises of the Brezhnev era in which the security interests of the United States, the PRC, and the Soviet Union have most sharply interacted: the 1969 Sino-Soviet border crisis, the 1971 India-Pakistan war, and the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese hostilities. The study outlines assumptions that the Soviets now seem to hold about the multiple purposes--and the future--of their force structure in the Far East. It concludes by weighing the security implications for the United States, the Soviet Union, and the PRC of three broad alternatives for Sino-U.S. relations over the next decade: the consequences if those relations remain essentially unchanged, if they sharply decline, or if they significantly improve.

This study is the initial product of a Project AIR FORCE research effort that seeks to explore and assess the prospects for and the problems involved in fuller development of security cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the PRC, and on this basis to assess the impact of such cooperation upon Soviet policies and tactics in dealings

with the Soviet Union's adversaries. Subsequent reports will address other aspects of the problem. In particular, the possibilities for Soviet conciliation of the PRC have been reserved for separate detailed consideration in a forthcoming study.

This work continues and builds upon an extensive body of Rand research on a variety of Asian, Chinese, U.S.-Soviet, Sino-U.S., and Sino-Soviet policy issues. Readers are referred, in particular, to the following:

Richard Moorsteen and Morton Abramowitz, Problems of U.S.-China Relations and Governmental Decisionmaking, R-659-DOS/ARPA, April 1971.

John Despres, Lilita Dzirkals, and Barton Whaley, Timely Lessons of History: The Manchurian Model for Soviet Strategy, R-1825-NA, July 1976.

Thomas M. Gottlieb, Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism and the Origins of the Strategic Triangle, R-1902-NA, November 1977.

Kenneth G. Lieberthal, Sino-Soviet Conflict in the 1970s: Its Evolution and Implications for the Strategic Triangle, R-2342-NA, July 1978.

Jonathan D. Pollack, Defense Modernization in the People's Republic of China, N-1214-1-AF, October 1979.

Richard H. Solomon (ed.), Asian Security in the 1980s: Problems and Policies for a Time of Transition, R-2492-ISA, November 1979.

Harry Gelman, The Politburo's Management of Its America Problem, R-2707-NA, April 1981; Executive Summary, R-2707/1-NA, July 1981.

William G. Hyland, Soviet-American Relations: A New Cold War?,
R-2763-FF/RC, May 1981.

The findings of this report are intended to be of assistance to Air Force officers and planners concerned with prospects for Soviet strategic policy in the Far East and with the strategic environment that may confront the Air Force in East Asia over the next decade. The study should also be of interest to a wide spectrum of readers concerned with Soviet policy in Asia.

This report reflects information available through August 1982.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Soviet military buildup in Siberia, Central Asia, and the Soviet Far East, in progress since about 1965, has involved both long-term continuity and shifts in tempo and emphasis. The allocation of the material and human resources required by the buildup has clearly been an important factor in the last three five-year planning cycles of the Soviet Ministry of Defense, which has had to make broad estimates of these requirements long in advance. Yet the buildup has not been evenly paced or uniform in its evolution. It appears to have gone through four phases to date:

- o An initial period of gradual expansion after 1965 from the base of some 17 to 20 divisions inherited from the Khrushchev era;
- o A period of some acceleration in all three major categories--manpower, active units, and equipment--for a few years shortly before, during, and after the 1969 border clashes with the People's Republic of China (PRC);
- o A period of much slower growth--and gradual improvement of the equipment and manpower levels of understrength units--between the early 1970s and 1977;
- o Some movement off this near-plateau since 1978, with modest increases in total combat manpower combined with significant reorganization and some forward deployment, increases in the number of new skeletal divisions deployed, and marked acceleration in the pace of modernization of equipment and stockpiling of materials.

In the process, the number of divisions of all strength levels deployed appear to have increased from roughly 20 at the outset to about 40 early in the 1970s to roughly 50 in 1982. A disproportionate share of the manpower--the bulk of the ground combat troops present today--was apparently in place by the early 1970s.

These changes in pace and emphasis have reflected a series of gradual changes in the mixture of Soviet motives for the buildup because of shifting circumstances.

THE INITIAL SOVIET MOTIVES

At the outset, Khrushchev's successors began the buildup when they decided that Khrushchev's removal had not altered Mao's profound hostility toward the Soviet Union and that they faced a permanent Chinese challenge to the legitimacy of Soviet borders with the PRC. They resolved to undertake a long-term strengthening of their position in the Far East, both to ensure their hold on the frontiers they claimed and, more broadly, to create the means to exert pressure on China. Unlike Khrushchev, Brezhnev was willing to devote resources to the major expansion of the Soviet ground forces associated with this long-term buildup in Asia.

These initial Soviet motives were reinforced in 1969 by the outbreak of a long series of border clashes with China. This crisis resulted from increasingly active border patrolling by both sides intended to assert jurisdiction at the many disputed points customarily controlled by the Soviets but claimed by the Chinese. In view of their great firepower advantage, the Soviets were at first disturbed and perplexed by their inability to compel the PRC to desist. Eventually,

however, they succeeded in intimidating the Chinese into halting such competitive patrolling by repeatedly raising the threat of conventional or nuclear escalation.

But although the military challenge to the Soviet version of Sino-Soviet borders was thus averted, the Chinese political challenge to those borders has remained. Since 1969, the Soviets have been faced with an unchanging Chinese demand for a preliminary unilateral Soviet military withdrawal from all disputed areas as a prerequisite to any border settlement. This adamant Chinese stand has helped perpetuate Soviet determination to ensure that their forces facing China will continue to overmatch and intimidate the PRC.

Two years after the 1969 crisis, the Soviets obtained what they saw as an initial geopolitical dividend from their threatening posture toward the PRC. During the India-Pakistan war of late 1971, India, with diplomatic and logistical support from the USSR, crushed Pakistani forces in East Pakistan over the objections of the PRC and the United States. The Soviets found that their deployments against China had helped to eliminate the possibility of Chinese intervention in support of Pakistan. The Soviets thus found for the first time that they could obtain geopolitical advantage in South Asia through their deployments in the north.

THE GROWTH OF SINO-SOVIET-U.S. INTERACTION

The major unfavorable effect of the 1969 crisis for Moscow was the impetus it gave to Sino-U.S. rapprochement, which unfolded in the three years that followed. The Sino-U.S. consultations that took place during the 1971 India-Pakistan crisis were a particularly unwelcome milestone for Soviet policy, since they established a precedent for a possible

future development of Chinese-American security cooperation. In response, during the first half of the 1970s--the period of Soviet-American "detente"--Brezhnev issued repeated private warnings to American leaders not to enter into a "military alliance" with China. In the same period, he made repeated unsuccessful attempts to entice the United States into a security relationship with the Soviet Union directed at the PRC.

THE SLOWDOWN IN THE BUILDUP AFTER 1972

Between 1972 and about 1977, the Soviets slowed down their Far East buildup. During the early 1970s they probably attained the interim force goals established in 1965 for the first stage of the buildup, and they estimated that Chinese competitive patrolling in the disputed border areas was not likely to resume in the face of the threatening Soviet military posture. They therefore concluded that the level of deterrence they had achieved was sufficient for the time being. The Soviets meanwhile hoped for improvements in their relationship with Beijing once Mao Zedong--whom they saw as the implacable driving force behind Chinese hostility--had left the scene. They hoped that divisions within the Chinese leadership might then open up the possibility of a settlement of Sino-Soviet differences based on significant Chinese concessions to the Soviet Union.

After Mao died in September 1976, however, these Soviet hopes were disappointed. Mao's successors over the next two years rejected Soviet overtures and insisted that Moscow "prove its sincerity with deeds" by withdrawing from the disputed border areas and by totally undoing the Soviet force buildup in Asia since Khrushchev's time. This the Soviets regarded as out of the question.

This Soviet disappointment with Beijing coincided with a steady deterioration in Soviet-American relations after the mid-1970s, in large part because of a growth in Soviet efforts to expand influence and presence in the Third World at the expense of the United States. These Soviet activities in Africa and Asia simultaneously exacerbated Chinese anxieties about Soviet expansionist tendencies. The Soviets themselves thus prepared the way for the United States and the PRC to begin to move toward the collaboration which Moscow feared.

THE INDOCHINA CRISIS AND THE STRATEGIC TRIANGLE

Both of these trends passed a landmark in 1978. Moscow's effort to expand its presence in the Third World at the expense of U.S. and Chinese interests now registered a major gain in Indochina. The United States and the PRC meanwhile established full diplomatic relations under circumstances that at the time appeared to presage the development of closer security cooperation against the Soviet Union.

In November 1978, the USSR established treaty ties with Vietnam, directed against China, that made possible the subsequent Vietnamese conquest of Cambodia and the consolidation of Vietnamese domination over Indochina. In taking this step, the Soviets probably initially miscalculated the likelihood of a Chinese military response and somewhat underestimated the risks inherent in their security commitment to Hanoi. During the subsequent Chinese three-week invasion of Vietnam, the Soviets helped Hanoi with logistics, intelligence, and rhetoric. But the Soviets displayed a caution regarding commitments to military action that reflected their reluctance to become engaged in possibly open-ended hostilities with Beijing, their hope that this would prove

unnecessary, their indecision about what to do if worse came to worst, and their uncertainty about the American attitude in the event of such hostilities.

In the wake of the Chinese withdrawal, however, the Soviets obtained from Vietnam gradually expanding use of naval and air facilities in Indochina as a quid pro quo for the promised Soviet deterrent. The Soviet sense of a vested interest in retaining access to these facilities is probably growing with the passage of time, and with it, the possibility of Soviet involvement in the event of a new Vietnamese clash with China.

THE NEW SOVIET MILITARY POSTURE SINCE 1978

By the time the Indochina crisis took place, the Soviet leaders had begun to make major changes in their military posture in the Far East. By early 1978, the Soviets had decided to improve the size, equipment, organization, deployment pattern, and rapid mobilization potential of their forces in Asia. Since then, they have taken steps

- o To establish a high command for the Far East theater of operations, imposing a single focus on the tasks of opposing China, Japan, and U.S. forces in the Far East;
- o To carry out a large-scale modernization of Far East military hardware, in parallel with similar modernization efforts elsewhere in the armed forces;
- o To activate additional, low-category divisions facing China;
- o To augment what the Chinese have regarded as the demonstrative and threatening deployment of forces in Mongolia;

- o To begin a new deployment of forces in the disputed southern Kuriles, intended to intimidate Japan;
- o To accelerate naval and air deployments to the Far East directed against Japan and U.S. forces in the area;
- o To make more visible to China and Japan the threat of mass destruction by deploying the SS-20 IRBM and the Backfire bomber to the Far East.

NEW MOTIVES FOR THE BUILDUP

These steps reflected the emergence of new Soviet motives for the Far East buildup, superimposed on the old motive of inhibiting the Chinese from challenging the Soviet version of the Sino-Soviet frontier. Three new considerations were particularly important.

1. The Soviets sought to ensure that Soviet military capabilities in the Far East remained adequate against any combination of Soviet adversaries, and particularly in the event of the development of Sino-U.S.-Japanese military collaboration.

2. The Soviets also sought to ensure, through the threat constantly posed on China's northern borders, that the PRC was dissuaded from undertaking effective military action to counter initiatives by Soviet clients on the PRC's southern border. This function of the Soviet buildup, which first came into effect during the 1971 India-Pakistan War, has been more fully displayed since the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

3. In addition, the Soviets have sought to create in the Soviet Far East a platform to assist in the future exploitation of opportunities for further geopolitical advance in South and Southwest

Asia. In view of the weakening of the U.S. position in Southwest Asia since the fall of the Shah and the Soviet advance into Afghanistan, the Far East has taken on new significance in the worldwide Soviet contest with the United States as the essential base for future Soviet naval deployments southward toward the Indian Ocean. At the same time, Soviet planes and ships dispatched to the Far East not only challenge the Japanese and American position in the area, but assist Soviet prospects in Southwest Asia by exerting pressure on American military resource choices between the Pacific and Southwest Asian theaters.

THE PERMANENCE OF THE FAR EAST BUILDUP

The Soviets are thus now driven by so many mutually reinforcing reasons to continue strengthening their position in the Far East as to make it unlikely that they will soon stop. Enormous inducements would be required to halt, much less reverse, this momentum. The Soviets appear to be holding out to the PRC the possibility of some eventual troop withdrawals, and given a sufficiently conciliatory Chinese stance over a protracted period, token Soviet concessions of this kind could in time be made. Major drawdowns, however, still seem improbable.

Meanwhile, the Soviets appear to have grown pessimistic that in time of war they would be able to use much of their Far Eastern ground forces to reinforce their position in the west, as they did in World War II. They seem to believe that they must shape their permanent force posture to allow for the possibility, however unlikely, that they might have to fight the PRC at some stage in a war with the United States, wherever such a war began.

The Soviets apparently believe that even if this worst case did not materialize, and China remained aloof from such a struggle, very large force deployments would still be required to deter the PRC and ensure its continued neutrality.

In addition, Soviet analysts also appear to assume that the Soviet Far East would be far more vulnerable to China than heretofore in the aftermath of a devastating and exhausting Soviet clash with the United States. They must therefore also guard against this final alternative. The establishment of the new Soviet high command in the Far East reflects all these considerations.

RECENT MODIFICATIONS IN THE TRIANGLE

These Soviet calculations do not yet appear to have been significantly altered by recent changes in the tone of Sino-Soviet and Sino-U.S. dealings. In 1982, the PRC agreed to a considerable increase in economic, technical, and cultural contacts with the USSR, while continuing to oppose and attack Soviet policy, particularly in areas near China's borders. Through the summer of 1982 Beijing persisted in deferring Soviet proposals for a resumption of border talks or negotiations for a fundamental improvement of relations. The Chinese continued to insist on Soviet cessation of all "hegemonic" behavior around China's periphery as a precondition for such an improvement. This meant, specifically, Soviet consent to a preliminary, unilateral Soviet withdrawal from all disputed territory on the Sino-Soviet border; Soviet reduction of forces east of the Urals to the level of Khrushchev's day; Soviet evacuation of Afghanistan; and Soviet withdrawal of their support and military presence from Vietnam. These

demands, which reflect incompatible geopolitical interests, have thus far imposed firm limits on the prospects for improvement.

Meanwhile, the growth in the Sino-U.S. relationship, in vigorous progress since 1978, has been halted since 1981, largely because of new prominence given to the Taiwan issue by both sides. As a result, Beijing in 1981 and 1982 moved increasingly to a public posture of criticism of both the United States and the Soviet Union. The geopolitical realities, however, remained asymmetrical. The PRC continued to maintain economic and other relations with the United States that were qualitatively different from those with the USSR; and Moscow, and not Washington, continued to develop a strategic threat to Chinese interests on the northern, southern, and western borders of the PRC. Despite the new coolness in the Sino-U.S. relationship, the security interests of the PRC and the United States remained to some extent mutually dependent.

THREE ALTERNATIVES FOR THE 1980S

If Sino-U.S. Relations Do Not Change

It is conceivable, although not probable, that the impasse in the Sino-U.S. relationship that began in 1981 will stretch on largely unchanged over the next few years, and that meanwhile the tone of bilateral relations will neither significantly improve nor greatly worsen. In that case, the Soviets will be left with a somewhat ambiguous situation in the triangle. The United States and the PRC under these circumstances would be likely to continue parallel policies and some cooperation in resisting Soviet use of force or backing for the use of force by others in areas around China's periphery--such as

Afghanistan or Indochina. In areas remote from China, divergence between Chinese and American policy will probably continue or even grow.

Existing bilateral cooperation in matters such as intelligence might well continue, but other forms of cooperation that would imply a closer military relationship would not materialize. There would be no transfer of U.S. weapons to the PRC, and despite what would likely be important Chinese military improvements, Chinese firepower would probably continue gradually to fall further behind the firepower available to Soviet forces along the Sino-Soviet border. But despite the continued Soviet sense of Chinese vulnerability, and despite the very limited nature of the Sino-U.S. security relationship under this scenario, the Soviets in any new crisis with the PRC would probably continue to find their risk calculations complicated to some degree by questions about the U.S. reaction.

From the standpoint of U.S. defense planning, it is likely that in a major U.S.-Soviet confrontation in other theaters, such as Europe and the Persian Gulf, the Soviets would remain concerned enough about the Chinese posture during and after the confrontation to maintain their military posture in the Far East essentially intact. In the event of a sizable U.S. naval deployment from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, however, the Soviet Pacific Fleet, as in the past, would dispatch important units to follow.

If Sino-U.S. Relations Drastically Deteriorate

A different set of consequences would follow in the 1980s if Sino-American relations drastically decline from the present level. In this scenario, an exacerbation of bilateral differences over Taiwan would bring all remaining diplomatic and security cooperation to an end,

so that even well-established intelligence cooperation would be halted. In this event, more intimate forms of military cooperation would of course be ruled out, the level of diplomatic representation might well be reduced, and the Chinese relationship with the United States might become virtually as cold as that with the USSR. In practical terms, however, the Soviet Union would continue to represent a grave threat to the Chinese state, and the United States would not.

The Soviets would attempt to exploit the changed situation against both the United States and the PRC. In dealings with Washington, Moscow would suggest that the Sino-U.S. split might soon be followed by Sino-Soviet rapprochement, that the world balance of power was changing, and that a more conciliatory U.S. posture in ongoing negotiations was now appropriate. To audiences both in Western Europe and in the Third World, the Soviets would stress that the Sino-American break was new evidence of America's increasing isolation on the world scene and a sign of a changing "correlation of forces" to which others should accommodate.

In dealings with the PRC, the Soviets would of course expand on the efforts they have already made to improve relations. However, they would probably continue to find it difficult to offer China more than minimal concessions in response to the far-reaching Chinese demands for Soviet withdrawals from the Chinese border, Siberia, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. The decisive issue would therefore remain the question of Chinese willingness to abandon those demands. Even under conditions of Chinese isolation from the United States, it appears somewhat unlikely that the PRC would permit a fundamental improvement in relations while the Soviets continued military activities on the Chinese periphery that represented severe challenges to Chinese national interests.

Nevertheless, it is conceivable that changing circumstances could eventually modify the Chinese view.

Given continued Chinese recalcitrance, the Soviets would be likely to seek to exploit the PRC's increased vulnerability. Bullying threats against the PRC, in the manner used in the past, would be likely to reappear on suitable occasions. If a major crisis evolved with an isolated yet hostile China during the coming decade, the Soviets would be somewhat more likely than they are today to commit themselves to an early military response.

Under this scenario, the Soviets would see some immediate improvement in their strategic position in Asia, but they would probably consider this to be limited so long as China remained hostile. The Soviet leaders would now be relieved of their fears of eventual Sino-U.S.-Japanese security collaboration against them. But while gratified at this, the Soviets would see little change in the other important reasons for their Far East buildup. Among other things, the Soviets would see an unreduced need to maintain military pressure on Beijing to inhibit PRC behavior on both the Soviet and Vietnamese borders. For these reasons, even a major Sino-U.S. estrangement, if unaccompanied by other major changes, would be unlikely to induce the Soviets to end the buildup. The Far East theater command structure would certainly not be abandoned. Moscow's treatment of its Far East deployments in the event of a major U.S.-Soviet confrontation elsewhere would probably not differ greatly from what would be expected under the first scenario.

On the other hand, more profound consequences would follow if, contrary to expectations, an isolated PRC under Soviet pressure did make

major concessions to the Soviet Union in the aftermath of a Sino-U.S. split. A major improvement in Sino-Soviet relations would specifically require, at a minimum, both a formal settlement of Chinese claims regarding the Sino-Soviet border and a Sino-Soviet resolution of the Indochina question. A Chinese change of these proportions, which is possible although not probable, might well significantly affect Soviet calculations regarding both their peacetime military needs in the Far East and their requirements for wartime contingencies. This would indeed make a difference in the world balance of power, and would profoundly complicate U.S. defense planning for Europe and Southwest Asia.

If Sino-U.S. Relations Are Radically Strengthened

The other side of the coin for the Soviet Union would be a revitalization and radical strengthening of the Sino-American security relationship. Such a change in the 1980s would presuppose a lasting resolution of the impasse over Taiwan. In addition, a change of this magnitude would probably come about only if some new Soviet action intervened in the next few years to influence both Beijing and Washington to see a gravely increased threat to their interests, necessitating in response a major revision of security relationships.

In this event, there would be a substantial flow of conventional weapons technology from the United States to the PRC. These transfers would probably still be far from enough to enable the PRC to mount a credible offensive threat against the USSR. But they would at least slow, and possibly even halt the further growth of the large existing Soviet conventional firepower advantage. There would also be much closer interchange and coordination on security matters between the PRC

and the United States, including some contingency planning against a variety of eventualities.

The Soviets would interpret such a change as a significant worsening of their security position in the Far East. Soviet ability to intimidate the PRC, while not eliminated, would decline. The Soviets would foresee some increase in the risks and costs of Sino-Soviet hostilities because of improved Chinese military capabilities. More important, however, would be the heightened risk they would see arising from even a modestly increased chance of conflict with the United States as a result of hostilities with China. They would, of course, be highly resentful of this change.

It is unlikely, however, that the Soviets would take rash and drastic action in response to the kind of Sino-American security cooperation postulated, since such cooperation would neither enlarge Chinese nuclear attack capabilities against the USSR nor create a meaningful Chinese offensive conventional threat to the Soviet Far East. It is possible that the Soviets would respond with some increase in the rate of Far East reinforcements or modernization. To the degree that they felt obliged to supply them, increased military manpower inputs to the Far East theater would intensify Soviet difficulties in allocating increasingly scarce manpower resources in the 1980s, and sharpen the competition between the needs of other military theaters and the demands of the Soviet economy. On the political side, the Soviets would do their utmost to exploit the difficulties that such a strengthening of Sino-U.S. security ties might create for the United States in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in West Europe, or in India.

Although such a major change in the Sino-U.S. relationship in the 1980s would probably come about only if some new Soviet action intensified perception of a Soviet threat, the chance of such a Soviet venture--for example, in Iran or Pakistan--will probably be governed largely by local circumstances and regional military risks, and not by the potential effects on the Sino-Soviet-U.S. triangle. The Soviet leaders do not appear to wish to allow their behavior toward third parties to be constrained by the possible consequences for Sino-U.S. relations. They are determined in any case to avoid giving their antagonists leverage over their decisions. This pattern is unlikely to change.

A SELECTIVE CHRONOLOGY OF SECURITY ASPECTS OF THE
SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT[1]

- Late 1949: Chinese Communists arrive in Xinjiang; Soviet sponsored "Eastern Turkestan Republic" collapses.
- February 1950: Treaty of Alliance and other agreements signed by Stalin with new Chinese Communist regime. In one agreement, Stalin promises to evacuate Port Arthur by end of 1952.
- September 1952: Deadline for evacuation of Port Arthur suspended because of the Korean War.
- October 1954: Post-Stalin Soviet leadership agrees to evacuate Port Arthur and Dairen.
- October 1957: Soviets sign secret agreement with PRC to supply "new technology for national defense."
- Spring 1958: Soviets request (1) long-range submarine radio in China and (2) joint fleet to be dominated by Soviet Union and to use Chinese ports. Chinese refuse.
- June 1959: Soviets give final explicit refusal to supply atomic weapon to China.
- June 1960: Soviets withdraw economic and technical advisers from China, including those concerned with military industry.
- 1963: Chinese publicly raise Sino-Soviet border issue.
- April-September 1964: First series of Sino-Soviet border negotiations is held and fails.
- October 1964: Khrushchev falls.

First Chinese atomic explosion.
- 1965: Soviets begin force buildup against China.
- Spring 1965: Soviets demand "air corridor" over China to Vietnam and base in Yunnan for support of Hanoi. Chinese refuse.
- 1966-1967: Cultural Revolution at height; People's Liberation Army

[1] This is not a chronology of the evolution of the Sino-Soviet dispute, but only of those developments that appear particularly relevant to the strategic relationship between the two powers. Many political and economic events of major importance are thus of necessity omitted.

(PLA) increasingly involved; PLA combat capability declines.

- February 1967: Chinese siege of Soviet Embassy in Beijing.
- August 1967: Chen Zaidao "mutiny" in Wuhan Military District; in aftermath, Mao retreats from effort to force PLA to participate in Cultural Revolution struggles.
- August 1968: Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; Mao resolves to show he is not intimidated.
- Winter 1968-1969: Aggressive Soviet and Chinese border patrolling leads to escalation of nonshooting border incidents.
- Spring-Summer 1969: Chinese stage shooting ambush at Chen Bao/Damansky Island; Soviets stage larger ambush two weeks later. Scattered border clashes multiply in east and west sections of frontier. Soviets approach United States about possible attack on China. Soviets make conventional and nuclear threats against China.
- September 1969: Zhou-Kosygin meeting at Beijing airport brings end to Chinese competitive border patrolling.
- October 1969: New Sino-Soviet border talks begin and immediately enter prolonged stalemate.
- Spring-Summer 1971: "Ping-pong diplomacy" and first Kissinger trip to China.
- Summer-Fall 1971: Internal Chinese leadership crisis, climaxed by unsuccessful attempt by Defense Minister Lin Biao to assassinate Mao, and death of Lin in plane crash in Mongolia while attempting to flee to USSR.
- Fall 1971: India, with Soviet backing, defeats Pakistan in war over East Pakistan despite opposition from PRC and United States.
- United States offers private pledge to help China against USSR should need arise out of India-Pakistan fighting.
- 1972: U.S. summit meetings in Beijing and Moscow.
- U.S.-PRC Shanghai Communiqué. U.S. detente with Soviet Union.
- 1972-1976: Slowdown in Soviet buildup against China.
- 1975: U.S. defeat in Vietnam, expulsion from Indochina. Vietnam soon begins tilt toward Soviet Union, away from PRC.
- 1975: Soviets begin adventures in Africa. Decay of Soviet-U.S. relations.

September 1976: Mao dies; his heirs reject Soviet overtures.

1978: New stage in Soviet Far East buildup begins, leading to new Far East theater command.

April 1978: Brezhnev and Ustinov visit Far East forces. Communist coup is staged in Afghanistan.

August 1978: Sino-Japanese treaty signed with "anti-hegemony" clause opposed by USSR.

Summer-Fall 1978: Rapid further deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Vietnam enters the Council for Economic and Mutual Assistance (CEMA).

November 1978: Soviets sign treaty with Vietnam.

December 1978: Soviets sign treaty with Communist regime in Afghanistan.

December 1978-January 1979: Vietnam attacks and overruns Cambodia.

December 1978-January 1979: PRC and United States complete normalization of diplomatic relations. Deng Xiaoping visits United States.

February-March 1979: PRC attacks Vietnam to "teach a lesson." With great difficulty and delay and heavy casualties, PRC reaches territorial goals and then withdraws.

Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia unaffected by Chinese attack.

Soviets display great caution during Chinese attack. Soviets hold large exercise in Siberia after Chinese withdrawal. Soviet military presence in Vietnam begins to grow after Chinese withdrawal.

April 1979: PRC announces intention to abrogate long-dormant Sino-Soviet treaty, but proposes general talks with Soviets on the Sino-Soviet relationship.

Fall 1979: General Sino-Soviet talks begin. Chinese demand fundamental Soviet geopolitical concessions, including withdrawal from Vietnam and great reduction of forces east of Urals.

December 1979: Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Sharp further deterioration of Soviet-U.S. relations. Chinese suspend general Sino-Soviet talks indefinitely.

1981-1982:

Marked cooling of Sino-U.S. relations over Taiwan issue. Chinese allow some cosmetic improvement in Sino-Soviet relations (exchange of economic, cultural, sports delegations).

