

Conflict on the Ussuri: A Clash of Nationalisms

By Harold C. Hinton

The armed clashes which took place between Soviet and Chinese border troops on a small disputed island on the Ussuri River boundary between the Soviet Union and China in March 1969 unquestionably marked the most serious escalation to date of the conflict that has been going on between the two major Communist powers ever since the late 1950's.

The fact that the clashes occurred on an island claimed by both sides necessarily related the crisis to the controversy growing out of the demands that China has put forward from time to time since 1963 for a revision of the territorial boundaries fixed by the so-called "unequal" treaties of the 19th century between the decaying Manchu Empire and the Western "imperialist" powers, including Tsarist Russia.¹ Yet, as the present article will endeavor to show, the sequence of developments that led up to the border crisis of 1969 suggests that the motivations of both parties were concerned not merely with the territorial or boundary issue as such, but even more with the global power struggle that has been gathering momentum between the two powers under

the impetus of a growing Maoist nationalism on the one hand and an answering Soviet nationalism on the other.

So much has already been written about the earlier phases of the Sino-Soviet conflict that there is no need to review them here. Suffice it to say that by the time of Khrushchev's overthrow in late 1964, what had started out as essentially a dispute in the ideological sphere had spilled over into virtually every aspect of Sino-Soviet relations to the point where Peking was denouncing Soviet "social imperialism" as just as dangerous an enemy as "US imperialism." The advent of Khrushchev's successors, moreover, did little—except very briefly—to mitigate Sino-Soviet tensions. In 1965, the rival nationalisms played out their antagonism mainly against the backdrop of the struggle in Vietnam, with each seeking to counteract or obstruct the influence of the other.

Then, in 1966, even this important issue was overshadowed by the eruption of the Maoist Cultural Revolution in China. This upheaval evoked sharp antagonism in the Soviet Union, mainly because, as it unfolded, it became an all-out assault on the Leninist principle of the supremacy of the party apparatus. In addition, however, a salient feature of the behavior of the Maoist revolutionaries and Red Guards was the manifestation of intense hostility towards the Soviet Union, as well as towards Soviet nationals in China, and there were occasional violent anti-Soviet demonstrations by Red Guards and soldiers along (and sometimes even across) the Manchurian frontier.

The Soviet response took several forms, including a vigorous propaganda campaign against Mao and the Cultural Revolution. More importantly, the Soviet military buildup in areas contiguous to the Chinese frontier, which had already begun in the early

¹ The most important 19th-century boundary treaties between China and Tsarist Russia were those of Aigun (1858) and Peking (1860), whereby China relinquished to Russian sovereignty all territories north of the Amur River and east of the Ussuri River. The latter treaty also ceded the Ili region of Chinese Turkestan to Russia. On the background of the Sino-Soviet boundary dispute, see Dennis J. Doolin, ed., *Territorial Claims in the Sino-Soviet Conflict: Documents and Analysis*, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1965.

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1960's,² was accelerated, and there were indications that the Soviet leadership, at a Central Committee plenum in December 1966, even gave serious consideration to the feasibility of some form of military intervention in China. If indeed this was the case, the Kremlin must obviously have decided against intervention, probably because there seemed to be slight possibility of the emergence of an anti-Maoist coalition in China that would accept Soviet support.³

Impact of the Czech Crisis

If China's Cultural Revolution marked a new stage in the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 ushered in another and more serious one. Implying as it did Moscow's readiness to intervene militarily against any "fraternal" socialist regime not to its liking, the invasion startled and alarmed Peking. The initial Chinese reaction was to voice loud "support" of the Czechoslovak "people" (although not of the "Czechoslovak revisionist leading clique"), as well as of Albania, Rumania, and Yugoslavia, which also appeared threatened by possible Soviet military action.⁴ In mid-September, perhaps with a view to distracting Moscow's attention from anti-Soviet manifestations by China's ally, Albania, Peking charged the Soviet Union with violating Chinese airspace during August.⁵

During the autumn, further Soviet military moves in Eastern Europe seemed increasingly improbable, but Peking was nevertheless perturbed by the vagueness of Soviet statements regarding the applicability of the "Brezhnev doctrine." Might not China—whose Maoist regime was regarded by Moscow as just as great an offender against orthodox Marxism-Leninism as the Dubcek regime in Czechoslovakia, although in a different way—be the next victim of Soviet intervention? Moreover, since the Soviets had invaded Czechoslovakia in time to forestall a party congress that was expected to bolster the Dubcek

leadership, might they not be contemplating a similar move against China, which was then preparing to convoke the Ninth Congress of the CCP? Chinese nervousness on this score may well have been partly responsible for Peking's repeated postponements of the Ninth Congress in late 1968 and early 1969, as well as for the absence of any advance publicity concerning the draft of the new CCP constitution to be acted upon by the Congress. This document, including as it did such unorthodox oddities as the naming of Lin Piao as Mao's successor, could hardly have been expected to please the Russians.

From mid-November 1968 to mid-January 1969, Mao made no public appearances, suggesting that he was either ill or spending the winter in a more salubrious climate than that of Peking. In either case, it seems likely that during this period he was not fully in charge of state affairs, creating a situation in which Premier Chou En-lai's moderate group of government administrators were apparently able to grasp the initiative. At any rate it was significant—in the light of Chou's evident inclination to bring about a normalization of China's foreign relations—that Peking invited the United States in late November to resume bilateral ambassadorial talks in Warsaw.⁶ Peking sought to rationalize this move by simultaneously republishing a March 1949 statement by Mao, in which he had referred not only to the permissibility of negotiations with the "enemy" but also to the "world anti-imperialist front headed by the Soviet Union." Thus there is reason to believe that the effective leadership in Peking at this time contemplated a reduction of tensions on at least one and possibly both fronts of the dual-adversary strategy that Mao had advocated with increasing insistence since about 1960—that is to say, the strategy of simultaneous struggle against American "imperialism" and Soviet "revisionism."

Before Chou's move toward conciliation got off the ground, however, Mao returned to the political scene in mid-January 1969.⁷ This was followed by a month of increasingly bitter anti-American polemics,⁸ culminating in Peking's abrupt withdrawal, on February 19, of its earlier offer to resume the Warsaw talks, which were scheduled to recommence the following day. At the same time, in keeping with

² See William Whitson's statement in *United States-China Relations: A Strategy for the Future*, Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1970, p. 144.

³ For an analysis of Soviet efforts to foment internal opposition to the Mao regime during the period of the Cultural Revolution, see Maury Lisann, "Moscow and the Chinese Power Struggle," *Problems of Communism*, No. 6, 1969, pp. 32-41.

⁴ E.g., see Chou En-lai's speeches of August 23 and September 30, 1968, as reported by the New China News Agency (hereafter, NCNA) on those respective dates.

⁵ See Chinese note of September 16, 1968, as published by NCNA on the same date.

⁶ Chinese note of November 25, as published by NCNA, Nov. 26, 1968.

⁷ Mao, Lin Piao, and other Chinese leaders attended a rally of 40,000 "revolutionary fighters" on January 25, 1969 (NCNA dispatch, Jan. 25, 1969).

⁸ E.g., the central party daily, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, and the CCP theoretical organ, *Hung Ch'i*, simultaneously published a vitriolic attack on President Nixon's inaugural address on January 27, 1969.

Mao's dual-adversary strategy, Peking directed a parallel series of somewhat less intense propaganda attacks against the Soviet Union. As a rule, these attacks did not raise the sensitive issue of the border, although a Soviet military buildup along China's northeastern frontier was reported.⁹

With tensions between the two Communist powers thus remaining at a high level, developments on both sides in early 1969 seemed to be moving toward some form of confrontation. For some years China had resorted to occasional demonstrations on the Sino-Soviet border as a means of expressing defiance of Soviet "revisionism," and Mao and Lin Piao may have calculated in early 1969 that certain specific Chinese aims could be served by the staging of another series of border demonstrations. For one thing, the Chinese were concerned over the intensified activity of Soviet military patrols along China's northern frontier and may have hoped to deter a possible escalation of Soviet action by striking a warning blow. Such action also might help to create an appropriate psychological climate for the approaching Ninth Party Congress and to reinforce the image of Lin Piao and the armed forces as the indispensable guardians of the fatherland; and at the same time it would serve as a timely riposte to a scheduled visit by Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Andrei Grechko to India on March 2.

Ambush on the Ussuri

The Chinese apparently were already aware that sometime after mid-February the Soviet Union had placed its forces along the Amur-Ussuri frontier on No. 1 combat alert and altered their rules of engagement to permit firing in disputed areas.¹⁰ Nevertheless, they evidently discounted the likelihood of a major Soviet response to a Chinese demonstration of force on the border, probably because they believed that Moscow was then preoccupied with a new "minicrisis" over West Berlin and would not want to risk a simultaneous confrontation in the Far East. They may also have thought that the recent return to Peking of dependents of Soviet embassy personnel after about two years' absence lessened the likelihood of strong Soviet retaliation.

