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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Report

*The Evolution of Soviet Policy  
in the Sino-Soviet Border Dispute*

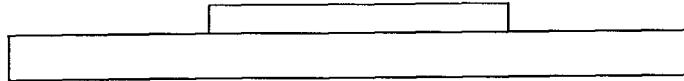
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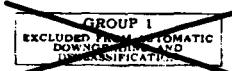
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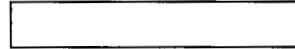
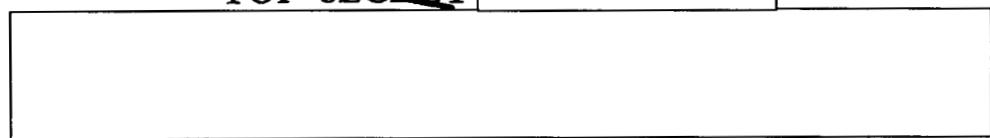


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## THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET POLICY IN THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE

### MEMORANDUM TO RECIPIENTS

.In origin and intensity, the Sino-Soviet border dispute is intimately related to the broader Sino-Soviet polemic. As tensions increased along the border, and as incidents multiplied and grew more serious in nature, a military confrontation evolved. In general, the story of the border dispute reveals Khrushchev, and his successors, seeking to contend with the effrontery of Mao Tsetung's efforts to establish Chinese presence in and claims to Soviet border areas that had never been under Chinese Communist jurisdiction.

The challenge was difficult for the Soviet Union to cope with. The Chinese efforts to establish a claim to border areas were real and troublesome. Their polemical charges and complaints against Soviet "imperialism" and "unequal treaties", designed to embarrass or to discredit the Soviet Union among Communist parties world wide, were having some effect. And probes by Peking's military patrols were increasingly serious and provocative, although they were kept at a level which would make large-scale Soviet retaliation difficult to justify. At the same time, however, Moscow had to make its threat of major retaliation credible.

This intelligence Report examines the evolution of Soviet policy toward the Sino-Soviet border dispute and of the thinking that led to the extensive Soviet buildup along the border. The study has been reviewed in the Soviet and

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Chinese sections of the Office of Current Intelligence and the Office of Strategic Research. The text has been adjusted to take account of most suggestions made by those sections and its major thrust and findings are generally accepted. The research analyst in charge was Arthur A. Cohen.

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John Kerry King  
Chief, DD/I Special Research Staff

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THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET POLICY  
IN THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Conclusions. . . . .	i
I. Khrushchev's Policies. . . . .	1
A. Origin of Border Encounters. . . . .	1
B. "Consultations, Not Negotiations". . . . .	3
C. A Phoney Nuclear Threat. . . . .	13
II. Policies of the Post-Khrushchev Leadership .	16
A. Avoiding Threats to Attack China . . . . .	16
1. More Border Guards . . . . .	16
2. Regular Army Buildup . . . . .	18
3. Cultural Revolution Containment. . . . .	22
4. Tactical Nuclears Deployed . . . . .	24
5. Czechoslovakia and China . . . . .	29
B. Chen Pao Battle and Subsequent Threat Campaign. . . . .	31
1. Skirmishes of 2 and 15 March 1969. . . . .	31
2. Chinese Return to Chen Pao . . . . .	45
3. A Veiled Nuclear Threat. . . . .	49
4. "Consultations" Again. . . . .	51
5. A Credible Threat. . . . .	66
6. Chinese Desist and Negotiate . . . . .	77
C. Prospects. . . . .	80

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THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET POLICY  
IN THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE

Conclusions

Soviet policy in the Sino-Soviet border dispute evolved to its present high military posture through a gradually escalating effort to prevent Mao's armed patrols from establishing jurisdiction over land which the Chinese Communist regime had never occupied. Because the Chinese effort has been a combination of verbal claims and pinprick probes, the degree of provocation has not spurred the Soviet leaders into a large-scale counterattack, and, until 1969, the Chinese seemed to believe that they would be permitted to continue their small probes indefinitely.

The border dispute was political in origin, an active extension of the bigger Sino-Soviet polemic. Consequently, the dispute has been irreconcilable almost from the start. Because both sides have viewed each border incident in the context of the bigger polemic, tensions have increased step by step. In 1960, Peking for the first time formally raised with Moscow old Chinese claims predating Mao's regime. Khrushchev calculated correctly that Mao was more interested in depicting him as a new imperialist Tsar than in acquiring Soviet-held land. Mao's land claim was indeed part of the bitter political feud, and Mao's main goal was to extract a political surrender, rather than small territorial concessions, as the price for a final settlement.

The bits of land which Mao began to contest are the Pamirs, the Man Chou Li railhead, and a 20-mile Soviet island near Khabarovsk. It has been precisely on the most insignificant islands and pieces of terrain that skirmishes

-i-

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have taken place, reflecting Peking's realization that a probe at the Pamirs, Man Chou Li, or the big Soviet island might provoke a severe military reprisal. The Chinese have signed border treaties with other countries--Burma (1960), Mongolia (1962), and Afghanistan (1963) are the best examples--conceding tracts of land as important as those they now contest with the USSR. That Mao contests territory more emotionally with the Soviets is conclusively demonstrated by his double standard in treating China's claim to the Pamir Mountains area--an area in which the Chinese have no actual jurisdiction. He withdrew the verbal claim to the strategic corridor in the southern Pamirs and "granted" it to Afghanistan in 1963, but he retained the verbal claim to all of the northern Pamirs held by the Soviets.

