



DIRECTOR OF
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Sino-Soviet Relations in the Early 1980s

National Intelligence Estimate

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6. Over the last decade, the central aim of Chinese foreign policy has therefore been the effort to build political bulwarks and strategic counterweights throughout the world against the Soviet Union as the one aggressively expansive great power, portrayed and genuinely regarded by China as intent upon increasing its political and military influence and presence everywhere in the world in "hegemonistic" fashion. This main thrust of Chinese policy has been combined in recent years with a prudent awareness of Soviet military superiority and, thus far, by a careful and accurate calibration of Chinese behavior to avoid crossing the threshold that might bring military confrontation.

The Border Issue

7. Also throughout the last decade, mutual intransigence has preserved an impasse in desultory Sino-Soviet negotiations over the disputed border. These negotiations are concerned with long-held grievances which the Chinese were prepared to gloss over in the years when they considered the USSR a friend. The Chinese have more recently felt unwilling to abandon them except upon terms which would constitute Soviet acceptance of a major political defeat on what Beijing regards as a central front in a much broader struggle.

8. The impasse centers on the Chinese demand for a preliminary Soviet military evacuation prior to adjudication of the border of as much as 20,000 square kilometers—territory in the Pamirs and several hundred islands in the Amur and Ussuri Rivers—which the Chinese claim czarist Russia and the Soviet Union have illegally occupied. (Beijing has also in the past insisted that the Soviets formally acknowledge that additional vast stretches of territory obtained by Russia in the 19th century were granted in "unequal treaties.") The demand includes at least one area the Soviets consider vital to their national interests, and which the Chinese know the Soviets will never evacuate: notably, the island of Heixiazi at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri, adjoining Khabarovsk and the Transiberian Railroad. The Chinese have scornfully refused Soviet offers to sign a nonaggression pact in place of the preliminary pullback, terming this a useless "paper pledge." Thus the impasse over the border is used by China primarily as an instrument of political warfare against the Soviet Union. The matter remains at one and the same time the leading symbol, central issue, and prime hostage of the frozen relationship. In the more than three years since Mao's death, his heirs have been unwilling to modify the substances

of the rigorous negotiating position he has bequeathed them. In fact, they have added to the initial Chinese demands by asserting the Soviets must "pull out" of Mongolia and Vietnam. These demands point to the central Chinese grievance: the continuing buildup of Soviet and Soviet-allied forces on China's northern and southern borders. The question of whether and under what circumstances they will be willing substantially to modify their positions is central to assessing the future of the relationship.

The Soviet Perspective

9. Moscow's ability to deal flexibly with Beijing is reduced by strong perceptions of a growing Chinese threat to key Soviet interests. The Soviets have their own particular historical interpretations and ingrained biases to match those held by the Chinese. On one level, Russian collective memory of two centuries of Mongol subjugation affects Soviet approaches to the China question, both at home and abroad. Looking at the more recent past, Soviet leaders see Chinese hostility as gross betrayal in the face of what they deem Moscow's long record of selfless assistance to China. During Mao's last decade, the Soviets believed that China was an irrational force in world affairs, lacking only the military means to achieve its goal of dominance over Asia. Since 1976, new concerns that the once-awaited "pragmatic" successors to Mao may now succeed in rationalizing China's economic and military policies while remaining implacable foes of the USSR have been evident. Looking toward the mid-1980s, Soviet leaders may be tempted to see a huge, modernizing, nuclear-armed China—especially as it seeks military ties with the United States—as a growing menace to their policies.

10. The Soviet leaders see Chinese implacability as a frustrating burden that has by now grown familiar, and they are inclined by long experience to prefer a prudent pessimism. They have seen their dispute with the Chinese grow for many years under highly varied circumstances, passing undiminished from one policy arena to another despite great changes in Chinese attitudes toward the rest of the world. The Soviets are therefore deeply impressed by the continuity and enduring strength of what they regard as the malevolent nationalist passions confronting them in Beijing. Some optimists among Soviet observers, looking toward the future, see grounds for hope that these Chinese attitudes may eventually abate. But even such optimists assume that, in the best of circumstances, Chinese foreign policy interests and objectives are

never likely to become harmonious with those of Moscow. At worst, on the other hand, a future military clash remains quite conceivable in Soviet eyes, and particularly so in view of the February-March 1979 Chinese attack on the Soviet Union's Vietnamese ally.