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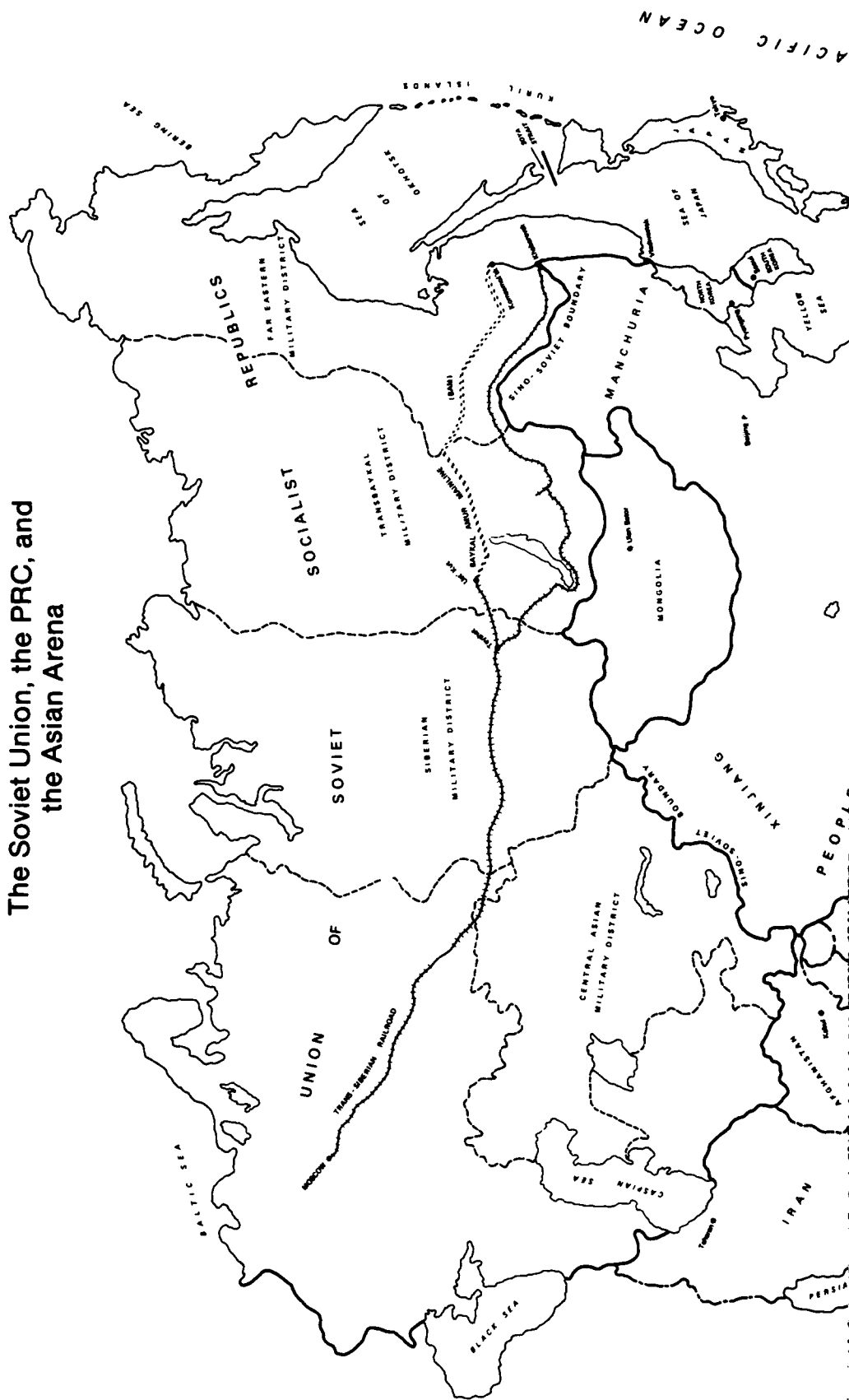
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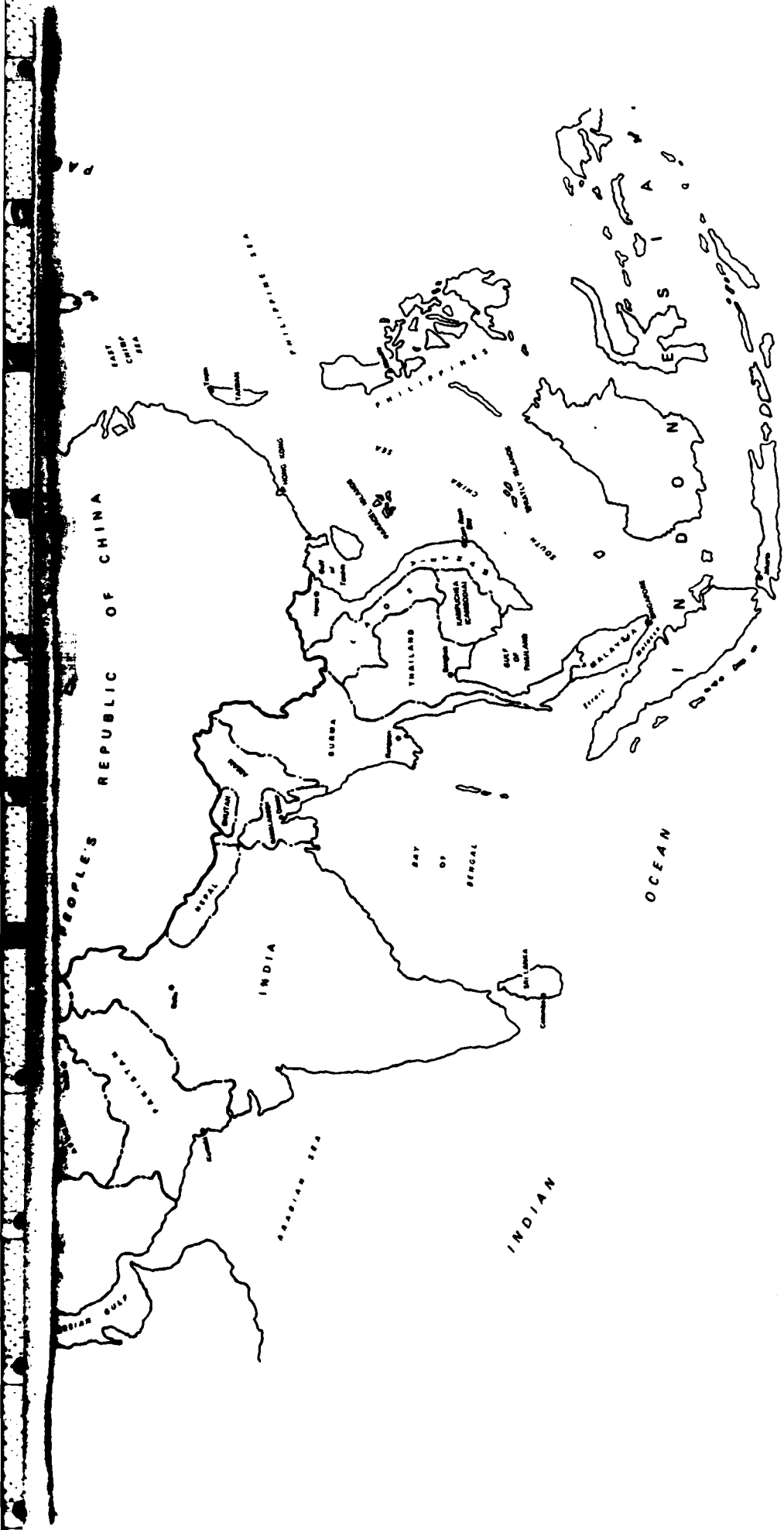
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Plate

**The Soviet Union, the PRC, and
the Asian Arena**

The Soviet Union, the PRC, and the Asian Arena





I. INTRODUCTION

One of the central judgments of this report is that the Soviets have powerful reasons to continue to maintain very large military forces in Siberia, Central Asia, Mongolia, and the Far East, and probably have little hope that they will be able to draw on Far East ground forces for significant reinforcements in the West in the event of hostilities in Europe. These Soviet intentions and assumptions are likely to be revised only in the event of very large unilateral Chinese concessions to the Soviet Union that are possible but improbable even in the event of a drastic break between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States.

The Soviets have come to see a permanent need for their Far East military posture only as the result of a long evolution in their thinking. Their sense of what their interests require has gradually emerged from many years of interaction with the PRC and the United States, culminating in changes in the Asian strategic environment over the last five years that have both heightened the dangers for the Soviet Union and expanded Soviet opportunities.

This report seeks to reconstruct the factors that over the years have cumulatively brought the Soviets to their present mind-set. The roots of Soviet strategic concern about the PRC are found, in the first place, in the Soviet discovery that they would never be able to harness China to serve Soviet interests. The paper therefore begins by briefly considering the residual effects today of the first Soviet experience with the PRC, when Stalin and his immediate successors sought and failed

to secure China as a strategic platform for the deployment of Soviet military power against the United States.

Next, the study reviews the circumstances under which the Soviets began the post-Khrushchev buildup that is still in process. It examines the initial Soviet motives for the buildup, the Chinese response, and Soviet reactions to that response.

The paper then traces the effects on Soviet attitudes created by the prolonged Sino-Soviet border crisis of 1969 and the impetus which that crisis gave to Sino-American rapprochement. It discusses the lessons Moscow derived from the circumstances surrounding the India-Pakistan war of 1971, when the Soviets for the first time found they could draw a geopolitical dividend from their military pressure against China. It reviews the new factors that have caused the Soviets to give increased emphasis to the buildup in the Far East since the late 1970s, dramatized by the initiation of a high command for the Far East theater of operations. It examines the nature of Sino-Soviet-U.S. interaction during the Indochina crisis of 1978-79, and the ongoing effects of that crisis on Soviet geopolitical ambitions and incentives to take risks in the Far East.

Against this background, the report draws conclusions about the implications for the future of the Soviet buildup. The paper concludes by weighing the likely consequences for Soviet risk-taking of three alternatives for the future of Sino-U.S. relations.

II. THE LOST SOVIET STRATEGIC BASE IN CHINA

Soviet expectations today about the prospects for Sino-U.S. military collaboration against the Soviet Union are conditioned by the past. The Soviets remember, in the first place, their own historic failure, between 1950 and 1958, to secure China as a strategic platform for the deployment of military power against the United States. The consequences of this defeat for Soviet strategic aspirations are not likely to be forgotten by Moscow's military planners.

The Soviet failure took place in two stages. During the first five years after the advent of Mao's regime in 1949, the Soviet Union was compelled to surrender piecemeal--and from the Chinese viewpoint, grudgingly--the important strategic advantages in China which it possessed at the outset of that regime. Over the next five years, the USSR found itself unable to realize another set of concrete and far-reaching military advantages it sought to obtain in their place. The transformation of China from supposed ally to implacable enemy thus immediately followed--and in effect, continued--a large and forced contraction of Soviet strategic ambitions in the Far East that was already completed by the end of the 1950s, and from which the Soviets are only now recovering.

What, specifically, were these aspirations, and these defeats?

XINJIANG

In late 1949, Stalin was obliged to acquiesce in the new Chinese regime's easy assertion of control in Xinjiang at the expense of the direct Russian local influence which Moscow had previously asserted

either through intrigue with local autonomous Chinese warlords or through encouragement of minority nationality revolt.[1] The preservation of such special Soviet influence in Xinjiang had been made possible for a number of years by the weakness and fragmentation of the Chinese state. With the arrival of the Chinese Communists in Beijing determined to extend their authority wherever possible to the old imperial frontiers, a Russian sphere of influence in Xinjiang could only have been maintained by force, a course which Stalin clearly considered inexpedient for what seemed at the time to be an obvious and overriding reason--the desire to establish an alliance with the PRC.[2] At one stroke, the Soviet Union thus lost for good a historic opportunity to consolidate control of the Chinese portion of Central Asia long contested by Russian regimes. To the present day, Soviet perception of Chinese behavior toward them along the western border--and of Chinese vulnerabilities in Xinjiang--continue to be influenced by this sense of a lost advantage.[3]

[1] Soon after a long-time Soviet understanding with the warlord Sheng Shicai collapsed in 1942-43, a Kazak and Uigur rebellion in the province orchestrated by the USSR produced a separatist "Eastern Turkestan Republic" which Moscow nurtured until the Chinese Communists arrived in 1949.

[2] One source has claimed, however, that in the last months before the Chinese Communist arrival in 1949, the Soviets did in fact make a feeble and abortive effort through intrigue to head off the loss of their special influence in Xinjiang by vainly urging the local Chinese Nationalist military commander to declare the province independent. (Allen S. Whiting and General Sheng Shih-t'sai, Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot?, East Lansing, Mich., 1958, pp. 117-118.)

[3] The action taken by the Soviet consulate in Urumqi in the spring of 1962 to encourage a large-scale exodus of Uigurs from Xinjiang to the Soviet Union reflected this Soviet conviction that experience had shown the region to be a point of vulnerability for Beijing. So, too, did the Chinese response, which included the permanent closure of the Urumqi consulate.

During the 1969 Sino-Soviet border crisis, the Soviets had the Xinjiang exile Zunun Taipov write an article describing the "national liberation movement" in Xinjiang in the 1940s, as well as the alleged oppression of Xinjiang by the PRC. (New Times, No. 27, June 1969.) Soviet propaganda

PORT ARTHUR AND DAIREN

At the opposite side of China Stalin did not give up so easily. Simultaneous with the abandonment of his assets in Xinjiang, he made a more vigorous effort to retain control of the more important strategic gains held by his troops since their conquest of Manchuria from the Japanese at the close of World War II. Most important were the naval ports of Dairen and Port Arthur and the Manchurian railway net, which had long been objects of Tsarist ambition. The new Chinese Communist regime of Mao Zedong, dependent upon Stalin for military support and economic assistance, temporarily agreed in 1950 to the continued Soviet use of the two ice-free naval ports on the Yellow Sea. The U.S. government at the time took a grave view of the strategic advantages conferred on the Soviet Union by these port facilities.[4] In retrospect, this was a high point in Soviet geopolitical advance in the Far East which the USSR did not approach again until Soviet ships appeared at Cam Ranh Bay three decades later.

Four years later, in 1954, a weaker and divided Soviet regime led by Stalin's heirs, seeking to appease Mao in the hopes of preserving and strengthening their alliance with him, agreed to surrender Port Arthur

broadcasts to Xinjiang then were particularly active in seeking to resurrect memories of the East Turkestan Republic.

[4] In January 1950, vigorous denunciation of Soviet behavior in Manchuria by Secretary of State Acheson was supported by "background material" released by the State Department that referred to Soviet efforts at "strategic domination" of the area, and emphasized that Soviet troops occupied "Dairen and the Port Arthur naval base area." The former American Consul in Mukden, Angus Ward, publicly commented at this time that the Soviet objective "was the same imperialist expansion towards ice-free ports that had occupied Russian dreams in the past two generations." (The New York Times, January 26 and 15, 1950; cited in Max Beloff, Soviet Policy in the Far East 1944-1951, Oxford University Press, London, 1953.)

and Dairen and the other extraterritorial advantages Stalin had extracted from Beijing.[5] To the same end, and apparently hoping, despite misgivings, that Soviet strategic interests could be advanced by strengthening China, the post-Stalin leadership took steps to lay the foundations of Chinese military industry. This policy culminated in October 1957 in the signing of a secret agreement to supply China with "new technology for national defense."[6]

THE SOVIET NAVAL DEMANDS OF 1958

During the year after the signing of the secret agreement, however, Soviet leaders became concerned by the growing evidence that Chinese strategic interests and foreign policy goals could diverge from their own, and sought, in effect, to hedge their bet on China. They returned to Stalin's policy of seeking to extract specific extraterritorial military rights from the Chinese Communist regime, hoping on the one hand to compensate themselves for the risks they were taking in building Chinese military strength, and on the other hand to create a mechanism to help control Chinese use of that strength. Implicit in these demands--although perhaps never made explicit--was the suggestion that the further supply of Soviet advanced military technology to China (such as an atomic explosive device, as well as surface-to-surface missiles additional to the SS-1 and SS-2, already in the pipeline to China)[7]

[5] In February 1950, the Soviets in a formal agreement with the new Chinese Communist government had promised to evacuate Port Arthur by the end of 1952, but the advent of the Korean War subsequently gave Stalin justification to suspend this promise and leave his troops in place. The death of Stalin and the end of the Korean War in 1953 brought the issue to a head.

[6] PRC government statement of September 1, 1963, released by New China News Agency (NCNA) August 31, 1963. Red Flag-People's Daily Joint editorial, September 6, 1963.

[7] On Soviet early shipment of short-range missiles to China, see Harold C. Hinton, "Communist China's Military Posture," Current

might be contingent upon China's demonstrating its tractability and trustworthiness by consenting to the Soviet proposals.[8]

The two of these proposals that have been confirmed demanded:

1. The establishment of a Soviet long-range radio facility on Chinese soil, for submarine communication, evidently intended to facilitate Soviet operations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
2. The establishment of a joint Sino-Soviet fleet, using Chinese ports, and with a high command dominated by the Soviet Union.[9]

In addition to their obvious intention to constrain Chinese behavior, these 1958 proposals testified, among other things, to the continued chagrin of Soviet military leaders at the setback to Soviet operations occasioned by the surrender of the Manchurian ports.[10]

More generally, they suggested a Soviet search for a framework,

History, September 1962, p. 153; Alice L. Hsieh, "The Sino-Soviet Nuclear Dialogue," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, January 1965. Hsieh states that Khrushchev remarked in June 1959 to Averell Harriman that the USSR had shipped "numerous" rockets to China.

[8] In placing this choice before the PRC, the Soviets were also seeking, neither for the first nor the last time, to split the Chinese leadership. This was one of the many occasions over the years when the Soviets sought to suborn the People's Liberation Army (PLA)--in this case, Defense Minister Peng Dehuai in particular. See Raymond L. Garthoff, "Sino-Soviet Military Relations, 1945-66," in Raymond L. Garthoff (ed.), Sino-Soviet Military Relations, Praeger, New York, 1966, pp. 87-93.

[9] Mainichi (Tokyo), January 26, 1972. The two proposals mentioned were cited by a Mainichi correspondent as part of a list of 11 Soviet historical "crimes" described to a visiting Japanese trade union delegation in Beijing by representatives of the China-Japan Friendship Association. This information appears authentic and probably reliable. Several other Chinese sources have alluded to the Soviet joint fleet proposal; two are cited below.

Garthoff, p. 90, asserted in 1966 that the Soviets may also have demanded "more closely integrated air defenses and possibly also . . . deployments of offensive Soviet nuclear weapons systems." There has been no confirmation of either of these suggestions, and the latter, at least, seems improbable.

[10] In July 1982, PRC Foreign Minister Huang Hua told a foreign interviewer that the Soviet naval demands which the Chinese had rejected in 1958 amounted to "demands to establish naval bases along the Chinese

analogous to the Warsaw Pact in East Europe, under which the Chinese land mass might be made to serve broad Soviet strategic interests. The Chinese leadership interpreted the Soviet proposals in just this sense, declared that they were intended to "place China under Soviet military control," and rejected them.[11]

This rejection, in turn, clearly gave an important nudge to the subsequent downward slide of the Sino-Soviet security relationship. It surely contributed to the Soviet inclination to stall on response to Chinese requests for the atomic weapon, and to the final explicit Soviet refusal to supply that weapon in June 1959.[12] This refusal, in its turn, was one of the major contributing factors in the rapid aggravation of the dispute that led to the abrupt cancellation of all Soviet economic and military assistance to China in the summer of 1960, and the gradual draining of all content from the alliance and substitution of a hostile relationship in the years to follow.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOVIET EXPERIENCE FOR THE UNITED STATES

From today's perspective, however, at least some Soviets may see a moderately encouraging corollary in this dismal record of the collapse of the Soviet alliance with the PRC. In view of Soviet concern since

coast." (ABC, Madrid, July 2, 1982.) It should be remembered that the Manchurian ports had been relinquished only four years earlier.

[11]Mainichi (Tokyo), January 26, 1972; Mainichi, March 9, 1967. In 1979, a Chinese official commented: "In 1958, the Soviet Union approached China with the demand that China and the Soviet Union establish a joint fleet with the ownership shared equally between them. The reasons they gave were that Soviet naval ports were vulnerable to blockade while China's coastline was very long and had excellent conditions. Actually, their aim was to control the coastline of China." (Liu Keming, "Soviet Foreign Policy: On Sino-Soviet Relations," paper prepared for the Sino-American Conference on International Relations and the Soviet Union, November 8-11, 1979, Washington, D.C.)

[12]Red Flag-People's Daily, joint editorial, September 6, 1963.

the late 1970s over the possibility of Sino-American strategic cooperation against the Soviet Union, some Soviets appear to find an element of reassurance in the Soviet experience with China--reassurance that the forces of Chinese nationalism are too strong to make it likely that the United States will succeed where the USSR failed.

There is no doubt that there is some merit in this view. Both the Soviet experiences of the 1950s and the 1960s and the more recent U.S. difficulties with Beijing over Taiwan have confirmed the force of the PRC's nationalism, its resentment of what it regards as affronts to its sovereignty, and its wariness about trading political concessions for security.

On the other hand, such a sanguine Soviet view ignores the degree to which the Soviets were themselves responsible for the demise of their association with Beijing because of their crude and repeated efforts to dominate China. It understates the possibility that the United States, lacking either the capability or the desire to dominate the PRC, may find it more feasible than the Soviets did to eventually reconcile important differences with Beijing. Moreover, such a view ignores another consideration explored later in this report: the extent to which Soviet permanent strategic ambitions in Asia give the United States and the PRC an ongoing common security interest in cooperation.

Finally, it should be noted that Soviet military planners have not drawn any such comforting conclusions from past Soviet disappointments with China. On the contrary, as later sections of this report will show, they continue to take measures against the eventuality of enhanced Sino-U.S. security cooperation.

SEQUEL: THE 1965 DEMAND FOR AN AIR CORRIDOR AND A YUNNAN BASE

Looking back over the panorama of failure in the Soviet effort to harness China to Soviet strategic purposes in the 1950s, the Soviet leaders also remember an ironic sequel. In the spring of 1965, the Soviet leadership, responding to the rise of the Sino-Soviet border issue and what it saw as mounting Chinese hostility, began its force buildup against China, for reasons which will be considered below. But at the same time and in this unlikely context, Moscow raised the issue of Soviet security cooperation with China for the last time. Moscow now launched new proposals that were in some respects reminiscent of the demands of 1958, and that the USSR very well knew would be regarded by Beijing as a fresh attack on Chinese sovereignty.

In an exchange of initially secret letters that both sides subsequently circulated widely, the Soviets demanded: (a) that China grant the USSR an "air corridor" through which to mount a massive Soviet airlift to Vietnam to succor the North Vietnamese in the face of U.S. attack, and (b) that China grant the USSR a base in Yunnan adjacent to Vietnam, to be totally under Soviet control, at which hundreds of Soviet military personnel would be stationed to support the Vietnamese war effort.[13] The Chinese of course rejected these proposals; the Soviets, playing to the international communist audience, had almost certainly anticipated such a rejection, and were evidently seeking to dramatize to Hanoi, and others, Chinese selfishness and stubbornness.[14]

[13] The Observer (London), November 14, 1965; also Mainichi, January 26, 1972.

[14] The Soviets in 1965 were probably also seeking to exploit any available fissures within the Chinese leadership on the subject of whether to cooperate with the Soviet Union in aiding Vietnam. It is

By that very token, this episode was significant as the first occasion in which Soviets in their political maneuvers against the Chinese sought to turn to their own benefit Beijing's sensitivity about security issues touching on Chinese sovereignty. In subsequent years, the Soviets were to move beyond this into a long-term effort to extract specific security advantages for themselves from China's problems with some of its other neighbors. In 1971, this persistent Soviet line of endeavor helped produce the Soviet-Indian treaty; in 1978, the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty; and in 1979, it at last furnished concrete benefits for Soviet military planners in the facilities placed at Soviet disposal by Vietnam.

In broad perspective, one lasting result of the strategic losses the Soviet Union suffered over the years in China was thus to intensify the Soviet search for substitutes elsewhere around China's periphery. Another result, of course, was to accelerate the development of Sino-Soviet rivalry and mutual hostility and eventually to propel China toward consideration of strategic cooperation with the United States.

Along this road, in the mid-60s the Soviet Union began a buildup of Soviet forces confronting China that is still in progress.

clear that there were differences of opinion in Beijing on this point. But it is equally clear that the Soviets were not sanguine about the result. They were abundantly aware of Mao's adamant hostility and they were convinced that he dominated Chinese policy toward the USSR. Equally important, they were aware that the specific military proposals they had now advanced had a flavor of extraterritoriality that made them particularly unlikely candidates to win Politburo acceptance.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF THE SOVIET ANTI-CHINA FORCE BUILDUP

Three points can be made at the outset about the general characteristics of the Soviet military buildup against China.

The first is that this process, in progress since about 1965, has obvious elements of long-term planning and continuity. The allocation of material and human resources required has clearly been an important factor in the five-year planning cycles of the Ministry of Defense and of the ministries supervised by the Military-Industrial Commission. The buildup has cumulatively absorbed a large portion of the total increase in the Soviet ground forces during the Brezhnev years. The Soviets have surely had to make broad estimates of these requirements, forecast long in advance, to be correlated with manpower induction and retention policies and with an anticipated range of other military manpower and economic labor force needs.

The effects on the materiel side are even more powerful. It is reasonable to suppose, for example, that over the years targeting of China has consumed an increasing fraction of the total mix of the evolving Soviet IRBM and ICBM capability and has therefore entered increasingly into the production plans for these products. Certainly such items as the concrete required for military airfields or large-scale defense fortifications in the Far East and the planes and weapons that will ultimately be used at such installations must be planned for long in advance in the context of total expected Soviet requirements. Even the planned production capacity of future plants intended to produce a wide variety of such items must be affected to some degree by

the projected requirements of the Chinese front. Planning for the Chinese task, like the other major Soviet military missions, must therefore reverberate forward for many years into the future, inevitably affecting a complex network of resource allocation decisions.

Second, the buildup, despite the factors making for long-term continuity, has not been evenly paced or uniform, particularly regarding additions of manpower. It seems fair to say, however, that any overview of the buildup must take into account not only the pace of the increase in troops assigned to the anti-China mission, but also changes in the pace of fortification, construction, and replacement of equipment, as well as changes in the rate of formation of new skeletal divisions that could be used for rapid mobilization.[1] Use of any one of these three criteria in the absence of the others is likely to produce a misleading view of the Soviet overall effort and intentions. With this caveat in mind, we may conclude that, broadly speaking, the buildup has gone through four phases to date:

- o An initial period of gradual expansion after 1965 from the base of some 17 to 20 divisions inherited from the Khrushchev era;
- o A period of some acceleration in all three categories--manpower, units, and equipment--for a few years around the turn of the decade;

[1]I have used the term "skeletal division," rather than more customary and precise terminology such as "Category III division," to emphasize the independent significance of a Soviet decision to activate or deploy a given unit, regardless of the level at which it is initially manned. The deployment of a new division at a very low level of manning adds much less to the immediate Soviet threat than to the Soviet mobilization potential, yet is a political and strategic act in its own right that should be separately weighed as a measure of Soviet plans and expectations.

- o A period of much slower growth--and gradual improvement of the equipment and manpower levels of understrength units--between the early 1970s and 1977:
- o Some movement off this near-plateau in the period since 1978, characterized by modest increases in total combat manpower in combination with significant reorganization and some forward deployment, increases in the number of new skeletal divisions deployed, and marked acceleration in the pace of modernization of equipment and stockpiling of materials.[2]

In the process, the number of Soviet divisions of all strength levels appear to have mounted from roughly 20 at the outset of the buildup to about 40 early in the 1970s to roughly 50 in 1982. A disproportionate share of the manpower--the bulk of the ground combat troops present today--was apparently in place by the early 1970s.[3]

Third, the mix of factors motivating the Soviets to conduct the buildup has not been static, but has changed considerably over time with

[2]Japan Defense Agency, Defense of Japan, 1980, pp. 49-58; Defense of Japan, 1981, pp. 76-86. In a notable article in the summer of 1981, Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov placed heavy emphasis on the need for lightly manned peacetime units capable of extremely rapid war-time mobilization. He therefore underlined the need for predisposition of "planned reserves of personnel and equipment." This discussion was accompanied by stress on the need for new forms of military organization, particularly the new "larger-scale form," the theater of military operations. We shall later consider the significance of the formation of a high command for such a theater in the Far East in 1978-79 (Kommunist, No. 10, July 1981, pp. 80-91).

[3]More detailed estimates of divisional totals at different periods of the Soviet buildup will not be found in this report because they would convey a misleading sense of precision. The best and most commonly used published sources, the estimates supplied annually by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, while useful as to trends, do not appear to be an adequate guide to the pace of small incremental changes.

changing circumstances. The fundamental conclusions the Soviets drew from their dealings with Mao through 1964 and 1965 were thus supplemented by a whole series of factors in turn: their experience in the 1969 border crisis; their reaction to Sino-U.S. rapprochement in 1971-72; their evaluation of Chinese behavior during the 1971 India-Pakistan war; their perception of Chinese behavior on the Sino-Soviet border during the 1970s; their discovery of a Soviet geopolitical interest late in the decade in deterring China from action against Vietnam; their decision to take steps to offset the worst-case possibility of eventual Sino-U.S.-Japanese military collusion against them; and finally, their perception of the heightened importance of their strength in the Far East as a result of both changes in SLBM technology and the new opportunities for power projection from the Far East that have emerged in Southeast Asia and beyond.

As each of these factors successively began to affect Soviet thinking about the force levels needed in Asia, there was an effect upon Soviet judgments about the level of risk that was acceptable in dealing with the Chinese. The discussion that follows will attempt to track the evolution of Soviet assumptions on both points.

IV. THE EVOLUTION OF THE BUILDUP TO 1969

FACTORS IN THE THINKING OF THE BREZHNEV REGIME

The decision the new Brezhnev regime appears to have made, not long after taking power, to begin a military buildup against China reflected the interaction of three factors.

First, the post-Khrushchev Politburo reached an overall conclusion that Chinese hostility--at least while Mao remained--was likely to be implacable and enduring. This Soviet assessment was strongly reinforced by the collapse of the hopes the new regime had harbored that it could reach a modus vivendi with Mao as a result of the removal of Khrushchev. The failure of the exploratory talks on the overall relationship held by Zhou Enlai with the Soviet leaders in Moscow in November 1964 and by Kosygin with the Chinese leaders in Beijing in February 1965 made it clear to the Brezhnev leadership that there was little chance that Mao would abandon his intransigence toward them. This conclusion was to be further reinforced a year later when Mao in early 1966 broke--for good--party-to-party relations with them, and thereafter ceased reference to the Sino-Soviet treaty or the Sino-Soviet alliance.

Second, superimposed on all this was the specific fact that Mao had publicly challenged the legitimacy of the Sino-Soviet frontiers, and just before Khrushchev's ouster had ostentatiously reiterated this challenge in such a fashion as to torpedo the first Sino-Soviet negotiations about the border. In the wake of the Chinese initial public disclosure in 1963 that they had an unsettled account with the Soviet Union over Tsarist and Soviet land grabs at Chinese expense,

negotiations about the eastern border had begun in early 1964. These talks were initially stalemated by Soviet unwillingness to admit--as the Chinese demanded--that the existing border treaties were "unequal." The talks were then terminated by the Soviets after publication of a Mao interview that made a frontal assault on the Soviet right to their holdings in the Far East.[1]

Khrushchev and his successors reacted to these Mao statements with fervent vows that the Soviet Union would take all measures necessary to ensure "the inviolability of its frontiers,"[2] and Khrushchev, a month before his removal, added a threat that the USSR would use "all means at its disposal" to defend its borders, including the "up-to-date weapons of annihilation" it possessed.[3] This was apparently the first Soviet nuclear threat made against China. But the Chinese furnished an effective reply to this threat in mid-October 1964, on the day after Khrushchev was removed, when they exploded their first nuclear device.