To maintain the policy of branding the Soviets "new Tsars" and demanding territory never controlled by the Peking regime, the Chinese have had to reject the border alignment principle of accepting the "line of actual control" which they had insisted upon in their dealings with India. In dealing with the Soviets, the Chinese have maintained a convenient silence on the ploy they used against the Indians. In the Indian case, the Chinese first established a presence in Ladakh and then insisted that the newly-acquired territory was China's because Chinese troops had jurisdiction over it. In the present case, China insists, with righteous outrage, that Moscow wants to draw the boundary line "wherever Soviet troops reach."

Shortly after Stalin died, and well before the start of the Sino-Soviet polemic, the Soviets permitted Chinese nationals to enter islands and grazing areas under the USSR's jurisdiction. But when Mao later revived old Chinese claims, Khrushchev viewed the border crossings as a means of asserting a land claim, and withdrew permission. When he enforced this restrictive policy, Mao countered by dispatching armed patrols to protect the Chinese border crossers. Eventually, Soviet and Chinese armed patrollers came into conflict.

Mao may have desired a border settlement in 1960, but Khrushchev, who could not accept the idea of negotiating for land already in Soviet possession, would not then

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negotiate. In 1964, when Khrushchev did agree to negotiate, he would not pay Mao's high political price for a settlement. He prepared to cede some river islands, excluding Soviet-held Hei Hsia Tzu near Khabarovsk. Mao was aware that his forces could not dislodge the Soviets from southern Siberia, and he said so, privately. However, Mao's terms for an agreement were structured to provide him a political victory and to exact a humiliating Soviet acknowledgement that the Tsarist treaties were "unequal" and that a "new" treaty incorporating all Chinese claims would have to be negotiated. These two demands have been the principle impediment to an overall settlement ever since.

Khrushchev believed that a settlement based on Soviet recognition of the invalidity of existing border treaties would provide Mao with the opportunity to "magnanimously" make a gift of their own land to the Russians. One such gift that he could grant after a settlement on his terms would be Vladivostok, which Mao in 1964 specifically had included among territories taken from China. Because the Chinese held no Soviet-claimed territory, all that Mao could concede was a willingness to drop his claims to the lands lost in the Tsarist-imposed treaties.

In exchange for dropping claims to lands covered by the old treaties, Mao demands withdrawals from additional areas taken by Russian (or later, Soviet) troops subsequent to the signing of the treaties. Specifically, the post-treaties land he claims are the Pamir Mountains area in the west (about 150 miles along the frontier), the strip of land near Man Chou Li between Mongolia and Manchuria (about 60 miles), and about 700 islands in the eastern rivers. Most of these areas have been under Soviet jurisdiction since 1945 or earlier. It is this extensive jurisdiction that he has begun to challenge, but his emphasis has been on the islands.

In order more effectively to contest Moscow's strong case based on actual jurisdiction, the Chinese began to insist at the 1964 talks that international law fixed the border line in rivers in the center of the main navigation channel. At the talks, the Soviets accepted this

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principle but were unwilling to turn over to the Chinese any more than 100 of the 700 islands they were demanding, including Hei Hsia Tzu. They also refused to declare the existing treaties invalid, and when Mao took his polemic outside the talks to personally belabor the point of Tsarist land-seizing, Khrushchev withdrew the Soviet negotiating team. This raised the border dispute to a new level of hostility.

The main goal of Moscow's China policy was then to convince Mao that asserting Chinese claims by patrolling would entail a big military risk. Khrushchev began hinting at the use of nuclear weapons. However, Moscow had not yet deployed tactical nuclear weapons systems to the Far East and had not yet built up its conventional forces there. Mao and his aides were able to distinguish a bluff from a credible military threat, and they persisted in sending out small patrols.

The post-Khrushchev leadership in Moscow had to confront the same China policy by the same implacable Mao. By October 1965, Brezhnev was justifying the deployment of big regular army units to the border areas. The following spring he made clear that he would hold Mao to the principle of ownership based on actual jurisdiction, and the Soviet leaders began to consider more seriously the proposition that Mao wanted to provoke border skirmishes.

The radical bent and capricious style of Mao's Cultural Revolution worried Moscow when its anti-Soviet animus was expressed at the border by Red Guard challenges to Soviet border guards. They did not fear a Chinese military attack so much as the escalation of a small fire-fight into a big battle and, eventually, a border war. In February 1967 a firefight reportedly occurred on the Sinkiang border and a probable exchange of fire took place at a point on the Amur. The same winter, pushing-and-shoving encounters involving border patrols became widespread along the Ussuri and Amur rivers, and many of the 1969 firefights were at points which had been tense for at least two years. Because the Soviets could no longer rule out the possibility of escalation at the border, they continued to increase their conventional forces near China in 1967. At the same time, they provided their field commanders with a tactical nuclear

-iv-

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weapons system to be used if a big retaliatory punitive strike against northern China became unavoidable. This marked the first time that Soviet combat troops anywhere were supported by the Scaleboard missile system.

This two-fold policy of contingency preparations for a retaliatory attack against northern China, on the one hand, and aggressive patrolling to turn back Chinese probes, on the other hand, was continued in 1968. The Soviets believed that the Chinese had the capability to detect the conventional-forces buildup, and they hoped that this would deter Mao from probing along the border. However, not even the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia --which increased Chinese concern--caused Mao to desist. In late September, Chou En-lai complained publicly about massive Soviet troop concentrations and overflights along the border, and he insisted that Moscow's military threats would have "no effect whatsoever." Marshal Grechko later claimed that there had been 1200 border-guard clashes in 1968 alone resulting from Chinese incursions. One of these, although not specified by Grechko, was the incident in which the Soviets disarmed the commander of the border post near Chen Pao Island; thereafter, several more encounters occurred before the Chinese executed an ambush on Chen Pao on 2 March 1969.

