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The Soviet Union's "China Policy," 1949-1972

IF strategic security is a primary Soviet foreign policy concern, in Asia its China policy is pivotal. From 1949 to the present, the Soviet Union's "China Policy" has evolved through four basic stages, the periodization of which has been determined by the changing state of Sino-Soviet relations. If there can be said to have been a period of alliance between the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic, it was during the first decade of Chinese Communist rule. The first stage extended from the victory of the Chinese Communists through 1958 and was marked by the establishment and initial crumbling of the alliance. Although three distinct phases are discernible in Soviet policy during this period, all are conceived and executed from the general perspective of China's strategic alignment with the Soviet Union.

After 1958, as the Chinese People's Republic moved to disengage itself from close ties with the Soviet Union, Soviet leaders, first Khrushchev, then his successors, Brezhnev and Kosygin, strove with little success to restore the alliance. The second stage embraces the years 1958-1964, or from the inception of China's Great Leap Forward until Khrushchev's fall from power. The Great Leap symbolized China's strategic decision

to break with the Soviet Union and Khrushchev's fall the consequence of his failure to repair the break. In the third stage, 1965-1969, Brezhnev and Kosygin continued the attempt to bring the Chinese back into the alliance, first demanding "united action" regarding Vietnam and, failing that, threatening China with nuclear bombardment.

The threat of war was the highest card that Soviet leaders could play in their effort to restore the Sino-Soviet alliance. War itself would not have forwarded that objective. Having played that card and failed, however, a new policy was required. The fourth stage of Soviet policy toward China was therefore inaugurated sometime after the war scare of 1969. Soviet leaders appear to have decided upon a basic change in policy, no longer conceiving of the Chinese People's Republic (CPR) as lying within the Soviet Union's strategic security zone, but outside it as an adversary. This policy shift does not, of course, preclude the possibility that a close Sino-Soviet relationship can be resumed in the future, but other factors—beyond the scope of this essay—would have to come into play for such an eventuality to materialize.

I. Decade of Alliance—1949-1958

THE three phases of the Soviet Union's China policy during the initial years can be correlated to changes in Soviet leadership. After Stalin's death, the USSR's China policy was followed by a period of policy ambiguity during the succession struggle between Khrushchev and Malenkov. (Incidentally, it was during the years from 1953-1956 that China obtained the greatest amount of Soviet aid, which was evidently the result of attempts by the main

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contenders for Stalin's mantle—Malenkov and Khrushchev—to obtain Mao's support.) After Khrushchev emerged victorious over Malenkov, he began to shape his own China policy, which led to the break in Sino-Soviet relations.

Stalin pursued a "two China" policy between 1949 and 1953, establishing a preponderant Soviet position in Manchuria and concentrating Soviet aid there.¹ In 1949 Kao Kang, the Chinese Communist leader in Manchuria, preceded Mao Tse-tung to Moscow where he signed a separate agreement between the Soviet Union and the Manchurian People's Republic. Despite the Sino-Soviet treaty of February 1950, the Soviet Union continued to occupy a strong position in Manchuria which included the region's ports, railroads, airfields, and general control over the economy. Soviet presence may have been an important factor in Kao Kang's own prominent position in the Chinese leadership. He was a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and vice-chairman of the Government Council as well as being first party secretary of the Manchurian regional bureau of the party.

Stalin's death precipitated a succession struggle in which China policy emerged as a contested issue. As Malenkov and Khrushchev competed for power in the Soviet Union after the removal of Beria, the Chinese leadership led by Mao initially supported Malenkov, perhaps unaware of the struggle. As each Soviet leader sought Mao's support, however, his China policy changed. Over the course of the year 1953-54 Mao shifted his support from Malenkov to Khrushchev, who advocated what was from his point of view a more attractive policy.

Malenkov's China policy was part of a larger general policy which he termed the "new course." In it, he hoped to reduce international tension in order to devote greater resources to the promotion of the lot of the Soviet citizen. Malenkov sought to avert an arms race by raising the specter of the

destruction of all civilization if a nuclear war erupted and in this context moved to bring to an end the Korean war. Malenkov's "peace" stance implied a similar role for China in Asia and no commitment to the buildup of Chinese power. Indeed, Malenkov perpetuated Stalin's two-China position. In an aid agreement with the Chinese signed in September 1953, Malenkov continued the concentration of Soviet assistance in Manchuria.²

Khrushchev took a diametrically opposite position from Malenkov. Although later championing the slogan of "peaceful co-existence," in the contest with Malenkov, Khrushchev took a hard-line position both internationally and domestically. The Soviet Union, he maintained, should not merely avoid war but should actively deter it by developing a powerful military posture. Such a stance would require continued emphasis on heavy industry at the expense of the consumer sector. If a nuclear war erupted, Khrushchev declared, it would not mean the destruction of civilization, but only of capitalism. China should also play an "active" role in the "struggle" for peace. Perhaps more important, Khrushchev perceived and acted upon what he correctly appraised as the weakness in Malenkov's China policy, the continued support for Mao's rival in Manchuria, Kao Kang.