11. Bounded by these perspectives, and confronted by the immediate reality of unyielding Chinese hostility, the first Soviet priority in dealing with China continues to be unrelenting geopolitical combat, the most important aspect of which is the maintenance of superior military force on the border. The Soviets therefore continue to keep ample Soviet military power facing Beijing as the prominent backdrop to any dialogue with the Chinese, to strive as best they can to weaken China's political, economic, and military influence in the world, to lobby everywhere against China's efforts to grow stronger, to constrain China's ability to combine with others against the USSR, and to suborn China's neighbors so as to isolate and outflank Beijing.

12. At the same time, however, the Soviets would like to reduce Chinese hostility. They see their conflict with Beijing as a major negative factor for their position on the world scene, complicating Soviet relationships with both the capitalist industrial states and the underdeveloped world, and partially offsetting those political benefits the Soviets have obtained from their accretion of military power. Moreover, they are acutely aware of the burden a hostile China presents as a second front. They therefore hope that the impetus provided to Sino-Soviet antagonism by Mao will slow as his era recedes, and that the Chinese leadership will come to be dominated by new forces desiring to conciliate the Soviet Union. The Soviet leaders do not expect in the foreseeable future to have a close relationship with Beijing, but they would like a calm one. They would greatly prefer to have borders with China that were mutually accepted and legitimized. As a means of broadening the relationship with China, they would like to expand the economic dealings which have been a minor factor for both countries for two decades.

13. In attempting to give life to these various wishes, hopes, and preferences, however, the Soviets remain greatly hampered by the Chinese memory of their past behavior toward China, and even more by the ongoing effects of present Soviet transgressions on Chinese interests, all of which tend to perpetuate Chinese hostility. Thus Soviet purposes are mutually conflicting. The Soviets appear characteristically in-

sensitive to the counterproductive effects of aggressively competitive behavior upon the bilateral relationship. Although many Soviets may in retrospect believe that Khrushchev made tactical mistakes in dealing with the Chinese in the early years of the dispute, the Soviet leadership is not inclined to question the legitimacy and appropriateness of the present Soviet behavior to which the Chinese object. Indeed, a principal goal of Soviet policy toward China appears to be to secure a "normalization" of bilateral relations under circumstances which, the Soviets hope, would imply tacit acceptance of the legitimacy and permanence of the Soviet geopolitical gains registered at China's expense.

The US Factor

14. The United States is a central consideration in the calculations of both Moscow and Beijing. China sees its developing association with the United States as the most important of its new bulwarks against the Soviet Union. The Chinese view this as a multipurpose relationship. They regard the United States as an important source of the capital and technology needed for the Four Modernizations, including, directly or indirectly, military modernization, and they see the US relationship as facilitating their increasing intimacy with Japan and their growing dealings with Western Europe. They probably interpret their Washington connection as supplying some increment of deterrence, however ambiguous, to Soviet military calculations about China, while also adding the possibility of leverage for Chinese diplomatic dealings with Moscow. In the absence of Western technological assistance for weaponry, China could only look forward to a continuing decline in military strength relative to the USSR. That might make it more difficult to maintain China's unyielding stance in Sino-Soviet relations. But the key factor will continue to be US resolve and ability to counter Moscow. Finally, the Chinese hope through their association with the United States to influence the United States and its allies to greater efforts to contain the spread of Soviet power and influence, just as some two decades earlier, at a time when they considered the United States their main enemy, they had sought to influence the Soviet Union to more vigorous efforts against the United States.