It is likely that the Chen Pao ambush was authorized by Mao. The right to patrol on the island, which is on the Chinese side of the main channel, had been bitterly contested by the Chinese for several months prior to the ambush. More and more, the worthless piece of river land assumed a symbolic importance for Mao and, characteristically, his commitment to retain the right to patrol became emotional. Mao's personal commitment was suggested by the tenacity of the subsequent effort to hold Chen Pao. More specifically, his own involvement was reflected in his "instruction" warning the local Soviet commander to withdraw and in the unusual personal praise he gave a Chen Pao "hero" at the party congress.

Mao's purpose in the initial ambush was not primarily to attain a victory for internal use or to blacken the Soviet image internationally, but rather to assert

-v-  
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his general claim to such places by taking a risk. In the act of wiping out a border guard detachment, he gambled that the Russians would not escalate either by launching a big ground-forces or conventional air attack, or by attacking farther inland with nuclears. He hoped that the Russians would not respond at all militarily because the Chinese claim to Chen Pao was so clearcut and had been implicitly conceded in the 1964 talks. He seemed to believe that if there were to be any counter-attack at all, most likely the Soviets would use small units. He was right about the level of retaliation. But Soviet superiority in armament enabled them on 15 March to retaliate in more than equal measure, resulting in a severe defeat for his border units.

From Moscow's viewpoint, this reverse should have disabused Mao of the idea that he could return his forces to the island. Mao, however, would not desist. When Chinese troops again went out to Chen Pao, the Soviets did not launch a clearing attack. They did not again attack Chinese patrols because a new battle might have touched off others on the border. They also intended to demonstrate that they were willing to cede the island and some others on the Chinese side of the main channel in a final border settlement.

The Soviet leaders hoped that a policy of selective military punishment combined with a proposal for negotiations would convince Mao that the only way to proceed was toward a settlement. However, they discovered after their retaliation at Chen Pao that Mao was willing to accept more punishment for his forces than they thought he would. Estimating that Mao, on second consideration, was prepared to live with a tense border situation indefinitely, they decided to hit his patrols hard with overwhelming firepower--return 10 blows for one, as Grechko put it--when future incursions were made. However, Brezhnev personally wanted some flexibility, allowing himself the option of deciding where and when to shoot, rather than being committed to resist every probe. Diversifying the policy of strong retaliation also meant that not every Soviet retaliation would be similar in measure to that employed at Chen Pao.

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The Soviet policy of selective, on-the-spot, military retaliation presented the Peking regime no significant military risk, and it did not cause Mao to negotiate or cease probing. Mao's strategy in contesting territory in the face of superior military power was to avoid concentrating challenges into a small timeframe, a concentration which might provoke a big Soviet attack. The level of provocation was also kept down by the use of small military detachment only. Employing this low-risk strategy, Mao's policy of 10 years of probing relentlessly moved always in the one direction of disputing Soviet jurisdiction.

Only by establishing a credible intention to go beyond small-scale border reprisals was Moscow finally able in September 1969 to convince Mao that the risks were now higher for pursuing his pinprick policy. The Soviets impressed this upon Mao through a complex threat campaign, combining more troop deployments with verbal warnings expressed openly and behind the scenes. The fear that a big Soviet attack was a possibility which could no longer be dismissed impelled Mao to accept negotiations without previous preconditions and to end border probes for the time being. When the Chinese finally agreed to negotiations on 7 October 1969, they authoritatively and explicitly noted that their main concern was the possibility of a Soviet "raid" on their nuclear installations.

The Chinese overreacted to the threat campaign. At a crucial time they included in their own calculations the appraisals of a number of foreign governments, as reported by their diplomats overseas, that the possibility of a Soviet preemptive air strike could no longer be dismissed. However, there is no evidence that any Soviet politburo member was advocating such a strike as a specific course of action. The evidence is that the politburo was worried about China as a future nuclear power. But the policy was to avoid a general or border war and to try to defuse the situation by tying the Chinese up in negotiations.

-vii-

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The threat campaign subsided somewhat with the beginning of negotiations, and the Chinese may come to realize that their September calculations had been too alarmist.

Soviet negotiations strategy is designed to end the border dispute by attaining an overall agreement which defines the alignment of Chinese-disputed sections. They are prepared to accept the main channel as the central line, to concede Chen Pao and other river islands, and to ask, in exchange, for recognition of Soviet ownership of Hei Hsia Tzu, the Man Chou Li strip, and the Pamirs.

Chinese negotiations strategy is not pointed primarily toward a final border settlement, but rather centers on the desire to attain a military agreement and major political concessions. They want a "no-attack" treaty and a non-use of nuclears guarantee from the USSR. They also refuse to start real negotiations until they get a unilateral Soviet withdrawal of forces to points well back of "all disputed areas."

Evidence suggests that the Chinese have demanded a minimum Soviet pullback of 15 to 20 miles away from most areas in dispute. Areas in dispute presumably now include points at which firefights occurred in Sinkiang in 1969, although Chinese maps have shown the border at these points as demarcated and fixed. Areas in dispute also include the Man Chou Li strip and the Pamirs, and the Chinese now demand a Soviet pullback of 60 miles in that mountain region. Disputed areas presumably also include most of the islands in the eastern rivers. A Soviet pullback of 15 to 20 miles from their bank at points where islands are contested would mean not only withdrawal from the island of Hei Hsia Tzu, but also complete military evacuation of Khabarovsk. The improbability of such a Soviet concession strongly suggests that the Chinese have raised demands which are not intended for real bargaining purposes. This position and Peking's privately disseminated view that no one should put any faith in the negotiations with the Soviets because they will not solve the border dispute suggests that Mao does not want a border alignment agreement except under conditions of major Soviet political and territorial concessions.