⁹ See, e.g., "Shameless Claque," *Jen-min Jih-pao*, Jan. 22, 1969. On the alleged Soviet military buildup, see *ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1969, and report in *The New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1969.

¹⁰ A Chinese note to the Soviet Union on May 24, 1969 (published the same day by NCNA) claimed that the Soviet frontier forces had been placed in "No. 1 combat readiness" sometime "following" February 16.

As the locus for their new demonstration, the Chinese chose the disputed island of Chenpao (known to the Soviets as Damansky) in the Ussuri River, which had already been the scene of similar demonstrations in the past. According to the Soviet version of the incident (which has won widespread acceptance outside China and is probably not far from the truth), Chinese border troops laid an ambush for an outnumbered Soviet patrol on Chenpao/Damansky in the early hours of March 2, the ensuing firefight resulting in heavy casualties on the Soviet side (and probably the Chinese as well).¹¹

Even if the Chinese had not initiated the Chenpao incident, however, it seems probable that an armed clash would eventually have taken place anyway in view of a marked stiffening of the Soviet international posture. Early in 1969, a "hawkish" grouping—perhaps taking advantage of Premier Kosygin's prolonged absence because of illness—appears to have formed within the Soviet leadership around General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and pressed for a harder line on a number of issues including Berlin and China.¹² This group was sharply antagonistic towards the Mao regime both because of Peking's ultra-left domestic policies, particularly the flouting of Leninist principles in the Cultural Revolution, and because of China's aggressively anti-Soviet international behavior, extending—according to Moscow—even as far as the shipment of arms to Peking's East European protege, Albania.¹³ As long as the new crisis over Berlin continued, Moscow probably remained reluctant to become involved in any major confrontation with China.¹⁴ However, about the beginning of March, the Soviet leaders decided to withdraw from the Berlin confrontation,¹⁵ and once this decision was taken, the way was clear for more forceful action in the Far East to teach Peking a lesson and force Mao to back down from his "adventurist" anti-Soviet policy. The Kremlin leaders may also have calculated

¹¹ The Soviet version was set forth in a diplomatic protest made to China on March 2, 1969, and made public by TASS News Agency, March 3, 1969. See also "A Provocative Sally of the Peking Authorities," *Pravda* (Moscow), March 8, 1969.

¹² One indication of a stiffening Soviet posture vis-a-vis Peking was a Radio Peace and Progress broadcast of January 24, 1969, which denounced both Mao and Lin Piao and assailed China's plans for the Ninth Party Congress.

¹³ See V. Shelepin, "Albania in Peking's Plans," *New Times* (Moscow), Feb. 19, 1969, pp. 19-20.

¹⁴ *Kommunist* (No. 2, January 1969, pp. 3-12) published a "rediscovered" Comintern document dating from 1936 on the danger of a sudden outbreak of world war. The intended message seems to have been that simultaneous tension in Europe and the Far East creates a risk of general war and is therefore undesirable.

¹⁵ See David Binder dispatch from Bonn, *The New York Times*, March 4, 1969.

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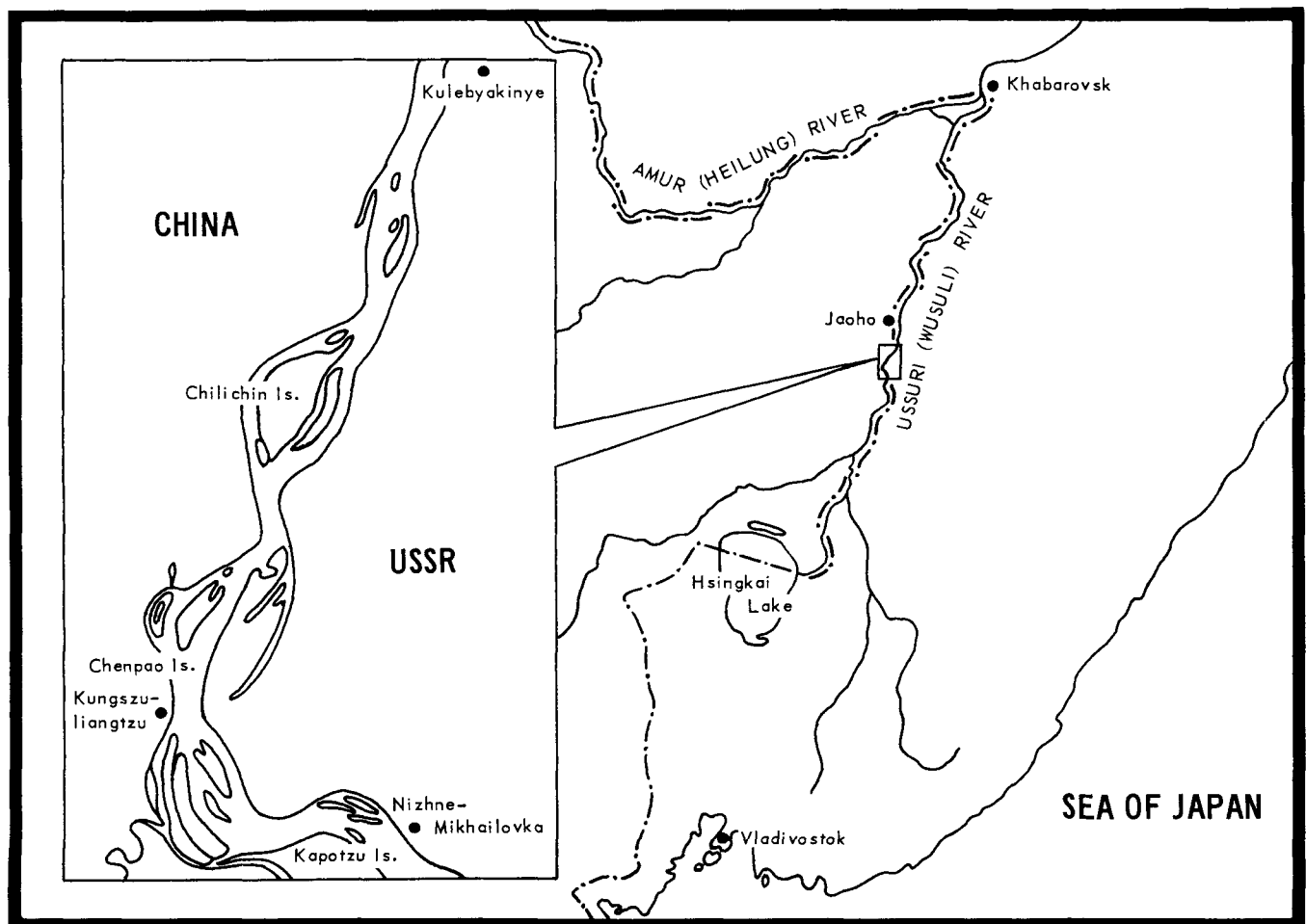
that such a course would help to cover up their retreat from Berlin, as well as to divert world attention from Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia and reinforce Moscow's position vis-a-vis its Warsaw Pact allies, while at the same time creating a popular issue at home. It was probably with these considerations in mind that Moscow issued the previously mentioned new rules of engagement for Soviet border forces in the Far East.¹⁶ In any event it seems clear that the Soviets were themselves girding for some sort of display of force in the Far East when the Chenpao clash occurred.

On the very day of the incident, both sides presented each other with diplomatic protests and began publicizing their respective versions of the clash.¹⁷

¹⁶ Paul Wohl, "Is Moscow Overplaying Its Rift with Peking?" *Christian Science Monitor*, June 2, 1969. (Wohl gives March 2 as the date of the change in the rules of engagement and gives the Soviet motive as a desire to cover the retreat from the Berlin crisis.)

Several features of the ensuing controversy suggest that the Soviet side not only had better communications with the scene of the fighting but was better prepared, politically even if not militarily, for an incident—a conclusion that reinforces the hypothesis that hostilities had been intended not merely on one side but on both. For one thing, Moscow began airing its version of the incident via radio broadcasts a few hours earlier than Peking. Moreover, the Soviet propaganda campaign that followed far surpassed its Chinese counterpart in intensity, seeking to offset the evident success of the Chinese attack by playing up the heroic conduct of the Soviet border guards, and to stir up anti-Chinese feeling among the Soviet people by charging the Chinese with atrocities against wounded Soviet soldiers. Again, while massive anti-Soviet demonstrations were mounted in

¹⁷ For the Soviet note, see fn. 10. The text of the Chinese protest was published by NCNA on March 3, 1969.