Thus Khrushchev's successors had hammered home to them from the start a clear view of the dimensions of the problem they had inherited. They apparently responded with an early decision to begin a long-term

[1]This interview, given to Japanese journalists on July 10, 1964, was published in Sekai Shuho (Tokyo) on August 11. Mao said:

About 100 years ago, all areas east of Lake Baykal, including Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and the Kamchatka Peninsula, were incorporated into Soviet territory. We have not as yet settled these matters with the Soviet Union.

In addition, Mao told the Japanese that the southern Kuriles held by Moscow "must be returned to Japan," and observed that in general the Soviet Union had occupied "too much territory" all around its periphery--in Europe after World War II as well as in Asia. He cited Poland and Finland, as well as Japan, China, and Mongolia, as members of the list of Soviet victims.

[2]Pravda, 15 September 1964 and 21 October 1964.

[3]Pravda, 15 September 1964.

strengthening of their military position in the Far East, both to ensure the "inviolability" of the frontiers they claimed and more broadly to create the means to exert pressure on Mao.

Third, Brezhnev, unlike Khrushchev, was predisposed to furnish the new resources deemed necessary to deal with the problem. While it is not impossible that Khrushchev himself, had he remained, would have felt compelled to begin a large-scale buildup against China, he had certainly indicated throughout his tenure in office a very strong reluctance--to put it mildly--to divert to the ground forces the large additional sums that were ultimately required by the anti-China effort.[4] The considerable increase in the size of the ground forces carried out over the ensuing years--in large part consumed by the buildup against China--took place in the context of an all-round expansion of all categories of Soviet military strength. This "all-azimuth," "all-service" approach to military spending, into which the new anti-China program fitted so neatly, was of course at first facilitated for Brezhnev by the rapid growth of the Soviet economic pie in the late 1960s and the increasing availability of resources for the military as a whole. Beyond that, however, it reflected a conviction that the expansion of all branches of Soviet military power would pay dividends for the expansion of the Soviet Union's geopolitical position in the world in relation to all its adversaries. One result was the militarization of the Soviet conflict with China.

[4] This is not intended to imply any generalizations about Khrushchev's attitudes on military spending as a whole--a more complex subject--but merely to note that he demonstrated, through both his successful and his unsuccessful efforts to cut the ground forces, a consistent inclination to give them a lower priority in resource allocation than did his successors.

THE PRINCIPAL ARENAS

The Strategic Significance of Mongolia

One of the first steps was to secure a Soviet military position in Mongolia. Brezhnev paid a visit to Ulan Bator in mid-January 1966, and soon thereafter a new mutual assistance treaty was signed. Pravda then informed Beijing that the USSR and Mongolia would henceforth "jointly" take all necessary measures, "including military measures," to defend the territory of both states.[5]

This decision served multiple purposes. On the political level, the establishment of a permanent Soviet military presence in Mongolia served to guarantee, once and for all, both the continued loyalty of the existing pro-Soviet Tsedenbal regime and its continued hold on power in the face of any future conceivable Chinese intrigues within the Mongolian party. While the first consideration was not a major concern (since Tsedenbal's loyalty was not seriously questioned), the second was of some long-term importance in view of the clashes within the Mongolian leadership some years earlier that had produced the purge of some Politburo members considered to lean toward Beijing. In short, like the Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, the Soviet forces in Mongolia would not only serve to confront and to intimidate the antagonist across the border, but would also ensure the stability of the local Soviet political base.[6] There would thus be no chance that political circumstances could ever force the Soviets to give up this strategic

[5]Pravda, January 19, 1966.

[6]On this ground alone--and apart from all purely military considerations--the Soviets are extremely unlikely ever to satisfy the Chinese demand that they remove their forces from Mongolia.

asset, as they had forced the USSR to abandon its conquests at Port Arthur and Dairen 12 years earlier.

At the same time, the introduction of Soviet forces into Mongolia served immediately to secure the flank of the Transbaykal Military District (MD). These deployments strengthened the Soviet capability both to defend and--eventually--to attack at the northern Mongolian trijunction with the USSR and Manchuria, focal point of a historic attack corridor between Russia and China and the scene of well-remembered Soviet battles with both Chinese warlords and the Japanese at different periods before World War II and again with the Japanese in the last month of that war.

Beyond this, Mongolia served not only as a strategic buffer against China, but as a platform from which--particularly after Soviet tank forces had been stationed there--the Soviets could menace the north China plain and the approaches to Beijing. The potential vulnerability of the Chinese capital to such an armored assault from Mongolia was over the years to become a matter of increasing political importance, and eventually, a focus of demonstrative Soviet efforts to intimidate the PRC.[7]

[7]Liu Keming, Director of the Chinese Institute of Soviet Studies, wrote in 1979: "The Soviet Union has dispatched large numbers of troops to station in Mongolia, and most of them are stationed in areas bordering China. The Soviet Union has built military bases including missile bases in Mongolia and has staged frequent joint Soviet-Mongolian military maneuvers there with China as the imaginary target of attack. Many of the Soviet Union's leading military personnel often go to Mongolia to carry out military activities against China. The stationing of Soviet troops in Mongolia constitutes an important component part of the Soviet Union's entire anti-China military strategic deployment." ("Soviet Foreign Policy: On Sino-Soviet Relations," a paper prepared for the Sino-American Conference on International Relations and the Soviet Union, Washington, D.C., November 8-11, 1979.) This rhetoric conveys a strong sense of a feeling of special vulnerability to the Mongolia deployments.

The Strategic Roles of the Far East and Transbaykal MDs

The buildup in Mongolia proceeded in general synchronization with the strengthening of the Soviet position in the two easternmost military districts of the Soviet Union--the Far East and the Transbaykal MDs. The preponderant weight of Soviet efforts was thus consistently placed on the eastern portion of the Sino-Soviet frontier, because of the extraordinary concentration there of vulnerable assets on both sides. On the Soviet side, these included the isolated salient of the Soviet Far East (Primorskiy Kray), with its cities, population, and naval facilities; the Trans-Siberian railway precariously close to the Amur and Ussuri, the two border rivers; and the many contested islands in the rivers themselves, which because of geography sometimes had considerable strategic importance in Soviet eyes.[8] Almost equally important to the Soviets was the fact that directly opposite, on the Chinese side, was the primary Chinese industrial base of Manchuria, also a vulnerable salient, and for those reasons a prize worth menacing from the Soviet side--but for that very reason defended by large Chinese armies whose presence further justified Soviet deployments opposite them.

The Far East Military District had always been the site of the largest Soviet concentration of force in Asia even in Khrushchev's time, when its primary mission was to defend Vladivostok and to confront the

[8] Particularly notable was the large island at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri which the Chinese call Heixiazi. (See map at the end of Sec. IV.) Although this island lies on the Chinese side of the main channel, it is immediately adjacent to Khabarovsk and the Trans-Siberian Railroad, which passes through the city. Khabarovsk would be highly vulnerable to fire from hostile forces on Heixiazi. The Soviets have therefore been determined to ensure at all costs that the Chinese never occupy this island, whatever the legal equities. (See H. Gelman, "Outlook for Sino-Soviet Relations," Problems of Communism, September-December 1979.)

United States and Japan. With the advent of the anti-China buildup, this district retained its primacy as its strength increased under Brezhnev, but became progressively more dual-purpose and dual-oriented, looking west and south as well as east. The mission of the Transbaykal Military District, on the other hand, now became unambiguously anti-Chinese. Although remaining second in the local allocation of forces, this district has probably gained the most from the buildup in comparison with its strength before the advent of Brezhnev and the anti-China task.

Partly because of the asymmetrical effects of geography upon the military needs of the opposing sides, and partly because of the Chinese perception of their firepower inferiority, the main Soviet forces have been deployed over the years much closer to the eastern river frontiers than have their Chinese opposition on the other side.[9] The disposition of Soviet strength, regardless of Soviet intentions, has therefore always implied a threat to China.

The Xinjiang Sideshow

Further to the west, the confrontation along the border between Soviet Central Asia and Xinjiang was to remain very much of a sideshow, with somewhat less at stake for both contestants, and therefore smaller forces on both sides.[10] Both sides knew that because of the

[9]The New York Times, July 25, 1972; Harry Harding, "The Evolution of Chinese Military Policy," in Frank B. Horton, Anthony C. Rogerson, and Edward L. Warner (eds.) Comparative Defense Policy, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1974, pp. 228, 229; Japanese Defense Agency, Defense of Japan, 1981, p. 96.

[10]In addition, in contrast to the eastern sector, some parts of the western Sino-Soviet border are so mountainous that neither side can maintain a sizable military presence close to the border.

significant Soviet local firepower advantage and the even greater logistical advantage, Xinjiang was highly vulnerable to the Soviet Union in the event of large-scale fighting and might be regarded by China as temporarily expendable in a protracted struggle. Despite its less vital military importance, this sector of the Sino-Soviet border confrontation remained a political tinderbox--because of the history we have noted of past Soviet efforts to dominate Urumqi, because of past (and continuing) Soviet attempts to incite local minorities against Beijing, because of the existence of several small, actively disputed points along the border, and because of a large Chinese claim in the Soviet-controlled Pamir mountains adjoining Afghanistan.

SOVIET PERCEPTION OF THE CHINESE RESPONSE

Against this background, the Soviet buildup in the first few years of the Brezhnev regime encountered what is likely to have seemed to Moscow a paradoxical response from the Chinese side: increased pugnacity combined with reduced capability.

The PLA's Difficulties

In terms of absolute military capabilities, the Chinese threat in the initial years of the buildup did not significantly increase, and in relative terms may well have declined as Soviet reinforcements arrived in the Far East and new Soviet weapons were deployed, and as much of Chinese military attention was necessarily diverted because of U.S. participation in the war in Vietnam.

Moreover, these were the years of the Cultural Revolution. Although Chinese military spending for R&D apparently was maintained at

a high level under the aegis of Defense Minister Lin Biao, accomplishments by R&D are likely to have suffered considerably because of the frenetic atmosphere engendered by the Cultural Revolution even in military research organizations. Procurement of new military equipment decreased at first for the same reason, although it then rose rapidly after 1968.[11]

More important, the combat proficiency of the PLA as a whole is likely to have suffered considerably. The extreme politization of the armed forces, the denigration of professionalism, the purges of successive Chiefs of Staff, the diversion of many military cadres to civilian administrative and political tasks previously performed by the shattered party machinery and, above all, the pressure on the armed forces to take sides in the factional struggles waged by rival Red Guard organizations throughout the country all surely had an adverse effect on military morale and capabilities.

The task of the Urumqi Military Region facing Soviet Central Asia, for example, was not made easier when early in the Cultural Revolution the long-time Region Commander, Wang Enmao, was personally baited in his Urumqi headquarters by Red Guards dispatched and protected by political leaders in Beijing who eventually went on to purge him.[12] Although some effort was made thereafter to protect those military commands immediately adjacent to the Soviet Union from this kind of thing, the tumult went on elsewhere, and it was not until the fall of 1967, after

[11] Chinese Defense Spending, 1965-79, National Foreign Assessment Center, SR 80-10091, Washington, D.C., July 1980.

[12] "Wang En-mao--Newly Appointed First Secretary of the CCP Kirin Provincial Committee," Issues and Studies (Taipei), Vol. 13, No. 5, May 1977, pp. 92-93.

the Wuhan Incident,[13] that Mao pulled back and gradually ceased to allow the armed forces to be tormented in this fashion.

The Chinese Posture Toward Moscow

What must have been difficult for Soviet political and military leaders to understand was that it was precisely in this period, when political chaos was attenuating the PLA'S capabilities, that Chinese baiting of the Soviet Union multiplied. In early February 1967, the Soviet Embassy in Beijing was besieged and isolated for more than a week. Pravda accused the Chinese of seeking to force a break in diplomatic relations, and such a break may in fact have been averted only as a result of the intervention of Zhou Enlai, who brought about an end to the siege. On several occasions during the next two years, Soviet and East European diplomats were manhandled in Beijing and Soviet merchant ships detained in Chinese ports. Meanwhile, along the Sino-Soviet border, all this was supplemented by occasional Red Guard demonstrative forays against Soviet border guards.[14]

More important, the Chinese leadership appears to have gradually authorized Lin Biao in 1966 and 1967, amid the chaos of the Cultural

[13]The nadir for the PLA was reached in July 1967 when Chen Zaidao, the Commander of the powerful Wuhan Military Region, the locus of much of China's ground force strategic reserves, engineered the arrest of emissaries from Beijing who had attempted to compel him to support a Red Guard faction hostile to himself and to public order. A crisis was avoided when Zhou Enlai made a hurried trip to Wuhan to release the Beijing representatives and bring Chen back to Beijing. A Chinese naval flotilla was meanwhile dispatched up the Yangtse from Shanghai to Wuhan to maintain order, no doubt to the bemusement of any Soviet naval intelligence collector who may have been watching offshore. There is some evidence that airborne units were also brought in to suppress the "mutiny." There was apparently considerable violence. ("Struggle Against Ch'en Tsai-tao at Enlarged Meeting of CCP Central Committee," Survey of China Mainland Press, No. 4095, January 9, 1968, pp. 18-19. Also see Thomas W. Robinson, The Wuhan Incident: Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution, The Rand Corporation, P-4511, December 1970.)

[14]The first detailed account of such Red Guard actions on the frozen Ussuri was provided in Pravda, July 19, 1967.

Revolution, to make more of an effort, through border guard patrolling, to assert an occasional presence on islands in the Amur and Ussuri border rivers that were claimed by China, often with a strong legal case, but that the Soviets had long regarded as their own. While both sides enforced a rule against shooting until March 1969, border guard shouting, shoving, and clubbing confrontations evidently grew gradually more frequent during the long winters of 1966-67, 1967-68, and 1968-69, when the frozen rivers made mutual access to disputed islands easier for both foot patrols and military vehicles.[15] Such confrontations became particularly common at places, such as the island of Chen Bao/Damansky in the Ussuri, that were normally uninhabited and that were close to the Chinese shore, and where the Chinese therefore felt, with some justification, that they had a particularly strong claim.[16]

THE PREPARATION OF THE SOVIET POPULATION

The Brezhnev regime reacted both to what it saw as the dangerous and unpredictable events inside China and to the new Chinese tendency to challenge the status quo with more active border patrolling.

Following a decision reported to have been taken at a December 1966 plenum of the Soviet Central Committee,[17] the Soviet regime began to

[15] Pravda, March 12, 1969; People's Daily, March 15, 1969.

[16] The Soviets in these years claimed that the border treaties gave them title to the entire width of the Manchurian border rivers to the Chinese shore, including all the hundreds of islands in the rivers, no matter how close they were to China; and their border guard patrolling sought to enforce this title. Although the Soviets knew that their legal case for this was weak, and they were willing to give up some of the islands on the Chinese side of the main river channels as part of a negotiated settlement, they were unwilling to give up many others which they considered of economic or strategic importance--and they were reluctant to give up anything without an overall settlement and Chinese abandonment of all other claims.

[17] Belgrade Domestic Service, December 12, 1966 (FBIS Daily Report, December 13, 1966, No. 6, 7); Belgrade Domestic Service, January 5, 1967 (FBIS Daily Report, January 6, 1967, No. 3, 4); A. A. Gromyko,

prepare the Soviet population for a long-term confrontation with China, and also for the militarization of the Sino-Soviet struggle. The members of the Politburo fanned out across the country in January 1967 to provide an extraordinary set of briefings about the China threat to local party organizations,[18] and thereafter the Soviet and East European press and radio began to allude more frequently both to the border encounters with the Chinese and to the Soviet military preparations. Particularly striking was one Czech broadcast in 1967 that asserted that the Chinese problem had already had a major effect on Soviet doctrine:

It is no secret that the Soviet army has taken a whole series of measures in case Beijing should decide to widen the so far occasional border provocations into a wider armed conflict. . . . I consider well-founded the opinion that some changes in Soviet military doctrine, above all the stress on the importance of conventional weapons and of land forces . . . and, to a certain extent, also some re-equipping of the Soviet air force . . . are the expression of a serious assessment of the potential danger which has developed in China.[19]

This statement surely oversimplified the causes of the changing Soviet military priorities to which it alluded. Nevertheless, it is significant as an unusually explicit public acknowledgment that a major revision of the weight given the ground forces by Khrushchev was in fact under way, and that long-term problems with China had something to do with this change.

Vneshnyaya Politika Sovetskaya Soyuz (The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union), Moscow, 1978, p. 111.

[18]The substance of the leaders' reports to the regional party meetings remained unpublicized, but the fact of the briefings was reported and the surrounding propaganda context made it amply clear that the subject was China.

[19]Prague radio, August 24, 1967.

THE EFFECTS OF THE SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA ON CHINESE BEHAVIOR

Against the background of the growing Soviet buildup in the Far East, the Soviet use of force against Czechoslovakia in August 1968 had a galvanizing effect on the Chinese. By demonstrating the lengths to which the Soviets were prepared to go, it dramatized the danger to Chinese security and thereby enabled Zhou Enlai to persuade Mao that a continuation of the Cultural Revolution chaos was a luxury China could no longer afford. At the same time, this event appears to have convinced the Chinese that they had to show the Soviet Union that they were not cowed by what had happened to the Czechs and would not be bullied. In addition to condemning the Soviet invasion and exhorting the PLA to strengthen border defense work, the Chinese now began calling attention to Soviet practices along the border--such as overflight violations--about which they had previously been silent.

On September 16, 1968, Beijing for the first time publicized a note of protest to the Soviet Foreign Ministry about Soviet border overflights, asserting that there had been an extraordinary increase in such violations between August 9 and 28.[20] It is credible that Soviet military reconnaissance may indeed have made frequent shallow violations of Chinese airspace in the past--reflecting a calculated and intimidating contempt for the capabilities of Chinese air defense--and it also is likely that there was a precautionary increase in such reconnaissance against China during the period surrounding the Czech invasion. By publicizing this phenomenon, the Chinese were also making an implicit admission of their weakness--their inability or

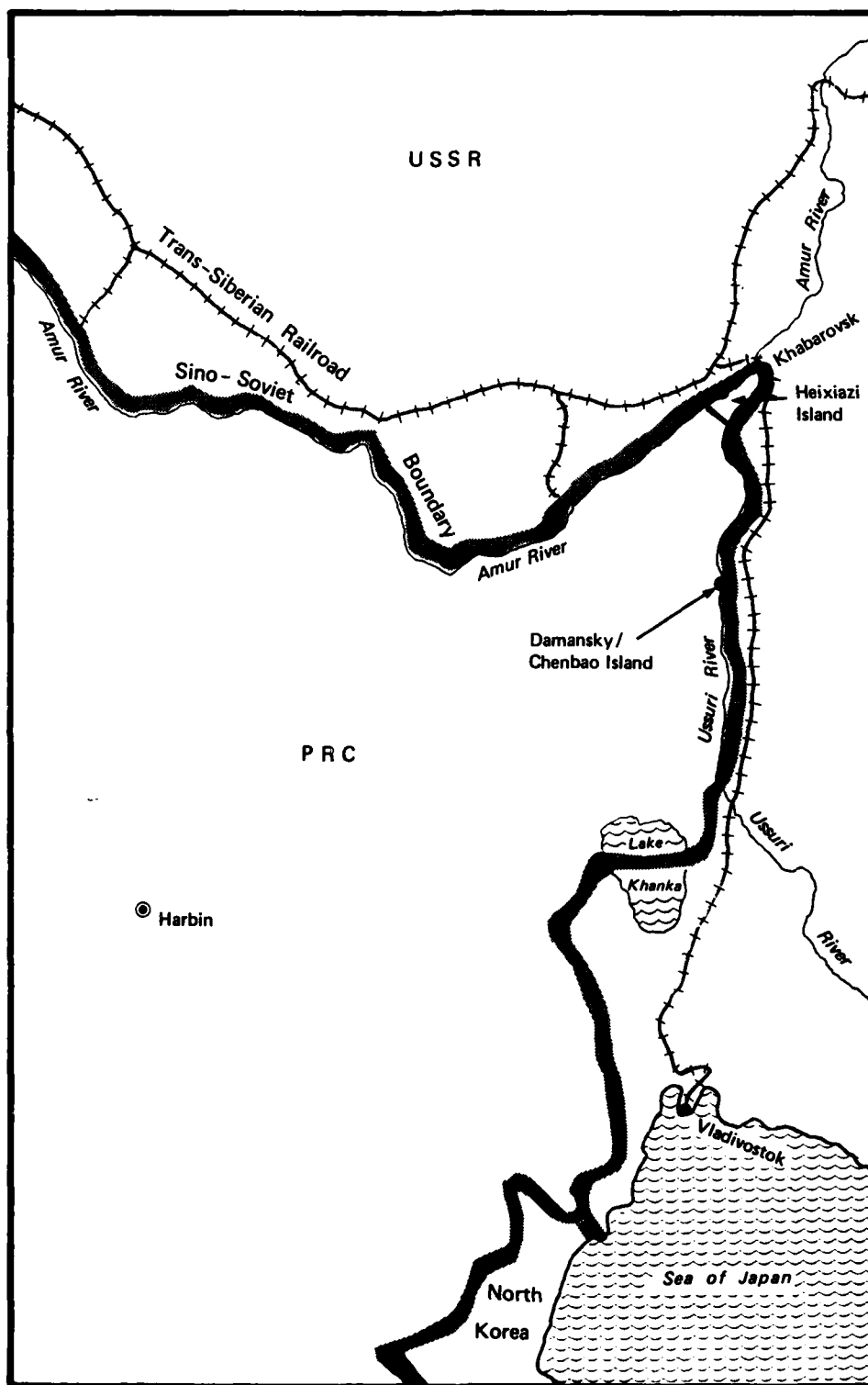
[20]New China News Agency (NCNA), September 16, 1968.

unwillingness to take risks to put an end to such alleged violations.[21] On September 29, responding to this implication, Zhou Enlai again asserted that overflights were taking place "more frequently," alluded to Soviet "massive troop concentrations" on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian borders, and announced that Soviet "military threats and war blackmail" would have "no effect whatever" on China.

It seems likely that the Chinese leadership, determined to show that they were not intimidated, overcompensated with more vigorous attempts to assert through border guard patrolling their title to those particular islands in the border rivers where they felt their right to be undeniable. This applied, above all, to Chen Bao/Damansky, where, as earlier noted, the Chinese legal case was especially strong. The Soviets, for their part, confident in their superior strength, were resolved to give not an inch. The result was a gradual escalation in border guard confrontations, from arguing, to shoving, to club-swinging,[22] until the Chinese at last staged a shooting ambush on Chen Bao in early March 1969.

[21] There is no evidence in the public record that Chinese interceptors have ever attempted to down a Soviet reconnaissance plane. The Chinese are well aware of their qualitative inferiority in the air, and they may have believed that such an incident would be particularly likely to escalate. (Partly for somewhat analogous reasons, they did not employ air power during the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese war.) Chinese and Soviet statements both suggest that the military helicopter seized by the Chinese in 1974 was apparently captured only after it had spontaneously become disabled and was obliged to land in Chinese territory.

[22] Pravda, March 12, 1969.



Heixiazi and Damansky/Chenbao Islands

V. THE 1969 BORDER CRISIS

Soviet behavior during the protracted crisis with China over the Sino-Soviet border between March and September 1969 was conditioned by a conflict between two fundamental and opposing Soviet national interests. On the one hand, the Soviet leaders saw an urgent need to find a way--if possible, without entering a war with China--to make the Chinese desist from efforts to enforce their claims on Soviet-held or Soviet-claimed territory. On the other hand, they wished to minimize the advantages over the Soviet Union which the Soviets saw the United States as seeking to extract from the Soviet dilemma. During the crisis period, the urgent first need took precedence over the second. The discussion to follow will suggest that despite the Soviet anxiety to avoid enhancing U.S. leverage over the Soviet Union, before the crisis was over, the Soviets in fact thought it necessary to try to involve the United States, if only as expert witness to the seriousness of their threats against China.

THE GENESIS OF THE CRISIS

In the first place, the Soviets were astonished and greatly disturbed at what they regarded as the incomprehensible temerity of the Chinese in accepting--and in some cases, provoking--armed combat with a greatly superior opponent. This was particularly striking in the way the sequence of clashes began.

As already suggested, the firefights of 1969 appear to have broken out partly as a result of expansion of an earlier pattern of more active patrolling by both sides at the many disputed points customarily

controlled (if not always inhabited) by the Soviets but claimed by the Chinese. More directly, however, the train of firefights was put in motion because the Chinese, in the first key clash on March 2, set a precedent by escalating to the shooting level border guard encounters that had been increasing over the past three years but that previously had been confined to shouting, shoving, or blows.

Because the Chinese, having set an ambush, had much the better of this first shooting incident on Chenbao/Damansky island, the Soviet leadership felt obliged to reply in kind at the next highest level. Thirteen days later, a much larger Soviet ambush at the same spot, undoubtedly approved by the Politburo and coordinated in advance in Moscow, produced the required bloody Chinese defeat. The Soviet attitude, like that of the Chinese toward Vietnam a decade later, was one of seeking to "teach a lesson" to the weaker party.

This event did not, however, put an end to competitive Chinese patrolling in the disputed areas. Under the circumstances--that is, given the extent of the blood that had just been spilled, and given Moscow's propensity in these circumstances to "lean forward" to defend all the territory it considered Soviet more vigorously and with more aggressive patrolling--further incidents were virtually inevitable. A long series of larger or smaller firefights thus ensued in March, April, May, June, and August, alternating between the disputed islands in the Amur and Ussuri border rivers, to the east, and the Xinjiang-Central Asian border, to the west. While firing in some of these clashes appears to have been initiated by the Soviets, it is likely that the Chinese began the shooting in other cases.[1]

[1] Henry Kissinger disagrees; he argues (White House Years, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1979, p. 177), apparently solely on the basis of the Soviet logistical advantage along the Central Asian-Xinjiang border,

The net result, for many in Moscow, was to confirm the impression of Chinese irrationality and unpredictability that had been fed by Chinese conduct over the preceding three years. Such incidents as the siege of the Soviet embassy in Beijing in February 1967, the periodic physical harassment of Soviet-bloc diplomats in Beijing, and the repeated detention of Soviet ships and crews in Chinese ports now, in retrospect, seemed to many Soviets to have been precursors of Chinese adoption of a policy of incessant small-scale armed challenge at innumerable points along the border. More than one Soviet was heard to remark, in the summer of 1969, that the Chinese now seemed to wish to "bleed us to death" through unending nibbling at the frontier. Frustrated over their inability to "read" the Chinese, the Soviets could not comprehend why it was so difficult to force the Chinese to inhibit their behavior. Much of the alarm in 1969 that seemed to some Soviets in later years to have been exaggerated and unnecessary derived from this sense of dangerous uncertainty; if Chinese behavior was open-ended, then anything was possible.

What disturbed the Soviets more than anything else were the implications of the apparent Chinese willingness to act in disregard of the great Soviet advantage in both conventional firepower and nuclear striking force. Themselves inclined to give decisive importance to their ability to calculate forces and risks accurately, the Soviets are likely to have seen in the risky behavior of the Chinese a contention

that the Soviets were initiating all the shooting. This appears to me to oversimplify the picture. In a situation in which aggressive border patrolling was being conducted by both sides, against a background of repeated recent firefights, the initiation of new firing is likely to have varied from incident to incident with changing tactical circumstances.

that the Soviets were bluffing. If the Chinese were not irrational, the only credible interpretation of their conduct was that they felt the apparent risks were illusory. The Chinese seemed to be implying that despite loud talk, the Soviet leaders were not, in fact, willing to accept the possible consequences of a war with China, and that Chinese local actions in defense of what Beijing saw as Chinese rights therefore need not be constrained by the threat of escalation.[2] There was enough of an element of truth in this to be particularly infuriating to Moscow; the Soviet leadership was indeed reluctant to become involved in a large-scale war with China.

THE SEARCH FOR CREDIBILITY REGARDING ESCALATION

A central aim of Soviet policy from March through September 1969 was therefore to create credibility for the threat to escalate, through a combination of means.

Behavior in the Border Encounters

First, the Soviets provided evidence of credibility through practice, by demonstrating readiness to use somewhat higher levels of force when reinforcements were deemed necessary in border encounters. The most notable such occasion was the second clash on Damansky/Chenbao on March 15 when the Soviets apparently employed considerably greater strength than the Chinese, including heavy use of artillery and rockets.[3]

[2]As already suggested, from Mao's perspective it was especially important, precisely because of the genuine Chinese alarm over the implications of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia the year before, to demonstrate that China was not cowed by the Czechoslovak precedent and could not be bullied.

[3]The Soviets bragged of the "mighty rain of artillery" employed against the PRC units (Pravda, March 17, 1969), and the Chinese complained of the Soviet use of artillery fire (Chinese Foreign Ministry Note of March 5, 1969, NCNA, March 15, 1969).

In most of the subsequent patrol encounters in 1969, the Soviet forces appear to have been larger than those of the PRC.

Advertisement of Reinforcements

Second, the USSR not only took steps to reinforce its dispositions facing China, but more to the political point, took measures to ensure that this reinforcement was discreetly advertised. The border clashes appear to have caused some acceleration of the pace of the Soviet buildup and of military resource transfers to Asia, although it is not clear that they materially altered the interim force goals for the buildup that were in effect before March 1969. But although the Soviets continued efforts to improve their firepower advantage over the Chinese, their more urgent need was to extract practical political leverage from the sizable advantage they already possessed. To this end, they allowed foreign visitors and journalists to observe and report on aspects of the reinforcement process, so as to multiply the political effect.[4] In addition, Soviet media during the crisis months occasionally alluded to recent Soviet military exercises in Asia; this was also somewhat unusual.[5] Moreover, the Soviets also appear to have encouraged widespread rumors that circulated after the Soviet victory in the second battle of Damansky island on March 15, erroneously contending that the

[4]A correspondent of the Japanese Asahi Shimbun, for example, was allowed to visit Khabarovsk in July, and duly reported that "military buildup was seen everywhere," and that "some 30 military trucks and field guns were seen on freight trains at Khabarovsk railway station, and MIG fighters were flying overhead." He added his impression that there had been some "mobilization" of reserve tanks and troops. (Quoted in Washington Post, July 16, 1969.) In view of the well-known Soviet attitude regarding military secrets, it is not credible that they would have permitted the visits had they not wished to encourage such reporting.