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The course of the Soviet politburo for the near future seems to be to sustain talks while refusing to reduce military pressure. The Russians seem to be settling down for a protracted stalemate, and Brezhnev indicated to the Central Committee at the end of the year that the Chinese have a concept of time which takes some getting used to. He stated that the USSR must continue with the negotiations, that the very "fact" that they exist is important, and that although Soviet forces could handle any military confrontations, it is "more" important to reach a settlement, even a "partial" local one.

-ix-

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THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET POLICY  
IN THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE

I. KHRUSHCHEV'S POLICIES

A. Origin of Patrol Encounters

From the start, Khrushchev tried to avoid a border conflict by mollifying Mao, permitting border people to share some of the land the USSR had controlled since the end of World War II, or earlier. His political palliatives were agreements covering the eastern border rivers and western grazing areas of the frontier.

The border river navigation agreement of the Stalin period (signed in 1951) provided Khrushchev with the means to settle small river-use disputes in the eastern sector by means of consultations in a Joint Commission. In addition, Khrushchev's policy permitted Chinese nationals to fish near and collect wood on islands in the border rivers --islands which, since Stalin's day, had been under Soviet jurisdiction. During his visit to Peking in September-October 1954, Khrushchev reportedly concluded an agreement with the Chinese designed to keep the western sector quiet. The agreement permitted shepherds from areas of Sinkiang which lacked roads to drive their livestock through Soviet territory up to a depth of six miles. The border remained quiet until the political dispute between Mao and Khrushchev escalated.

The first big border crossings in the fall of 1959 occurred in the western sector where famine-stricken Moslem minorities moved permanently onto Soviet territory. In order to stop the flow, Khrushchev increased Soviet patrol activity. In mid-1960, when the Chinese formally requested

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a settlement of old land claims, Khrushchev chose to regard the border crossings as politically planned incursions. Thereafter, tension on the border increased rapidly.

Khrushchev feared that a key factor in the developing Chinese claims would be the presence of the Chinese shepherds and minority groups on Soviet-controlled border lands. Their presence could then be interpreted to mean jurisdiction, or an equal claim to jurisdiction. On 22 August and again on 21 September 1960, the Chinese began to ask for a border settlement through talks and to raise claims to big sections of Soviet land adjacent to Sinkiang and the eastern border rivers. They also proposed the establishment of a joint commission to demarcate the border of Sinkiang--presumably the 180-mile sector marked "undertermined" on Chinese maps, indicating extensive claims in the Pamir area. The Soviets reportedly refused to discuss their claims "at any level," that is, either with central Chinese authorities or with lower-ranking officials working in a joint commission similar to the one handling border river navigation.

The Soviets have claimed that 1960 was the year when Chinese troops as well as civilians began "systematically"--i.e., deliberately and continuously--to enter Soviet territory without permission. The first Soviet government note to Peking protesting border incursions and the construction of "fortifications" on territory adjacent to Sinkiang was reportedly sent to Peking on 17 August 1960. It is conceivable that the Chinese sent more "shepherds" across the western sector and more "fishermen" onto river islands in the eastern sector than previously in order to establish a claim based on continual presence. It is equally conceivable that they merely continued to send across the same number of men as previously. In either interpretation, the new Soviet action was to withdraw permission to enter Soviet territory.

Moscow alerted its Far East Border Guard organization, and on 28 May 1960, a high-ranking official of the organization called for increased vigilance along the Amur and Ussuri rivers. Far East border patrols were again

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warned to be alert for transgressors of Soviet territory in a broadcast of 4 September 1960, which referred to an "enemy spy" who had been caught on the Amur. The commentator also indicated, for the first time in Soviet broadcasts, that Chinese border guards were patrolling the south bank of the Amur. The clearest indication that Moscow had withdrawn permission to use Soviet-controlled river islands appeared later on in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Moscow quoted Chinese "written instructions" issued by provincial authorities of Heilungkiang--the eastern border area--to a Chinese "fisherman":

When fish are being caught on the disputed islands of the Amur and Ussuri, the Soviet border guards often demand that our fishermen leave these islands. We propose that the catching of fish on the disputed islands be continued and that the Soviet border guards be told that these islands belong to China, and that the border is being violated by them, not by us. (Quoted in Soviet Government Statement of 21 September 1963)

Withdrawal of permission to enter Soviet territory was countered by Mao through a new policy of gradually sending individual border guards, and later entire patrol details, into areas previously used only by shepherds and fishermen. The Soviet response was to open new patrol routes and, according to the Chinese, to push these into China's territory. In this way Chinese and Russian armed patrols came into confrontation along the entire length of the border.

B. "Consultations, Not Negotiations"

While Khrushchev and Mao increased their border-patrol forces throughout 1961 the Chinese tried to maneuver Moscow (as well as New Delhi) into the position of the recalcitrant refusing to settle border problems. In order to demonstrate Peking's reasonableness, Chou En-

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lai was given considerable leeway to make concessions, with only small concessions in return, in signing border treaties with Burma (October 1960) and Nepal (October 1961). What were Mao's views on a border settlement with the USSR? It is conceivable that he desired such a settlement and that he was advancing excessively large claims merely as bargaining counters for acquiring smaller pieces of territory. But the primary intention seemed to be a matter of more effectively waging the political polemic against the Soviet Union.