The Amur-Ussuri boundary between China and the USSR and (inset) detailed map of the riverine islands involved in the 1969 border conflict.

various parts of China, including Peking, these were nowhere near as violent as the obviously staged attack on the Chinese embassy in Moscow on March 7 by a rock-throwing "mob."¹⁸ Nor was there anything on the Chinese side comparable to the Soviet Union's highly unusual move, via diplomatic channels, to explain its case against Peking to the West German government in Bonn, and presumably to other governments as well.¹⁹

There is little doubt that, even in the absence of immediate Soviet military reprisals extending beyond Chenpao Island itself, the Chinese were startled and alarmed by the magnitude of Moscow's response. Peking was reported deeply concerned for the security of the remote northwestern border province of Sinkiang—site of the main centers of Chinese nuclear weapons development—which was obviously vulnerable to Soviet retaliatory action from neighboring Kazakhstan.²⁰ There may also have been an acute—albeit unarticulated—fear that Moscow might even resort to large-scale military intervention to forestall the Ninth Party Congress, just as it had intervened in Czechoslovakia to forestall the 14th Congress of the CPC. In characteristic Maoist fashion, however, Peking decided to put on a bold face in the hope not only of deterring the adversary but also of using the affair to promote domestic political mobilization. Accordingly, a major editorial published simultaneously in the army organ *Chieh-fang Chun Pao* (Liberation Army Daily) and *Jen-min Jih-pao* on March 4, under the title "Down with the New Tsars," raised the issue of the Sino-Russian treaty of 1860 defining the boundary along the Ussuri—a subject which the initial Soviet statements on the March 2 clash had left unmentioned, treating Chenpao/Damansky as obviously Soviet soil. Peking's position was that the island was Chinese under the 1860 treaty because it lay on the Chinese side of the river's main channel. On March 13, a further Chinese note to Moscow alleged a series of Soviet "encroachments" on Chenpao/Damansky since March 2.²¹

At this point, various considerations appear to have spurred the Soviets to prepare another firefight on Chenpao/Damansky, this time under conditions

of superiority sufficient to guarantee a Soviet victory. Apart from a natural desire to exact revenge for the humiliation suffered by the Russians in the March 2 affair and to punish Peking's recalcitrance, the Soviets may have hoped to influence the deliberations of the Ninth Party Congress, which seemed likely to open about March 15, and to pressure Peking towards a renunciation of its contention that the boundary treaties were "unequal" and therefore should be considered open to revision. Moscow may also have felt that a Soviet display of strength was necessary in order to impress an important meeting of the Warsaw Pact powers scheduled to take place in Budapest on March 17.²²

Second Clash on Chenpao

The bulk of available evidence (except, of course, from Soviet sources) points to the conclusion that the clash of March 15 on Chenpao/Damansky—which was much more serious than that of March 2—was initiated by the Russians and resulted in a clear-cut Soviet victory. Both sides immediately lodged diplomatic protests accusing each other of a fresh act of aggression.²³ A Soviet Chinese-language radio broadcast the same day reminded Peking in strong terms of the USSR's immense superiority to China in strategic weapons.²⁴ Meanwhile, the Soviet press proceeded to revive its periodic charges of Chinese collaboration with West Germany in a number of fields, including nuclear weapons technology—apparently with a view to convincing the USSR's Warsaw Pact allies that fighting Peking was an effective way of struggling against Bonn without incurring the excessive risks involved in a confrontation over Berlin. Undoubtedly worried and frightened by the vigor of the Soviet action of March 15, Peking for its part began to tone down its propaganda exploitation of the Ussuri crisis.²⁵

Fortunately for the Chinese, a shift of thinking in favor of the "doves" appears to have occurred in Moscow at about this time. Several possible causes

¹⁸ See Henry Kamm dispatch from Moscow, *The New York Times*, March 8, 1969. The Chinese embassy in Moscow protested the incident the same day; see text of note released by NCNA, March 10, 1969.

¹⁹ See Dan Morgan report from Bonn, *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), March 12, 1969.

²⁰ Stanley Karnow, "China Worried by Possible Soviet Threat to Vital Province," *The Washington Post*, March 11, 1969.

²¹ Text released by NCNA, March 13, 1969.

²² The Warsaw Pact meeting did in fact see an attempt by Brezhnev to exploit the Chinese issue (see Anatole Shub dispatch from Budapest, *The Washington Post*, March 19, 1969).

²³ Text of Soviet note released by TASS on March 15, 1969; text of Chinese note released by NCNA, same date (both notes reprinted in *The New York Times*, March 16, 1969). A separate NCNA report of March 15 referred to the 1860 Sino-Russian treaty, whereas the Soviet statements after the clash did not.

²⁴ Radio Peace and Progress broadcast, March 15, 1969.

²⁵ See Stanley Karnow, "China Tones Down Trouble on Border," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 1969.

for the shift can be suggested.²⁶ One possibility is that the Ussuri clashes may have led Peking to obstruct transshipments of Soviet military equipment bound for North Vietnam, prompting Hanoi to urge Moscow to ease its pressure on China. Another consideration may have been the fact that many in the international Communist movement were plainly dismayed by the spectacle of the two major socialist states engaging in armed conflict and were calling on both sides to compose their differences.²⁷ At the same time, the crisis with China was not having the effect Moscow had hoped it would toward inducing the Warsaw Pact powers—particularly Rumania—to tighten their security ties with the Soviet Union. But the most important factor of all—at least in the writer's view—was probably Moscow's concern over the possibility that excessive Soviet pressure on China might impel the Mao regime to seek a rapprochement with the United States. No doubt the Kremlin leaders took due note, in this connection, of an important speech delivered by US Senator Edward M. Kennedy in New York on March 20. Advocating better Sino-American relations, Kennedy stated:

*Even now, the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in the wake of the recent border clashes may be stimulating at least some of the leaders in Peking to re-evaluate their posture toward the United States and provides us with an extraordinary opportunity to break the bonds of distrust.*²⁸

Given Moscow's extraordinary sensitivity (since about 1966) to any hint of a possible improvement in Sino-American relations, it is perhaps not surprising that on March 21 Premier Kosygin tried to telephone Peking to discuss means of easing the border crisis. But the Chinese, perhaps sensing a sudden improvement in their bargaining position and very likely divided as to the best course to take, refused to talk with Kosygin beyond insisting that he communicate with them through regular diplomatic channels.²⁹

²⁶ On the atmosphere of concern in Moscow at this time, see Charlotte Saikowski, "Kremlin Alarmed," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 22, 1969. On divisions of opinion within the Soviet military, see Christian Duevel, "Disarray Among the Soviet Marshals," *Radio Liberty Dispatch*, May 22, 1969.

²⁷ See, e.g., statement by Japanese party Chairman Sanzo Nosaka, headlined "Chinese and Soviet Governments Should Settle Border Dispute Through Talks," published in *Akahata* (Tokyo), March 18, 1969.

²⁸ Text in A. Doak Barnett and Edwin O. Reischauer, Eds., *The United States and China: The Next Decade*, New York, Praeger, 1970, p. 155.

In retrospect, the Kosygin telephone call of March 21, 1969, appears to have marked a major watershed in Soviet management of the Sino-Soviet border conflict. To be sure, the Soviets continued to apply various forms of military pressure after that date, as they had before, but with an important difference. In the earlier phase, in which Brezhnev had figured conspicuously, Moscow appears to have been motivated largely by a desire to teach the Chinese a lesson (and to derive ancillary benefits from doing so) without any serious effort to move toward a border settlement, at least on any terms that Peking could be expected to find acceptable. In the second phase, in which Kosygin seemed to assume the leading role, military and psychological pressures were accompanied by diplomatic offers of—or demands for—talks aimed at resolving the border issue, preferably (from Moscow's viewpoint) through Peking's agreement to abandon its sweeping claim that the border treaties were "unequal" and therefore open to revision. At the same time, of course, efforts to exploit the continuing border crisis for the furtherance of other Soviet objectives were by no means abandoned. At the international Communist conference of June 1969 in Moscow, for example, Brezhnev again attempted—and once more with little success—to use the China issue to mobilize support for the Soviet party, and he also seized the occasion to float his famous proposal for some sort of Asian collective security organization, presumably with an anti-Chinese orientation.³⁰

Diplomatic Jockeying

The inauguration of the new phase of Soviet policy was signaled by a Kremlin note of March 29, transmitted to Peking—whether by accident or by design—almost on the eve of the opening of the Ninth Party Congress on April 1. After recapitulating briefly Moscow's version of the two Ussuri clashes, the note, for the first time on the Soviet side, took up the issue of the treaties that formed the basis of the Sino-Soviet boundary. It of course defended their validity and denied that they were "unequal"

²⁹ The only published source for Kosygin's telephone call and the Chinese response is Lin Piao's report of April 1, 1969, to the Ninth Party Congress (text released by NCNA, April 27, 1969), but there appears to be no reason to doubt the accuracy of Lin's statement.