Traveling to Peking with Bulganin, his Defense Minister, in September 1954, Khrushchev offered the Chinese a highly attractive aid package which included the Soviet withdrawal of all presence from Manchuria and, incidentally, from support of Kao Kang. In addition, Khrushchev offered to grant 520 million rubles in aid, abolish Soviet interests in the joint stock companies set up in the 1950 agreement, withdraw Soviet armed forces from the Port Arthur naval complex in Manchuria, and construct two railroads to link the Soviet Union and China, one through Outer Mongolia and the other through Sinkiang. (The former link was completed in 1956; the latter has never

1. For a detailed analysis of the first decade of Sino-Soviet relations, see the author's "The Structure of Communist Politics," *World Politics* Vol. XXIV, no. 4 (July, 1972).

2. For the struggle between Khrushchev and Malenkov, see Herbert Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1959), pp. 71-2.

been completed.)³

Khrushchev's offer was probably decisive in gaining Mao's support and shortly thereafter the Chinese leader began to echo Khrushchev's position on the effect of nuclear war. At the same time, having disposed of Kao Kang, Mao moved to consolidate his control over Manchuria. Mao's shift was dramatically reflected in his public statements to the Soviet leadership. For example, in March 1953, in an article eulogizing Stalin, Mao noted that:

*We profoundly believe that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet government, headed by Comrade Malenkov, will certainly be able to continue the work of Comrade Stalin.*⁴

His position had reversed by February 1956. In a letter written before the conference, he declared:

*The great successes of the USSR in foreign and domestic policy in recent years are inseparable from the correct leadership of the well-tryed Central Committee of the CPSU headed by Comrade Khrushchev.*⁵

The 20th Party Congress in 1956 marks the beginning of Khrushchev's China policy and the beginning of the end of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Whatever Khrushchev's motives for delivering the "secret speech" and initiating the de-Stalinization campaign, the effect on Mao and the Chinese leadership was far-reaching.⁶ Several of Mao's colleagues attempted at this juncture—whether with Khrushchev's support or not is unknown, but suspected—to assume a more important role in the direction of Chinese affairs at Mao's expense. Mao's response was

to throw his support to several of Khrushchev's opponents who, in mid-1957, sought to overthrow the Soviet leader, but failed. Neither attempt succeeded, although Mao appeared to be the worse off by the end of 1956. The upshot of these inter-party intrigues was Khrushchev's decision to end further credit to China (except for the agreement of 1959), although the annual cash and carry trade agreements would continue, a decision which placed China in a very difficult position.

The effect of the decision to terminate further credit and aid to the Chinese was to place in jeopardy China's entire industrialization program and to demonstrate the extent to which the CPR was dependent upon Soviet aid. The Soviet Union supplied the key elements in China's growth: technology, plans, expertise, as well as some of the materials, which at this point in time, were unavailable elsewhere to the Chinese.

The Chinese leaders had not been blind to perception of the dangers inherent in the Soviet aid program. Already in 1956 the issue of the nature of future Sino-Soviet relations had been raised implicitly in discussions over China's general direction of economic development and over the question of when she should acquire nuclear weapons, and how.⁷ By 1957, the issue was joined: Would China's future development take place with or without the Soviet Union? The issue split the Chinese leadership with one wing in the party led by Mao urging a break with the Soviet Union while another led by Liu Shao-ch'i urged continued reliance upon close relations. There were recognized risks in either choice. To break with the Soviet Union meant a period of inevitable hardship, perhaps even chaos, while alternate sources of supply were developed and the economy restructured. To stay with it contained risks of another sort. While China would receive aid, the strings attached to that aid could inhibit if not constrain China's freedom of action, not only economically but politically as well.

3. David Floyd, *Mao Against Khrushchev* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 220.

4. *Pravda*, March 10, 1953.