The Chinese began to complain privately about 19th century Tsarist land acquisitions which "should" be returned to China--viz., 170,000 square miles of Central Asia, 8,000 square miles of the Pamirs, 231,000 square miles of southern Siberia, and 154,000 square miles of the maritime provinces in the Soviet Far East. Politburo member Peng Chen stated privately to Indian Communists at the 22nd CPSU Congress in October 1961 that Peking had problems not only with the Indian border, but also with the Manchurian border, and that these problems were similar. Peng's rhetorical question--"What is wrong with a country trying to claim its own?"--was an early indication that Peking was having trouble convincing other Communist parties that Mao's extensive claims were not immoderate or deliberately contrived to confront Khrushchev with a new political problem.

Khrushchev recognized that to determine the real extent of Mao's territorial claims required a persistent effort to think seriously about the big, immoderate demands. Although Chinese bargaining with the Indians--e.g., a trade off whereby Peking would relinquish an old map claim to Indian territory in the east for New Delhi's acquiescence in Chinese encroachments in the west--provided him with insight into the give-and-take aspect of Peking's negotiating procedures, he was not certain that Mao would even drop his big claims. He concluded that he must refuse to begin bargaining with Mao over any territory--big or small--not under Chinese control.

His policy was to begin making contingency military plans for possible future large scale Chinese incursions against the Trans-Siberian Railroad, exposed Far Eastern

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cities, or both. In March 1962 a Soviet field training exercise countered a mock Chinese attack across the Manchurian border and a drive against Vladivostok. In the fall of 1962, the Soviets built more guard posts along the Amur and Ussuri rivers, and in November, they reportedly began to fortify the big island in the Amur--Hei Hsia Tzu--that is opposite Khabarovsk and is claimed as Chinese on Peking's maps. For their part, the Chinese, beginning in August 1962, considerably tightened up their border-surveillance system in Sinkiang. They tried to seal off the border following the large-scale exodus (in May) of about 50,000 Moslems from Kuldja (Ining) into Soviet territory. The aroused Moslems had asked the Soviet consulate for military help and Soviet border guards had not turned back the refugees. The embarrassed Chinese accused the Soviets of complicity, closed down a number of Soviet consulates including Kuldja, and warned that Peking would "smash" the aggression and subversion "of any enemy." In the fall of 1962, the Chinese began to build a string of border defense stations in Manchuria manned by Public Security Troops, primarily to prevent refugees from crossing into Soviet territory and secondarily to keep Soviet agents out.

By December 1962, when Mao had settled his border problem with the Mongolians, he again tried to prod Khru-shchev into negotiations about revived claims.

Up to this point, the Chinese had been stating their claims and seeking border talks behind the scenes, but Khru-shchev's insulting remark about the "stench" arising from the Western colonies on China's territory at Hong Kong and Macao (Supreme Soviet speech of 12 December 1962) aroused Mao to bring his territorial claims out into the open. Chou En-lai made unprecedeted statements about Soviet "imperialism" to a visiting Japanese political figure in late December, describing Peking's border problem with the USSR as the "final and most difficult one." He declared that Soviet Central Asia "belongs to China" because the Tsars illegally had seized it, that Soviet Marxism-Leninism was "imperialist communism," and that China's policy is designed "to adjust" her colonialist-abused territory and borders.

The border dispute was publicized for the first time by either side in the Peking People's Daily editorial of 8

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March 1963, which warned Khrushchev that Peking viewed the issues of Hong Kong and Macau as similar to unequal treaties formerly imposed on China and asked if he were prepared to raise all unequal treaties--i.e., those imposed by the Tsars--and undertake "a general settlement." An intention to press Khrushchev to begin negotiations was indicated by a Chinese Foreign Ministry official in mid-April 1963 when he told the Burmese that China has as much reason to try to "adjust" its borders with the USSR as to adjust the situation of colonial Hong Kong. He added that the Chinese were now prepared to go to Moscow for face-to-face talks on various disputed border claims.

Khrushchev acted on two levels in 1963 in an effort to get Mao to drop the claims. On the military level, he put more Soviet border guards in place to prevent Chinese patrols from asserting territorial claims by moving onto Soviet territory. In the spring of 1963, the Soviets considerably increased the number of KGB border guard districts along the China border, stationing most of these men along the Manchurian border in detachments of 100-250 men each. In mid-March, a Soviet force, including at least an armored regiment, conducted a field exercise near the Lake Khanka-Vladivostok area adjacent to Manchuria. Soviet border guards reportedly were using "gentle persuasion"--i.e., fists or rifle butts--to keep Chinese patrols out of disputed territory, and by late April, Chinese vessels were barred from the Soviet part of the Amur north of Khabarovsk. Soviet vessels were barred from the Chinese part of the Sungari River.

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garding direct encounters, Chinese patrols, when challenged by Russian border guards, insisted they were on China's territory and produced maps to prove their assertion.

On the political level, Khrushchev issued at first oblique and then direct warnings that the policy of asserting claims by aggressive patrolling might trigger a Soviet military response. Politburo member Mikoyan, in an unusual hint in a speech of 11 July, seemed to be saying that Soviet troops might have to fight again, as they had fought against "Japanese" on Chinese territory in Manchuria. Moscow warned that "existing borders" must be respected

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because "any other attitude toward borders is fraught with the danger of war" (Izvestiya, 26 August 1963) and that where soldiers of neighboring states face each other with "rifles cocked" there is "danger that bloodshed can begin from a chance rifle shot." (Pravda, 19 September 1963)

Up to this time, there had been no firefights, according to a Soviet official. But another Soviet official stated that Chinese patrols regularly were firing into the air during encounters, presumably to warn Soviet border guards to retire from disputed territory. The Chinese also tried to get Khrushchev to pull back Soviet patrols by requesting in a note of 23 August that both sides should "maintain the status quo of the boundary and avert conflicts"--a formulation Peking was using with Nehru as well to prevent a renewal of the border war with Indian troops.