³⁰ For Brezhnev's speech at the conference, see *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, July 2, 1969, esp. pp. 10-12. See also Charlotte Saikowski, "Russian Flurry: Kremlin Leaders Scout Asia for Friends in Border Dispute," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 20, 1969.

in any significant sense. It also made clear that the Soviet Union would defend the territories acquired under the treaties with whatever force might be necessary. In conclusion, the note proposed the earliest possible resumption of Sino-Soviet border talks, which had been started in 1964 but discontinued with Khrushchev's fall.³¹ Although no reply could reasonably be expected while the Ninth Party Congress was in progress, the Soviet Foreign Ministry followed up its note of March 29 with another two weeks later proposing specifically that talks be reopened in Moscow on April 15 or at "another time in the near future convenient to the Chinese side."³²

Implicit in the Soviet handling of the border dispute during this period appears to have been a belief—quite consistent with Premier Kosygin's leading role in the affair—that Mao Tse-tung and Lin Piao were basically opposed to border talks, and that therefore an effort should be made to check their influence and enhance that of the relatively moderate Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. It may have been with this objective in mind that *Pravda* on May 3 published an article by the well-known Soviet writer, Konstantin Simonov, flatly charging Lin Piao with personal responsibility for the first Ussuri clash.³³ Whether or not the *Pravda* attack had any political effect in Peking, the period following the Ninth Party Congress was marked by Chou's resumption of a leading role in the shaping of Chinese foreign policy. Chou's position as third-ranking leader in the Peking hierarchy had been called into question at the Congress but was now reconfirmed, although perhaps on condition that he confine his major activities to the diplomatic field.³⁴

On May 11, Peking accepted a Soviet proposal of April 26 to reconvene the joint Sino-Soviet commission charged with regulating navigation on border rivers (i.e., the Amur and Ussuri).³⁵ The commission met on June 18 at Khabarovsk and after some vicissitudes concluded its work successfully in early

August.³⁶ Although these normally routine discussions assumed more than their usual significance in the context of the border crisis, they fell far short of meeting Moscow's demand for comprehensive talks on border issues.

On May 24, the Chinese at last sent a lengthy reply to the Soviet note of March 29, which had proposed the immediate opening of such talks. The reply insisted that Peking's policy sought the avoidance of border incidents and the settlement of disputes through diplomatic negotiation. On the other hand, it charged the Soviet Union with responsibility for the March clashes on Chenpao/Damansky, as well as for other border incidents; reaffirmed that Chenpao/Damansky was Chinese territory even under the "unequal" treaty of 1860; and claimed that the Soviet Union had illegally occupied territory beyond what China had been forced to cede under the 19th-century treaties, not only in the Amur-Ussuri region but also in the Pamirs, on the western frontier of Sinkiang province. The note went on to propose a cease-fire along the "line of actual control" on the Amur-Ussuri frontier, demanded the annulment in principle of the "unequal" treaties as a preliminary to a comprehensive border settlement, but agreed that these treaties might be taken as the basis of such a settlement subject to "necessary adjustments at individual places." The note rejected the April 15 date (already past) proposed by Moscow for the opening of full-fledged "boundary negotiations" and suggested that another date be agreed upon through diplomatic channels.³⁷

The Soviet answer was sent to Peking on June 13. It insisted on the continued validity of the treaties denounced by China, reasserted the Soviet claim to ownership of Chenpao/Damansky Island, and again alleged Chinese responsibility for all border incidents. Nevertheless, it welcomed Peking's agreement in principle to the holding of border talks and proposed that they be resumed in Moscow within two to three months. In concluding, the reply assumed a peremptory tone closely approaching that of an ultimatum, stating that "the Soviet Government expects the Chinese Government to inform it shortly whether the above proposals on the dates and place for the continuation of the consultations are acceptable to it."³⁸

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had already started orchestrating a concert of military and psychological pressures designed to force Peking into a hard and

³¹ Text of Soviet note released by TASS, March 30, 1969.

³² Text of note broadcast by Moscow Domestic Service, April 12, 1969.

³³ For comment on Simonov's article, see Bernard Gwertzman dispatch from Moscow, *The New York Times*, May 4, 1969.

³⁴ Whereas Chou's name had usually been listed third among the top Chinese leaders at major party gatherings, official reports of the Ninth Congress proceedings departed from past practice in listing all the top leaders below Mao and Lin in the Chinese equivalent of alphabetical order (i.e., according to the number of brushstrokes in the Chinese character for their surnames). This displaced Chou from the third position. However, beginning with a rally held on May 19, 1969, Chou was once more listed directly after Mao and Lin.

³⁵ For comment, see Stanley Karnow, "China Agrees to Soviet River Talks," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 1969.

³⁶ NCNA dispatch, Aug. 11, 1969.

³⁷ Text released by NCNA, May 24, 1969.

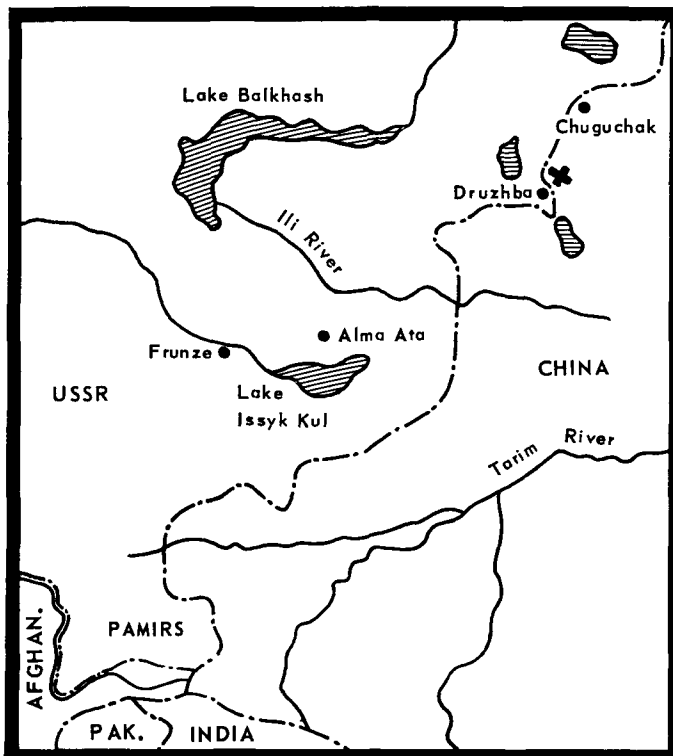
³⁸ Text released by TASS, June 14, 1969.

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fast commitment to renew the 1964 talks. Early in June, for instance, Soviet diplomats were reported taking soundings in Western capitals to ascertain their probable reaction in the event of a Sino-Soviet war in which either side might resort to nuclear weapons.³⁹ These pressures were intensified following the Soviet note of June 13. On July 10, Foreign Minister Gromyko included in his report to the Supreme Soviet a lengthy and sternly-worded denunciation of Peking on a number of issues, including the border dispute.⁴⁰ Much more threatening was the steady strengthening of Soviet forces and dispositions in the Far East. About the beginning of August, Moscow announced the appointment of a new commander of the Soviet Far Eastern Military District, Colonel General V. F. Tolubko, whose position in the Soviet Army's missile forces was not likely to be overlooked in Peking. Shortly thereafter, in an article commemorating the 40th anniversary of the

³⁹ See Paul Wohl, "Peking Softens Its Line," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 5, 1969.

⁴⁰ *Pravda*, July 11, 1969 (trans. in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Aug. 1969, pp. 4-11).



The disputed frontier between China's westernmost province of Sinkiang and Soviet Central Asia. "X" indicates the area where an armed clash took place on August 13, 1969.

1929 outbreak of a brief undeclared war between the Soviet Union and China over ownership of the Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria—a conflict which resulted in a Soviet victory—General Tolubko pointedly recalled that after "all efforts to settle the conflict by peaceful means had failed," the Soviet side had struck a "sudden and decisive blow."⁴¹

During this period relatively minor clashes continued to occur at scattered frontier points. For example, Moscow charged the Chinese with firing on Soviet transport workers on the Amur River near Khabarovsk in early July.⁴² But probably the most serious incident occurred on August 13 along the border between northwestern Sinkiang province and Soviet Central Asia. Although both sides presented conflicting versions of the incident, the most plausible version appears to be that Soviet forces occupied a hill two kilometers on the Chinese side of the border and for a time successfully defied the Chinese to dislodge them.⁴³ Assuming this to be correct, the Soviets may well have staged the incident deliberately to remind the Chinese of the vulnerability of remote and thinly defended Sinkiang to Soviet conventional attack, just as Tolubko's appointment had perhaps been intended to underline China's vulnerability to a Soviet "surgical strike" using nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, both the Soviets and the Chinese were beaming propaganda broadcasts across the border in an effort to stir up unrest among each other's ethnic minorities.⁴⁴

Up until this time, notwithstanding Chinese press reports of "war preparations," there had been few signs of any serious alarm or defensive mobilization, at least in Peking.⁴⁵ Following the August 13 border incident, however, Chinese statements about Soviet preparations for war began to take on a more urgent tone,⁴⁶ and for the first time since the start of the border crisis there were reports of significant northward movements of Chinese troops from South

⁴¹ V. Tolubko, "The Glory of Heroes Lives," *Krasnaia zvezda*, Aug. 6, 1969.