5. Quoted in George Paloczi-Horvath, *Khrushchev, the Making of a Dictator* (Boston: Little-Brown, 1960), p. 193.

6. For a discussion of the secret speech, see the author's "China and the Communist World," in Frank Trager and William Henderson, eds., *Communist China: 1949-1969* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), pp. 262-4.

7. Donald S. Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 68.

II. Khrushchev's Failure in China 1958-1964

MAO Tse-tung and his supporters had won the debate over the future of Sino-Soviet relations, pushing through the general policy decision on the Great Leap at the second session of the VIIIth Party Congress in May 1958. The implications of the decision were clearly recognized by Khrushchev, who initiated a long-term, broadly based attempt to preclude Chinese disengagement. At first, Khrushchev took advantage of the disastrous economic consequences of the Great Leap forward, by urging and perhaps directly supporting the coalescence of opposition to Mao Tse-tung. Such support was perhaps unnecessary, as the Great Leap itself was sufficient to generate opposition within those organizations, like the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which were adversely affected. The failure of the Great Leap gave Mao's opponents the political strength to force the Chinese leader to relinquish one of his two top posts, the chairmanship of the CPR. Liu Shao-ch'i assumed that position in early 1959 and immediately began to reverse Mao's policies. In addition, in late summer, the Minister of Defense, P'eng Teh-huai, supported by the chiefs of his ministry, launched an attack on Mao's policies as the product of "bourgeois fanaticism" at a Politburo conference. Mao immediately responded by convening the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee where his policies were upheld and his opposition repudiated. P'eng's attack failed and the price he paid for the attempt was the loss of his position.⁸ In September, Mao began the general housecleaning of the ministry, appointing Lin Piao as the new chief in place of P'eng. Capture of the Ministry of Defense enabled him to keep his policies more or less in force and prompted Khrushchev to escalate his own efforts to bring China's policies back into line with the Soviet Union's.

In seeking to build the pressure on the

8. David Charles, "The Dismissal of Marshall P'eng Teh-huai," *The China Quarterly*, no. 8 (October-December, 1961).



Nikita Khrushchev

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Chinese leadership, Khrushchev developed his policy on several levels: state, ideological, party and economic. No direct military pressure was employed. On the state level, Khrushchev either declined to support China in conflict situations, or sided with her opponents, as in the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1959 and the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962. He sought to exert economic pressure in 1960 by withdrawing from China all technicians with their plans and cutting off further aid deliveries, including oil. On the party level, Khrushchev attempted to isolate the Chinese and indications were that strong pressure would be brought to bear on them at the World Congress of Communist Parties to be held in December 1964, including possible expulsion from the movement. Finally, Khrushchev engaged in a far-reaching and vitriolic ideological polemic with the Chinese in the course of which he became personally identified with an anti-Chinese stance.⁹

By the early fall of 1964 Sino-Soviet relations had seriously deteriorated. Khrushchev's hard-line policy was reaching its climax, which was expected to come at the

9. Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership, 1957-1964* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1966).

December meeting of the World Congress of Communist Parties in Moscow. However, unexpected developments in Southeast Asia precipitated a crisis within the Soviet leadership which culminated in Khrushchev's fall from power. The Tonkin Gulf incident, which symbolized the United States' decision to intervene in South Vietnam to prevent a Vietcong conquest, became Khrushchev's Waterloo.¹⁰ Within a week American forces were being deployed in Southeast Asia and other steps were being readied. Khrushchev's initial reaction to the rapid American move was to attempt to prevent or at least delay the American buildup by means of action in the United Nations. Hanoi, however, refused to participate in the scheme, leaving the Soviet Union with the problem of quickly supplying North Vietnam to counterbalance the American action.

The principal difficulty facing Khrushchev in his attempt to aid Hanoi was the long and exposed sea route to North Vietnam. If the Americans were willing to commit troops to South Vietnam, would they not also be willing to confront Soviet ships traveling to North Vietnam, in the manner of the Cuban missile crisis two years previously? Soviet planners could not but consider this type of response a definite possibility if not probability. It therefore became imperative to establish a secure supply route into North Vietnam, and China was the obvious answer. But it was precisely here where Khrushchev's hard-line China policy became a stumbling block in his effort to provide aid to Hanoi. The vitriolic state of Sino-Soviet relations made Chinese agreement to permit transshipment of Soviet materials across China highly unlikely, particularly since Khrushchev had become publicly identified with an anti-Chinese policy. In the face of the growing danger that U.S. involvement would succeed in thwarting a communist victory, the Soviet leadership sacrificed the individual, who by policies difficult if not impossible for him to alter,

stood as a barrier to any reconciliation. Thus Khrushchev fell from power, succeeded by men from his own Politburo entourage, Brezhnev and Kosygin, who strove to bring about a re-establishment of the Sino-Soviet alliance over the issue of Vietnam.