While Khrushchev sustained military pressure on Chinese patrols and deployed more troops toward the China border, he began to move toward negotiations. But he was still not clear about how serious Mao would be in pressing the big claims in order to get small areas all along the border. Aside from the actual territorial dispute, he apparently concluded that he must try to get Mao to drop the polemical attacks regarding unequal treaties by keeping the talks more limited in scope than Mao desired. Moscow called for consultations on the demarcation of "specific sections" of the border, rather than an overall realignment, and added the warning that the "artificial" creation of territorial problems is "dangerous" and could lead to "fighting." (Soviet Government Statement of 21 September 1963) Consultations were again limited to "specific sections" of the border in the CPSU letter of 29 November 1963 to the CCP. The Statement and the letter used the word, "consultations," to indicate that the talks would not be expanded to include "negotiations" about the entire border.

There is some evidence that the tactic of threatening the Chinese with a nuclear attack, although indirect and vaguely formulated, was initiated in the summer of 1963. Referring to the Sino-Soviet as well as the Sino-Indian border, Khrushchev in late July stated [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] that it is unwise to start "a world war" over

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old claims of ancestors. An Izvestiya writer wrote on 26 August that conflicts over frontiers threaten to plunge the world into "a thermonuclear war," and on 17 October, a Soviet lecturer stated privately that the border situation with China had become "catastrophic" and that Chinese troops are being trained in rudimentary measures designed to defend them against "nuclear attack." In mid-October, [redacted]

[redacted] reported that Moscow had warned Peking that it would receive a "decisive blow" if it continued its aggression against the Soviet border. Chinese concern over a possible Soviet attack (the nature of which was not specified) was reflected in two private statements by high-level CCP leaders between October and December, as well as in the protracted and unusual flight-tour by Chinese military VIP planes of airfields along the Sinkiang border from early to late October.

On the eve of the talks, Khrushchev also tried to warn Mao that Soviet representatives would not accept contrived arguments to justify claims. He publicly attacked arguments in border disputes which relate to "history, ethnography, blood affinity, religion" as well as "over-population". (Letter to Heads of State, 31 December 1963) By the time Chou En-lai revealed to Edgar Snow on 23 January 1964 that an agreement had been reached to open border "negotiations," Soviet press articles were already rejecting Chinese claims to those parts of Siberia lying along the Amur and to the Maritime Provinces along the Ussuri. Politburo member Suslov formalized the Soviet plan to discuss "only certain more accurate definitions" of the border (Report to the CPSU Central Committee Plenum, 14 February 1964), and Khrushchev on 21 February hinted publicly that Mao would get no important concessions: "We got these borders as our inheritance, and we must maintain them."

When the border talks began in Peking on 25 February 1964, Khrushchev desired an end to the border dispute but he would not accept Mao's terms for a settlement. According to the evidence, these terms were structured in such a way as to provide Mao with a political victory prior to a settlement. He desired a political statement by Moscow declaring the Tsarist-era treaties with China to be

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"unequal" and the present border alignment to be unjust. Only after such a statement was issued by Moscow could there be any real progress toward a settlement. The opening Chinese position--viz., "Although the old treaties relating to the Sino-Russian boundary are unequal treaties, the Chinese Government is nevertheless willing to respect them and take them as the basis for a reasonable settlement of the Sino-Soviet boundary question." (CCP letter of 29 February 1964 to the CPSU)--was a canard. For outsiders, it gave the appearance of reasonableness, but for Khrushchev it concealed Mao's private political demand for a Soviet declaration that the present border is based on unequal treaties.

Moscow's appraisal of the Chinese strategy in the talks was made privately at the time by a Soviet diplomat in Peking. He said the Chinese could use such a Soviet declaration later to profess that, by demarcating the border formally as it now exists, they were "magnanimously" making "a gift of their land" to the Soviet Union. Primarily for this political reason, the Soviets were refusing to draw up such a declaration. They had instructed their delegation, headed by KGB border guard chief, Colonel P.I. Zyryanov, and only "technical" in its composition, not to discuss the political questions of old treaties and claims. The delegation was to hew only to the technical matter of demarcating some "few sections" which are in doubt because of geographical features--e.g., a river changing its course or sand banks appearing at certain sections in the river. That is, Khrushchev refused to surrender on a big polemical point but was prepared to give Mao some of the disputed river islands the Soviets held in order to end the border dispute.

However, Mao in 1964 wanted all areas occupied by Soviet troops beyond the old treaty line. He made an apparent temporary exception of the Pamirs, and his negotiators were permitted to accept the Soviet alignment. (The Pamirs claim was revived, however, in 1969.) Khrushchev refused to withdraw his forces from these areas--areas held by the Soviets well before Mao's regime had been established. At the talks, the Chinese demanded recognition of "unequal" treaties. By 17 March, only two sessions had been held.

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Khrushchev tried to apply some political pressure to the Chinese by having the Soviet position on demarcation of "certain sections" revealed outside the talks in New Delhi (I.V. Spiridonov press conference, 10 March 1964) and by Ambassador Chervonenko in Peking [redacted]

[redacted] The Chinese responded outside the closed sessions, first with Chou En-lai's 26 April public statement on the right of transgressed nations "to recover lost territory by every means," and then on 8 May by publishing the text of CCP and CPSU letters, including the one professing CCP willingness to take the old treaties as the basis for a "reasonable" settlement.

In the secret talks, a working-level joint commission was established in which both sides exchanged maps and began to work on demarcating the map-border for the northeast sector. By late June, the Soviet delegation had to warn the Chinese that if they persisted in repeating their big land claims from imperial days, the Soviets logically had the right to claim Sinkiang and Heilungkiang because these areas had been part of the Tsarist empire. This riposte provided Mao with a new polemical point, and he chose to make it outside the secret talks.