⁴² Soviet protest reported in *Pravda*, July 9, 1969. See also Charlotte Saikowski, "Moscow and Peking Both Tell of New Clash," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 10, 1969.

⁴³ See Bernard Gwertzman dispatch from Moscow, "Soviet and China Fight New Battle in Central Asia," *The New York Times*, Aug. 14, 1969. The text of China's diplomatic protest on the incident was released by NCNA, Aug. 13, 1969; the Soviet protest of the same date was published in *Pravda*, Aug. 14 (trans. in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Sept. 10, 1969).

⁴⁴ John Gittings, "Guessing with Guns," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong), Aug. 21, 1969, p. 443.

⁴⁵ Agence France-Presse dispatch from Peking, in *The New York Times*, Aug. 5, 1969.

⁴⁶ Tillman Durdin dispatch from Hong Kong, *The New York Times*, Aug. 16, 1969.

China.⁴⁷ By the end of the month, Western as well, probably, as Chinese observers were beginning to take the possibility of Soviet military action against China—whether a “surgical strike” or the occupation of Chinese border regions—still more seriously following press reports that Moscow had been asking East and West European Communist leaders what their reaction would be in such an eventuality.⁴⁸

With the three-month deadline set by Moscow for the start of border talks approaching and no reply yet forthcoming from Peking, *Pravda* on August 28 published an editorial denouncing in unusually strong language China’s “adventurist course” both on the Sino-Soviet border and in world affairs generally. After noting Peking’s failure to reply to the Soviet proposal of June 13 and reiterating Moscow’s desire for peace and good relations with China, the editorial went on to warn that “if war were to break out under present conditions, with the armaments, lethal weapons, and modern means of delivery that now exist, not a single continent would remain unaffected.” Quite obviously, Moscow wanted to cow Peking into thinking that the two countries stood on the brink not just of war, but of nuclear war.

The Kosygin-Chou Meeting

However, Moscow, too, found itself under certain restraining pressures. One was its own concern—stimulated by the action of the Nixon administration to relax US restrictions on trade with and travel to the Chinese mainland—that excessive Soviet pressure on China might drive Peking into the arms of the United States.⁴⁹

Moscow also faced pressure from Hanoi, which saw the threat of Sino-Soviet hostilities as gravely prejudicial to its hopes of victory in the Vietnam struggle in view of North Vietnam’s dependence not only on Soviet arms shipments but also on their unhindered movement by rail through Chinese territory. Following the death of Ho Chi Minh on September 3, 1969, North Vietnam took advantage of the visits of the Soviet and Chinese premiers to Hanoi for Ho’s funeral to impress upon both parties to the dispute the urgent desirability of steps toward a negotiated settlement. While Kosygin was still in Hanoi,

Moscow evidently decided to renew an offer that it had reportedly first made to China near the end of August to dispatch the Soviet premier to Peking for talks with Chou En-lai. No answer had yet come from Peking by the time Kosygin left Hanoi on September 10, however, and he therefore flew to Calcutta en route homeward. At Calcutta, he received word, probably sent directly from Peking, that a visit would be in order, but that he could meet with Chou only at the airport, without the protocol that would attend a drive into the city itself. By the time he reached Dushanbe, in Soviet Central Asia, Kosygin was informed by Moscow that these conditions, though not ideal, were acceptable, and he accordingly flew to Peking on September 11.⁵⁰

A communique issued by the Chinese stated that Chou and Kosygin held a “frank conversation” lasting several hours.⁵¹ The Soviet premier apparently uttered no threats, and for a few weeks thereafter the Soviet press suspended all anti-Chinese polemics. According to information leaked a few days later by North Vietnamese sources, who presumably were eager to show the effectiveness of Hanoi’s conciliation efforts, Kosygin had presented broad proposals for a normalization of inter-governmental (but not inter-party) relations, including the holding of discussions on border issues at the Deputy Foreign Minister level, mutual resumption of ambassadorial representation, and talks looking toward a restoration of economic relations.⁵²

Proposals of such importance obviously could not be accepted or rejected before they had been discussed by the top Peking leadership. For the time being, therefore, Chou merely repeated to Kosygin China’s earlier demand for a cease-fire and mutual disengagement along the “line of actual control.”⁵³ It seems quite likely that the ensuing deliberations within the leadership found the Maoist faction still adamantly opposed to any broad accommodation with the hated “revisionists” in Moscow. At any rate, when the slogans for the October 1 celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Chinese People’s Republic were made public on September 16,⁵⁴ their tone conveyed no hint of any intent to compromise with Moscow. The twenty-second slogan contained

⁴⁷ Tilman Durdin dispatch from Hong Kong, *ibid.*, Aug. 30, 1969.

⁴⁸ Chalmers M. Roberts, “Russia Reported Eying Strikes at China Nuclear Sites,” *The Washington Post*, Aug. 28, 1969; Anthony Astrachan, “Western Envoys Differ on Soviet Threat to China,” *ibid.*, Aug. 29, 1969.

⁴⁹ See Bernard Gwertzman dispatch from Moscow, *The New York Times*, Aug. 18, 1969.

⁵⁰ See Christian Duevel, “Kosygin’s Surprise Visit to Peking,” *Radio Liberty Dispatch*, Sept. 12, 1969; also, Bernard Gwertzman dispatch from Moscow, *The New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1969.

⁵¹ NCNA, Sept. 11, 1969.

⁵² Kyodo News Agency report from Tokyo, Sept. 12, 1969. See also Harrison E. Salisbury, “Kosygin’s Offer to Chou Detailed,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1969.

⁵³ Chinese official statement released by NCNA, Oct. 7, 1969.

⁵⁴ NCNA release, Sept. 16, 1969.

the thoroughly Maoist exhortation, reminiscent of the language used by Lin Piao in his report to the Ninth Party Congress, to “unite and oppose any war of aggression launched by imperialism [*i.e.*, the United States] or social-imperialism [*i.e.*, the Soviet Union], especially a war of aggression in which atom bombs are used as weapons!”

That the absence of any conciliatory response from Peking to Kosygin’s proposals deeply annoyed Moscow was suggested by the fact that the London *Evening News*, on September 16 (the same day that the Chinese anniversary slogans were announced), published an article by Victor Louis, a notorious Soviet journalist known to have close official connections in Moscow, that was highly threatening towards China. Louis warned that the Soviet Union had the capability to apply a wide variety of pressures to China, including a “surgical strike” or even an invasion, clearly implying that such extreme options might yet be exercised.

Agreement on Border Negotiation

What part, if any, Louis’ warning may have played in influencing Peking is open to conjecture, but it does appear that the Chinese leaders became convinced about this time that the situation was becoming too risky and that Peking had better soften its stand vis-a-vis Moscow.⁵⁵ In any event, on September 18 the Chinese government reiterated its earlier proposal to Moscow for a cease-fire and a mutual withdrawal of forces from disputed border areas, and when no Soviet reply was forthcoming, it sent another message to the same effect on October 6. This time a prompt reply apparently came from Moscow, and Peking was able to announce the following day that “the Chinese Government and the Soviet Government have now decided through discussion that negotiations are to be held in Peking between the Chinese and Soviet sides on the Sino-Soviet boundary question at the level of vice-minister of foreign affairs. The date for starting the negotiations is now under discussion.”⁵⁶

Having agreed to negotiations, however, the Chinese quickly made it clear that they had no intention of retreating on the substantive issues in dispute.

⁵⁵ Peking’s decision to ease the border crisis may have been influenced by a speech delivered by US Undersecretary of State Elliott Richardson on September 5, in which he refrained from supporting either side and declared that the United States “could not fail to be deeply concerned with an escalation of this quarrel into a massive breach of international peace and security” (*The New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1969).

⁵⁶ Chinese official statement of October 7, 1969 (see fn. 53).

On October 8, the Chinese Foreign Ministry made public a lengthy “refutation” of the Soviet note of June 13, strongly denouncing both historic and recent Russian policy toward China, particularly on the border question, and affirming the existence of “irreconcilable differences of principle.” The statement reiterated the “unequal” character of the boundary treaties and contended that any “overall settlement of the Sino-Soviet boundary question” ought to recognize that fact, but it made plain that “China does not demand the return of the Chinese territory which Tsarist Russia annexed by means of these treaties.” At the same time, the statement again accused the Soviets of claiming territory in the Pamir and Amur-Ussuri regions *beyond* the line established by the treaties and declared that either side occupying territory in violation of the treaties “must, in principle, return it unconditionally to the other side,” although “necessary adjustments” could be made by common consent. The statement concluded that a new Sino-Soviet boundary treaty should be negotiated on this basis, and that in the meantime both sides should withdraw their troops from all disputed areas and observe a cease-fire.⁵⁷ A comparison of this position with the one enunciated by Peking in its May 24 note to Moscow reveals no essential differences—except, of course, for the newfound willingness of the Chinese to discuss a specific date for the start of border negotiations.