III. Continued Failure to Restore Unity, 1965-1969

KHRUSHCHEV'S fall implied a forthcoming change in Soviet policy. Initially, the new leadership of Brezhnev and Kosygin strove to use the crisis over Vietnam to bring about a rapprochement with the Chinese People's Republic. When persuasion failed, they turned to the use of raw power to achieve their objective with equal lack of success and far-reaching consequences for long-range Soviet China policy. Kosygin's stopover in Peking en route to Hanoi in February 1965 sparked a debate within the Chinese leadership regarding the Soviet proposal for "united action" over Vietnam.¹¹

The debate, although complex, can be summarized in terms of the positions taken by the principal spokesmen for the opposing positions. Lo Jui-ching, PLA Chief of Staff, expressed the argument for unity with the Soviet Union over Vietnam. China would supply the manpower and the Soviet Union the weaponry to defeat the American "aggressors." In short, Lo Jui-ching argued for rapprochement with the Soviet Union and Chinese intervention in Vietnam. Lin Piao, Mao's Minister of Defense, articulated the argument against intervention and reconciliation. Lin developed the thesis of "peoples' war," declaring that China would not fight the United States in Vietnam. Only if the United States attacked China would China respond with "peoples' war." Refusal to intervene in Vietnam (although not to give assistance) obviated any necessity for rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Lin Piao rejected the proposal

10. See the author's *The Bear and the Dragon*, *op. cit.*

11. Uri Ra'anan, "Peking's Foreign Policy Debate, 1965-66," in Tang Tsou, ed., *China in Crisis*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 23-72.

for "united action." The Mao group's victory in the "debate" was signaled by publication in early September 1965 of Lin Piao's argument in the pamphlet "Long Live the Victory of Peoples' War."

Mao's victory over his internal and external opponents was by no means final. In fact, the situation in Vietnam had grown to major crisis proportions. Where in April at the beginning of the debate the United States had 15,000 men in Vietnam performing a constabulary function, by June that number had doubled and American forces had assumed an offensive combat role; and by December there were 165,000 troops in Vietnam with every indication that more were on the way. In other words, Mao could expect that his domestic opponents—at the urging of Soviet leaders—would raise the issue of united action again. Given the increase in the dimension of the crisis in Vietnam there was little certainty that Mao could be assured of victory a second time.

The political implications for Mao of the decision to re-establish Sino-Soviet unity were ominous. It would mean the reversal of a basic strategic course with which Mao had become identified and, indeed, of which he had been the principal architect. It would mean Mao's political demise. Therefore it became necessary to accelerate the pace of the struggle with his domestic opposition, a struggle which had been gradually building for several years and whose current manifestation was the Socialist Education Movement, begun at the 10th Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in September, 1962. To the outside world this struggle came to be known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which, to be sure, as are all large policy decisions, was initiated for a multiplicity of reasons. Principally, however, Mao sought to remove "those in the party taking the capitalist road," that is, those who favored the policies of rapprochement with the Soviet Union and unity over Vietnam.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution forced another shift in Soviet policy toward China. Apparently caught off guard at the start, when Soviet leaders realized that

one early result of the "cultural revolution" was the removal from positions of party power of those Chinese leaders who had favored rapprochement, they began to build military strength along the Sino-Soviet border. The removal of the pro-Soviet group from the Chinese leadership meant that the Soviet Union had no further hopes of influencing the decision-making process from within China and so built military strength in an effort to exert pressure from without. The Soviet troop and missile buildup became evident by early 1967 but did not reach massive proportions until after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968. The combination of the Soviet buildup with developments in the cultural revolution led rapidly to the most severe crisis yet in the crisis-studded Sino-Soviet relationship.