Mao committed the prestige of his own name to his polemic with Khrushchev by using a 10 July interview with visiting Japanese socialists to depict the Soviets as post-Tsarist land-usurpers. He tried to bedevil Soviet diplomacy by injecting himself into the Japan-Soviet issue over the southern Kuriles: "They must be returned to Japan." He also said that the Soviet Union has occupied "too much territory" on its periphery, including Poland, Finland, Mongolia, and border areas adjacent to Manchuria.

Khrushchev still preferred to continue the secret talks in Peking. Even when the Japanese press exuberantly printed a short version of Mao's remarks (13 July), he still provided the CCP with the opportunity to disavow their accuracy. The Soviets privately protested to the Chinese charge in Moscow and to Chou En-lai and Deputy Foreign Minister Wang Ping-nan in Peking. Not only did these officials confirm the accuracy of the published interview, but Chou went on to defend Mao from a Japanese complaint regarding

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[Redacted]

troublemaking. He told another Japanese socialist on 19 July that Mao had not raised a new, troublemaking point because he, Chou, had indicated to Khrushchev as far back as January 1957 many examples of the Russians having taken "too much territory." The secret talks continued until the Japanese press--the weekly Shekai Shuho on 11 August--printed the full text of Mao's 10 July interview.

The fuller version of the interview revealed to Khrushchev that Mao had made the most explicit, detailed, and extensive accusations of land-seizing ever made by any Chinese leader against the USSR.

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

More importantly, Mao had intended that his charges should be publicized at a time when the secret talks were in session. But most importantly, Mao had indicated that his accusations were tantamount to an open refusal to end political polemics. On the contrary, Mao had taunted Khrushchev by declaring that he would continue the "paper war."

We have been challenged and we are resisting. It has been proposed to us that we stop the open discussion, be it even for three months. ...Regarding war on paper, there are no dead in such a war. We have been waging such a war for several years already, and not a single person has died. We are prepared to wage this war another 25 years.

Mao then exploited, for the first time in public, confidential material from the Peking border talks.

Among the Soviets are some [i.e., the negotiators] who said that they want to put China's Sinkiang and Heilungkiang into the USSR. The Soviets are strengthening their forces along the border areas.

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My view is that they plan to put them [i.e., Sinkiang and Heilungkiang] into their territory.

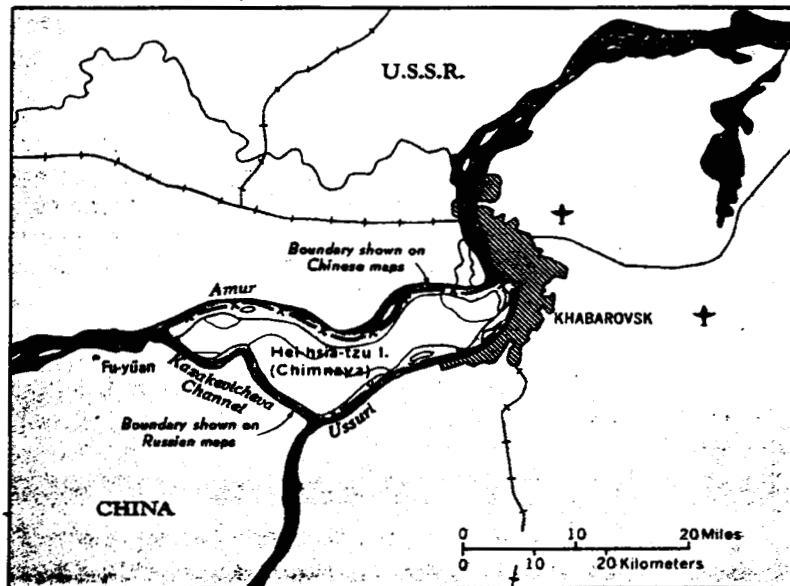
Actually, the Soviet delegation merely had raised a hypothetical counterclaim. Mao's distortion of the statement, and his revelation of it, convinced Khrushchev that the talks would never get beyond the limited progress thus far attained.

A Soviet diplomat reported [redacted] in Peking that "an agreement" had been reached with regard to the Sinkiang border, but that the dispute over the eastern rivers was unresolved. By July, some limited progress had been made in the working-level joint commission regarding map-demarcation of the northeast border. The Soviet delegation had conceded that the border line in the Amur and Ussuri rivers runs along the main channel. (The Chinese in 1969 cited this concession as also applying to the disputed island of Chen Pao.) They also had informed the Chinese that they would be willing to cede jurisdiction to "some" islands in the Ussuri and Amur on the Chinese side. Peking later complained (People's Daily, 18 April 1969) that the Soviets would only cede 100 of about 700 islands on the Chinese side of the main channel. Two other main roadblocks remained. One was the Chinese demand for a Soviet declaration that the old treaties were unjust. The other was the specific Chinese claim to Hei Hsia Tzu, the Soviet-held 20-mile island adjoining Khabarovsk south of the main channel at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri. In their commentary on the film released on 18 April 1969, the Chinese specifically referred to Hei Hsia Tzu as "occupied" by Soviet troops.

The Soviets discovered that the Chinese concept of "maintaining the status quo" meant a Soviet pullback to a line north of the actual line of Soviet control. Even though the Chinese would not agree to further map-demarcation of the northeast until, according to a source in Peking, the Soviets conceded Hei Hsia Tzu, Moscow was prepared to continue the talks. The full text of Mao's interview was published on 11 August, and four days later Khrushchev withdrew the Soviet delegation.

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Hei-hsia-tzu Island (Chimnaya Ostrov)



97715 3-70

Developed by the Soviets and in their possession.  
The Chinese negotiators in the 1964 border talks  
claimed ownership to it, and on 18 April 1969,  
Peking complained of its "occupied" status.