⁵⁷ Released by NCNA, Oct. 8, 1969.

TROUBLED FRONTIER

1—Chinese fishermen tangling with a Soviet gunboat on the Ussuri River, not yet icebound. The Chinese accused the Russians of using their patrol craft to harass and intimidate Chinese fishing boats.

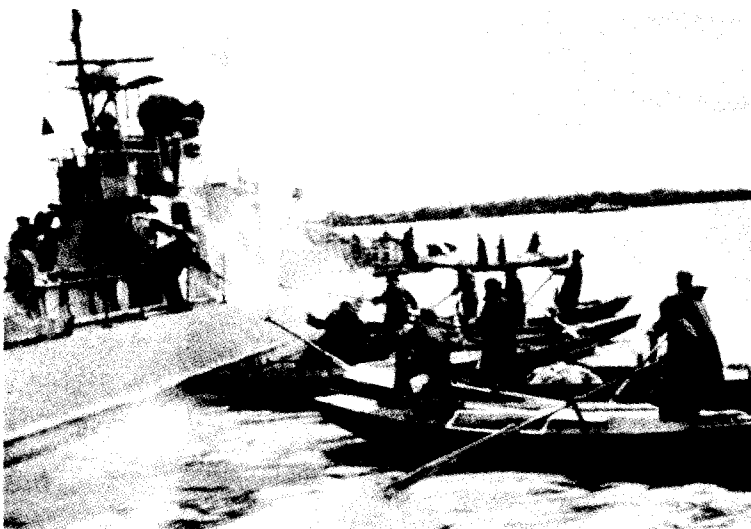
2—A new use for the Thought of Mao. Members of a Chinese border patrol on the frozen Ussuri reading from their little red books of Mao’s teachings to members of a Soviet patrol.

3—A unit of Soviet frontier troops, with armored vehicles, allegedly moving toward Chenpao Island. The Chinese claim Chenpao on the ground that it lies on the Chinese side of the main river channel.

4—Soviet frontier guards (in white uniforms) allegedly obstructing a Chinese patrol off the shore of Kapotzu, one of the disputed islands in the Ussuri.

5—Chinese winter fishermen defying a Soviet armored car on the ice.

—Photos reprinted from a Chinese English-language propaganda pamphlet entitled *Down with the New Tsars*, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1969.



1



2



3



4



5

A PLEDGE UNKEPT

The government of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republics declares as void all the treaties concluded by the former government of Russia with China, renounces all the annexations of Chinese territory, all the concessions in China, and returns to China free of charge, and forever, all that was ravenously taken from her by the Tsar's government and by the Russian bourgeoisie.

—Karakhan Manifesto, Sept. 27, 1920.

Following the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia, the Soviet Republic solemnly renounced the unequal and secret treaties with China, Tsarist Russia's spheres of influence in China, extraterritorial rights and consular jurisdiction. . . . The nullification of the above-mentioned treaties was made official by the Agreement on General Principles . . . of May 31, 1924. This agreement did not consider Russian-Chinese treaties defining the state border to be among the unequal or secret agreements. There was no talk of their being annulled or revised.

—USSR government statement of March 29, 1969, in *Pravda*, March 30.

Moscow, too, was making concessions in agreeing (1) to "negotiations" rather than mere "consultations," as had been proposed in the Soviet note of June 13; (2) to Peking rather than Moscow as the locus of the negotiations; and (3) at least implicitly, to the premise that the border treaties were indeed "unequal" and therefore might be open to some minor adjustments. These concessions did not come easily and were not in fact openly avowed. Nor did the Soviets make any favorable response to reported urgings by the Italian and Japanese Communist Parties that Moscow and Peking should compose their party as well as their state differences. Indeed, the publication in *Kommunist* (No. 15, October 10, 1969) of a strongly anti-Chinese theoretical article by Mikhail Suslov attested to Moscow's unwillingness to go this far.

The Peking Talks

It was in these somewhat ambiguous and none too promising circumstances that the Sino-Soviet border talks finally opened in Peking. The Soviet delegation, led by Deputy Foreign Minister V. V. Kuznetsov, who had served as the first Soviet ambassador to China after the death of Stalin, reached Peking on October 19 and began talks the following day with a Chinese delegation headed by

Deputy Foreign Minister Ch'iao Kuan-hua. From the outset, a deep official silence settled over the negotiations on both sides. It was not long, however, before press reports indicated that the talks were stalled over China's insistence that Peking's demand for a cease-fire and troop withdrawal be put at the top of the agenda—a demand which the Soviets were understandably reluctant to concede since a mutual withdrawal of forces would take away their main bargaining advantage.⁵⁸

This was presumably where matters stood when Kuznetsov and his military deputy returned to Moscow on December 14, officially to take part in a session of the Supreme Soviet but undoubtedly also to report to the party leadership on the progress (or lack of it) of the talks and to receive fresh instructions.

Peking was evidently very concerned that Kuznetsov's departure might mean the breakdown of the talks or his replacement by a lesser figure, and it was probably not purely coincidental that Peking was reported at this time to be showing fresh interest in a resumption of ambassadorial talks with the United States, presumably as a means of exerting pressure on Moscow.⁵⁹ However, in spite of the pessimistic report Kuznetsov must have given his superiors on the Peking parley,⁶⁰ and notwithstanding an occasional reversion by the Soviets to the psychological warfare tactics of the previous summer,⁶¹ it is clear in retrospect that Moscow decided to continue the talks and to give Kuznetsov somewhat more flexible instructions. Some of the probable reasons for this decision will be suggested in the concluding section.

Kuznetsov returned to Peking on January 2, and the talks resumed shortly thereafter. During the next few weeks, the Soviet negotiator apparently agreed in principle to concede Chinese sovereignty over some of the disputed islands on the Amur and Ussuri Rivers and to discuss the status of the Pamir region, but he reportedly continued to hold out for a time against the Chinese demand for a cease-fire

⁵⁸ The Hong Kong Communist newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* reported (Nov. 6-10, 1969) that the talks showed "no signs of progress." See also Stanley Karnow, "Sino-Soviet Talks Stall on Troops," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 7, 1969, and "China, Russia Appear Stalled in Border Talk," *ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1969.

⁵⁹ See Stanley Karnow, "China Sees Leverage in US Talks," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 14, 1969.

⁶⁰ See Bernard Gwertzman dispatch from Moscow, *The New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1969.

⁶¹ E.g., see V. Tolubko, "The Will to Victory," *Krasnaia zvezda*, Dec. 7, 1969; for comment, see Paul Wohl, "Soviet Nuclear-Arms Practice Seen as Warning to Peking," *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 6, 1970.

and mutual troop withdrawal.⁶² Meanwhile, the Soviet press kept up its psychological pressure on China, publishing a number of stern articles by Soviet military experts and others warning that Peking's bellicosity and stubbornness were creating serious risk of a Sino-Soviet war, even nuclear war.⁶³ The force of these warnings was weakened, however, by a *Pravda* article (February 15, 1970) written by S. L. Tikhvinsky, a China specialist and member of Kuznetsov's delegation, who denounced US journalist Harrison E. Salisbury's newly-published book, *War Between Russia and China* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1969), and explicitly denied that Moscow was contemplating an attack, especially a nuclear attack, on China. Peking, although reportedly somewhat perturbed by the possibility that talks currently under way between Moscow and Bonn might produce an understanding that would free Soviet hands for stronger action in Asia, seemed disposed to take Tikhvinsky's assurance at face value and was reported to be somewhat less tense over the border situation.⁶⁴

Effect of Cambodian Events

The Cambodian crisis precipitated by the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk in March 1970 had the effect of further easing Sino-Soviet tension since it drew the urgent attention of both powers to the new situation in Southeast Asia. Indeed, Moscow was reported in mid-April to have come to some sort of agreement with Peking, although a secret and possibly informal one, on a cease-fire and at least a partial troop withdrawal.⁶⁵ Following a visit by Kuznetsov to Moscow between April 18 and May 3, the negotiators were even reported to have discussed possible Sino-Soviet cooperation in the Cambodian crisis, but with Soviet military pressures reduced, Peking reportedly showed no interest.⁶⁶

⁶² Bernard Gwertzman dispatch from Moscow, *The New York Times*, March 1, 1970.

⁶³ E.g., V. Korionov, "The Highway," *Pravda*, Jan. 6, 1970; V. Shelepin, "China: Militarist Intoxication," *New Times*, No. 3 (Jan. 20, 1970), p. 14; Yu. Andreyev, "Militaristic Fever in Peking," *Krasnaia zvezda*, Jan. 21, 1970; Aleksandrov (pseud.), "To Imperialism's Advantage," *Pravda*, March 19, 1970; and I. Makarov, "Militarist Hysteria in China," *Krasnaia zvezda*, March 31, 1970.