15. The Soviets see the present triangular relationship as highly unfavorable to their interests, and they are concerned that it may get worse. They are particularly exercised at the evolving security relationship

emerging out of Sino-US normalization, and they see beyond this the specter of Sino-US-Japanese-NATO collaboration against the Soviet Union. The Soviets are unwilling to take into account the degree to which their own behavior may be impelling the United States toward Beijing, still less to offer Washington significant concessions to prevent such movement. They long assumed that, in the last analysis, the United States would itself consider its multitude of dealings with the USSR—particularly the many arms control negotiations—too important to jeopardize through close security alignment with Beijing, but they almost certainly no longer have high confidence in this assumption. The Soviets may now count increasingly on Washington's European allies, who the Soviets believe are more vulnerable to the consequences of a total cessation of detente, eventually to dissuade the United States from a close security association with the Chinese. Meanwhile, they would of course greatly prefer that China itself cease to desire such an association, and they are therefore prepared to explore various avenues that might lead to a Chinese change of heart, however pessimistic they are about the outcome.

The Japanese Factor

16. Because of geographical and historical factors and Japan's status as the third-ranking industrial power, the Sino-Soviet struggle for influence in Japan is second in importance for the two antagonists only to their contest over their relationships with the United States. In Tokyo, despite the importance of trade with the Soviet Union and the Japanese preference for maintenance of a nominal "equidistance" between Moscow and Beijing, the Soviets are in fact at a considerable disadvantage, which appears to have grown somewhat in recent years. The Soviets are handicapped in the first instance by Japanese cultural affinity for China and historically generated distrust for Russia and the Soviet Union. In addition, the Soviets believe themselves burdened by a pro-Chinese cast of US policy in Japan. Symptomatic in this regard was the signing in August 1978, with what the USSR believed to have been US encouragement, of a Sino-Japanese Friendship Treaty containing what the Soviets chose to regard as anti-Soviet overtones. This occurred despite a long Soviet diplomatic and propaganda campaign, which had in effect made this issue a public test of the relative influence of China and the USSR in Japan. More generally, the Soviets find the possibility of Japanese investment in certain of the largest projects once envisaged for Siberia obviated by

US unwillingness to participate. At the same time, the Soviets are concerned about the powerful long-term pull of the Chinese market upon Japan. They continue to display anxiety over the eventual effects of Japanese technological cooperation with China and to complain bitterly about the implications of growing Japanese military contacts with the Chinese.

17. These concerns have not prompted the Soviet Union to remove major irritants in Soviet-Japanese relations. In particular Moscow has refused to discuss the Japanese claim to the southern Kuril Islands, a claim that has been vigorously supported by the Chinese since 1964. In addition, the Soviets have persisted in an ongoing military buildup in the Far East generally, and on the disputed islands of Etorofu (Iturup), Kunashiri, and Shikotan specifically, which continues to evoke further Japanese concerns and resentments that are amplified by Beijing. This Soviet behavior is evidently motivated in large part by a desire to deploy forces in the southern Kurils to inhibit US naval entry into the Sea of Okhotsk while ensuring Soviet exit from Vladivostok in case of war. But as in the case of Soviet policy toward China, the inertia of conservative military considerations has thus far been allowed by Soviet policymakers to outweigh what may prove to be major long-term negative political consequences. The net effect of these policies has thus far been to further solidify the Japanese consensus underwriting the Japanese military alliance with the United States and to furnish additional tacit justification for the slow gravitation of Japan toward China as well as a gradual Japanese defense improvement.

18. On the whole, the structure of this quadrilateral relationship has thus far served to reinforce the inclination of dominant Chinese leaders to give no ground to the Soviets. The Chinese regard the US military presence in the Far East, anchored in the relationship with Japan, as an indispensable counterweight to Soviet military strength in the area. The existence of this presence probably serves in some degree to encourage Chinese willingness to remain intransigent in Sino-Soviet bilateral relations.

The Indochina Factor

19. In the last two years, another key variable has been introduced into the Sino-Soviet relationship by events in Indochina. From the Chinese perspective the Soviets have successfully sought to exploit Vietnamese conflicts of interest with China which had been submerged while the United States was present but