[5]See, for example, Krasnaya Zvezda, March 8, 1969.

Chinese losses in this battle had been multiplied by Soviet use of terrible and mysterious new weapons, hitherto unknown.[6] It was obviously the Soviet purpose thereby to strive to encourage exaggerated awe and respect for the Soviet firepower advantage.

Three Precedents for Large-Scale Conventional Attack

Third, the Soviets repeatedly reminded the Chinese of three past occasions when the Soviet Union had escalated to large-scale combat in the Far East.

1939. The Soviets several times during the 1969 crisis pointed to the sharp defeat inflicted upon Japanese forces in a short undeclared war fought 30 years earlier at Khalkin-Gol near the Manchurian-Soviet-Mongolian trijunction.[7]

1929. The earlier rout of local "Chinese militarists" by a specially formed Soviet army in 1929 was similarly used as an object lesson for Maoist "adventurists," notably by Col. Gen. V. F. Tolubko in a well-known article published not long after his transfer to command of the Far East Military District.[8]

[6]The Soviet agent Victor Louis later wrote: "The Soviet Union prefers using rockets to manpower. She has a variety of rockets to choose from, depending upon the terrain and other circumstances. For instance, in the case of a Chinese attempt to occupy an island, the whole surface of the island was burned together with any Chinese troops and equipment already ensconced there." (London Evening News, September 16, 1969.)

[7]This precedent was cited in a series of Pravda articles in early May that used history as testimony for the credibility of escalation and that drew the lesson that Chinese provocation would invite immediate retaliation. (Konstantin Simonov, "Thinking Out Loud," Pravda, May 3 and 4, 1969.) Pravda, on August 18, celebrating the anniversary of this 1939 victory, termed the rout of the Japanese at the Khalkin-Gol river "a warning to the Chinese adventurists."

[8]Krasnaya Zvezda, August 6, 1969. Tolubko took the occasion to emphasize that Soviet troops remained in Manchuria "for some time." This episode was recalled again in Sovetskaya Rossiya, September 19, 1969.

1945. The Soviets also brought to Chinese attention a much larger-scale Soviet attack: the Soviet conquest of Manchuria from Japan at the close of World War II. Chief of the General Staff Marshal Zakharov, in an article entitled "An Instructive Lesson," recalled the "two converging strikes" into Manchuria that overwhelmed the Japanese, and said that this "graphically testifies" to what could happen to others.[9]

The Threat of Nuclear Attack

Fourth, in addition to citing precedents for large-scale conventional attack, the Soviets sought to convince the Chinese leaders that there was a real possibility of a Soviet nuclear attack. In general, however, they approached this task in much more gingerly fashion, conveying the message primarily by innuendo, by implication, through occasional statements in non-authoritative Soviet sources--[10] and, above all, by manipulating and encouraging a crescendo of

[9] Izvestiya, September 2, 1969.

[10] The most nearly explicit such threat in the Soviet press appeared at the very outset, soon after the first Damansky/Chenbao battle, when an emotional rehash of the battle in Krasnaya Zvezda of March 8 included a statement that "the rocket troops showed at the important exercises just completed that the formidable weapons entrusted to them by the motherland for defense of the Far Eastern frontiers are in strong, reliable hands. Let any provocateurs always remember this." A week later, a broadcast in Mandarin by Moscow's Radio Peace and Progress--which purports to be unofficial--declared that "the whole world knows that the main striking force of the Soviet Armed Forces is its rocket units," and went on to emphasize that in any contest between Soviet and Chinese nuclear-missile forces, "Mao Tse-tung and his group . . . would certainly end up in utter defeat." The Soviets then apparently decided that this language was unwise, and for several months thereafter, both official and nominally unofficial Soviet media were more circumspect in allusions to the possible use of nuclear weapons. In mid-summer, the Soviet revelation that the deputy chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces had been transferred to command the Far East Military District was itself a broad hint of a connection between the two; but Tolubko's August 6 article admonishing the Chinese did not allude to rocket-nuclear forces. On August 28, however, a Pravda

Western speculation and assertions on this subject. The Soviets clearly wished here to have their cake and eat it too. They desired to avoid or minimize the negative political consequences that they believed they might incur--in world public opinion as a whole and within the Chinese elite--[11]if they were to make brutally unequivocal and authoritative threats of nuclear attack against China. To this end, they went so far as to issue repeated denials that they had any such intention.[12] At the same time, they did their utmost within the constraints described to persuade the Chinese leaders to disbelieve their formal denials. This dual campaign was ultimately successful.

The Use of the United States. To fully convince the Chinese of the reality of the risk of Soviet nuclear attack, the Soviets found it necessary to invoke the testimony of others on the credibility of their threat. First, during the summer of 1969, they apparently transmitted letters to certain Communist Parties in the West raising the possibility of a Soviet preemptive strike at Chinese nuclear installations.[13]

editorial declared that if a war with China did break out, it would involve "lethal armaments and modern means of delivery" that "would not spare a single continent," strongly implying the inevitability of the use of nuclear missiles against China in any such war.

[11]The Soviet leadership had by no means given up vague hopes of some day--perhaps after Mao's demise--finding Chinese leaders with whom it could improve relations. The Soviets therefore had the difficult and delicate job of intimidating the current leadership without permanently destroying all such hopes.

[12]For example, a week after Radio Peace and Progress called attention in its Mandarin broadcasts to the Soviet nuclear arsenal in the context of the border clashes, a Radio Moscow broadcast in English on March 21 derided "the provocative false rumor" of threatened Soviet nuclear action against China as an invention of British propaganda. On August 13, Literaturnaya Gazeta denounced Western "lies" about Soviet readiness to use nuclear weapons against China.

[13]Washington Star, August 28 and 29, 1969; Kissinger, 1979, p. 184.

Second, and probably not without certain misgivings, the Soviet Union sought to involve the United States. On August 18, a Soviet Embassy official in Washington asked a State Department official what would be the U.S. reaction to a Soviet assault on Chinese nuclear facilities. In putting this question to the United States, the Soviet leaders were most unlikely to have expected support or approval for such a step, which they had good reason to expect would not be forthcoming. Rather, the Soviets were probably hoping that the U.S. reaction to the question, even if adverse, would reach the Chinese, and would serve as independent testimony to the gravity of the Soviet menace to China. This hope was borne out when, on August 27, the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence revealed to diplomatic correspondents that the Soviet Union had been sounding out foreign Communists on the possibility of an attack on China[14] and indicated genuine concern about the matter.

Victor Louis's Last-Minute Threat. But it was not until September 16--a few days after the Beijing airport meeting between Premiers Chou and Kosygin had finally defused the crisis--that the Soviets made their most explicit and elaborate threat in the West to use nuclear weapons against China, using a technique that was intended to be both sufficiently authoritative to be completely frightening, yet disavowable. They published in the London Evening News, under the byline of their well-known agent Victor Louis,[15] a story that had

[14] Kissinger, 1979, p. 184.

[15] The Soviet attitude regarding the Western treatment of Victor Louis is two-sided. On the one hand, Moscow wishes Louis' nominal status as a simple Soviet "free-lance journalist" to be sufficiently respected to make his statements nonbinding, and also to assure him

probably been carefully vetted for Louis in the International Department of the Central Committee, and possibly drafted there. This story cites "well-informed sources in Moscow" as asserting that "Russian nuclear installations stand aimed at the Chinese nuclear facilities," that "the Soviet Union prefers using rockets to manpower" in responding to border clashes, that the USSR "has a variety of rockets to choose from," that the Soviets have a "plan to launch an air attack on Lop Nor,"[16] and that "whether or not the Soviet Union will dare to attack Lop Nor, China's nuclear center, is a question of strategy, and so the world would only learn about it afterwards." [17] These statements were apparently timed to provide impetus to Chinese agreement to enter border talks, a matter then under consideration in the wake of the Zhou-Kosygin meeting.

Although the Soviet use of Louis in September 1969 to threaten China was probably profitable for Soviet policy, we shall later consider another occasion, soon after Mao's death in 1976, when the use of Louis again for this purpose backfired on the Soviets.

continued access to Western institutions, like the London Evening News, that might feel obliged to deny him employment if he had an official Soviet title. On the other hand, Moscow also wishes Louis' actual status as an agent and spokesman for the Soviet regime to be sufficiently well recognized to lend attention and weight to his published statements.

[16]Lop Nor is well known to be a nuclear weapons test site. Louis presumably singled it out as a symbolic example familiar to the public.

[17]There has never been an official and public Soviet nuclear threat against China as explicit and brutal as this. The closest parallel was a private statement allegedly made by Brezhnev in a conversation with a Western statesman a decade later. Even if correctly reported, which is not certain, this statement was probably not intended for publication. We shall discuss this incident later in another context.

THE QUESTION OF SOVIET REAL INTENTIONS

To what degree were the Soviet leaders sincere in conveying these various threats? In the absence of direct evidence, speculation about degrees of Soviet sincerity is always highly conjectural. Some rumors have suggested, and it is not impossible, that members of the Soviet military establishment argued during 1969 that the Soviet Union should seize the occasion to take preemptive action against the PRC. This is quite uncertain, however; and in any event there seems no good reason to believe that this point of view at any time during the crisis months gained ascendancy within the Ministry of Defense, let alone within the Defense Council or the Politburo, the bodies that had the decisive say. The long-term risks of inaction may well have been considered important, given Chinese hostility and Chinese advanced weapons programs. Yet the Soviet leadership is likely to have continued to believe throughout 1969 that the risks of inaction would be greatly outweighed by the risks and costs that would flow from either out-of-the-blue nuclear assault or sudden large-scale conventional attack.

This does not mean that the Soviet leaders were confident that they would not end by taking such actions. On the contrary, since they were determined to cow the Chinese at any costs, and since they could no longer predict Chinese behavior with confidence, throughout the 1969 crisis the possibility that the situation might gradually evolve into full-scale war must have seemed to them considerable.

THE EFFECT ON BEIJING

The cumulative result of all the measures adopted in the Soviet credibility campaign was that the Chinese were, in fact, gradually intimidated. The repeated intimations of the nuclear strike threat appear to have impressed the Chinese somewhat more than the more explicit Soviet trumpeting about past large-scale invasions of China, although this may also have had some effect. The Chinese have since 1969 more than once expressed the conviction that the Soviets would be most reluctant to risk becoming bogged down in a long-term conventional land war in China, and that China would have the capability to ensure that any large-scale Soviet invasion would become such an open-ended struggle.[18] It is possible, however, that Chinese confidence that the Soviets were effectively deterred by this consideration wavered in 1969 in the face of Soviet military conduct and public statements. At the least, doubts on this score are likely to have added weight to the arguments of those--presumably led by Zhou Enlai--who successfully argued at the close of the summer that steps be taken to reduce the existing tension.

[18]An unusually pithy statement of this oft-repeated Chinese view was furnished in 1977 by Vice Premier Li Xiannian, who told the editor of a British newspaper: "Russia will get into trouble if it starts a war with China, as our territory is so vast. They know the way we would fight. We would mobilize the masses of the civilian people and get them bogged down in China. . . . Even if Russia occupied half of China, we would go on fighting. Should the Russians put one foot on Chinese territory, they would find themselves in a swamp." (The Sunday Times, London, March 27, 1977.) A year later Military Commission Vice Chairman Nie Rongzhen claimed, in addition, that the Soviets would have logistic difficulties: "If they fight in our territory, it will be a major problem for them [with their heavy reliance on armor and other vehicles] to supply large quantities of fuel in good time." (FBIS Daily Report, August 9, 1978.)

In any case, the nuclear strike threat clearly had an important effect on Chinese private calculations. From May 1969 on, Chinese pronouncements made frequent reference to Soviet "nuclear blackmail" of China, to Soviet missile deployments against China, and finally, to the possibility of Soviet surprise nuclear attack.[19] While to some extent these Chinese public statements were self-serving, intended to further blacken the Soviet image inside and outside China, they nevertheless almost certainly also reflected a genuine and increasing Chinese leadership concern. The Soviet steps taken in August to advertise in the West the possibility of such an attack appear to have added some verisimilitude to this possibility in the minds of the Chinese. One effect may therefore have been to encourage doubt about the adequacy and survivability of the Chinese nuclear deterrent, which in 1969, five years after the first Chinese nuclear explosion, did not yet include the 1500 n mi CSS-2 IRBM capable of reaching most major Soviet cities in Siberia, let alone the 3500 n mi CSS-3 limited-range ICBM, which is capable of reaching Moscow.[20]

[19]For example, PRC Government Statement, May 24, 1969 (NCNA, May 24, 1969); NCNA, June 2, 1969; NCNA, July 6, 1969; NCNA, August 1, 1969; NCNA, August 14, 1969. A Chinese slogan issued for PRC National Day on September 16 for the first time in the use of such slogans called attention to the possibility of Soviet attack on China in which nuclear weapons would be used; and a joint People's Daily-Liberation Army Daily-Red Flag anniversary editorial on September 30, 1969 defiantly insisted that China would not be intimidated by "nuclear blackmail." After the Victor Louis threat discussed above, the October 7, 1969 Chinese Government Statement that formally accepted negotiations warned that "if a handful of war mongers dare to raid China's strategic sites, that would be war . . . and the Chinese people will rise up in resistance." This was probably meant to imply that any "surgical strike" would inevitably become a long-term land war. Eight years later, a People's Daily article on May 13, 1977 recalled in bitter detail the Soviet "nuclear blackmail" used against China in 1969.

[20]Defense Intelligence Agency, Handbook on the Chinese Armed Forces, DDI-2680-32-76, July 1976, pp. 8-1, 2; A-50. In 1969, Chinese nuclear delivery systems were limited to the 600 n mi CSS-1 MRBM and a

In the aftermath, the experience of 1969 may therefore have lent urgency to subsequent efforts to achieve Chinese operational status for the CSS-2, accomplished two or three years later, and for the CSS-3 thereafter. The events of 1969 probably also reinforced Chinese determination to develop basing modes for the growing mix of Chinese strategic weapons that would permanently assure sufficient Soviet uncertainty about Chinese strategic survivability to guarantee the Chinese deterrent.[21] The upshot, for the Soviets, was to be the evolution of a strategic environment in which they knew that the kind of "nuclear blackmail" they successfully practiced against China in 1969 would never again be quite as credible.

THE SOVIET BALANCE SHEET

For more than one reason, therefore, from the Soviet perspective the net results of the 1969 crisis were mixed, with significant minuses as well as pluses.

The Cessation of Aggressive Patrolling

The minimum Soviet objective was attained. After Mao had consented to allow Zhou to meet with Kosygin in September, the PRC was at last induced to halt aggressive patrolling intended to assert the Chinese claim to hundreds of points claimed and held by the Soviet Union. In return, the USSR made a small tacit concession: In the case of a few

fleet of aging bombers using technology obtained from the Soviet Union in the 1950s. (Ibid., A-41.)

[21]In October 1981, a CIA analyst testified to Congress that the PRC "strategic missile force's deterrent value has been increased by concealment and dispersal in remote areas." (The Implications of U.S.-China Military Cooperation, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, GPO, 1981, p. 23.)

river islands where the Soviet legal claim was obviously exceptionally weak and the Soviet strategic and economic interest small, the Soviets themselves apparently ceased patrolling, in effect ceding control of such points to Beijing. Damansky/Chenbao island, the scene of the first two firefights, was one such case, and has remained in the hands of the Chinese ever since.[22] The Soviets undoubtedly judged this a small price to pay; they had averted the perceived danger that the border would be kept continuously aflame, and they had managed to do it without giving up control of the vast majority of the disputed points and without going to war with China. They surely judged this a major achievement.

The Resumption of Border Talks

In addition, the Chinese were induced in October to begin a new series of border negotiations with the Soviet Union, in effect resuming the talks that had been broken off in 1964. But although the fact of the negotiations was itself useful to the USSR, as symbolizing and helping to perpetuate some reduction in tensions along the border, the Soviets soon became aware that they were unlikely to get a settlement they were willing to accept--a settlement ratifying Soviet title to most of the disputed points. Instead, the Chinese from the outset demanded in the talks a Soviet military evacuation of all disputed territory prior to demarcation of an agreed frontier. The PRC in the years since has never relinquished this position. Thus, while the Soviets at the

[22]As early as the late spring of 1969, PRC official documents implied that the Chinese were back on the island, and claimed that the Soviets were threatening to fire at them. (Chinese Government Statement, May 24, 1969 (NCNA, May 24, 1969); Chinese Foreign Ministry Note, June 6, 1969 (NCNA, June 6, 1969).) In the years since the 1969 crisis, Chinese propaganda has frequently made it clear that the PRC retains physical possession of Chenbao.

close of the 1969 crisis got the Chinese to halt their military challenge to the Soviet version of the border, they did not get the PRC to abandon its political challenge to the legitimacy of the existing Soviet holdings along the frontier. Instead, the border negotiations were to become a new Chinese vehicle for the assertion of charges of territorial thievery against the Soviet Union. Soviet leadership statements over the next few years were to suggest that the Soviets found this prolonged impasse discouraging--and a source of ongoing vulnerability for Soviet dealings with the United States.

The Problem of Enhanced U.S. Leverage

For the Soviet leaders, the growth of U.S. maneuverability relative to the Soviet Union was the major drawback of the way the crisis was resolved. From the beginning, as earlier noted, the Soviets were concerned that U.S. leverage might be enhanced, but felt obliged to give priority to efforts to isolate China from the United States. As early as March 11, Ambassador Dobrynin raised the Damansky incident with Kissinger, insisting that China was "everybody's" problem; this was one of many such briefings given by Soviet ambassadors to Western leaders in 1969 in a prolonged effort to elicit Western sympathy.[23] In June, Soviet diplomats intimated that because of the China problem, the Soviet Union wished to minimize difficulties with the United States.[24] And in August, as noted, the Soviets quietly raised the question of the U.S. reaction to a Soviet attack on Chinese nuclear facilities. The Soviets, as Kissinger observed at the time, were seeking to secure U.S. neutrality if not cooperation. At the same time, they were attempting

[23]Kissinger, 1979 p. 172.

[24]Kissinger, 1979, pp. 178-179.

to convey to China the impression that the United States would look with equanimity on a Soviet attack on China, and as we have concluded, they were seeking to elicit a U.S. reaction that would impress the Chinese with the gravity of the Soviet threat.

In so doing, the Soviets also made evident their sense of vulnerability by repeatedly soliciting and obtaining assurances that the United States would not try to exploit the USSR's China problem against the Soviet Union. Although it is clear that the Soviets from the start heavily discounted these assurances, they apparently were very slow to realize that their display of anxiety about China in their communications with the United States was itself stimulating the very U.S. efforts to exploit the China issue that Moscow wished to head off. Meanwhile, both their threats against the PRC and their efforts to plant the notion that the two superpowers were collaborating against Beijing had the effect of increasing Chinese readiness to do business with the United States.

Prompted in large part by the "solid evidence of the growing obsession of the Soviet leaders with their China problem,"[25] the U.S. leadership began to seek to turn this Soviet anxiety to the U.S. advantage by exploring a U.S. opening to China. In June 1969, as the armed clashes on the Sino-Soviet border accumulated, the President privately suggested to Kissinger that the United States "subtly encourage" countries being urged by the USSR not to establish relations with Beijing to proceed to do so.[26] In July, the United States announced an easing of restrictions on trade and travel to the PRC, and

[25] Kissinger, 1979, p. 179.

[26] Kissinger, 1979, p. 179.

in August, President Nixon privately asked Pakistan and Romania to open channels of communications for the United States with the Chinese leaders.[27] Over the next decade, the Soviets were to become preoccupied with the consequences of this U.S. action.

[27] Kissinger, 1979, pp. 179-182.

VI. THE CONFRONTATION FROM 1969 TO MAO'S DEATH

SOVIET MANEUVERS IN THE STRATEGIC TRIANGLE IN THE AFTERMATH OF 1969

Over the next two years, the Soviet buildup against China continued at a fairly rapid pace while the Soviet leaders explored the implications of the evolving situation in the Sino-Soviet-U.S. triangle. They apparently were suspicious throughout of the possibility of secret Sino-U.S. negotiations, and they sought to head off the chance that their two adversaries would combine against them by making secret proposals to each. In both cases, they were unsuccessful.

Approaches to China

In dealing with China, the Soviets found it difficult to offer credible enticements because their underlying interests remained incompatible with those of the PRC and because they did not believe it prudent or desirable to abandon a threatening military posture toward China. On the contrary, they continued to further strengthen that posture while filing a succession of proposals with Beijing that they had little expectation China would accept. They assigned highest priority to making sure that Beijing continued to be constrained in its border patrolling.

The Soviet ongoing buildup and the implied threat of nuclear attack on China--the advantages that had produced the Chinese backdown in 1969--now became a target of Chinese demands in the border negotiations. When the Chinese made it clear that no fundamental concessions were to be expected under conditions of "nuclear blackmail," the Soviets, who had no intention of abandoning what they saw as necessary military

leverage upon China, offered the Chinese instead a series of paper substitutes: proposals for nonaggression and non-use of force treaties. The Chinese invariably countered what they naturally regarded as a propaganda ploy by insisting that any such paper pledges be incorporated into a Soviet agreement to make a unilateral preliminary military withdrawal from all the areas China claimed to be in dispute.[1] There this matter rested.

Meanwhile, Soviet uneasiness about the possibility of secret Sino-U.S. dealings prompted repeated secret attempts by the Politburo to make personal contact with the Chinese leaders. Perceiving themselves to be in a race with the United States to try to "normalize" relations with the PRC before the United States did, the Soviets made proposal after proposal for a summit meeting with Mao or Zhou.[2] These efforts were doomed by the same consideration that made a border settlement impossible; the Soviets could not successfully intimidate the Chinese and expect to conciliate them at the same time. The Chinese therefore went on with the secret negotiations that eventually produced a

[1] In practice, the Chinese were not asking the Soviets to evacuate the vast areas in the Far East which China claimed Russia had stolen in the past. Nor were the Chinese demanding, as is sometimes supposed, a uniform Soviet pullback of any given distance all along the border. Rather, the Chinese since October 1969 have requested a Soviet withdrawal from those particular places and areas which Beijing claims Tsarist Russia and the USSR have occupied in addition to the territory given Russia by "unequal treaties." This refers in effect primarily to the hundreds of islands in the eastern border rivers and the large Pamir tract in the west. (Chinese Foreign Ministry statement, October 9, 1969. For more details, see H. Gelman, "Outlook for Sino-Soviet Relations," Problems of Communism, September-December 1979.)

[2] O. Borisov, "Who Is Preventing Normalization?", Izvestiya, May 16, 1974.

Sino-U.S. summit,[3] while rejecting Soviet feelers for a Sino-Soviet summit out of hand.[4]

Approaches to the United States

Unsuccessful on one side, the Soviets tried the other. In July 1970, after the SALT I negotiations with the United States had been under way for only nine months, the Soviet SALT delegation surfaced a proposal for Soviet-U.S. "joint retaliatory action" against any third nuclear power that undertook "provocative" action against the USSR or the United States.[5] Against the background of the Sino-Soviet border crisis of the preceding year, this momentous proposal was transparently aimed at China. The Soviets were seeking, in effect, to lock in a Soviet-America combination against Beijing before the PRC could come to an agreement with the United States that would isolate the Soviet Union. While it is not clear how serious were the Soviet expectations that the United States would consider this proposal,[6] the Soviets may have hoped, at a minimum, that even temporary American consideration, when leaked to Beijing, would serve to increase Chinese distrust of the

[3] Kissinger, 1979, pp. 187-191, 684-732.

[4] Izvestiya, May 16, 1974.

[5] John Newhouse, Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1973, p. 189; Henry Kissinger, 1979, pp. 547-548.

[6] This Soviet gambit was attempted at a moment when the progress of Sino-U.S. contacts and discussions that were to lead to the breakthrough of the following year had momentarily come to a halt because of the U.S. incursion into Cambodia. The Chinese had cancelled the Warsaw Ambassadorial talks scheduled for May 20; had issued a blistering Mao statement denouncing the United States; and had sent up MIGs to intercept a U.S. reconnaissance plane well off the Chinese coast, for the first time in years. The Soviets may well have concluded that this was as propitious an opportunity as they were likely to get to influence the direction of events in the triangle, and that however small the chance of U.S. acceptance, the USSR had little to lose. It is worthy of note that only a week later, on July 10, Beijing issued the first positive signal toward the United States in many weeks. (See Kissinger, 1979, pp. 694-697.)

United States and delay any Chinese modus vivendi with the United States.

A quick American rejection put an end to these hopes for the time being, but four years later the Soviets were to revive the essence of this notion outside the SALT context and in somewhat different form. Richard Nixon states that at his last summit with Brezhnev in Moscow in July 1974, Brezhnev privately proposed "a U.S.-Soviet treaty which others could join where each country would come to the defense of the other if either country or one of its allies were attacked.[7] It thus appears that at both the opening and the closing stages of the detente relationship, Moscow unsuccessfully floated security proposals to the United States which were aimed at isolating the PRC and either preempting or breaking the American connection with China.

In the meantime, in the years after the abortive Soviet 1970 SALT proposal for "joint retaliatory action," Soviet fears began to materialize with the advent of "ping-pong diplomacy" in the spring of 1971 and the announcement in July that Kissinger had made his initial secret visit to China. It was at this juncture, while waiting for the effects on the triangular balance of President Nixon's planned visits to Moscow and Beijing the following years, that a new military crisis involving all three emerged.

[7]Richard M. Nixon, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon, Grosset and Dunlap, New York, 1978, p. 1030. Kissinger reports that Nixon instructed him, in the presence of the Soviets, to consider the idea of such a treaty for subsequent exploration with the Soviets; but Kissinger was adamantly opposed and Nixon, soon to be overwhelmed by the Watergate crisis, never referred to the matter again. It is extremely unlikely that this notion would have been long considered by either man under any circumstances, since as Kissinger points out, such a treaty would have had the "clear implication that the United States was giving the Soviet Union a free hand to attack China." (Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1982, pp. 1173-1174.)

THE 1971 TRIANGULAR CRISIS OVER INDIA-PAKISTAN

The Issues and the Results

Two years after the 1969 border confrontation, a crisis of a different kind involving the Soviet Union, China, and the United States arose over the 1971 India-Pakistan war. In this case, the immediate issues involved were: first, whether India would attack the Pakistani army in East Pakistan to succor the Bangladesh cause and liquidate East Pakistan; second, whether, having accomplished this, India would seize the occasion to destroy West Pakistan as well; third, whether at some stage in these proceedings China would intervene militarily against India and in defense of its old associate, Pakistan; and fourth, whether the USSR, having just signed a friendship treaty with India implying readiness to support New Delhi, would then be led to attack China in its turn. From the outset, the perceived interest of the U.S. government was to prevent this sequence of events, and first of all to prevent a Soviet-backed Indian military victory.

In retrospect, it appears likely, for reasons described below, that each of the great powers involved--the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the United States--sought during the crisis to convey an exaggerated impression of the risks it was prepared to run. But if all were bluffing, the USSR was the most successful at it. In the end, the Soviet Union emerged as the major victor in this test of geopolitical strength. India acted, and China did not. The diplomatic efforts of the United States, in association with China, were unable to prevent the overthrow of the East Pakistan regime by Indian armies generally perceived to have been unleashed behind the shield of the Soviet-Indian

treaty. Although subsequent U.S. diplomatic pressures--and fleet movements in the Indian Ocean--appear to have helped influence the eventual Indian decision to forgo dismembering West Pakistan,[8] even this partial U.S. achievement was generally obscured from the world public by the ambiguity that had surrounded ultimate Indian intentions.

Soviet Risk Calculations

The Soviet Union therefore benefited from the widespread impression that it had made possible an unalloyed Indian victory by deterring both China and the United States from actions that might otherwise had been taken to prevent it. From the Soviet perspective, there had been little military risk with either antagonist required to arrive at this result.

Calculations Regarding the United States. Afterwards, the Soviet Union appears to have privately claimed to India that it had deterred a U.S. attack on India by deploying naval units to shadow U.S. forces in the Indian Ocean.[9] In fact, there is little reason to believe that the Soviet leaders at any stage either had been prepared to accept armed conflict with the United States to protect Indian interests, or had thought this contingency likely to arise. Although Moscow, in pursuit of its own political interests, may have sought to encourage Indian apprehension of the United States, in their own councils the Soviets are likely to have remained throughout fairly confident that such fears were unjustified. To the end of the crisis, they probably adhered to the view that it was extremely improbable that a U.S. administration beset by

[8] Kissinger, 1979, pp. 911-913.

[9] After the crisis, a U.S. newspaper report alleged that Soviet Ambassador Pegov had privately assured the Indian government that a Soviet fleet was in the Indian Ocean and that the USSR would not "allow" the United States to intervene on behalf of Pakistan. (Washington Post, December 21, 1971.)

profound national divisions over Vietnam and intense domestic criticism of its India policy would dare to attack India, whatever the circumstances. Consequently, they are likely to have considered it highly probable that the threat the Administration sought to convey by moving a task force into the Bay of Bengal was, in essence, a bluff.