⁶⁴ Norman Webster dispatch from Peking, *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1970.

⁶⁵ Murray Marder, "Moscow and Peking to Pull Back Troops," *The Washington Post*, April 16, 1970.

⁶⁶ See Anthony Astrachan dispatch from Moscow, *The Washington Post*, May 10, 1970.

In fact, anti-Soviet ideological polemics had already resumed in the Chinese press,⁶⁷ and once it was clear that no cooperation was possible regarding Cambodia, Moscow also took up the ideological battle once more—though still insisting on its intention to continue seeking a normalization of intergovernmental relations with Peking.⁶⁸ In this atmosphere the Peking talks obviously could not be expected to make any real progress, although Premier Kosygin indicated in a speech on June 10 that the Soviet government, despite its frustration, intended to continue the negotiations.⁶⁹ A couple of weeks later, it became known that Kuznetsov, because of ill health, would be replaced as Soviet chief negotiator by Deputy Foreign Minister L. F. Ilchev.⁷⁰

In the second half of June, there were again indications of an easing of tensions between Moscow and Peking. Sino-Soviet press polemics virtually ceased, and by mid-July two modest but real steps forward had been achieved. The Sino-Soviet joint commission on border river navigation resumed discussions,⁷¹ and the two governments reportedly agreed to resume ambassadorial-level representation for the first time since 1966, with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Liu Hsien-chuan to become Peking's ambassador to Moscow.⁷² Former Soviet propaganda chief V. I. Stepakov was reported initially designated as Soviet ambassador to Peking but—either because of ill health or because he was unacceptable to the Chinese—was later replaced by V. S. Tolstikov, formerly Leningrad party first secretary. (Tolstikov took up his post on October 10, and Liu left Peking for Moscow on November 22.) China's agreement to restore ambassadorial representation after a lapse of four years seemed at least to signify a desire to avoid a new escalation of tension as serious as the border crisis of 1969.

Despite this conciliatory gesture in the diplomatic sphere, however, there was no sign of any abandon-

⁶⁷ See joint editorial entitled "Leninism or Social-Imperialism?," published in *Jen-min Jih-pao*, *Hung Ch'i*, and *Chieh-fang Chun Pao*, April 22, 1970.

⁶⁸ "Pseudo-revolutionaries Unmasked," *Pravda*, May 18, 1970. See also M. Ukraintsev (pseud.), "Asia and the Peking Empire-Builders," *New Times*, June 9, 1970, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁹ TASS dispatch, June 10, 1970. Kosygin again expressed the same attitude in an interview with the editor of the *New Delhi Patriot* (TASS dispatch, Aug. 10, 1970), as did Brezhnev in a speech on August 28 (Moscow Radio, Aug. 28, 1970).

⁷⁰ Chalmers M. Roberts, "Sino-Soviet Negotiator Goes Home," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1970. Ilchev arrived in Peking on August 15.

⁷¹ "China and Soviet Renew Talks on River Shipping," *The New York Times*, July 11, 1970.

⁷² "China Envoy Said to Get Moscow Post," *The Washington Post*, July 16, 1970.

ment by Peking of the Maoist dual-adversary strategy in the realm of political propaganda. On the occasion of Army Day (August 1), the major editorial published in *Jen-min Jih-pao*, *Hung Ch'i*, and *Chieh-fang Chun Pao* attacked the Soviet Union in these uncompromising terms:

Social-imperialism greedily eyes Chinese territory. It has not for a single day relaxed its preparation to attack China. In words, it claims that it poses no threat to China. Why then does it mass its troops in areas close to Chinese borders? Why has it dispatched large numbers of troops into another country which neighbors on China [i.e., Mongolia]? Why does it frenziedly undertake military deployments to direct its spearhead against China? It is clear that social-imperialism, like U. S. imperialism, says that it poses no threat to China only to weaken our vigilance [and] to fool the people of its own country and the world.

The context in which this alarmist passage appeared, however, strongly suggested that its main purpose was to promote domestic political mobilization rather than to express genuine concern over an imminent Soviet attack.

War or Peace?

Surveying the troubled course of Sino-Soviet relations over the last few years, one cannot doubt that Chinese leaders recognize the existence of powerful disincentives to any major war with the Soviet Union, whether over territorial boundaries or anything else. In addition to the obviously great superiority of the Soviet Union in military-industrial strength and strategic weapons, the Chinese realize that they would face serious logistical difficulties in any Sino-Soviet conflict, as well as the risk of renewed political discord at home. On the other hand, Peking appears convinced that its international political and ideological position is sufficiently strong to permit it to manage the border dispute without incurring excessive risk of war. Although perhaps to a lesser extent than before the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Maoist leadership still seems to view the Soviet Union as a kind of "paper" bear immobilized, in the last analysis, by fear of Communist China and her ponderous defensive strength, and by general clumsiness and irresolution.

Accordingly, Peking's approach since September 1969 has been to avoid major frontier incidents while

keeping the Soviet Union politically in play through protracted discussions in which the Chinese keep pressing for a cease-fire in return for only minor substantive concessions on their own side. In addition to a cease-fire, Peking appears genuinely desirous of gaining at least some prestige items from the border talks, such as Soviet recognition in principle of the "unequal" character of the original boundary treaties and some minor border adjustments in China's favor in those areas (principally, the Amur-Ussuri and Pamir regions) where Soviet forces have occupied or intruded upon territory claimed to be Chinese under the treaties.

Meanwhile, for the sake of ideological consistency and domestic political effect, Peking continues to adhere, at least outwardly, to the Maoist dual-adversary strategy by giving vent to occasional outbursts of polemics against Soviet "social-imperialism" and shunning "united action" with the Soviet Union on such issues as Cambodia. At the same time, the Mao regime seeks to mend its political and diplomatic fences elsewhere, notably in its relations with North Korea and North Vietnam—and even, to a limited extent, in its relations with the United States.

On the Soviet side, too, there are powerful disincentives to war. From the military standpoint, major Soviet offensive operations on Chinese soil not only could be expected to encounter numerically superior Chinese forces in most areas, and probably a militantly hostile local populace, but also would entail serious logistical problems. China's defensive preparations, moreover, have been extensive, reportedly including the reorganization for military purposes of the sprawling Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region so as to place most of it under the Mukden, Peking, and Lanchow Military Regions, thereby improving the possibilities for a coordinated defense in depth.⁷³

The political deterrents are as cogent as the military. To begin with, there is no persuasive evidence to indicate that Moscow would be capable of establishing or calling into being any Chinese collaborationist regime, except perhaps on a localized scale in border regions with large non-Chinese populations. Such being the case, for the Soviet Union to attempt a Czechoslovakia-type military intervention in China to enforce the Brezhnev doctrine would, in all probability, be futile; and more than that, the end result would be to intensify traditional Chinese hatred of the Russians and thus to render illusory any Soviet

⁷³ Tillman Durdin dispatch from Hong Kong, *The New York Times*, June 21, 1970.

hopes of reestablishing the unity of the Communist world under Moscow's leadership.

In addition to these arguments, the "doves" in Moscow—who are believed to include some highly-placed military figures⁷⁴—can point to still other considerations supporting their position. Among these are China's recently enhanced political standing in Asia, the inadvisability of driving China and the United States together, the probable alienation of foreign Communist parties if the Soviet Union were to go to war with China, and the need to give higher priority to the solution of persistent economic problems at home as well as to the protection and strengthening of the Soviet position in Europe and the Middle East.⁷⁵

Thus, at least from the viewpoint of the Moscow "doves," the balance of political advantage appears to lie on the side of avoiding a major conflict with China and waiting out Mao's death in the hope of working out an accommodation with his successors. With that eventuality in mind, Moscow seems to nourish some slight hope that the recently revised (July 1970) Soviet treaty of alliance with Romania, providing for common defense against "any state or group of states" (Article 8), might serve as an acceptable

⁷⁴ Soviet Army Chief of Staff M. Zakharov is believed to be among those opposed to war with China (see Christian Duevel, "Marshal Zakharov's Position on the Sino-Soviet Conflict," *Radio Liberty Dispatch*, Feb. 10, 1970).

⁷⁵ It is perhaps indicative of Soviet military priorities that the massive "Dvina" winter maneuvers of the Red Army in 1970 were held in Byelorussia rather than in Soviet Asia (see Charlotte Saikowski, "Moscow Escalates War of Words with Peking," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 21, 1970).

TWO VIEWPOINTS

About a hundred years ago, the area to the east of [Lake] Baikal became Russian territory, and since then Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Kamchatka and other areas have been Soviet territory. We have not yet presented our account for this list.

—CCP Chairman Mao Tse-tung, in an interview with a Japanese Socialist Party delegation, *Sekai Shuho* (Tokyo), Aug. 11, 1964.

I would like to quote our Premier [Khrushchev], who has said that the borders of our country . . . are sacred. We are prepared to handle all border problems calmly. But one should also know that on the Soviet borders not only our entire military power but also the hearts of all our people stand on guard, in the west as in the east.