In the cultural revolution, Mao had been forced to rely heavily upon the PLA in order to achieve his objectives. By the fall of 1967 more than one-half of China's main force units (twenty of thirty-seven army corps) had been committed to internal political duties. As a result, by the summer of 1968, China's defense capabilities had been seriously weakened.¹² Although Mao and his supporters had attempted to dissemble China's weakened condition (through propaganda and other means), by the spring of 1968, Soviet leaders indicated not only that they had perceived China's condition but that they were prepared to take more forceful action. April saw the opening propaganda shots in a strong political attack on Mao Tse-tung which laid the basis for a formal break. More serious were military activities; the incidence of border clashes rose in proportion as the Soviet buildup continued, but most foreboding were events in Czechoslovakia. Beginning in May the Soviets openly mobilized their armed forces in an effort to intimidate the Czech party leadership into accepting Soviet demands. Then in late August Soviet leaders sent troops and tanks into Czechoslovakia to force a decision. The

12. See the unpublished doctoral dissertation by Harvey Nelsen, *An Organizational History of the Chinese People's Liberation Army: 1966-1969* (George Washington University, 1972).



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Soviet press justified their actions in terms which sounded chillingly similar to those being employed to denounce China.

The point was inescapable. However unlikely China's leaders may have considered actual military intervention by the Soviet Union, the propaganda and military buildup in the context of the Czech crisis could not be ignored. And Mao did not ignore this threat, hastily terminating the cultural revolution in mid-1968 even though it seemed on the verge of success. Beginning in early August, Mao strove to buttress China's national defenses withdrawing the PLA's front-line troops from domestic duties and returning them to their defense positions. By early spring of 1969 both sides were prepared for the major confrontation which followed.

Throughout the year 1969 the Soviets applied increased military and political pressure.¹³ Conflict erupted in each of the three main sectors of the Sino-Soviet border—Manchuria, Mongolia, and Sinkiang. The

13. *The Bear and the Dragon*, *op. cit.*

first to reach a flashpoint was the Manchurian sector when in early March a "border incident" occurred at Damansky (Chen Pao) Island in the Ussuri River. Several dozen soldiers were killed, each side denying responsibility for initiating the incident and attempting to place the blame on the other. A second, larger-scale conflict occurred in the same area two weeks later. In each case the Chinese were successful in matching the Soviet input.

The Chinese leadership could hardly fail to see the analogy between the Manchurian border clashes and the earlier Czech situation in which escalating border activity preceded invasion. Moreover, the political situations were strikingly similar. In Czechoslovakia, the Soviets intervened to prevent the convocation of a party congress which would have legitimized a policy and leadership the Soviet Union opposed. In China the border pressure seemed designed to prevent the convocation of the CCP's Ninth Party Congress whose preparations were then in progress. At the height of the crisis, the Canadian communist paper *Canadian Tribune* published an article on March 19th by Wang Ming noting the "struggle between two lines" in China and condemning Mao's attempt to smash the CCP. The line of argument was much the same as that which preceded the Czech crisis, leaving little doubt as to its implication.

However, if these Soviet actions were intended to prevent the convocation of the Ninth Party Congress, they failed. The congress opened secretly on April first and continued through the twenty-fourth. Its final communiqué was designed to show internal unity and military control in the face of external threat. The Soviet response to the *fait accompli* occurred in June with the convocation of the long-postponed World Congress of Communist Parties. Although the Soviet leaders met with resistance at the congress from Rumanian and Yugoslavian delegations, rumors abounded regarding the Soviet intention to gain agreement for the extension of the "Brezhnev Doctrine" to China. There was, however, no public rebuff to the Chinese agreed upon by the con-

gress' delegates.¹⁴

As China intensified war preparations, the Mongolian and Sinkiang sectors became focal points in July and August. The Soviets increased the number of troops and missiles in Mongolia while the beginnings of an irredentist campaign could be noted in the press of the Mongolian Peoples Republic. In August, Sinkiang drew attention as armed clashes occurred frequently.

The culmination of the Soviet policy of brinkmanship occurred in September with the threat of nuclear bombardment. At the same time on September 16 the Soviet Union unofficially noted its willingness to intervene militarily in China if so requested by a bona fide leader of the opposition. The combined threat of Soviet military intervention and nuclear bombardment brought the Chinese to the bargaining table with the comment on October 7 that there was "no reason whatsoever for China and the Soviet Union to fight a war over the boundary question."¹⁵ The beginning of the "border talks," the description by which the talks were commonly referred to, ended the threat of immediate conflict. Although no settlement was achieved and the talks soon stalled, the Soviet Union gradually lowered its aggressive public posture of the previous few months and shifted its policy.

IV. The Reformulation of Soviet Asian Strategy, 1969-1972

DURING the crisis of 1969, the United States moved to improve relations with the Chinese Peoples Republic by unilaterally relaxing trade restrictions in July. It was the first of several steps which the Administration took during the next two years culminating in the President's visit to Peking

14. Joseph G. Whelan, *World Communism, 1967-1969: Soviet Efforts to Reestablish Control*, Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970).