At the same time, however, it also seems probable that the Administration's posture made more of an impression on the Indian authorities, and helped to move New Delhi to accept a cease-fire with West Pakistan after the collapse of resistance in East Pakistan, despite a strong temptation to crush Pakistan once and for all. The USSR appears in the closing days of the crisis to have encouraged this Indian decision. Although Kissinger contends that in so doing, the Soviets were mainly impelled to avoid "even the minor risk that we might act irrationally,"[10] the Soviets were probably influenced largely by considerations having little to do with military risk. One was the possibility that an India that had totally destroyed its Pakistani rival might in the future be less dependent on the Soviet Union. Another was the prospect that a further escalation of the India-Pakistan crisis would eliminate the possibility of a Soviet-U.S. summit in 1972, at a time when a Sino-U.S. summit had already been scheduled.

Calculations Regarding China. The Chinese side of the equation was even easier to manage. The role generally attributed to the Soviet Union in deterring any Chinese attack on India was more clearcut, while paradoxically the risks, from the Soviet perspective, were for good reasons even smaller.

[10] Kissinger, 1979, p. 912.

In view of the precedent set in 1962--when Chinese troops had routed Indian forces in India's Northwest Frontier area--the question of the Chinese response had been the major Indian concern in preparing to settle the question of Pakistani rule in East Pakistan. In the years since 1962--and more and more blatantly as Sino-Soviet mutual hostility grew in the late 1960s--the Soviets had done their utmost to help preserve and where possible exacerbate Sino-Indian tensions. For example, ever since the Chinese explosion of a nuclear device in 1964 the Soviets had sought to play upon the additional Indian concerns generated by Chinese possession of this weapon. To this end, the Soviets had, among other things, encouraged the dissemination of persistent erroneous rumors--apparently widely believed in India--that China had deployed nuclear missiles in Tibet aimed at and capable of hitting India.[11] Indian fears and animus toward China were meanwhile continuously fueled over the years by the ongoing Chinese political and security association with Pakistan, and were not greatly diminished by the fact that China had not intervened during the first India-Pakistan war in 1965.

Against this background, New Delhi in 1971 regarded the possibility of Chinese counter-intervention in Pakistan as sufficiently serious to require an extraordinary step to eliminate the Chinese obstacle to

[11]These have not ceased. At recently as December 5, 1981, Pravda reported a statement by the Indian Defense Minister asserting that "according to information in his possession," China had deployed what Pravda termed "missile-launching installations in Tibet on the border with India." Pravda went on to cite unspecified Indian press sources as "noting" that China had recently been stepping up "war preparations" against India, and alleging that "launch installations for medium-range missiles aimed at Indian cities have been deployed in three areas of Tibet." These assertions seem improbable.

Indian freedom of action. The Soviet-Indian treaty of "friendship and cooperation" signed on August 9 was clearly intended to serve this purpose. New Delhi had previously been reluctant to sign such a treaty because of the embarrassment it would create for Indian claims to neutral status; this consideration was now outweighed by a more urgent need. In sum, despite the ambiguities in the Soviet treaty commitment (considered below) India felt that it had purchased, at moderate political cost, an effective and necessary deterrent.

From the Soviet perspective, the Indian treaty was not entirely without risk, but risk of a political, rather than a military nature. In the very unlikely event that China did intervene militarily against India in reaction to an India move against Pakistan, the Soviet Union would surely be seriously embarrassed if it did nothing effective to help India; yet it is not credible that the Soviet leadership was prepared to take any step likely to involve the USSR in a momentous war with China for the sake of Indian interests, which were seen as far removed from Soviet vital interests. It is true that the treaty did not literally oblige the USSR to take military action to defend India, but only to "consult" and to take unspecified "appropriate effective measures" in the event of hostilities. This ambiguity was of course carefully calculated. But the Soviets were well aware that the existence of this legal and semantic loophole would not save the USSR from considerable political losses should the deterrent to China prove illusory, and should the USSR then find it impossible to take effective action. In this sense, there was an element of bluff in the Soviet position as well as that of the United States.

However, the Soviet leadership was probably satisfied, at the moment the treaty was signed, that even the political risk described was not large; and as Soviet luck would have it, the chances of Chinese intervention were to diminish further rather dramatically between the signing of the treaty on August 9 and the gradual emergence of India-Pakistan hostilities in late October-early November.

The Soviet calculations are likely to have been as follows: In the first place, the Soviet leaders from the outset appear to have believed that they had an effective deterrent. They concluded from Chinese conduct that their threats had intimidated China in 1969, and that the Chinese did not desire another crisis with the Soviet Union. They also seem to have believed that however ambiguous the language of the Soviet-Indian treaty, the Chinese were likely to see it as implying a risk of Soviet military action too serious for China to challenge. We shall see that the apparent success of this calculation in 1971 was to mislead Soviet thinking about China and Vietnam in 1978.

Second, the Soviets were certainly aware, as was the West and China, that Indian firepower capabilities and military effectiveness had been significantly improved since the debacle of 1962. On the other hand, the Soviets had good reason to suspect that the Chinese military efficiency shown in 1962 had been impaired by the trauma of the Cultural Revolution, and they knew that in contrast to 1962, a very large portion of Chinese military resources were now diverted toward the Soviet Union. The Soviets were also aware of the logistic difficulties and long lead-times needed to reinforce Chinese forces in Tibet. Further, regardless of what the Soviets may have sought to suggest to New Delhi, the Soviets

are likely to have assumed that Chinese use of nuclear weapons against India was out of the question. All in all, therefore, the Soviets probably concluded that there was a considerable chance that even if China did move against India, Soviet military action, with its attendant risks, might not be required.

Third, and most important, fortuitous extraordinary developments within China were to make the issue of possible Chinese intervention virtually moot. In mid-August 1971, about a week after the Soviet-Indian treaty was signed, the tension that had long been growing beneath the surface between Mao Zedong and his heir-apparent, Defense Minister Lin Biao, began to come to a head. Mao commenced a protracted rail tour of southern and central China in a successful effort to secure the support of key military leaders for the showdown with Lin. On September 12, Lin, faced with imminent ouster from power, attempted to assassinate Mao by blowing up his train. When this failed, Lin attempted to flee China to the Soviet Union, but his plane crashed en route and Lin was killed in Mongolia. Immediately thereafter, the Chief of the Chinese General Staff and other key members of the Chinese military leadership were arrested; moreover, because the Chinese Air Force was suspected (with good reason) of complicity, all Chinese military aircraft were grounded for many weeks thereafter.[12]

Whatever the state of Soviet knowledge about the situation inside the Chinese leadership at the time the Soviet-Indian treaty was signed on August 9, it seems highly probable that by November 1, when Indian army units had begun to cross into East Pakistan and when the Soviets

[12]Lin's son and several other followers were associated with the Air Force. See The Lin Piao Affair, Michael Y. M. Kau (ed.), International Arts and Sciences Press, White Plains, 1975; The New York Times, July 23, 1972, September 2, 1973.

began an airlift of military supplies to India, the Soviets were fully aware that the Chinese high command had been decapitated and the Chinese Air Force forbidden to fly. This knowledge surely had a decisive effect on the Soviet estimate of the likelihood of a Chinese response. What was already a fairly small risk had now been transformed, by a stroke of good fortune, into a "free ride."

Sino-U.S. Consultations at the Climax

Nevertheless, on December 10, in the closing days of the crisis when the end of the East Pakistan regime was imminent and the United States was concerned with preventing subsequent Indian destruction of West Pakistan, PRC Ambassador Huang Hua is reported by Kissinger to have made ambiguous statements[13] which Kissinger asserts he interpreted at the time as hints that China might even then take military action to help Pakistan. Kissinger also claims to have momentarily believed this, and to have also believed that "the Soviet Union was then committed to use force against China." These American beliefs, held between December 10 and 12, are said to have redoubled the urgency of U.S. actions, to have caused a radical increase in U.S. diplomatic pressure upon the Soviet Union and India, and to have triggered the movement of the U.S. fleet. In retrospect, however, it became apparent to Kissinger that he had misinterpreted Huang Hua's statements.[14] Huang had, presumably, merely sought to reiterate, in general terms, China's steadfastness against the Soviet Union whatever turn the crisis took, and thereby to reinforce American resolve.

[13] Kissinger, 1979, pp. 906-907.

[14] Kissinger, 1979, pp. 906-907.

This episode had some long-term significance for the future of Sino-U.S. security cooperation against the Soviet Union. The highly visible parallel efforts undertaken at the UN and elsewhere and the repeated private consultations on tactics in the crisis set a precedent in the coordination of Chinese and American actions to counter Soviet machinations that was duly noted by the Soviet leaders. Probably of even greater importance were the private U.S. assurances alleged to have been given to China and an unannounced U.S. decision to take measures to assist China against the Soviet Union should the need arise. When, on December 10, Huang Hua expressed Chinese concern that the Soviets would see the successful India operation in East Pakistan as a precedent for the dismemberment of other countries, Kissinger replied that "the United States would not be indifferent to further Soviet moves" and that "an attack on China especially would have grave consequences." [15] Two days later, while awaiting an urgent Chinese message which the American leaders rather remarkably expected to presage Chinese military action, President Nixon is said to have decided "that if the Soviet Union threatened China we would not stand idly by." Moreover, "if the [Chinese] message contained what we both suspected and feared," the U.S. representative "was instructed to reply to the Chinese that we would not ignore Soviet intervention." [16] This reply was in the event not delivered, since the Chinese message did not, in fact, indicate an intention to march.

[15] Kissinger, 1979, pp. 906-907.

[16] Kissinger, 1979, p. 910.

To be sure, none of this constituted either an iron-clad U.S. guarantee to China or an effective U.S. deterrent against a Soviet attack on China. The one ambiguous U.S. promise actually given to China, in the Kissinger statement of December 10 to Huang Hua, was probably regarded by Beijing as of uncertain value, partly because of its private nature and lack of specificity, and partly because the prospects in 1971 for achieving public support in the United States for meaningful U.S. action to succor China were at best problematical. The equally ambiguous U.S. message prepared for China on December 12 was never delivered, while the President's reported private decision on that day that the United States would "not stand idly by" remained private, neither communicated to any foreign power nor exposed to the test of U.S. public opinion. In sum, the U.S. movement toward a national commitment to assist China barely began in 1971.

The Administration did not, in fact, know either how far it wished to go to help China against the Soviet Union, nor how far it could go if subjected to the test.[17] There is no evidence, and no reason to believe, that the Soviet Union received any message from the United States directly referring to the possibility of U.S. help to China in the event that the crisis escalated into Sino-Soviet conflict. The leaders of the United States desired that the Soviet leaders nevertheless infer from U.S. behavior that this possibility might arise should the crisis get out of hand and such escalation occur; but because

[17] According to Kissinger, while the President had decided that China would receive "some significant assistance" in an extremity, "the precise nature" of any such assistance would be "worked out when the circumstances arose." (Kissinger, 1979, p. 910.) One of these governing circumstances, of course, would be the chance of assembling a U.S. consensus behind actions in support of China.

of the constraints of U.S. public opinion, they could not supply the Soviets with credible evidence to support this inference.[18] Kissinger states that the U.S. carrier task force was moved into the Bay of Bengal "to provide some military means to give effect to our strategy and to reinforce the message to Moscow" (that the United States would "not ignore" Soviet intervention against China). It is difficult to visualize, however, how the posing of a highly implausible threat in the south against India could either enhance the credibility of an unvoiced threat to help China should the USSR attack it or strengthen U.S. military capabilities to do so.

Having said this, it remains true that the Sino-U.S. consultations and diplomatic cooperation over the 1971 India-Pakistan crisis were a most unwelcome milestone for the Soviet Union. Moreover, the conclusions drawn by American leaders on this occasion about the U.S. national interest in helping the PRC withstand any Soviet threat represented an important turning point for U.S. policy, even if it had little immediate effect on Soviet behavior. Over the long run, the significance of the trend toward Sino-U.S. security cooperation begun during this crisis considerably outweighed the value of the immediate political gains the Soviet Union extracted from the crisis.

[18] It could be argued that the Soviets might nevertheless have been inclined to attach some credibility to the chance that strong U.S. action might emerge from the India-Pakistan crisis because of a number of forceful and sometimes unpopular moves the Administration had taken in other areas in 1970 and 1971--notably the incursions into Cambodia (spring 1970) and Laos (early 1971) and the vigorous stands taken in reaction to the Cienfuegos crisis and to the Syrian attack on Jordan (both fall 1970). The considerations surrounding the India-Pakistan war were sufficiently different, however, that I find this argument unconvincing.

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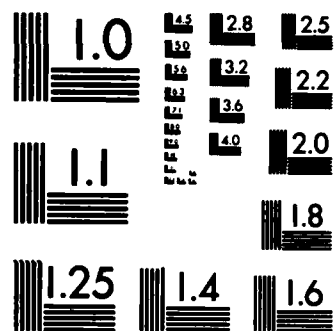
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The Lesson of 1971 for Soviet Ambitions to the South

In strategic terms, Soviet byplay with their antagonists over the India-Pakistan war had one long-term effect on Soviet thinking that is increasingly important today and that will be considered in context later in this report. This was the Soviet discovery that their buildup in the Far East could be made to assist their geopolitical ambitions to the south. In 1971, the Soviets concluded that their conventional and nuclear forces deployed against China had helped to paralyze forceful Chinese opposition to Soviet policy in the India-Pakistan crisis. Consequently, when new opportunities for Soviet policy eventually opened up in Indochina late in the decade, the Soviet leaders had a precedent providing reason to expect that their Siberian and Far East deployments would again guarantee freedom of action to a Soviet client in the south. In the 1980s this blocking, diverting, and menacing function of Soviet power in the Far East--now deployed against the PRC, Japan, and U.S. naval forces--is likely to play an important role in Soviet efforts to exploit any future opportunities that may appear in South and Southwest Asia.

The Holding Action in the First Half of the 1970s

Over the next five years after the India-Pakistan crisis, Soviet strategy toward China became in essence a holding action. The buildup slowed down markedly. The Soviets were unsuccessful in further attempts to line the United States up with them against China, but on the other hand they were relieved to see that despite the precedent set during the India-Pakistan war, Sino-U.S. rapprochement did not evolve rapidly into anti-Soviet security cooperation. The Soviets now waited for the death

of Mao, and pinned their hopes on the conjecture that this event, when it finally came, might extricate them from their unfavorable position in the triangle.

The Slowdown in the Buildup

It is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of the slowdown in the buildup, but it appears that at least by 1972, the large-scale reinforcements seen earlier had been reduced to a much smaller flow. Although major military construction continued, the Soviets seemed to concentrate thereafter on gradually filling out and improving the capabilities of units already in place. Equally as important as this deceleration in the flow of military personnel eastward was the slowdown, persisting over the next several years, in the rate of establishment of new division structures in the Far East. This change in the slope of the curve appears to have occurred as Soviet force levels allocated to the anti-China and anti-Japan missions in Asia (in the Central Asian, Siberian, Transbaykal, and Far East Military Districts and Mongolia) rose toward 400,000 ground combat personnel, and as the rough total of divisions at all strength levels assigned to these areas approached 40.[19]

Possible Achievement of Interim Force Goals. There may well have been several contributing reasons for the slowdown. It is a reasonable

[19]See The Military Balance (International Institute for Strategic Studies), issues for 1970 through 1977. In the spring of 1977, a Chinese Foreign Ministry official discussed the Soviet buildup in an interview in Beijing. He repeated the somewhat exaggerated Chinese standard rhetorical claim that Soviet armed forces "in the east as a whole" reached one million men (even counting all the other Soviet services besides the ground forces east of the Urals, this is inflated). But he also asserted that there had been "no" increase in the manpower deployed since 1972, although, he added, Soviet military equipment had improved. (The New York Times, March 25, 1977.)

conjecture that one very important consideration was that the first-stage, interim force goals established by the Brezhnev regime in 1965 had been mostly, if not entirely, achieved during the 8th Five Year Plan, from 1966 through 1970. It is not impossible that this happened sooner than expected because of an acceleration over planned rates in 1969 and 1970 as a result of the 1969 border crisis. In any case, it is plausible that the military planners for the 9th Five Year Plan, which was to be carried out from 1971 through 1976, felt by late 1970 and early 1971 that they would soon have accumulated sufficient margin in Asia for the time being to permit them over the coming period to allow the anti-China buildup to continue at a more moderate pace.[20] This would in turn permit them, after 1972, to divert a larger share of the scheduled growth of the ground forces to other purposes.[21]

Perception of Greater Border Stability. It also seems likely that the Soviet leadership felt able to decelerate the buildup because the situation on the Sino-Soviet border appeared, at last temporarily, somewhat more stable. The 1969 sequence of firefights had stopped; Chinese competitive patrolling had been curtailed; and border incidents had become much more infrequent. The border negotiations, although going nowhere, were at least a useful token of stability. Moreover, although the new thrust of Chinese foreign policy under Zhou Enlai's

[20]Not long thereafter, they also decided to commit the enormous resources required to build a second Siberian railroad--the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) project. This decision, announced by Brezhnev in 1974, was a major undertaking to be begun in the 10th Five Year Plan (1976-1980). The decision testified to Soviet determination to expedite the economic development of the east, and also, of course, to strengthen Soviet capabilities to support and reinforce its military forces in the east. In a sense, it supplemented the buildup.

[21]Including, for example, an enlargement in the size of all Soviet divisions.

aegis remained thoroughly anti-Soviet (and much more effective), the Soviets could console themselves that at least the irrationality and unpredictability they associated with the Cultural Revolution had vanished. Finally, Lin Biao was also gone. Since the Soviets may have associated Lin with pugnacious Chinese behavior on the border in 1969, his death--and the associated disruption in the Chinese high command--may well have been seen as also promising continued Chinese caution.

In this connection, it should be noted that the pace of Soviet military preparations against China was never simply a function of the Soviet view of Chinese military strength, or even of the Sino-Soviet military balance. On the contrary, the Soviets had accelerated those preparations in precisely those years when PLA morale and energies were devastated by the Cultural Revolution, when China did not yet have a deployed missile capable of reaching Soviet cities, and when the diversion of Chinese strength in response to a U.S. buildup in Indochina to the south was increasing. Paradoxically, the USSR began to decelerate the buildup in the years when the U.S. presence and threat on the Chinese southern flank was declining, when the PRC was reinforcing and strengthening its forces facing north, and after the Chinese had for the first time deployed a missile (the CSS-2) giving them a more than trivial deterrent against Soviet nuclear attack. Clearly, the Soviet view of what was required by the Chinese military "threat" was never simply a function of the Soviet estimate of the Chinese order of battle. At least equally important was the Soviet subjective appraisal, at the time future deployments were being planned, of what could be expected of Chinese behavior and Moscow's assumptions at each stage about what it wanted to deter the Chinese from doing. By 1972, reviewing the results

of the 1969 border crisis and the 1971 India-Pakistan crisis, the Politburo was evidently satisfied with the level of deterrence it had achieved, for the time being. But this satisfaction was only provisional, and as later events proved, temporary.

Hopes for Improvement after Mao. In addition, the Soviet leadership had not quite given up hope of a significant improvement in their relations with the Chinese, once Mao Zedong had also departed the scene. From long experience they had come to look upon Mao as the implacable driving force behind Chinese hostility. They continued to hope that there were elements in the Chinese elite--particularly in the PLA--that desired a reduction of Sino-Soviet tensions, and that these preferences, submerged under Mao, would surface once Mao was dead. They hoped that divisions within the Chinese leadership might then open up the possibility of a settlement of Sino-Soviet differences based on significant Chinese concessions to the Soviet Union. With this in mind, through the middle 1970s they continued vehemently to deny that they had made nuclear threats against China in 1969, and to denounce those--like Joseph Alsop--who reminded the world that the USSR had then sought out American approval for a possible Soviet nuclear strike at the PRC.[22] At the same time, they showed remarkable patience after a Soviet helicopter crew was captured and detained in China in March 1974, and not released until December 1975.[23]

[22]For example, Pravda on February 6, 1972, September 23, 1972, and February 8, 1973 carried vituperative articles denouncing Alsop for recalling this Soviet behavior.

[23]As noted earlier, it is probable that the helicopter was, in effect, thrust into Chinese hands by becoming disabled and making a forced landing on Chinese territory. As the Soviets probably suspected, it is likely that the disposition of this machine and its crew subsequently became a political issue within the Chinese leadership.

Renewed Anti-China Appeals to the United States

Meanwhile, at summit meetings during the first half of the 1970s--the period of so-called "detente"--Brezhnev continued his dual campaign of private exhortations of American leaders about China. On the one hand, he kept trying to entice the United States into a security relationship with the Soviet Union directed against China. On the other hand, he and Gromyko continued to issue gratuitous private warnings to Nixon and Kissinger not to enter into a "military alliance" with China.[24]

It should be noted that although the first aspect of this campaign failed, the second addressed a contingency that was not, in fact, a live possibility throughout Kissinger's tenure in office. Kissinger makes it clear that extensive Sino-U.S. information and opinion exchanges went on throughout the Nixon and Ford Administrations. Yet it is equally clear from his statements that such security measures as U.S. arms sales to the PRC or joint contingency planning--let alone the creation of an "alliance" with the PRC--were outside active consideration in this period.[25] It is reasonable to suppose that despite the repeated Soviet displays of alarm and paranoia about the Sino-American relationship, the Soviet leaders were aware of the evidence that the Kissinger-Nixon policy toward China was a limited one. Indeed, the bulk of Soviet published comment between 1972-1975--particularly after the

[24]Richard M. Nixon, pp. 883, 1030; Kissinger, 1979, pp. 1226-1227; Kissinger, 1982, pp. 233, 294-295, 1173-1174. As earlier noted, the last of these Brezhnev attempts during the detente period was made in July 1974, and involved the notion of a Soviet-American mutual defense treaty, transparently directed at the PRC.

[25]In addition, of course, neither then nor at any point subsequently has the PRC desired a full-fledged "military alliance" with the United States.

signing of the SALT I agreement in 1972--suggested increasing inclination to assume that the United States would not wish to jeopardize the arms control process and other overriding U.S. interests by moving into a close security relationship with China.[26]

THE SHIFTING PATTERN IN MID-DECADE

Worsening Relations with Washington

Soviet hopes and calculations began to change after the mid-1970s. First, the Soviet-American relationship began to get steadily worse, in part because of Soviet activities in the Third World that not only infringed on U.S. interests but also exacerbated Chinese anxieties about Soviet expansionist tendencies. For more than one reason, therefore, the Soviets were themselves preparing the way for the United States and the PRC to begin closing the gap between them.

It has been suggested that the spectacular growth of Soviet efforts to expand their presence and influence in the Third World after 1975 was prompted, in part, by Soviet chagrin over the failure of their efforts to align the United States with them against China. Disappointment with the U.S. unwillingness to forgo its China connection, in this view, united with other factors to cause Soviet disillusionment with the results of detente and readiness to begin an "offensive" in the Third World.[27]

[26]One Soviet observer later remarked that after the Soviet-U.S. relationship began to worsen in mid-decade, some in Moscow privately began to claim that the original excessive scare about the "Chinese threat" had caused undue emphasis on the Soviet need for good Soviet-American relations. (Private memorandum of conversation.) It is likely that in the aftermath of the "detente" period, the Soviets tended to exaggerate in their own minds the extent to which they had sought to propitiate the United States because of China, and to underestimate the extent to which their actions had been calculated to torpedo U.S. interests; for example, by supplying arms to Egypt through 1973 and to Vietnam in 1973-74.

[27]William G. Hyland, Soviet-American Relations: A New Cold War?, The Rand Corporation, R-2763-FF/RC, May 1981.

This view probably overstates the importance of the China factor in prompting the growth of Soviet expansionist activity in the Third World after 1975. As already noted, although the United States through 1975 had rebuffed Brezhnev's efforts to secure a Soviet-American alignment against China, it had also refrained from attempting to create a close security relationship with China against the Soviet Union. It is true that the Soviets were influenced in part by disillusionment with the fruits of the bilateral Soviet-U.S. relationship (particularly regarding trade). But more important, the Soviets would under almost any circumstances have been reluctant to forgo those new opportunities that increasingly opened up for them in Africa and elsewhere after mid-decade.

Moreover, the degree of continuity in Soviet competitive behavior throughout the decade should not be underestimated. Even during the detente period when they were vainly seeking to entice the United States to side with the USSR against the PRC, they had always given a higher priority to their competitive efforts to damage the U.S. position abroad--most notably in their arms shipments to Vietnam, which played a vital role in the most important American defeat of the decade before the Soviet "offensive" in the Third World had yet begun. After 1975, Soviet efforts to explore new avenues of opportunity to expand their influence at the expense of that of the West and the United States thus did not require a reshaping of underlying priorities, although they did involve the deployment of Soviet military resources in new places and on a new scale. And as these Soviet opportunities and activities spread to Asia--to Afghanistan and Indochina--they increasingly attacked Chinese interests as well.

The Disappointment Following Mao's Death

Second, in September 1976 Mao finally died, and to the great disappointment of the Soviet leadership after so many years of waiting, the Sino-Soviet relationship did not significantly improve.[28] At the outset, the Chinese quickly rejected an initial crude Soviet probe for restoration of party relations.[29] Some Soviet authorities evidently then decided that it would be desirable to show Mao's heirs both a carrot and a stick.

New Victor Louis Threat Backfires. The Soviet agent Victor Louis was used once more to threaten the PRC, almost exactly seven years after he had done so in 1969, with what Moscow saw as good results. He now published in the British and French press an article advancing the hope that military men trained in the USSR and friendly to the Soviet Union would come to the fore in China, but warning the Chinese that Soviet patience was "limited." Louis went on to threaten that the USSR might do something "irreversible" if the PRC did not make some answering conciliatory gesture within the next month.[30]

This threat, however, backfired, since it played into the hands of the United States. Secretary Kissinger took the occasion to warn the USSR publicly that the United States would take "an extremely dim view of a military attack or even military pressure" on the PRC.[31]

[28]Hyland emphasizes the importance of this Soviet failure with Mao's successors in helping to prompt a Soviet political "counter-offensive" in dealings with Vietnam in 1978. (Hyland, p. 42.) Although this major Soviet disappointment was probably indeed a factor in subsequent Soviet behavior, its significance should be qualified. As the discussion later will argue, it was the decisions taken--and changes in the relationship accepted--by Vietnam, rather than by the Soviet Union, that were of decisive importance in 1978.

[29]The New York Times, September 15, 1976.

[30]London Evening News and France Soir, October 14, 1976.

[31]Statement on CBS television program "Face the Nation," October 24, 1976 (Department of State Bulletin, November 15, 1976). Earlier,

Pravda responded with a denunciation of Kissinger's "clumsy intervention" and a pious denial that the Soviet Union had ever "entertained designs" on China.[32]

This episode brought home to the Soviet leaders the fact that the usefulness to Moscow of such casual attempts to intimidate Beijing had been reduced since 1969--both because of the deterioration in Soviet-U.S. relations and as a result of the concomitant improvement in Sino-U.S. relations. Under the new conditions, Moscow could no longer idly threaten Beijing--even unofficially--unless it was willing to risk driving its two adversaries closer together. This certainly did not mean that the Soviets would not again threaten Beijing if they felt the circumstances demanded it. But it did mean that henceforth any decision to threaten would have to be much more carefully weighed--and, no doubt, more broadly coordinated in Moscow--as a considered act of state.

The 1978 Chinese Rejection of a "Joint Statement." The disappointment of Soviet hopes regarding the post-Mao leadership was formalized in February 1978, when Moscow presented Beijing with a proposal that they negotiate a "joint statement" on the principles to govern their relationship.[33] The Soviets may have been holding this

Kissinger had taken the occasion of a news conference on October 15 to stress that "we believe that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of China is very important to the world equilibrium, and we would consider it a grave matter if this were threatened by an outside power." (The New York Times, October 16, 1976.)

[32]Pravda, October 27, 1976. Victor Louis then published an article in the West (France Soir, October 31-November 1, 1976) responding to Kissinger by reversing his field and claiming that the Chinese on the Sino-Soviet border had been making "friendly gestures" to the Soviets and that Chinese radio propaganda no longer attacked the USSR--all quite untrue, of course. The discomfiture of those who had planned and authorized Louis' original article was obvious.

[33]People's Daily, March 26, 1978; FBIS Daily Report, March 27, 1978.

proposal in reserve for some time--perhaps even since before Mao's death--awaiting a propitious moment which never came. In reply, the Chinese insisted that Moscow "prove its sincerity with deeds" by accepting Chinese demands in the border negotiations, and also by-- in effect--totally undoing the force buildup of the last 13 years. The PRC now asked that the USSR demonstrate its sincerity by withdrawing its forces entirely from Mongolia and by lowering its strength east of the Urals to the level of the Khrushchev era.[34]

By this time, however, the Soviet leadership not only had no intention of doing this, but was already impelled for a mixture of reasons once again to increase the scope of its military efforts in the Far East.

[34]People's Daily, March 26, 1978; FBIS Daily Report, March 27, 1978.

VII. THE HEIGHTENED FAR EAST PRIORITY AFTER THE LATE 1970s

In 1977 and 1978 a growing assortment of considerations of different kinds began to influence the Soviet leaders to give a heightened priority to their strength in East Asia. Some of these factors concerned China; some the United States and Japan; some, the three together. Gradually and cumulatively, the joint effects of all these inputs to Soviet thinking began to be more and more visible after 1978.

THE SCOPE OF CHANGES

In retrospect, it appears that by early 1978 at the latest, the Soviets had decided that it was necessary to give heightened importance to the size, structure, organization, deployment pattern, and rapid mobilization potential of their forces confronting China.[1] This changing priority was symbolized--and perhaps also given impetus--by the highly unusual public visit Brezhnev and Minister of Defense Ustinov paid to the commands at Khabarovsk and Vladivostok in April 1978.[2] In

[1] It should be emphasized, however, that these changes in the Far East went forward as part of a broader, nationwide program to modernize the Soviet armed forces and to improve their structure.