—Alexei Adzhubei, then editor of *Izvestia*, in an interview published in *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), Aug. 2, 1964.

model for a viable future Sino-Soviet relationship—at least in the eyes of the military element in the Chinese leadership.⁷⁶

On the other hand, there are some factors that might, under certain conditions, become powerful enough to swing the balance in Moscow in favor of stepped-up military pressure, or possibly even a major attack, on China. For one thing, the nature and scope of the Soviet military buildup in Asia are such as to suggest that Moscow is determined to command a full range of conventional and nuclear options up to and including a nuclear first-strike capability, whether preemptive or as the prelude to all-out attack.⁷⁷ Obviously, the availability of these options tends to create, under conditions of tension, the temptation to use one or another of them.

Meanwhile, there is little question that Peking, by dragging its feet in the border negotiations and in the matter of normalizing Sino-Soviet intergovernmental relations, and by continuing to display uncompromising political and ideological hostility toward Moscow, is sorely taxing the patience of the Soviet leaders and tempting them to bring increased military pressure on China in order to force a retreat. Also, the recent trend toward improved Soviet relations with the West—evidenced by the SALT talks, the Soviet treaty with West Germany, the Middle East truce, and the absence of a Soviet-US confrontation over Cambodia—tends to ease Moscow's fear of a two-front war and thus to heighten the temptation to teach China a lesson while conditions are favorable. Given, in addition to all this, Moscow's long-range fear of a historically hostile China which is well along the road to acquiring a thermonuclear force capable of striking the Soviet Union, the temptation to launch a preemptive attack—rationalized, of course, as a defensive measure—must be considerable. It may be partly with this eventuality in mind that Moscow has been endeavoring to broaden the scope of its alliance system in Eastern Europe to cover an attack by "any state or group of states."⁷⁸

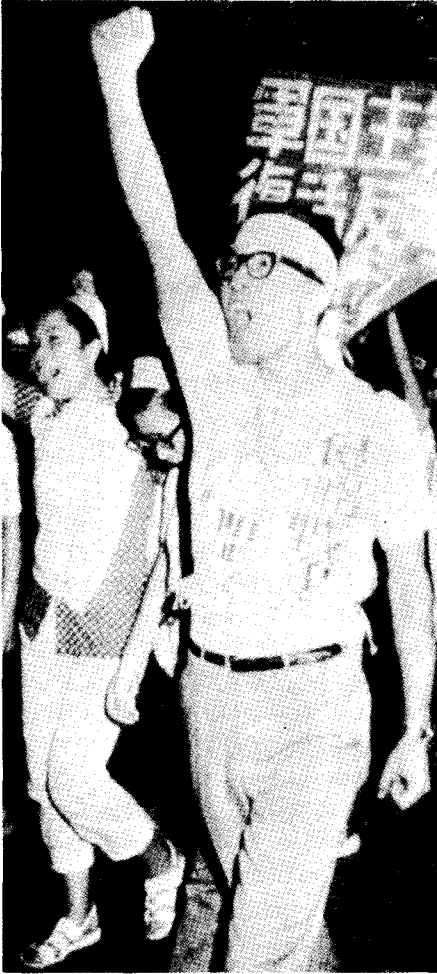
In short, the possible courses that Sino-Soviet relations may take in the foreseeable future cover the full spectrum of alternatives, ranging from peace to war—including, of course, the classic Communist condition of neither war nor peace.

⁷⁶ Such a hope seems indicated by a Radio Moscow broadcast (in Mandarin) to the Chinese People's Liberation Army, July 9, 1970, publicizing the Soviet-Romanian treaty.

⁷⁷ See William Beecher, "Russia vs. China Along Their 4,500 Mile Border," *International Herald Tribune*, July 22, 1970.

⁷⁸ See R. Waring Herrick, "Brezhnev Builds a Bilateral Treaty Bulwark Against China," *Radio Liberty Dispatch*, May 20, 1970.

The many faces . . .



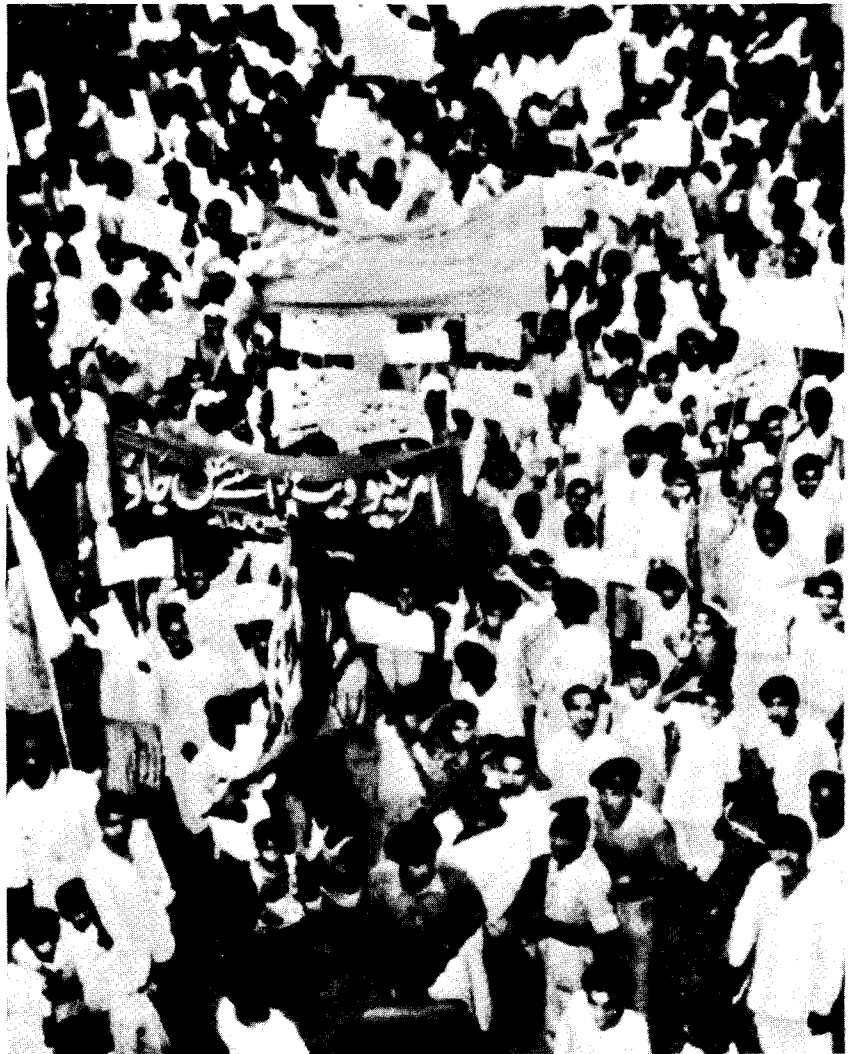
Japan



North Vietnam



Burma



Pakistan



Laos



Indonesia



Korea

Is China Expansionist?

EDITORS' NOTE: China's possession of a growing nuclear weapons system and of a developing delivery system has given new impetus to speculations about her foreign policy objectives and intentions. Because China's record in this field, as in many others, has been ambiguous since the inception of the Great Cultural Revolution, Western observers have been widely divided in their interpretations—particularly on the question of whether China's foreign policy is expansionist or not. We present below two contrasting views and cordially invite our readers to send in brief comments, which we will endeavor to publish in the correspondence columns of subsequent issues.

A Design for Aggression

By Franz Michael

Commentators who talk about Communist Chinese "expansionism" tend to approach the subject in terms of the 19th- or early 20th-century concept of the game of international power politics played among nation-states. "What will *China* do next?" is the issue often posed, as if in our time international relations could still be described in terms of the actions taken by individual states. Too little attention is paid to the fact that since the establishment of Communist power in the Soviet Union in 1917, a new dimension has been added to world politics—a unique Communist policy, known in doctrinal terminology as "socialist internationalism." After the Communist seizure of power in China in 1949, this new dimension, related as it is to the drive for a worldwide Communist revolution,

became an integral factor in Chinese Communist foreign policy. In the writer's view, it promises to assume an even larger role in the aftermath of the GPCR—China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966-67.

This ideological dimension is of major importance in the foreign policy of all Communist countries. When the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was first founded, Lenin and his colleagues envisioned the new polity as the nucleus of a world structure, to be joined by "soviets"—that is, victorious revolutionary governments—from all continents of the globe. The first military force in the USSR was recruited not only among Russians but from German and Austrian prisoners of war and other nationalities; it was meant to be a truly international army, fighting for the goal of world revolution.

That phase ended within a year, when the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk forced the revolutionary movement to assume the functions of a state and introduced Leninist communism to the rules of international conduct which had evolved among nation-states over several centuries. When other Communist governments were formed after World War II, they too took their place in the traditional state system.

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