15. New China News Agency, October 7, 1969. For the Soviet threat, see the article by the Soviet "journalist" Victor Louis, "Will Russian Rockets Czech-mate China?" *London Evening News*, September 16, 1969.

in February 1972. The Chinese evidently decided that improved relations with the United States were necessary to provide a counterweight to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union clearly perceived the implications of an improvement in Sino-American relations for its own position in Asia, if not the world. Such perception may have been a factor in the Soviet leaders' desperate effort to bring China back into the Soviet camp by threat of nuclear bombardment in the fall of 1969. The logical extension of continued Sino-Soviet conflict was establishment of better relations between China and the United States. It would mean American penetration of the Chinese mainland which had been prevented for the previous two decades and the undermining of the Soviet Union's strategic position in Asia.

Soviet leaders responded to the implied shift in the international balance of forces by unfolding a new four-pronged strategy aimed at compensating for the removal of China as an element in its Far Eastern strategic position. In fact, for the first time since 1949, the main thrust of Soviet policy places the Chinese Peoples Republic in an adversary position. Heretofore, despite difficulties between them, the Soviet leaders acted under the assumption that China was included in their overall strategic posture. The principal elements of the new strategy included the continued buildup of the Soviet military position—in depth—along the border; the improvement of Soviet-Japanese relations, strengthening of ties with India, and the continued support of North Vietnam (although the Sino-Soviet conflict has carried with it the loss of the use of the Chinese railway system as a principal means of supplying Hanoi).

Improving relations with the Japanese dovetails with the larger decision to build up in depth Siberia and the Maritime provinces. The overall impact, it is presumed, will be to strengthen Soviet ties with Japan while helping to fortify the Soviet position in Siberia where Soviet forces operate at a logistical di-advantage versus the Chinese despite enormous stockpiles of materials and troop superiority.

The war in Vietnam is also a key to the successful development of Soviet strategy, which is to keep China in a two-front conflict situation. The withdrawal of American forces thwarts that strategy by removing pressure from the Chinese southern flank, permitting redeployment of Chinese forces northward to meet the Soviet buildup. It is therefore imperative for the Russians to do whatever is possible in an attempt to prevent an American withdrawal. This means maintaining a high level of conflict in the area by continuing to supply the North Vietnamese forces with needed material without which they are incapable of waging sustained, large-scale battles.¹⁶ Hopefully, from the Soviet viewpoint, the threat to South Vietnam would forestall an American withdrawal, which, in turn, would also preclude redeployment of Chinese forces northward. The result would be continued pressure on the Chinese leadership and continued relative military superiority for the Soviet Union along the Chinese border.

In fact, Soviet military superiority along the border already constitutes a "strategic pin" immobilizing China's forces and ability to maneuver elsewhere. The extent to which Chinese forces are currently immobilized was graphically demonstrated in the recent Indo-

16. Tammy Arbuckle, "Soviet Airlift Aiding Hanoi," *The Washington Star-News*, September 8, 1972.

Pakistani conflict. Soviet willingness to "open a diversionary action" in Sinkiang against China was the strategic pin which was an important factor preventing Chinese intervention and assuring the Indian victory.¹⁷

Conclusion

FOR twenty years the Soviet Union's policy toward China was conceived and executed from the perspective of a China linked to the Soviet Union in strategic alignment. As the Sino-Soviet relationship began to disintegrate in the late fifties, successive Soviet leaderships strove to restore the alliance. It was not until the ultimate threat of war failed that the Soviet Union reappraised its basic policy. The threat of war steeled rather than intimidated the Chinese, prompting them to seek a counterbalance to Soviet pressure in the United States. Chinese success in this matter was evidently the reason for the shift in Soviet policy from seeking to re-establish the alliance, to preparing for a long-term adversary relationship. As noted at the outset of this essay, one cannot and should not rule out the possibility of a turnabout in Sino-Soviet relations, but this choice would seem to rest primarily with the Chinese leadership.

17. Jack Anderson, "Bay of Bengal and Tonkin Gulf," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 1972.

LETTERS INVITED

In this issue the IR continues its policy of presenting articles which are relevant both for the present and the future. Recognizing the controversial nature of many of these essays, the IR will provide a forum for readers who might wish to criticize, comment upon, or explore additional ramifications of the arguments presented in its pages. Consequently, we will be willing to consider publishing letters dealing with any IR essay or review. *We look forward to hearing from you.*