[2] See The New York Times, April 10, 1978. The lengthy, well-reported Brezhnev-Ustinov rail tour of economic and military facilities in Siberia and the Far East was apparently intended to serve notice--both to the Chinese and to local Soviet officials--of the heightened strategic importance the Soviets assigned to the development and defense of the eastern portion of the USSR. In Vladivostok, Brezhnev and the Defense Minister visited the fleet; at Chita, they had "discussions" with the commanders of the Transbaykal Military District; and at Khabarovsk, on the Chinese border, the local Soviet commanders staged what was termed a "combined-arms tactical exercise" for the two leaders. (Pravda, April 4, 6, 8, 1978.) The Chinese Minister of Defense reacted to this visit by writing that Brezhnev had "personally sneaked into Siberia and the Far East to encourage the Soviet troops and issue war cries." (Xu Xiangqian, "Heighten Vigilance, Be Ready to Fight," Red Flag, No. 8, 1978, as reported by NCNA, July 30, 1978.)

the years that have followed, the effects of this decision have apparently been reflected in a variety of ways:

First, by the widely reported large-scale renewal of Soviet military hardware in Siberia, Mongolia, and the Far East with next-generation equipment--a process that was particularly notable in the case of aircraft.[3]

Second, by an acceleration of the process of deploying new, low-category, thinly-manned divisions facing China.[4] This process had the advantage of significantly augmenting both the rapid mobilization potential of the anti-Chinese forces and the threat perceived by China without a comparable immediate expenditure of increasingly scarce military manpower resources.

Third, by carrying out a major reorganization of the Soviet command structure opposite China. By 1979, a high command was established[5] for the Far East theater of operations which has been alleged to exercise authority over the Far Eastern, Siberian, and Transbaykal Military Districts, including Soviet forces in Mongolia.[6] It is

[3]Japanese Defense Agency, Defense of Japan, 1980, pp. 51-53; Defense of Japan, 1981, pp. 78-79.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Initially, under General Petrov, the prestigious commander of the successful Soviet-Cuban operations in Ethiopia in 1977-78, and now chief of all Soviet ground forces. (Boston Globe, March 28, 1979.)

[6]Japanese Defense Agency, Defense of Japan, 1980, pp. 51-53. This authoritative Japanese publication asserted that "a new combined command was established to control the Far Eastern, Transbaykal and Siberian military districts as well as the troops stationed in Mongolia." It added that "in establishing the combined command . . . the Soviet Union has apparently taken into consideration the need to cope with any contingency not only on the Chinese front but also in the Pacific theater. . . ."

The Chinese have also taken public note of this change. On October 9, 1981, NCNA stated that as a "first step" in "building up an independent command structure for war in the Far East . . . the Soviet Union set up in 1978 the Far Eastern Theater Command near Lake Baykal to assume

plausible to conjecture that under wartime conditions, if not sooner, the Pacific Fleet and the Central Asian Military District might also be subordinated to this command. In view of the dual mission of the Far East Military District--facing both China and Japan--the establishment of the high command imposed a single focus on the tasks of opposing China, Japan, and U.S. forces in the Far East. In addition, it was a long step toward recognizing the inescapable permanence and need for self-sufficiency of the Far Eastern theater, a subject to which we shall return later.

Fourth, by augmenting what the Chinese have regarded as the demonstrative and threatening deployment of forces in Mongolia. The PRC has reacted bitterly and publicly to what it sees as an increased and gratuitous Soviet threat to the north China plain since 1979, as well as to the unprecedentedly large Soviet exercise held in and around Mongolia in the spring of 1979.[7]

And fifth, by making more visible to China the threat of strategic weapons of mass destruction through the deployment of the SS-20 IRBM and the Backfire bomber. Notable in this connection was an unusual facet of the deployment trend of the SS-20 after 1979. When one takes into account the dual-purpose deployments just east of the Urals, which are generally credited with the capability to target both Europe and the Far

unified command of troops in the Far East, Transbaykal and Siberian military districts and in Mongolia as well as the naval and air forces in the region." (FBIS Daily Report--China, October 14, 1981, D-1.)

[7]This exercise was first described in The New York Times, March 17, 1979. It was further reported by the Japanese Yomiuri Shimbun on March 27, citing a Japanese Foreign Ministry and Defense Agency statement, by the Boston Globe on March 28, and finally by NCNA on March 29. For one Chinese reaction to this Soviet threat, and to such maneuvers, see the quoted statement by Liu Keming, Sec. IV, footnote 7.

East, this IRBM appears to devote more nearly equal targeting to the China/Far East side than have previous such weapons systems.[8] In parallel with this has been the gradual, piecemeal discovery over the same period--through the revelations of Soviet conduct in Afghanistan and Indochina--that the Soviet Union has been preparing and testing in action chemical and biological agents to which China is potentially particularly vulnerable.[9]

Meanwhile, there was simultaneously an acceleration of naval and air deployments to the Far East directed against Japan and U.S. forces in the area. The naval buildup was dramatized by the temporary deployment to Vladivostok of the antisubmarine warfare (ASW) carrier MINSK and the large troop carrier IVAN ROGOV in 1979. Probably of more fundamental long-term significance for U.S. naval forces in the Pacific was the fact that the Backfire was deployed with antiship as well as deep theater bombing missions. The aspect of these changes that had the most immediate political consequences, however, was the Soviet decision to begin fortification and garrisoning in 1978 of the southern Kurile islands claimed by Japan, despite the adverse political effect this had on Soviet relations with Japan.

[8]See John M. Collins, U.S.-Soviet Military Balance, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1980, Map 4, p. 134. In addition, there has been an increasing Soviet tendency in recent years to modernize weapons systems in Asia at roughly the same pace as in Europe. In the east, as in the west, the arrival of the Backfire bomber has complemented the strategic threat presented by the SS-20 deployments.

[9]This is not to imply that the USSR desired the world public to learn of these activities, in view of the bad publicity attached to them. However, the Soviet leaders probably saw some benefit if the Chinese leaders privately became aware of them--particularly in the case of the use of mycotoxins in Indochina.

THE MULTIPLE CAUSES

Why did the Soviet leaders begin this multifaceted effort in 1978? A mixture of four reasons[10] seems likely.

The Heightened Role of the Sea of Okhotsk Bastion

One factor was simply the powerful effects of advancing technology. The advent at about this time of very-long-range submarine-launched ballistic missiles such as the SS-N-8--and, later, the SS-N-18--made it possible for the first time for Soviet ballistic missile submarines to target the United States without leaving "bastion areas"--that is, partially sheltered bodies of water immediately adjoining the Soviet Union, such as the Barents Sea in the northwest, and the Sea of Okhotsk in the Far East.[11] This fact gave added and growing strategic importance to the nearby and surrounding land areas--the Kola peninsula in the northwest, and the Soviet Primorskiy province, Kamchatka, and the Kurile chain in the east. The heightened role of the Sea of Okhotsk made it increasingly important for the Soviet Union to deny U.S. access to this Sea in time of war and to guarantee its own egress. This growing sensitivity about the bastion area in turn contributed to the Soviet decision to begin the fortification of the southern Kuriles and to accelerate the naval, air, and ground force buildup along the surrounding coasts.

[10]Again, these factors specific to Soviet concerns in the Far East were superimposed on the impetus given to Far East weapons modernization by the broader process of modernization going on throughout the Soviet armed forces.

[11]"While YANKEE-class SSBNs must operate in the eastern Pacific to strike the United States, DELTA-class SSBNs in the home waters can hit almost any target in the United States with their SS-N-18 SLBMs." (Major General James C. Pfautz, "The Soviet Military Presence in Asia," paper presented at the Security Conference on Asia and the Pacific, Palm Springs, January 8-10, 1982.)

Presumptive Insurance Against Sino-U.S.-Japanese Cooperation

It is also likely that the Soviets by early 1978 had already begun to take out insurance to seek a margin of advantage against a worst-case contingency of Sino-U.S.-Japanese security cooperation. Even before the successive alarm bells were rung in Moscow by the visit of U.S. Presidential security adviser Brzezinski in China in May 1978, the signing of the Sino-Japanese friendship treaty in August, and the announcement of Sino-U.S. normalization in December, the Soviet leaders seem to have begun to fear that their efforts to retard the drawing together of these three powers would ultimately be unsuccessful. It is thus entirely plausible that resources allocated and military plans made during the 1977 finalization of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (1977-81) were in part influenced by the desire to prepare for this contingency. The projected increase in Soviet strength in the Far East in combination with the new Soviet organizational cohesion was clearly expected to give the Far Eastern theater an independent viability against the potential combined forces of its adversaries, and a significant advantage if those adversaries did not combine.[12]

Although the Sino-U.S.-Japanese security combination feared by the USSR has not in fact yet materialized, the Soviets probably now view the steps they have taken as serving a prophylactic purpose. The menacing new Soviet deployments in Mongolia and the Kuriles have in common, among

[12] In his earlier-noted 1981 article, Orgakov made unusually explicit references to the new status of the "theater of military operations," emphasizing that it had now replaced the "front" as the new Soviet "basic form of military operations." He also asserted that what he claimed was "the expansion of the military-political ties between the United States and China and Japan" was creating "a long-term military threat to our Eastern borders." (Kommunist, No. 10, 1981, pp. 80-81.)

other things, the goal of intimidating two prospective members of this hypothetical alliance. The potential to intimidate is enhanced by the concrete military advantages these deployments would give the Soviets against their prospective adversaries in wartime--in the Chinese case, quicker access by Soviet armor to the north China plain, and in the Japanese case, greater possibilities to achieve and maintain control of the Soya Strait.

In general, this recent effort to intimidate regional opponents through the Far East buildup bears a close resemblance to the analogous function already served by the Soviet buildup in Europe.

The Heightened Importance of Indian Ocean Support

The new activism in the Soviet deployments and organizational measures taken in the Far East also reflected the heightened importance of the Far East in supporting Soviet efforts to exploit new opportunities opening up in southern and western Asia. Apparently because of the uncertain reliability of the Suez Canal, Soviet naval operations in the Indian Ocean have had to be largely supported and controlled from distant Vladivostok. In view of the events that unfolded in both Iran and Afghanistan in 1978, and the geopolitical opportunities created for the USSR by the weakening U.S. position in Southwest Asia, the Far East took on additional significance in the worldwide Soviet contest with the United States as the essential base for future Soviet naval deployments southward and westward.

The Wish To Increase Leverage on China concerning Vietnam

The Soviets were also influenced to give a higher priority to the Far East buildup by a felt need to increase their leverage on China in connection with trends in Indochina in the wake of the expulsion of the United States from the peninsula in 1975. The Soviet leaders undoubtedly watched eagerly the approach of geopolitical opportunity through 1977 and 1978 as they observed the rapid decay of Sino-Vietnamese relations and the parallel growth in Soviet-Vietnamese association, which were to culminate in Hanoi's entry into the Council for Economic and Mutual Assistance (CEMA) in June 1978 and the signing of the Hanoi-Moscow treaty in November. Since 1975 the Chinese had been warning--correctly, as it turned out--of the Soviet thirst for access to the former U.S. naval facilities at Cam Ranh Bay.[13] Even before the opportunity to cash in on these facilities materialized, the Soviets are likely to have vaguely foreseen that circumstances might well evolve in which they could reap geopolitical profit by underwriting Vietnamese ambitions in Indochina and protecting Vietnam against the PRC. Over and above all other motives, the strengthening of the Soviet ground, air, and naval position in the Far East after 1978 was intended to serve this

[13]As early as June 1975--only a few weeks after the American evacuation of Vietnam--Deng Xiaoping publicly warned that "the other superpower insatiably seeks new military bases in Southeast Asia," and told a visiting Thai Premier that it was "highly probable that that superpower may request the use of bases in South Vietnam." (NCNA, June 30, 1975; The Nation, Bangkok, July 3, 1975.) Three years later--not long before the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty--Deng was continuing to warn of the Soviet desire to make use of the "dozens of naval facilities and airports" in Vietnam "that were built by the United States during the war." (Asahi Shimbun, Tokyo, September 7, 1978.)

purpose of increasing Soviet deterrent pressure on China to restrain China's actions to the south.

It was against this background that a test of the Soviet deterrent capability suddenly appeared in Indochina in late 1978.

VIII. THE 1979 CRISIS IN INDOCHINA

The third Sino-Soviet military crisis in which the United States had a major security interest lasted from late December 1978, when the Vietnamese opened their blitzkrieg into Cambodia, to early March 1979, when the Chinese ended their "counterattack" into Vietnam. This crisis took place in a strategic environment which was significantly different from that of either 1969 or 1971. A combination of major new dangers to Soviet interests, new advantages enjoyed by the Soviet Union, and new opportunities had emerged together to reshape the Politburo's calculus of risks and potential profit.

THE NOVEMBER 1978 TREATY

Factors in Soviet Calculations

First, it seems likely from the circumstances surrounding the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty on November 3, discussed below, that the Soviet leaders were well aware from the outset of the Vietnamese intention to attack and conquer Cambodia. They were aware also that if the PRC responded in kind against Vietnam and in defense of its Cambodian client, Soviet choices would be limited. Even in the unlikely event that it should want to do so, the Soviet Union could not bring significant ground force strength to bear in Vietnam itself for many weeks or even months because of the great logistical difficulties. Consequently, as in the case of India in 1971, the central issue created by the 1978 treaty was the implicit Soviet threat to take military action of some kind across the Sino-Soviet border--whether by land or air or both--in the event of Chinese action against Vietnam.

At the same time, the Soviets were probably aware that for historical reasons--the centuries of Chinese pretensions to an Indochina sphere of influence--Chinese incentives to respond forcefully in defense of their clients in Indochina were stronger than they had been in the case of Pakistan. They knew that the Chinese logistical task in this event would be somewhat less difficult,[1] and that the Chinese military and political establishment was considerably more coherent than it had been in 1971.[2] Finally, the Soviets knew that the Chinese relationship with the United States was at least somewhat closer in 1978 than it had been in 1971, raising for the Soviet Union more acutely the question of the U.S. reaction in the event of Sino-Soviet hostilities.

The Matchup with China. Second, from the Soviet perspective, the state of their military matchup with China in 1978 had both favorable and unfavorable implications for the venture they were about to take in Indochina by associating themselves with Hanoi's plans to act. The Soviets entered the crisis with a firepower advantage over China--both conventional and nuclear--that had grown rather than diminished since the first crisis in 1969, when they already had a great advantage in both respects. On the other hand, with the entry into operational status of both the CSS-2 and CSS-3, and their deployment in modes likely to diminish Soviet confidence in the total effectiveness of any

[1] This is not to say that this task was easy or that it was performed very well in 1979, but merely that it was inherently less of a nightmare than that of supporting large forces against a well-equipped enemy from China through Tibet.

[2] Again, this is not to say that serious disagreements within the Chinese political and possibly even military leaderships did not exist in 1979, but merely that they were far less grave than those that existed at the time of the Lin Biao crisis in the fall of 1971.

disarming strike, the Chinese deterrent against any Soviet attack had been greatly improved since 1969. Moreover, the Soviets had every reason to suspect that the Chinese also thought so. Consequently the Soviets could not expect indirect nuclear threats of the kind employed against China in the 1969 crisis to have the same degree of credibility again. Meanwhile, despite the continued growth of the Soviet firepower advantage, the Soviets are likely to have retained their reluctance to become involved in a land war with China from which they might not be able to extricate themselves.

The Likely U.S. Role. Third, it was not clear what role the United States might play. The experience of the past decade again pulled in two directions, and paradoxically gave the Soviet leaders cause for both confidence and concern. In November 1978, when the Soviets signed their treaty with Vietnam, the pros and cons of the U.S. factor in any resulting Soviet confrontation with China probably appeared to them as follows:

On one side of the ledger was the Soviet perception that the world power position of the Soviet Union compared with that of the United States had been significantly improved since 1969. In the decade gone by, trends in both the strategic and conventional military balances had been encouraging to the Soviet leadership. The growth of Soviet power projection capabilities and a simultaneous decay of U.S. and Western influence at a number of points in the Third World hitherto strongly oriented toward the West had permitted an unprecedented expansion of the Soviet presence around the world. Particularly gratifying had been the spectacular and effective Soviet-Cuban operations in Africa after 1975 in the face of feeble and ineffectual American protests. As recently as

April 1978, a Communist coup in Afghanistan that promised to expand Soviet influence to the south had occasioned no U.S. reaction at all. Meanwhile, the United States had suffered a humiliating defeat of historic proportions in Vietnam in 1975, an event that had inhibited U.S. behavior ever since. From this perspective, seizure of a new Soviet political opportunity in Indochina is likely to have been seen by the Soviet leadership as an action fitting into a pattern of precedents in which Soviet boldness had been rewarded and the U.S. response increasingly constrained.

Also on this side of the ledger, tending to encourage a somewhat more sanguine Soviet view of the risks involved, were the visible impediments to Sino-U.S. military cooperation. Throughout the decade, the worst Soviet fears of 1971 had not been realized; after the initial major steps toward rapprochement in 1971 and 1972, the United States had not moved into a military alliance with China against the Soviet Union. Instead, the Sino-U.S. relationship had entered a prolonged period of very slow growth. In view of this record, some Soviets may have argued that even seven years after the issue first arose during the India-Pakistan crisis, it remained unlikely that public opinion would allow the U.S. leaders to assume risks of conflict with the Soviet Union over China--and particularly so as a by-product of Sino-Soviet confrontation over Vietnam, with its painful associations to the U.S. public.

On the other side of the ledger, however, Soviet leaders in November 1978 had cause to believe--remembering the shock of the U.S. opening to China in 1971--that the United States was capable of unpleasant surprises. One result of the deterioration of Soviet-U.S.

relations since 1975 had been a reversal of the trend of declining U.S. military spending; another had been the beginning of a trend toward somewhat closer Sino-U.S. dealings. During 1978 this trend toward greater Sino-U.S. cooperation had seemed to accelerate, notably with the visit of Brzezinski to Beijing in May 1978, and the U.S. encouragement of Japan to sign the Sino-Japanese friendship treaty essentially on Chinese terms in August. The Soviets meanwhile observed the inauguration of gradual unwelcome changes in the U.S. position regarding Western arms sales to the PRC. Although it is likely that the Soviets did not foresee, when the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty was signed in early November, that Sino-U.S. normalization would be completed only a month later,[3] they were surely well aware of unusual stirrings in the relationship.

It is conceivable, however, that this very fact may have reinforced Soviet incentives to seize the emerging opportunity in Indochina while the risks of U.S. involvement were still modest, and before a U.S. military association with China had solidified. Indeed, the Soviets may have hoped that their treaty relationship with Vietnam would dramatize to Washington the latent risks for the United States involved in Sino-U.S. security ties, and inhibit their further development. Both during and after the crisis, Soviet propaganda sought to convey this message to the United States.

In addition, after the fact, the Soviets surely regarded the military benefits they obtained from the new relationship with Vietnam, discussed below, as a useful offset to the unwelcome developments in

[3]It is possible, as some have suggested, that the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty accelerated Chinese agreement on terms for normalization. If so, this was surely, for Moscow, an unexpected and undesired result of the Soviet action.

Chinese relations with Japan and the United States. It is unlikely, however, that the latter trends prompted the drawing together of Vietnam and the Soviet Union, as some observers have contended.[4] It should not be forgotten that the major and decisive shift occurred in the position of Vietnam, and not in that of the USSR, which had long been coveting the military facilities in Vietnam and courting Vietnamese alignment with the Soviet Union in opposition to China. The Vietnamese drift toward the USSR and estrangement from China had been going on gradually for several years before 1978 for reasons having little to do with Chinese policy toward Japan and the United States. In November 1978, this process reached its culmination because of a drastic firming up of Vietnamese intentions toward Cambodia that made a deterrent against China suddenly appear much more urgent. Vietnam then accepted a relationship of dependence on the USSR which Moscow had long desired and which Hanoi had long avoided.

The Underestimation of Risks

The net result of the interplay of these considerations was that initially the Soviet leaders probably somewhat underestimated the risks latent in their actions, and had no "worst-case" plan in mind at the outset. The evidence of their behavior just before and during the crisis, reviewed below, suggests surprise and temporizing. This pattern of hesitancy and caution during the Chinese "counterattack" also suggests that the Soviet leadership had not previously decided on the course of action they would take to save the Hanoi regime if worse came to worst. As previously suggested, it seems likely that they were strongly influenced--perhaps misled--by their easy experience with China

[4]William C. Hyland, p. 42.

in 1971, and therefore partially miscalculated the Chinese reaction in 1979 to the more severe provocation created by the overrunning of Cambodia.

The Changing U.S. Posture. The risk calculations the Soviets had made before signing the treaty in early November were undoubtedly modified by subsequent U.S. behavior. Over the following three months, the Soviet leaders were to receive a succession of shocks from the United States. The surprise announcement of Sino-U.S. normalization in December was followed in January by the surprise Deng Xiaoping visit to Washington. Observing the extensive consultations that took place there, the Soviets probably remained uncertain as to the nature and extent of U.S. commitments, regardless of any private or public U.S. disavowals. Indeed, the Soviets were probably predisposed by their own conspiratorial world-view to suspect that some such commitments may have been made, however improbable this might seem. In late January, after the visit, Moscow is reported to have received from the United States a private message urging the Soviet Union not to become involved in the event of Sino-Vietnamese hostilities.[5] However the Soviets interpreted this, it is unlikely to have strengthened Soviet confidence that the United States would not react to Soviet risk-taking against China. Most important of all, the Soviet leaders observed U.S. naval forces deployed in the area--in Southeast Asia--where in the past the United States had indeed waged war for a decade.[6] The cumulative

[5] Reuters, Moscow, January 28, 1979.

[6] The Christian Science Monitor, February 12, 1979. At the end of February, one press report asserted that the Soviets were being "signalled" by the "presence of six U.S. Navy vessels near Hong Kong," and that the aircraft carrier USS CONSTELLATION had also left the Philippines for the South China Sea. (The Christian Science Monitor, February 28, 1979.)

result is that by the time the Sino-Vietnamese fighting began in February, the Soviet leaders had probably become somewhat less confident than they had previously been that escalation could not bring about U.S. involvement.

The miscalculation about China and the greater uncertainty about the United States had consequences for Soviet behavior during the crisis, and despite the fortunate outcome for the USSR, apparently caused the Soviets some embarrassment thereafter.

The Ambiguity of the Treaty Commitment. The Soviets took care to ensure sufficient ambiguity in the treaty signed with Vietnam to preserve their options, including the option of inaction. Unlike all other Soviet treaties signed with Communist states, the pact with Vietnam was not called a "mutual assistance" treaty, and did not pledge Moscow to provide "immediate aid," including "military" aid, in the event of an attack on Vietnam. Instead, as they had in the case of India, the Soviets promised to "consult" with the Vietnamese and to take "appropriate effective measures." This language, once again, was intended to enable the Soviets to have their cake and eat it: to imply a threat against China without formally committing the Soviet Union to any military response.

But also, as in the case of the 1971 India-Pakistan crisis, the Soviets knew that this legal safeguard would not protect them from the severe dilemma that would arise if the Vietnamese regime should ever find itself in desperate need of Soviet action. Moreover, because Vietnam, unlike India, was a Communist regime, the political pressure on Moscow to take dangerous military risks in such an extremity would be much higher.

The Treaty and Soviet Military Presence

However ambiguous their deterrent against China, the Soviet leaders did not intend to sell it to Vietnam cheaply. The atmosphere surrounding the final negotiations that produced the treaty in Moscow in early November strongly suggested that the talks included hard bargaining.[7] Although the evidence is not conclusive, it is a reasonable speculation that one of the matters under contention involved the guidelines for the special military rights which the Soviet Union subsequently obtained in Vietnam for the first time: the right to conduct naval port visits, to use and enlarge naval support facilities in Vietnamese ports, to build and operate electronic facilities at Cam Ranh Bay, and to use Vietnamese airfields for staging of long-range naval reconnaissance flights from the Soviet Far East.[8] All of these Soviet privileges emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Sino-Vietnamese fighting. It appears likely that the details of the Soviet activities that may have been broadly sanctioned on a contingent basis by these understandings were only spelled out in Soviet-Vietnamese contacts during and after the fighting. For example, the spacing of Soviet TU-95 reconnaissance flights to Vietnam and the length of the

[7]Moscow radio described the atmosphere of the first session of talks as one of cordiality, mutual respect, and "comradely frankness," a phrase that almost invariably indicates disagreement. Contrary to custom, there was no welcoming banquet for the Vietnamese provided after the first session. Only after the final session, when agreement had been reached, did Moscow radio announce "full unanimity of views"; and only then did the USSR provide the missing banquet.

[8]This activity, now widely known, is summarized by P'an Hsi-t'ang, "Expansion of Soviet Naval Power in the Far East," Issues and Studies, Taipei, pp. 47-49. Beijing has repeatedly and bitterly complained about these Soviet base rights in Vietnam (e.g., People's Daily, May 9, 1979, FBIS Daily Report, May 11, 1979, and People's Daily, June 3, 1979, FBIS Daily Report, June 8, 1979).

stay of these aircraft in Vietnam may well have become the subject of continuing conversations between Moscow and Hanoi.[9] Nevertheless, agreement in principle on the broad framework of these new Soviet activities, to be phased in if need later arose, is likely to have been part of the Soviet-Vietnamese bargain from the outset, and an essential if unpublicized portion of the treaty package finally agreed upon.[10]

Vietnamese Calculations about This Presence. The bargain struck had pluses and minuses for both sides. It is likely that the Vietnamese found the aroma of extraterritoriality conveyed by these Soviet military privileges on Vietnamese soil very distasteful indeed, and that sparring over the prospective ground rules for these privileges took up much of the treaty negotiations. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese are likely from the start to have seen important compensation for themselves if the Soviet deterrent obtained greater credibility from a more visible Soviet military presence in and around Vietnam. By the same token, the Vietnamese evidently saw added incentive to permit the implementation of these Soviet activities once the Chinese attack on Vietnam had furnished additional evidence of the Vietnamese need for the Soviet Union.

Finally, the extremely cautious Soviet behavior displayed during the Sino-Vietnamese fighting in 1979 may have also influenced Hanoi to place greater value on the Soviet presence as increasing the likelihood

[9] These flights evolved out of shorter flights from the Soviet Far East conducted during the Chinese incursion that went only as far as the East China Sea. See Japanese Defense Agency, Defense of Japan, 1979, pp. 38-40.

[10] The Soviets from the outset of 1979 thus walked a fine line between their thirst for military bases and their perception of risk for themselves. They had a vested interest in a heightened Vietnamese fear of China sufficient to bring about a Soviet military presence in Vietnam, yet they had not decided how to respond to the dangers that might be created by the kind of Chinese actions that would heighten Vietnamese fears.

that Moscow could not evade involvement if a more serious Chinese attack ever materialized. However unlikely the chance that a new Chinese attack may appear today--and even more unlikely the chance that such an attack would create a desperate Vietnamese need for Soviet help--the Vietnamese are likely to welcome a Soviet presence that might reduce Soviet procrastination if worse came to worst.

The Soviet Risk-Benefit Calculus. For the Soviets, on the other hand, the reasoning was almost the obverse. In the eyes of the Soviet leaders, the only drawback of the new Soviet military privileges was the possibility, however remote, that they might eventually constrict Soviet choices and reduce the flexibility of Soviet options on whether and how to become involved in the event of Sino-Vietnamese fighting. Before the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese war, this possibility was minimal because the Soviet presence was still very small. Since then, the chance that the USSR might inadvertently become involved before it wished to has indeed become somewhat greater over time as the local Soviet military presence has grown. At the same time, however, the underlying risk has diminished somewhat because the likelihood of a new Sino-Vietnamese war has itself become more remote as a result of the sobering Chinese experience in the 1979 engagement, the increased Vietnamese strength in the border area, and other factors.

In any case, the Soviets in 1978, at the time the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty was signed, clearly believed that any such risks would be outweighed by the value their new privileges in Vietnam could offer to Soviet power projection capabilities. The facilities eventually obtained in Vietnam offer the Soviets major conveniences for the deployment into the Indian Ocean of naval forces based in and controlled

from the Soviet Far East, help the Soviets to support frequent deployments in the South China Sea, and give a significant assist to Soviet submarine and ASW operations within a wide radius of Vietnam.[11] And beyond all this, as noted earlier, the Vietnam facilities have a historical significance to the Soviet leaders, since they are the first points of support for naval operations that the USSR has been able to obtain in the Pacific outside its home territory since the Soviet Union was forced to surrender Port Arthur and Darien in the 1950s.

THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN THE CRISIS

The Changing Soviet Posture

Despite the legal hedge which the Soviets inserted into the treaty around their implied promise to help the Vietnamese in case of need, the Soviet leaders at first sought to advertise the treaty as a major instrument of deterrence. At the treaty signing on November 3, 1978, Brezhnev asserted that the document had already become a "political reality," and that "whether they [the Chinese] want it or not, they will have to reckon with this reality." A month later--and only two weeks before the Vietnamese blitzkrieg began--Gromyko when presenting the treaty for ratification pointed ostentatiously to the very commitment the Soviets had wished to water down:

I want to draw particular attention to Article 6 of the treaty. It stipulates that if either Party is attacked or threatened with attack the Soviet Union and Vietnam shall immediately consult each other for the purpose of eliminating the threat and taking appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and security in their countries . . . It is understandable that this article has particularly great importance in present conditions.[12]

[11]Department of Defense, Soviet Military Power, 1981, p. 93. FY 83 Report of the Secretary of Defense to Congress, p. II-20.

[12]Pravda, December 4, 1978.

The unspecified "present conditions" that Gromyko had in mind were, in fact, the Vietnamese preparations to attack Cambodia, the ongoing border incidents between Vietnam and China, and the first, as yet minor, steps in what was to become a massive redeployment of Chinese armies toward the Vietnamese frontier.

The striking contrast between Gromyko's parading of the operative clause of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty before the Vietnamese attack, and the extraordinary reluctance of the Soviets to refer to the clause once a Chinese response began, strongly suggests, once again, that the Soviets did not seriously expect the Chinese military action, and had believed that they would again enjoy a "free ride." Although the Soviets were surely aware of the evolution of the Chinese buildup against Vietnam as it developed in late December and throughout January, they initially said very little about this. They were reticent about the Chinese troop movements partly because they did not want to raise the issue of their own intentions, but also partly because they may at first have continued to hope that the Chinese were bluffing and were merely seeking to intimidate Vietnam, in the same way that they themselves had for a long time sought to intimidate China through their buildup on the Chinese frontier.[13]

[13] A Soviet broadcast on January 3 thus referred in passing to alleged reports "from foreign correspondents in Beijing" about Chinese troop movements to the borders of both Vietnam and the Soviet Union, and characterized this, in generalized fashion, as efforts "to whip up tension on the borders with the country's neighbors." Until the last week of January, the Soviets contented themselves with minimal reportage of the Chinese buildup and with unspecific condemnation of Chinese efforts at "intimidation." As late as January 27, a television broadcast by Leonid Zamyatin, chief of the Central Committee International Information Department, claimed that the Chinese themselves were spreading reports about the possibility of a Chinese "lightning strike" into Vietnam "in order to exert political and

After Soviet receipt of the private U.S message urging Soviet caution in late January, however, the Soviets seemed to attach greater credence to the possibility that China would really attack, and Soviet editorials and broadcasts denouncing the Chinese took on a tone of greater alarm. Nevertheless, no Soviet statement specified what the Soviets might do if the Chinese marched, or referred directly to the possibility of any military Soviet action. The closest approximation to such a threat was far removed indeed, and was contained in one journal's appeal to "international public opinion" to prevent Beijing "from overstepping the forbidden line." [14]

The Nature of the Soviet Crisis Warnings

After the Chinese did attack, the Soviets issued a Government Statement demanding that the Chinese stop "before it is too late," insisting that the Vietnamese have "reliable friends" and asserting that the Soviet Union would "fulfill the commitments it assumed" under the treaty with Hanoi. [15] Neither the Statement nor any other Soviet public comment chose to be more specific about the nature of those commitments, however, nor to refer, throughout the period of the fighting, to Article 6 of the Treaty, about which Gromyko had been so grandiloquent in December. Although the Soviet Minister of Defense later termed the Government Statement a "serious warning" to the Chinese, he too refrained from any hint as to what the Soviets proposed to do if this warning were ignored and the Chinese continued their assault. [16]

military pressure on Vietnam." Zamyatin seemed still to be adhering to the bluff theory.

[14] New Times (Moscow), February 8, 1979.

[15] TASS, February 18, 1979.

[16] Ustinov electoral speech, TASS, February 23, 1979.

The Chinese View of the Risks

The Chinese, however, do not appear to have had great confidence that the Soviets would not act, and they seem to have become more nervous about this as the fighting went on. From their perspective, there were many variables involved. The Chinese leaders had reason to be grateful to the United States for the relatively favorable posture the United States adopted (described above) which might help to inhibit the Soviets. But if the USSR could not be completely certain that the United States might not become involved if worse came to worst, the other side of the coin was that the PRC, for its part, had no strong reason to expect this, and moreover could not be sure how the Soviets assessed the likely U.S. role. All in all, although the Chinese leadership appears to have made a considered judgment, before crossing the Vietnamese border, that the Soviet Union would probably not take military risks in response to the kind of limited Sino-Vietnamese engagement Beijing envisioned, the PRC nevertheless appears to have seen at least a marginal chance of a Soviet attack. It is possible that the Chinese leaders attached some weight to warnings Deng may have received in Washington about the dangers involved, and it is likely that they took soundings elsewhere to solicit a range of informed Western opinion on the possible Soviet response.

Beforehand, the Chinese did what they could to minimize the risk. They reinforced in Xinjiang, they evacuated civilians on a large scale from exposed areas in proximity to the border, they put forces facing the Soviet Union in a posture of enhanced readiness--all steps which

they knew the Soviets would see, and which they hoped would remind Moscow of the risks involved for the USSR in any precipitate action.[17]

Most important of all, they advertised in advance, as widely as possible, the limited nature of their objectives, both in space and time.[18] As the fighting developed, the delays in the Chinese timetable occasioned by the stubborn Vietnamese resistance therefore apparently evoked not only embarrassment in Beijing but also increased concern about the Soviet reaction, since these delays inevitably tended to make ultimate Chinese objectives seem more ambiguous and the Chinese promise of a short "lesson" and an early pull-out somewhat less credible.

To counteract this impression, the Chinese early in the fighting appear to have given the Soviets renewed assurances through an indirect channel. On February 20, Deputy Foreign Minister He Ying is alleged to have privately told the dean of the Beijing diplomatic corps that a Chinese withdrawal had begun, and to have asked the dean to disseminate this information to all foreign diplomats.[19] Although this incorrect assertion was not publicized by Beijing, and although the Chinese did not in fact begin the pullback for nearly two weeks more, they had in effect given the USSR, through a third party, an authoritative

[17]Tien Tien Jih Pao, Hong Kong, February 20, 1979; Daily Telegraph, London, April 17, 1979; The New York Times, September 30, 1979.

[18]They implied that they would go only a modest distance into Vietnam and stay for only a modest amount of time. This had some credibility because of the precedent of Chinese behavior in their clash with India in 1962, when they had voluntarily withdrawn after routing Indian forces in the Northeast Frontier Agency. In practice, the main test applied now by all concerned was whether the Chinese would seek to descend from the Vietnamese border highlands into the Red River delta to menace Hanoi.

[19]UPI, Beijing, February 20, 1979, quoting a West German DPA report of that date. The dean of the diplomatic corps cited in this report was Lebanese ambassador Ellen Boustany.

reiteration of their intention to do so. On March 5, after the fall of Long Son--an event evidently necessary for Chinese pride--the Chinese announced that they had taught Vietnam its "lesson" and would now retire. The long delay in achieving the fall of Long Son was apparently largely responsible for the delay in the Chinese withdrawal.

The Soviet Military Response

During the Sino-Vietnamese war the Soviets assisted the Vietnamese in Vietnam with air and coastal transport,[20] increased their naval air reconnaissance from the Soviet Far East,[21] maintained the naval intelligence collection vessels already deployed in the vicinity of Vietnam,[22] and moved a naval flotilla down from the Soviet Far East as far as the East China Sea. There, however, the flotilla remained, and did not venture into the South China Sea during the fighting.[23]

There is no evidence, and no reason to believe, that during the hostilities major threatening gestures were made by the Soviet Union along the Chinese border.[24] Not long after the fighting ceased, the USSR during the spring of 1979 staged a large-scale military exercise in the Soviet Far East, Siberia, and Mongolia,[25] and no doubt hoped with

[20]Washington Post, March 10, 1979; The New York Times, March 16, 1979.

[21]Japanese Defense Agency, Defense of Japan, 1979, pp. 38-40.

[22]The New York Times, February 8, 1979.

[23]Japanese Defense Agency, Defense of Japan, 1979, pp. 39-40. See especially the map, p. 39.

[24]The Chinese later did tell Western journalists that during the Sino-Vietnam fighting they had observed Soviet local reinforcements opposite Xinjiang (The New York Times, September 30, 1979) and opposite Inner Mongolia (Daily Telegraph, London, April 17, 1979), but that "the Russian threat came to nothing," and "there were no armed clashes." It seems unlikely that these local troop movements constituted a Soviet attempt to intimidate the PRC.

[25]The New York Times, March 17, 1979; Yomiuri Shimbun, Tokyo, March 27, 1979; Boston Globe, March 28, 1979.

good reason that aspects of this exercise would be observed by the Chinese and would incidentally help in Moscow's ongoing efforts to intimidate China. But in view of the long lead-time probably required to prepare such exercises,[26] it appears most unlikely that this one was organized in response to the events of the previous few months in Indochina, or had intimidation as its primary purpose.

Although the Soviet war effort was thus confined largely to logistics, intelligence, and rhetoric, it can be argued that little more was required by the Vietnamese given their own impressive resistance and the limited Chinese objectives. Afterward, the Soviets could claim--and no doubt said so privately to Hanoi--that their primary contribution had been to ensure that the Chinese objectives were indeed limited and remained so. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that at the outset of the fighting, when some uncertainty necessarily existed about Chinese intentions, the Vietnamese would not have welcomed a more forthright deterrent warning from Moscow to Beijing, including warning gestures on the Sino-Soviet border.

Subsequent Defensive Soviet Rationalizations

Both during and after this 1979 episode, some Soviet statements seemed somewhat defensive about what the USSR had and had not done. In a speech on March 3, Brezhnev protested that "no one should doubt" that the Soviet Union would live up to its treaty commitment, evidently reflecting a belief that some doubts had arisen. Some Soviet editorials later stressed that the Soviet deterrent had worked, and that "the

[26]See, on this point, the views of U.S. military experts cited in Boston Globe, March 28, 1979.

Peking leadership had to reckon with the serious warnings addressed to it by the Soviet Union." [27] Other Soviets, after the fact, passed dark hints implying that forthright and threatening Soviet actions which they were unable to specify had indeed been taken during the crisis. [28] Yet others implicitly denied this, claiming that Moscow's "vigorous diplomatic activity" had been all that was needed, and that in so doing, "our country, acting in accordance with the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty, gave fighting Vietnam all the help which was necessary in the Vietnamese comrades' opinion." [29] At least one Soviet writer admitted that Soviet behavior had been conditioned by risks implicitly involving the United States. [30]

Would Moscow Have Used Force Against China?

At least as important as what the Soviets actually did, however, is the question of what they might have done if events had put them to the test. Any judgment as to how the Politburo would have acted if forced to the wall can only be conjectural. All things considered, however, it

[27] Far Eastern Affairs, No. 3, 1979, p. 10.

[28] Recounting an interview with the Soviet Foreign Ministry officials Kapitsa and Sladkovsky, the Polish editor Lukowsky wrote: "The Chinese leaders . . . in their view of Soviet capabilities and its ability to counter military aggression are realists, no doubt. One of my very responsible interlocutors said: 'You can write down that in the days when China committed an aggression against Vietnam we took practical steps in the Far East which were very well understood in Beijing.'" (Polityka, April 14, 1979.)

[29] A. Bovin, Izvestiya, March 21, 1979.

[30] In his Izvestiya article, Bovin, unlike many other Soviet writers, alluded to dangers which may have indeed preoccupied the Soviet leadership: "Moscow, like Hanoi, understood that the situation which had arisen was fraught with dangers on a global scale. Of course, the concrete choice of means to influence the situation was dictated by concrete circumstances." This was clearly an allusion to the possibility of U.S. involvement.

seems likely that if the Chinese attack had not only continued but had shown signs of decisively defeating Vietnam--and specifically if Chinese forces had descended into the Red River delta to seriously threaten Hanoi--the Soviet leadership would have felt obliged to confront military risks it had been most reluctant to contemplate. Under these circumstances, for this leadership, the political costs of inaction would have gradually exceeded the political costs and risks of action.

It is plausible that under these conditions the Politburo would have first authorized the large-scale threatening military gestures on the Soviet side of the Sino-Soviet border that it apparently withheld during the fighting that actually took place. Judging from the precedent of Soviet behavior toward Israel at the close of the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, the Soviet leadership would have also dispatched one or more private threatening messages to Beijing through diplomatic channels. Almost certainly, this would have been accompanied by private messages to the United States intended both to try to get the United States to intervene with Beijing to persuade the PRC to desist, and to influence the United States to show caution if the Chinese did not desist and the Soviets then attacked.

The next step is more problematical, but in all events is likely to have been strongly influenced by the U.S. response to these warning displays and messages and by a fresh Soviet evaluation of the probable U.S. reaction to a Soviet attack on China. If at this stage the Soviets saw a high risk of a forceful U.S. response, it is possible that they would have temporized further for some time while continuing to threaten the PRC and seeking to dissuade the United States.

If, as is somewhat more likely, the Soviets now saw a reasonably good chance that the United States would not intervene, and if the Chinese did not stop, the Soviets might at last have acted. Given the extraordinary Soviet difficulty in sending help to Vietnam itself that would be both sufficient and timely, any meaningful action to save the Hanoi regime in the extremity postulated would have had to be taken on the Sino-Soviet frontier. One essential Soviet problem here, however, was a dilemma of scale. Military steps against China on a sufficient scale to be sure to compel a diversion of Chinese forces away from Vietnam would have implied acceptance of the dangerous consequences of a full-scale war with China. On the other hand, much smaller Soviet military actions of a merely demonstrative or "punitive" nature, that sought to avoid immediate commitment to a full-scale war, might quite possibly have been insufficient to cause the PRC to withdraw from Vietnam.

On the whole, however, it seems more likely than not that if the Soviets acted at all, they would have begun at the lower end of the spectrum, with local punitive ground force raids or token conventional air strikes of modest size, in the hope that the threat of escalation thus demonstrated would suffice to procure a Chinese withdrawal. The possible sequence of events after this is more difficult to judge.

To sum up: by 1979 the question of possible U.S. behavior in the event of Sino-Soviet hostilities had grown into a major complication for Soviet risk calculations, and the Soviet leadership would have sought to satisfy itself on this point before moving against China. But if repeated readings had given Moscow reasonable confidence about U.S.

inaction, the Soviets would probably have eventually responded to a grave Chinese threat to Hanoi by using force against the PRC. They most likely would have begun at lower levels of force while threatening to go higher.

THE AFTERMATH IN THE TRIANGLE TO DATE

Since the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese fighting, there have been changes in certain aspects of the Sino-Soviet-U.S. triangular relationship that have modified the main trends seen in the late 1970s.

The steady decline in Soviet-American relations since the mid-70s has continued, and even accelerated. Because of the further contraction of U.S. maneuvering room in the triangle, the intrinsic importance to the United States of the role played by the PRC has continued to increase.

Chinese forces continue to confront hostile armies on two sides, to the north and the south. Although Hanoi has been unable to put an end to Khmer Rouge resistance to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, on the whole and for the time being the Vietnamese with Soviet help have made good their effort to assert control over the Indochinese peninsula. In this sense, the Chinese effort to "teach the Vietnamese a lesson" has failed. The Soviets have consolidated and expanded the military benefits they acquired on Vietnamese soil at the close of the Sino-Vietnamese fighting, and now maintain a semi-permanent naval presence in the South China Sea. The Vietnamese have meanwhile strengthened their military position in their northern border provinces facing China, thus probably making any prospective new Chinese attack much more difficult and costly.

The Sino-Soviet border stalemate also continues, and the Sino-Soviet border talks in progress since 1969 have not resumed since 1978. In the spring of 1979, the Chinese gave notice of abrogation of the long-dormant Sino-Soviet treaty of alliance. Although Beijing then agreed to general talks with Moscow on possible improvement of the overall relationship, once the talks began the PRC immediately asserted as prerequisites for any agreement the far-reaching demands for Soviet military withdrawals from Asia previously announced,[31] thus making it clear that no agreement was expected. These talks were then suspended indefinitely by Beijing after the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Diplomatic sparring about possible resumption of one or another of these two sets of talks resumed in the latter half of 1981, but by mid-1982 had produced no result.

The Chinese continue to insist on cessation of all Soviet "hegemonic" behavior around the PRC's periphery as a precondition for a fundamental improvement of relations. This now means, specifically, Soviet agreement to Chinese demands for a preliminary, unilateral Soviet withdrawal from all "disputed" territory on the Sino-Soviet frontier; Soviet reduction of forces east of the Urals to the level of Khrushchev's day; Soviet evacuation of Afghanistan; and Soviet withdrawal of their support and presence from Vietnam. These Chinese requirements have been growing, along with the growth of Soviet activities in Asia, since they were first announced in Beijing in 1978, and it remains virtually certain that Moscow will never satisfy them.[32] At the same time, however, in 1982 the Chinese did agree to

[31]This was first explicitly confirmed in early 1980, in a Spiegel interview with People's Daily correspondent Tan Wenrui (Der Spiegel, Hamburg, February 18, 1980).

[32]For a Soviet view of these demands, see M. S. Ukraintsev,

take some further steps to relax existing tensions with the Soviet Union. They permitted a considerable increase in state-to-state economic, technical, and cultural contacts with the USSR, and while continuing to oppose and attack Soviet policy, they reduced the volume of their polemics. The tension between these two aspects of Chinese policy toward the USSR will be discussed in Sec. IX.

Meanwhile, the growth in the Sino-U.S. relationship, in vigorous progress since 1978, has been halted since 1981, largely as a result of new prominence given to the Taiwan issue by both sides. Apparently mainly for this reason, the Chinese in 1981 and 1982 moved increasingly to a public posture of criticism of both the United States and the Soviet Union. The geopolitical realities, however, remained asymmetrical. The PRC continued to maintain economic and other relations with the United States that were qualitatively different from those with the USSR; and Moscow, and not Washington, continued to develop a strategic threat to Chinese interests on the northern, southern, and western borders of the PRC.

"Soviet-Chinese Relations: Problems and Prospects," Problemy Dalnego Vostoka, No. 2 1982.

IX. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The Buildup Now Serves Ever Broader Soviet Interests

We have seen that the mixture of Soviet motives for the buildup has changed over the years, and the relative weight of different Soviet motives has shifted as well.

During the first five or six years of the buildup after 1965, the Soviets were overwhelmingly concerned with creating the military capabilities east of the Urals deemed necessary to inhibit the Chinese from challenging the Soviet version of the Sino-Soviet frontier. These capabilities were intended to ensure that the USSR would overmatch the Chinese at every step up the ladder of escalation, and to ensure Chinese recognition that they would be overmatched. Since October 1969, the threat conveyed by this buildup has succeeded in deterring the Chinese from attempting aggressive border patrolling to assert the Chinese version of the frontier.

The original purpose of the buildup, protection of the frontier, has endured, but in recent years has been accompanied--and more and more overshadowed--by new purposes:

- o First, to ensure, through the threat constantly posed on China's northern borders, that the PRC was inhibited from undertaking effective military action to counter initiatives by Soviet clients on the PRC's southern borders. We have seen that this function of the Soviet buildup first came into effect during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, and has been more fully displayed since the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

- o Second, to ensure that Soviet military capabilities in the Far East retain an advantage against any combination of Soviet adversaries, particularly in the event of the development of Sino-U.S.-Japanese military collaboration.
- o And third, to ensure that the Soviet Far East can serve as an effective platform to assist in the exploitation of opportunities for Soviet geopolitical advance in South and Southwest Asia.

In sum, the Soviet buildup in the Far East has evolved from relatively simple beginnings to more and more complex purposes. It increasingly defends not only the Soviet version of borders with China and Japan, but also a steadily widening circle of Soviet geopolitical interests elsewhere. The troops and weapons deployed against China have come to embody pressure on the PRC not only to accept the status quo on the Sino-Soviet frontier, but also to accept a new status quo more recently imposed in Indochina that is a fresh challenge to Chinese interests. Similarly, the Soviet planes and ships dispatched to the Far East not only challenge the Japanese and American position in the area, but assist Soviet prospects in Southwest Asia by exerting pressure on American military resource allocations.[1]

[1] That is, they confront the United States with the alternatives of either accepting a less and less favorable naval and air balance in the northwest Pacific--with the adverse geopolitical consequences that may follow there--or of restricting carrier transfers from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean intended to partially offset the imposing Soviet ground and air advantage in Southwest Asia.

The Far East Theater is Here to Stay

The Soviets are thus now driven by so many mutually reinforcing reasons to continue strengthening their position in the Far East that it is unlikely that they will soon stop. Enormous inducements will be required to halt, much less reverse, this momentum. In any case, it seems clear that a second major theater of war--with permanent requirements that are almost, if not quite comparable to those of the European theater--has become a permanent fixture in Soviet military planning. As we have noted, this geopolitical fact has now been given organizational recognition.

A Wartime Ground Force "Swing Strategy" is Now Unlikely

As a corollary, the evidence suggests that the Soviets have become pessimistic that in time of war they would be able to use much of their Far Eastern ground forces as a reserve pool for a "swing strategy," as they did in World War II.[2] Far Eastern troops flowed steadily westward throughout the war to help defeat Hitler, until a rapid reverse transfer of troops eastward in the closing months of the war made possible the overwhelming surprise assault on Japanese forces

[2]As already noted, Marshal Ogarkov stressed in his July 1981 Kommunist article the decisive importance of the "theater of military operations" as the new basic Soviet strategic unit of operations, and implied that the theater must have an independent wartime viability. The voicing of this generalization was clearly given impetus by Ogarkov's assumption that the Far East high command, operational since at least 1979, would continue to face what Ogarkov termed a "long-term" threat from the United States, China, and Japan. The implication was surely that the forces assigned to the theater organization were now considered fairly permanent.

in Manchuria. There is reason to suspect that in the early years of the Brezhnev buildup against China, some Soviet military leaders continued to nourish hopes that the bulk of these forces could be regarded as a potential reserve for a "swing strategy" to be employed in case of need.[3] If so, these hopes have probably now dwindled, and this change is formalized in the inauguration of a permanent Far Eastern theater.[4]

In this regard, the Soviets are probably now governed by three considerations:

1. While surely still far from enthusiastic about the possibility that they might become engaged in a two-front war in Europe and the Far East, the Soviets apparently now consider it essential to prepare for that contingency, and they also probably judge it unlikely that the forces so laboriously assembled in

[3]Some Soviets evidently regret the abandonment of the swing strategy. As recently as 1979, one Soviet author reviewed in some detail "the contribution of the troops of the Far East to the overthrow of the German-fascist invaders." (S. Isayev, *Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal* (Military-Historical Journal), No. 8, August 1979.) Although he did not draw conclusions as to the practicality of making such transfers in the future, he emphasized that in World War II it proved possible to deter a Japanese attack while furnishing large reserves for the struggle in the west.

[4]In peacetime a tension does, however, exist between Soviet resource choices for deployments in the east and west. This creates a potential conflict between the interests of the Soviet Union's opponents on its two flanks. Thus if NATO should agree to a treaty with the USSR on intermediate-range nuclear weapons on terms that permitted the Soviets to transfer some of their existing SS-20s in Europe to Asia, Chinese (and Japanese) interests would be injured.

peacetime that now cover this contingency could be significantly and safely drawn down in wartime.[5] They seem to believe that they must shape their permanent force posture to allow for the possibility, however unlikely, that they might eventually have to fight the PRC during a war with the United States, wherever such a war began.

2. The Soviets apparently believe that even if this worse case did not materialize, and China remained aloof from such a struggle, very large forces would still be required to deter the PRC and ensure its continued neutrality.
3. In addition, Soviet analysts appear to assume that the Soviet Far East would be far more vulnerable to China than heretofore in the aftermath of a devastating and exhausting Soviet clash with the United States.[6] They must therefore also guard against this final alternative. The establishment of the new Soviet high command in the Far East reflects all these considerations.

[5]On the contrary: it is reasonable to suppose that the Far East theater in wartime would expect the use of one or more of the Soviet airborne divisions, which are all based west of the Urals. It is also conceivable that the wartime filling out of low-category divisions in Asia might necessitate some movement of conscripts from west to east. In short, although the Far East theater is evidently intended to be self-sufficient, it might well require some additional help at the outset of hostilities.

[6]This point was raised by Soviet analysts during extensive interviews conducted in Moscow by an American specialist in 1981. See Banning N. Garrett, Soviet Perceptions of China and Sino-American Military Ties, Harold Rosenblum Associates, Arlington, Va., June 1981, pp. 48, 60. This is a first-rate study. Some Japanese analysts have independently reached the same conclusion: that in any extensive Soviet-U.S. clash in the Far East in which China was not initially involved, the huge expected attrition of Soviet weapons and aircraft would upgrade the significance of China's large inventory of semi-obsolete hardware, and might for the first time create a potential Soviet vulnerability to China. (Private conversation.)

U.S. and PRC Security Interests Have Become Interdependent

The record of Soviet behavior since the Far East buildup began also supports the conclusion that even at the present very limited level of Sino-U.S. security cooperation, the security interests of the PRC and the United States have become, to some extent, mutually dependent.

On the Chinese side, two concrete and ongoing geopolitical benefits from this relationship stand out. There seems little doubt that the growth of Beijing's American connection has over the years increasingly complicated Moscow's risk calculations regarding China. The vivid contrast between the kind of threats used against China during the 1969 border crisis and the extraordinary Soviet reticence during the Sino-Vietnamese crisis 10 years later[7] appears to derive at least in part from the growth in Soviet concern about the U.S. reaction (along, of course, with other factors).[8] However ambiguous U.S. intentions remain in the event of a Sino-Soviet conflict, the issue has become sufficiently important to Moscow to have some constraining effect on Soviet risk-taking. Indeed, it is likely that Brezhnev's efforts at

[7] Soviet behavior during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, while vigorously assertive, can be excluded from consideration in this context, since, as explained in an earlier section of this report, there was almost no chance of either Chinese or U.S. military intervention, almost no chance of Sino-Soviet or Soviet-U.S. military conflict, and consequently very little risk to the Soviet Union.

[8] Other considerations include the fact that the Soviets are naturally more sensitive to Chinese behavior on their own border than to Chinese actions against Vietnam, the fact that the Chinese nuclear deterrent had significantly improved in the 10 years between 1969 and 1979, and the fact that the Chinese had advertised limited intentions in Vietnam. While all these factors contribute to explaining the contrast in Soviet behavior on the two occasions, they are not the whole story. As discussed above, the Soviets were also far more wary of what the United States might do in 1979, particularly in the light of Deng's visit to Washington and evident Soviet concern about the U.S. fleet.

summit meetings in 1972, 1973, and 1974 to head off the development of a U.S. security association with China reflected, at least in part, a long-standing Soviet belief that this process would tend to reduce Soviet ability to bully China.[9]

In addition, the Chinese ability to continue to resist Vietnamese and Soviet consolidation of a fait accompli in Indochina--a cornerstone of present Chinese foreign policy--has become increasingly dependent on American diplomatic support as the stalemate in Cambodia has continued. In view of the restiveness already shown toward this policy by some ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) states that are friendly to the United States but suspicious of China, pressures on the United States to modify the policy are likely to grow in the future. By continuing to resist these pressures--at some political cost--U.S. policy encourages and reinforces the position taken by Thailand, which for geographical reasons is vital to Chinese efforts to resist the assertion of Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina.

On the other side of the ledger, the evolution of events over the last decade has undoubtedly increased the importance of the PRC to U.S. security interests. As already suggested, one side effect of the deterioration of Soviet-American relations in the 1970s was an inevitable reduction of the maneuverability in the strategic triangle that the United States enjoyed in the early 1970s, when it had better relations with both the PRC and the USSR than they had with each other.[10] This narrowing of U.S. alternatives in the triangle as a

[9]The symbolic turning point, in this regard, is likely to have been Soviet discomfiture following the Victor Louis threat of October 1976 (see Sec. VI, pp. 70-71).

[10]Kissinger has persuasively argued that in 1971 the United States gained practical fruits from this early advantage, which apparently caused the Soviets to accelerate coming to final agreement in the Berlin talks. (Kissinger, 1979, pp. 837-838.) It must be

result of the hardening of the American posture toward the Soviet Union has been useful to Beijing. But, as already suggested, the worsening of Soviet-U.S. relations did not fundamentally result from the process of Sino-U.S. rapprochement, as the Soviets sometimes allege.[11] Rather, it has resulted from the continued outward pressure of Soviet foreign policy to expand Soviet presence and influence everywhere possible, most often at the expense of the interests of the West in general and the United States in particular.

This is the same worldwide process that also presses on Beijing's interests on its periphery, and Beijing's resistance occupies a major segment of Soviet energies. There is little reason to believe that this broad and fundamental impulse underlying Soviet policy will soon disappear. Consequently, the security interest of the United States in the continued viability of Chinese resistance to Soviet military pressure remains an objective fact whose significance is likely to grow over the next decade.

THREE ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS FOR SOVIET RISK-TAKING

We will conclude by considering the implications of three alternative prospects for Sino-U.S. security relations in the 1980s for the Soviet propensity to take risks in dealing with China. The first assumes that the cool Sino-U.S. relationship of the summer of 1982

remembered, however, that thereafter the United States never again obtained comparable benefits from its position in the triangle. Particularly after 1972, the Soviets proved unwilling to make tactical concessions because of China.

[11]On the contrary, the downhill slide of Soviet-U.S. relations commenced during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, and began to accelerate sharply in 1975--all long before Sino-U.S. relations had evolved very far from the initial improvement achieved with the Nixon visit in 1972.

remains more or less at the same level for the rest of the decade, neither improving significantly nor greatly worsening. The second alternative postulates a sharp further decline of the relationship from this level. The third assumes a major improvement in the relationship, and a significant expansion of U.S.-PRC security cooperation during the next decade.

If Sino-American Relations Stay as They Are Now

It is conceivable, although not probable,[12] that the impasse in the Sino-U.S. relationship that began in 1981 will stretch on largely unchanged over the next few years, and that meanwhile, the tone of bilateral relations will neither significantly improve nor greatly worsen. If this is the case, the Soviets will be left for the indefinite future with a somewhat ambiguous situation in the triangle.

The Setting. Under this alternative, the Soviets might expect a strategic environment with the following elements.

The United States and the PRC would be likely to continue "parallel action" and some cooperation in resisting Soviet policy where it involved the Soviet use of force or backing for others' use of force in areas around China's periphery--as in the cases of Afghanistan and Indochina.

[12] This is somewhat unlikely because the stalemate over the Taiwan issue has seemed inherently unstable, requiring periodic decisions on both sides that are more likely ultimately to produce either a major degradation or major improvement in the relationship. Moreover, it is quite possible that even without such decisions, a slow erosion of the relationship will continue so long as the issue persists. Nevertheless, it is possible at least to envisage an alternative for the 1980s in which the Taiwan issue is not completely resolved but put off with a series of ad hoc understandings, while the coolness that characterized the relationship in the first half of 1982 continues indefinitely at about the same level.

In regions of the world remote from China, and in policy matters where a direct Soviet use of force was not immediately at issue (as in the case of Poland in the aftermath of the December 1981 imposition of martial law), [13] divergence between Chinese and American policy would sometimes, perhaps frequently, recur. The PRC would become increasingly concerned with maintaining its standing with prevailing opinion in the Third World, and to the extent that it saw U.S. policy as conflicting with that goal, it would take care to separate itself from the United States. The strong Chinese criticism of U.S. policy already heard on many Third World topics would continue. In general, the convergence between PRC and U.S. policy would continue to be closest in the Far East.

To the degree that important bilateral cooperation between the two countries against the Soviet threat may already exist--for example, in matters such as intelligence--[14] it would probably continue. Under this alternative for the Sino-U.S. future, however, other forms of cooperation that would imply a closer military relationship--such as U.S. naval visits to Chinese ports--would surely not materialize.

While U.S.-Japanese military cooperation, planning, and coordination would continue gradually to grow, the Sino-U.S.-Japanese military combination feared by the Soviets for the last five years would still not emerge. At the same time, if Japanese rearmament should

[13] As of the summer of 1982, the PRC had not criticized the Polish martial law regime, and had taken steps to improve trade relations with it. This was apparently partly because of Beijing's fears about the possible incendiary effect of Solidarity's example upon Chinese workers, and partly because the PRC had been primarily concerned about an overt Soviet military move.

[14] Presumably most important in this regard is the alleged Sino-U.S. joint facility in China for monitoring Soviet military testing, widely reported in the Western press (The New York Times, December 8, 1980 and June 19, 1981).

accelerate in the 1980s, the Japanese may come to perceive an increasing stake in the health of the Sino-U.S. relationship, and become more and more concerned over its stagnation.

There would be no transfer of U.S. weapons to China in the 1980s, but there would be a continued flow of industrial technology relevant to military capabilities to China from the United States, Japan, and Europe and a continued trickle of some weapons technology from Europe. The scope of this flow would be affected primarily by Chinese internal economic decisions--the degree to which the domestic priority assigned "military modernization" continued to be constrained by what Chinese leaders consider more pressing economic needs, and the degree to which the Chinese continued to be parsimonious in allocating hard currency for weapons acquisition abroad. On balance, considering the scope of Chinese economic difficulties, the PRC would be more likely than not to retain its present restrictive line toward military spending unless an unforeseen crisis intervened.

In consequence, despite what would probably be important Chinese military improvements, the firepower available to Chinese forces confronting the Soviets would probably continue gradually to fall further behind the firepower available to the Soviet forces along the border, which would continue to be periodically updated with the fruits of Soviet military technology. The question of when a concrete Chinese threat to the Soviet Union might actually materialize--a matter which Soviet authors for a decade have said is a real concern, but for the future rather than the present--would thus continue to recede into the future. [15]

[15]The standard Soviet public line, conveyed in countless

The present military impasse in Indochina would be more likely than not to continue throughout the decade. Despite pressures on the United States from some ASEAN states to come to terms with Hanoi, the chances are less than even that the United States would do so. Meanwhile, a new Chinese land attack on Vietnam would remain throughout the decade an extremely difficult undertaking. Moreover, such an attack would be unlikely in the absence of a drastic Vietnamese military initiative, such as a large-scale attack on Thailand intended to shut off the Chinese supply route to the Khmer Rouge. On the other hand, the Chinese naval capability for operations against Vietnam in the South China Sea could be improved sufficiently during the 1980s to increase the possibility of a PRC clash with Vietnamese and consequently Soviet naval units in the area. In particular, the chance would grow that such a Sino-Soviet naval clash might evolve out of Sino-Vietnamese encounters over fishing or oil exploration rights, or over conflicting claims to South China Sea islands. The Soviet use of Vietnamese military and naval facilities and the size of the Soviet military presence in Vietnam would meanwhile probably continue to expand.

articles, is that (a) there has been no reduction in the priority given to Chinese military spending; (b) much of Chinese weaponry is obsolete, and indeed China has serious military weaknesses, but is striving mightily to remedy them with U.S. help; and (c) China is not in a position to threaten the USSR (yet?), but because of its alleged militarism and expansionism is a grave threat to all its other neighbors, particularly those in the south. Soviet concern about China is therefore, by implication, basically altruistic. In private, some Soviet specialists concede the low priority given to Chinese military modernization, the paucity of modern foreign weaponry actually bought so far by the PRC, and the difficulties found in absorbing modern military technology. They continue to express concern, however, about the future. (See Garrett, pp. 36-37, 51-52.)

Other things being equal, there would probably be some further improvement in the Chinese strategic deterrent against the USSR in the 1980s. However, if during the decade the evolution of U.S.-Soviet strategic negotiations and the development of U.S. strategic programs should produce abrogation or severe modification of the antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty, the resulting Soviet ABM deployment might cause some degradation of the Chinese deterrent, particularly in view of the relatively unsophisticated nature of Chinese missile technology. As one Western observer has pointed out, the Chinese now have acquired a paradoxical stake in the viability of this Soviet-U.S. agreement.[16] Similarly, as mentioned earlier, any NATO agreement with the Soviet Union on strategic weapons in Europe that did not explicitly rule out a Soviet transfer of SS-20s from Europe to western Siberia or the Far East would mean an increased Soviet strategic threat to the PRC. In short, given a continuation of the present very limited security relationship between Beijing and Washington, the PRC over the next decade will remain vulnerable to the possibility of significant, sudden changes in the Soviet strategic threat as a result of independent decisions by others over which China will have no control and very little influence.

The Soviet Reaction. If this is the Sino-U.S. environment that materializes over the next decade, Soviet judgments about likely U.S. behavior in the event of Sino-Soviet hostilities will continue to be somewhat uncertain. Such hostilities could arise through escalation of a new conflict on the Sino-Soviet border; as a result of a renewal of fighting along the Sino-Vietnamese border, or, perhaps, in Laos; or

[16]Garrett, p. 64.

conceivably, as suggested above, as a result of conflict over Chinese and Vietnamese-claimed islands in the South China Sea. None of these contingencies now appear imminent or highly probable. Yet, despite the recent Chinese consent to increase Sino-Soviet contacts and reduce tensions, from the Soviet perspective the possibility of another clash with China in the 1980s remains not at all remote.

Despite continued Chinese military inferiority and the very limited nature of the Sino-U.S. security relationship under this scenario, the Soviets in any new crisis with the PRC would probably continue to find their risk calculations complicated by questions about the U.S. reaction. In each of the situations mentioned they might therefore hesitate for some time before acting. There might well be some difference of opinion in Moscow over probable U.S. behavior. In sum, a close last-minute reading of U.S. intentions would continue to precede any major Soviet action against China, and should a strong possibility of U.S. involvement materialize the Soviets would become much more likely to defer action and accept sizable political costs of inaction.

Counterbalancing this wariness about the U.S. role will be a continued Soviet sense of Chinese vulnerability and an increasing sense of their stake in their military presence in Vietnam, which with the passage of time may come to seem more and more of a vested Soviet interest. In any crisis situation with China in which the Soviets become convinced that the United States is not going to act, they might become more likely than heretofore to use force against China.

From the standpoint of U.S. defense planning, it is likely that in a major U.S.-Soviet confrontation in other theaters, such as Europe and the Persian Gulf, the Soviets would remain concerned enough about the

Chinese posture during and after the confrontation to maintain their military position in the Far East essentially intact. In the event of a sizable U.S. naval deployment from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, however, the Soviet Pacific Fleet, as in the past, would dispatch important units to follow.

If Sino-American Relations Sharply Decline

The second alternative for the 1980s would of course be greatly preferable to the Soviet leaders, since it would improve their leverage over both their antagonists--particularly over the PRC, but to a considerable extent also over the United States.

The Setting. In this scenario, it is assumed that during the coming decade an exacerbation of bilateral Sino-U.S. differences, presumably over Taiwan, brings diplomatic and security cooperation to a virtual standstill. Even well-established intelligence cooperation is halted. More intimate forms of military cooperation--and such symbolic events as naval visits--are of course ruled out. The level of diplomatic representation is reduced. The overall tone of the relationship retreats at least to that at the beginning of the 1970s, long before normalization. It is possible, in this contingency, that the Chinese would explicitly revert to the two-enemy posture they maintained in the last half of the 1960s--when they treated the Soviet Union and the United States as comparable antagonists. In any event, the PRC's relationship with the United States would become nearly as cold as that with the USSR, and the strategic triangle would now appear to be more nearly equal-sided. In practical terms, however, the Soviet Union would continue to represent a grave threat to the Chinese state, and the United States would not.

Under these conditions, the possibility of significant transfer of military technology from the United States to the PRC would be eliminated, but the Chinese would continue to have access to some such technology from Western Europe. PRC interaction with West Europe, as well as with Japan, would thus become even more important to Beijing. It is conceivable that under these changed and more dangerous circumstances, spending for military modernization would receive a higher priority from Beijing, and that the Chinese might feel obliged to allocate more hard currency for this purpose. Even so, however, the virtual elimination of the PRC's American connection would probably bring with it some net reduction in the rate of improvement in PLA capabilities over the decade.

Meanwhile, many Japanese would be deeply concerned at such a deterioration of Sino-U.S. relations because of what they would take to be the possible destabilizing--and unbalancing--consequences. The Japanese would strive to ensure that their own relationship with Beijing was not damaged. Some Japanese would foresee a possible increase in Soviet ability to apply pressure against Japan. It is possible that one result would be some further increase in the scope of Japanese military cooperation with the United States.

The Soviet Reaction. For their part, the Soviets would attempt to exploit the changed situation against both the United States and the PRC. In dealings with Washington, Moscow would repeatedly suggest that the thoroughgoing Sino-U.S. split might soon be followed by Sino-Soviet rapprochement, that the world balance of power was changing, and that a more conciliatory U.S. posture in ongoing negotiations was now appropriate. The Soviets might reiterate their appeal for a resumption

of Soviet-U.S. bilateral dealings on terms that would tacitly legitimize accelerated Soviet exploitation of competitive advantages in the Third World. Meanwhile, to audiences both in Western Europe and in the Third World, the Soviets would stress that the break between the United States and the PRC was new evidence of America's increasing isolation on the world scene[17] and was another manifestation of the changing "correlation of forces" and the inevitable trend of historical development. While many would of course discount this, it is possible that some in these audiences who already tended to be intimidated by the growth of Soviet power would be inclined to agree, and would find in this change fresh reason to adjust toward accommodation with Soviet wishes. Many would take for granted that a Sino-Soviet rapprochement indeed was coming, that China was in the process of changing sides again. This assumption would reinforce the impression that historical trends were favoring the Soviets and that it would pay to behave accordingly.

In dealing with the Chinese, the Soviets would of course attempt to exploit the situation to improve relations. In 1981 and 1982, they made a sustained effort of this kind in response to the cooling of Sino-U.S. relations--although with only modest results--and it is likely that a more drastic deterioration of the Washington-Beijing relationship would bring a more vigorous Soviet appeal to China. In any such effort, however, the Soviets would probably continue to be hindered, as they are today, by their deep-seated reluctance to give up the concrete geopolitical advantages they now hold over the PRC. Their past and

[17]The Soviets would of course be particularly likely to press this theme if the United States simultaneously were experiencing serious difficulties in its relations with its West European allies.

present behavior suggests that they would again use both the carrot and the stick, but would characteristically place emphasis on the latter.[18] While doubtless continuing to offer Beijing improved economic and cultural relations, they might also continue to find it difficult to offer the PRC more than minimal concessions in response to the far-reaching Chinese demands, long on the table, for Soviet military withdrawals from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Mongolia, the Sino-Soviet border, and Siberia east of the Urals.

The decisive issue for Sino-Soviet relations under these conditions would therefore remain the question that is decisive today: whether the Chinese would be willing to abandon these demands and, in effect, make much larger, nonreciprocal geopolitical concessions to the USSR (among other things, by tacitly accepting the status quo in Indochina, including the Soviet position there). The Chinese decision in 1982 to reduce tensions with the USSR by allowing a considerable increase in cultural and technical contacts of secondary importance has raised for some Western observers the question of whether this might presage more fundamental concessions by the PRC.

This now appears somewhat unlikely. It will probably continue to be difficult for the Chinese to agree to allow a fundamental improvement in Sino-Soviet relations while the Soviets continue military activities in Afghanistan and Indochina, on the Chinese periphery, that represent

[18]To cite a minor example from recent Soviet behavior: Despite the appeals in 1982 by Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders for a fundamental improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, the Soviets have felt unable to forgo continuation of their inflammatory broadcasts to Xinjiang that seek to exacerbate recent Chinese troubles with the minority nationalities in that province. In private conversation, Chinese observers have pointed to these "slandorous" broadcasts as evidence of Soviet insincerity.

fundamental challenges to Chinese national interests.[19] Nevertheless, it is just conceivable that changing circumstances could eventually modify the Chinese view.[20] These questions are of central importance to the United States and will require separate, more detailed consideration.[21]

Given continued Chinese recalcitrance, the Soviet leaders would be likely to seek to exploit China's increased vulnerability to squeeze China for these fundamental concessions. Bullying threats against the PRC, in the pattern demonstrated by Victor Louis in 1969 and 1976, might reappear on suitable occasions. Even if the Soviets did not allude to the fact that they no longer felt constrained by concern over the possible American reaction, their behavior toward the PRC would reflect this assumption.

[19]As of July 1982, the Chinese were continuing to insist that they would never budge from this position. In his earlier-mentioned interview on July 1, PRC Foreign Minister Huang Hua told a Spanish correspondent that Soviet troop deployments were intended "to encircle China," that this was the policy of a "social-imperialist power," and that

Brezhnev's statements last March about a rapprochement with China are no more than a sequence of pretty words. As far as we are concerned, it is deeds that matter, and thus far we have seen no sign that the USSR wants to abandon its policy of expansion and aggression. Until that happens China will not abandon its own policy of opposing such hegemony. (ABC, Madrid, July 2, 1982.)

[20]One relevant variable, for example, is the question of whether at some point in the 1980s, under conditions of Sino-U.S. noncooperation, some U.S. administration might abandon the present policy toward Indochina and come to terms with Hanoi's conquest of Cambodia. This possibility also seems on the whole to be improbable, given the ongoing Vietnamese military association with the Soviet Union. Should this change nevertheless occur, the ensuing chain of consequences might have a considerable effect on Chinese willingness to conciliate the Soviets.

[21]A later study in this project will seek to determine more precisely what concessions to China the Soviets could some day find consistent with their national interests and what the Chinese response in that event might be.

Should they encounter what they chose to interpret as a serious military provocation by China, the Soviets would be somewhat more likely than they are today to commit themselves to an early military response. As before, the Soviet leaders would be reluctant to get involved in a large-scale land war in the depths of China. But if a major crisis evolved with an isolated yet hostile China during the coming decade, there would be an increased chance that the Soviets would undertake conventional air strikes or ground force raids against the PRC, with clear potential for further escalation. If a Sino-Vietnamese naval clash occurred in the South China Sea under this scenario of almost total Sino-U.S. estrangement, Soviet naval forces in the area would be likely to take part.

From the standpoint of their overall position in Asia, the Soviets would perceive some improvement in their strategic position, but they would probably consider this to be limited so long as China remained hostile. The Soviet leaders would now be relieved of their fears of eventual Sino-U.S.-Japanese security collaboration against them. But while gratified at this, the Soviets would see little change in the other important reasons for their Far East buildup discussed earlier. The felt need to overmatch the Japanese and Americans would remain; the requirements of the Sea of Okhotsk bastion would remain; so, too, would the support function of the Soviet Far East in furthering Soviet ambitions in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. Moreover, so far as Beijing itself was concerned, the Soviets would see an unreduced need to maintain military pressure on China to inhibit PRC behavior on both the Soviet and Vietnamese borders.

Because of these mutually reinforcing factors, even a major Sino-U.S. estrangement, if unaccompanied by other major changes, would be unlikely to induce the Soviets to make more than token concessions to the PRC. The growth in particular of Soviet air and naval strength in the Far East might well continue at an undiminished pace. The Far East theater command structure would certainly not be abandoned. Moscow's treatment of its Far East deployments in the event of a major U.S.-Soviet confrontation elsewhere would probably not differ greatly from what would be expected under the first scenario.

Nor, while Chinese hostility toward the USSR persisted, would a Sino-U.S. rift be likely to lead the Soviets to a major revival of plans for a wartime "swing strategy." It is unlikely that the Soviets would see their deterrent needs against China as diminishing significantly in wartime because of this change. The Soviets would continue to envision a pressing wartime need for the wherewithal to intimidate Beijing to ensure China's continued neutrality. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, they would also continue to see a possibility that in the event of Soviet-U.S. hostilities, the PRC might eventually seek to take advantage of Soviet military exhaustion in the wake of a debilitating Soviet-U.S. exchange. The need to ensure against this possibility would thus also remain.

All the foregoing would be substantially altered, of course, if a Sino-U.S. split were eventually to be followed by a major improvement in Sino-Soviet relations--specifically including both a formal settlement of Chinese claims regarding the Sino-Soviet border and a Sino-Soviet resolution of the Indochina question. A change of these

proportions might well significantly affect Soviet calculations regarding both their peacetime military needs in the Far East and their requirements for wartime contingencies. This would indeed make a difference in the world balance of power, and would profoundly complicate U.S. defense planning for Europe and Southwest Asia.

Such a change, again, appears improbable yet not inconceivable over the next decade.

If Sino-American Cooperation Greatly Expands

The other side of the coin, for the Soviet leaders, would be a vigorous expansion of the present Sino-U.S. security relationship in the direction, if not to the juridical status, of a military alliance. Such a change in the 1980s would surely presuppose a complete resolution of the present Sino-U.S. impasse over Taiwan. In addition, a change of this magnitude would probably come about only if some new Soviet action intervened in the next few years to influence both Beijing and Washington to see a gravely increased threat to their interests, necessitating a major revision of security arrangements in response.

The Setting. Under this scenario, the following security consequences would emerge during the decade.

There would be a substantial flow of conventional weapons technology from the United States to the PRC. Although it would still not involve the most advanced U.S. technology, this input would make an important difference to PLA defensive capabilities if the Chinese were successful at assimilating the technology. It would also remedy some existing conventional firepower deficiencies in the Chinese matchup with Vietnam. The weapons technology transfers would be far from enough to enable the PRC to mount a credible offensive threat against the USSR.

But they would at least slow, and possibly even halt the further growth of the large existing Soviet conventional firepower advantage. That is, the PRC might cease to fall still further behind. Such transfer would therefore eventually place limits on Soviet leverage over China regarding both the Sino-Soviet border and Vietnam, and somewhat impede Soviet ability to bully China.

There would also be much closer interchange and coordination on security matters between the PRC and the United States. This would involve frequent high-level visits by military as well as political leaders, staff exchanges of view, and some contingency planning against a variety of eventualities. U.S. naval visits to Chinese ports such as Dairen or Shanghai would now take place. The United States and the PRC might now also consult more closely on the status of ongoing U.S. negotiations with the Soviet Union--such as the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START), the Intermediate Nuclear Force talks (INF), and MBFR--that have implications for Chinese security interests.

There would probably be some negative consequences for U.S. relations with some ASEAN states that would continue for a variety of reasons to be suspicious of Chinese intentions. The Soviets would of course do their utmost to further encourage these suspicions and to exacerbate resentment of U.S. arms transfers. The ultimate political effects would be partly dependent on whether the PRC was then willing to make significant reassuring or compensatory concessions to the Southeast Asian states that it had previously withheld.[22]

[22]These would probably mean: (a) trade concessions, and (b) more importantly, thoroughgoing and unambiguous steps to cut remaining PRC ties with revolutionary Marxist-Leninist groups in Southeast Asia with which Beijing has long been associated. If the PRC did not make such important concessions, one possible effect of large U.S. arms transfers to the PRC might be a collapse of the already fragile ASEAN consensus on refusal to accept Hanoi's fait accompli in Indochina.

There might also be some concern in Tokyo over such a change. The same sectors of Japanese opinion that would have been worried by a drastic decline in Sino-U.S. relations might now become somewhat exercised (although not nearly as much) by a strong improvement in the Sino-U.S. security relationship. Japanese concerns would now focus on what Tokyo might regard as the inflammatory effects of this connection on the Soviets. Since, however, this scenario presupposes new Soviet actions sufficient to increase both Chinese and American threat perceptions, it is possible that the Japanese view of the Soviet threat would also be seriously affected, and that the net result would be to minimize the adverse Japanese reaction to heightened Sino-U.S. cooperation. The Japanese would now become quite anxious to be kept informed of the details of this cooperation, including any contingency planning. Although they would still probably not wish to take active part in such cooperative military activities, it is possible that in this atmosphere over time there would be a modest evolution of Japanese Defense Agency contacts with the PLA. It is also conceivable that against this background, there would be a very gradual shift in Japanese policy on technology sales to the PRC to allow technology transfer to be somewhat more directly related to Chinese defense needs than heretofore. In this case, the net result for Soviet perceptions would be to revitalize the specter of Sino-U.S.-Japanese security cooperation.

The reaction in West Europe to such an expansion of Sino-U.S. security relations might well be more adverse than the reaction in Japan. Some in Europe might fear that this change would be overly provocative to the Soviets, that it would increase the chance of a Far Eastern conflict that might affect Europe. The Soviets would

assiduously seek to encourage this view. Many would fear, with or without Soviet encouragement, that it would have a harmful effect on prospects for arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, some sectors of West European opinion that were not strongly predisposed to conciliate the Soviets might yet regret such an expansion of the Sino-U.S. relationship because they would foresee in it the possibility of a growing diversion of U.S. energies and resources away from Europe and toward the Pacific.

The Soviet Perspective. Although the situation depicted would not represent materialization of the very worse fears the Soviets may have harbored,[23] they would certainly regard it as a significant worsening of their security position in the Far East. They would of course be highly resentful of this change. They would see the following consequences:

Soviet ability to intimidate the PRC, while not eliminated, would decline. This would partly reflect improvement in Chinese defense capabilities as a result of U.S. technology transfer. But as already suggested, this improvement even cumulatively would not give the PRC an offensive capability against the USSR. There would merely be, at most, a reduction in the size of the continuing Soviet conventional firepower advantage and the coercive potential associated with that advantage. Probably more significant in this connection would be the revision necessitated in Soviet calculations about the likelihood of U.S. involvement in the event of Sino-Soviet hostilities.

[23]The worst nightmare, for the Soviet leaders, probably involves the notion that the United States might some day resume the direct assistance to Chinese strategic programs that the USSR halted at the end of the 1950s. They probably believe, however, that this is unlikely under almost any foreseeable circumstances.

In short, from the Soviet point of view, an increase in the risks and costs of such hostilities because of improved Chinese military capabilities might be of some importance; but the heightened risk arising from even a modestly increased chance of conflict with the United States would be of overwhelming importance.

In consequence, the Soviets would see themselves as possessing somewhat less leverage on Chinese behavior on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnamese borders and in the South China Sea. Under the new circumstances, for example, with U.S. naval forces in the vicinity, Soviet intervention in response to a Sino-Vietnamese naval clash might now seem much more risky. On the whole, the implicit Soviet guarantee to Hanoi underwriting Vietnamese domination of Indochina would become more dangerous to fulfill.

In addition, the Soviets might see some reduction in the strategic advantage they hold over the United States in deploying forces in Asia because of their interior lines of communication. They might envision the possibility of Sino-U.S. logistical cooperation, for example, in facilitating more rapid U.S. military reaction to Soviet military initiatives in Southwest Asia.

Finally, the Soviets would see the need to anticipate a somewhat larger possibility of PRC involvement in the event of Soviet-U.S. hostilities. However uncertain this would remain, prudence would now dictate that the Soviets prepare more actively against this contingency. The wisdom of having already abandoned hope of being able to carry out a "swing strategy" in Asia would now be apparent.

What Would the Soviets Do? Over the years, there has been occasional speculation in the West that the Soviets might react with drastic and violent steps to the emergence of a closer Sino-U.S. military relationship. This view does not seem consistent either with geopolitical realities or with the basic patterns of Soviet thinking.

As already suggested, the Soviet buildup against China described in this report was not motivated either by fear of existing Chinese military power or by the expectation of imminent and massive Chinese invasion. It was prompted by a felt need for sufficient local concentration of force to inhibit specific Chinese behavior, first along the Sino-Soviet frontier and next with regard to Vietnam, and then, as a byproduct of coercion of China, to gain certain additional geopolitical benefits. From first to last, Soviet contemplation of the use of force against China has always been conditioned (a) by the nature of the alleged "provocation"--that is, the damage to Soviet interests threatened by specific Chinese conduct and (b) by the risks involved in a Soviet military response.

It appears unlikely that the Soviets would see the alleged provocation created by Chinese acceptance of the military relationship with the United States described in this scenario as itself sufficiently threatening to Soviet vital interests to justify Soviet acceptance of grave risks in response. Given the continued Chinese military inferiority to the USSR that would prevail, the Soviets would not see this change as presaging a Chinese surprise attack on the Soviet Union that necessitated preemption at all costs. If the PRC went on to take specific actions that did threaten Soviet interests, either on the

Sino-Soviet border or against Vietnam, the Soviets would respond in the light of the given circumstances, with due attention to the risks involved, which, as already suggested, would now be significantly greater. But priding themselves on their ability to weigh risks, costs, and benefits coolly and dispassionately, the Soviets in any case would not accept possibly unnecessary major risks by taking drastic steps in advance of such Chinese actions.

On one occasion in recent years, the Soviets are reported--according to an account of uncertain validity--to have given the United States through an indirect channel a warning about the kind of Sino-American military relationship that allegedly would prompt a Soviet preemptive attack on China. In January 1980, a press report asserted that Brezhnev, in a recent Moscow interview with the French official Jacques Chaban-Delmas, had said that he "would not tolerate" a U.S. "nuclear arming of China," and that this would lead to a Soviet nuclear attack on China which would give the United States "only minutes to decide their options." Brezhnev is said to have gone on to exclaim that "after the destruction of Chinese nuclear sites by our missiles, there won't be much time for the Americans to choose between the defense of their Chinese allies and peaceful coexistence with us." [24]

If one takes this account at face value as representing a genuine warning by the Soviets, the implication would appear to be that the

[24] The New York Times, January 29, 1980, citing Daily Mail (London) of that date. This anecdote is not confirmed by other press accounts of the Chaban-Delmas visit. The remarks Brezhnev is alleged to have made bear a certain resemblance to the nuclear threats against China advanced through the Victor Louis article of September 1969. It is therefore possible that even if the attribution to Brezhnev was not authentic, the story nevertheless originated with the Soviets. In either case, the intention was apparently to intimidate the West Europeans, the United States, and the PRC.

Soviet Union would regard U.S. assistance to the PRC in strengthening its strategic nuclear attack capabilities as sufficiently threatening to Soviet vital interests to evoke a preemptive attack on China. The Soviets are of course well aware that the PRC already has a nuclear delivery capability, and that it is modest in size, nonthreatening to the Soviet Union (since the Chinese are far more vulnerable than the Soviets) and barely adequate as a deterrent. Presumably the Soviets intend to imply that at some unspecified point of improvement this strategic capability in the hands of the Chinese would become intolerable. Whatever the truth of this contention, it is evident that the threat applies to a contingency--U.S. assistance to China's nuclear attack capabilities--which is highly implausible under conceivable circumstances. It is equally apparent that the threat does not apply to the level of enhanced security cooperation described in this scenario.

If one rules out such drastic measures, the outlines of the probable Soviet response become fairly clear. While the Soviets since 1978 have been making military preparations against the contingency of greater Sino-U.S. cooperation, it is possible that if it materialized there would be some increase in the rate of Far East reinforcements or modernization. Soviet decisions would be conditioned by the priority given to conflicting calls on military resources, particularly in military manpower, which will be stretched much tighter in the 1980s. To the degree that they felt obliged to supply them, increased military manpower inputs to the Far East theater would intensify these difficulties, and sharpen the competition between the needs of other military theaters and the demands of the Soviet economy.

On the political side, the Soviets would do their utmost to exploit the U.S. political vulnerabilities that would be created in ASEAN, in West Europe, and perhaps in India by the elevation of the Sino-U.S. security relationships. Although the Soviets have in the past asserted that some (unspecified) level of such cooperation would make it impossible for them to go on with arms control talks with the United States,[25] they have not repeated this threat in recent years, and it seems likely that the Soviet policy on arms control would continue to be driven primarily by Soviet equities in the strategic balance with the United States, and secondarily by the Soviet struggle with the United States to influence European security policy. On both grounds, unilateral Soviet curtailment of arms control negotiations because of U.S. actions with regard to China would not seem to be in the Soviet interest.

Finally, it was assumed at the outset that a change of this magnitude between Washington and Beijing would probably come about only if some new Soviet action caused the United States and the PRC to see a gravely increased Soviet threat. The chances of such a Soviet action--for example, in Iran or Pakistan--will probably be governed largely by local circumstances and regional military risks, and other things being equal, the Soviets are not likely to be deterred by the potential effects on the Sino-Soviet-U.S. triangle. Soviet conduct around China's periphery in recent years does not appear to have been significantly inhibited by Soviet concern to avoid triggering closer Sino-U.S. collaboration against the USSR. Where the Soviets have shown

[25] Pravda editorial article, June 17, 1978.

restraint in Asia (as in the case of the Soviet response to the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese fighting), it has seemed to derive mainly from their calculations about immediate military risk. The Soviet leaders do not appear to wish to allow their behavior toward third parties to be constrained by the possible consequences for Sino-U.S. relations. They are determined in any case to avoid giving their antagonists leverage over their decisions. This pattern is unlikely to change.