### C. A Phoney Nuclear Threat

The breakdown of the talks and Mao's personal and open commitment to escalating polemics impelled Khrushchev to reappraise the prospects of real conflict along the Chinese frontier. The Soviets began to talk about the Chinese as though they were indeed a more active national enemy than the Americans, the threat of hostilities with them along the border appearing more probable than hostilities with the U.S. Khrushchev, no longer able to look forward to a border settlement, began to prepare for a border war.

Khrushchev was more impressed with Mao's hostility and implacability than he had been before Mao's interview with the Japanese. As the 2 September 1964 Pravda editorial put it, "No one exposed the actual aims of the Chinese leadership better than he did." The Chinese were not only using methods of struggle similar to the Americans, but more importantly, they had "openly" stated their territorial designs.

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The Pravda editorial declared:

No, we cannot agree with the Chinese leaders' assessment of their own actions. Their struggle against the CPSU, the world communist movement, and the USSR and other socialist countries is not a 'paper war.' Insofar as its fierceness, scale, and methods are concerned, it does not differ from the imperialist cold war against the socialist countries....

We are faced with an openly expansionist program of far-reaching pretensions. (emphasis supplied)

The Soviets were particularly concerned about Mao's inclusion of Vladivostok among territories taken from China. It was the most vulnerable city to Chinese ground attack and it had been the scene of more Soviet field training exercises than any other Far Eastern city.

In late July and early August, tank division stations north of Vladivostok moved to about 10 miles from the Manchurian border and astride the only rail link with China in the area. This move was a visible warning to the Chinese to keep out. They were also warned publicly in a Pravda editorial quoting Lenin who said "Vladivostok is far away, but this is our very own city."

Because of the significantly increased hostility provoked by Mao's interview, Soviet threats implying an intention to use nuclear weapons against China if necessary were a shade more explicit than those of 1963. Khrushchev's son-in-law, Adzhubey, in response to a question regarding Mao's land claims, warned that the USSR's "entire" military force was guarding Soviet borders. (Der Spiegel, 3 August 1964) Khrushchev himself, in the context of a rebuke to Mao on 15 September, referred to new weapons, his intention having been to make a nuclear threat:

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Of course, if war is imposed on us, we shall fight with all the forces and means at our disposal. And we have sufficiently powerful, I may say unlimited, means of warfare.... Given up-to-date weapons of annihilation, it is now particularly dangerous and, I would say, criminal, to search for wealth through the extension of 'Lebensraum.' ...If we are attacked we shall defend our borders with all means at our disposal. Soviet frontiers are sacred... (emphasis supplied)

The implication was that the USSR would not confine itself to the use of conventional weapons in the event of war with China. The formulation came closer to a public threat to use nuclears against Chinese forces than anything Khrushchev had ever said. However, the Soviets at that time had not deployed tactical nuclear systems to the Far East.

Mao and his aides were able to distinguish a bluff from a real military threat. Khrushchev had failed to frighten the Chinese into ceasing their probes because he had not made his threats sufficiently credible, either by deploying tactical nuclears or by a big conventional-forces buildup on the frontier. It was not until September 1968 that the Chinese began to complain about Soviet "rocket" bases in the border areas, probably referring to the tactical nuclears deployed in 1967 after Khrushchev's ouster.

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## II. The Policies of the Post-Khrushchev Leadership

### A. Avoiding Threats to Attack China

Khrushchev's ouster in mid-October 1964 transferred to his successors one strategic and two tactical border problems. The strategic one was how to impel Mao to conclude a border settlement. Would Mao have to be threatened with a nuclear weapons attack and, if this were to prove necessary, how could the threat be made credible without actually striking at Chinese targets?

The new leadership decided to stay clear of the nuclear threats Khrushchev had used. The two tactical problems were of more immediate concern, namely, how to turn back Chinese border patrols without igniting a Maoist protracted war of conventional forces and how to maneuver against Mao's political demands. They concentrated their energies on the two tactical problems first.

#### 1. More Border Guards

The most pressing problem for Soviet frontier guards was the Chinese effort in the east, the probing to dispute possession of the islands in the Amur and Ussuri. In the west, in Sinkiang, crossings by shepherds and refugees were the main irritant, inasmuch as Chinese armed patrols had not yet begun to dispute the comparatively well-marked border land. The Chinese were also kept busy putting down riots (and preventing riots) of Moslems trying to cross to Soviet Central Asia to join their displaced families, and Soviet broadcasts were making Peking's task more difficult.

Border tension in the east was a legacy of the Khrushchev period. Toward the end of Khrushchev's leadership, "border defense tension"--a continuing state of alert and dispute--was reported (in March 1964) by a Chinese border defense post at Jao Ho on the Ussuri. A Chinese patrol boat on the Amur reportedly was fired on in April after a slight intrusion into Soviet-claimed waters, and in July two Soviets

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and one Chinese were reported killed when the Chinese exchanged fire with a Soviet vessel which had approached too close to their shore. By October, the Soviet-Manchurian border was being patrolled by at least 20,000 KGB border guards, and on 21 October the new leadership declared that the USSR had been and will continue to take all measures necessary to ensure "the inviolability of its frontiers." (Pravda editorial) In late 1964, the Far East Border Guard District was strengthened by the addition of small units, including river guard units, apparently for patrol of the Amur and Ussuri.

Regarding the other tactical problem--viz., how to maneuver against Mao's polemical attack--the new leadership had it made clear to them by Chou En-lai in Moscow in November that Mao was demanding complete surrender on the whole range of political issues. In making his demand for surrender in the political dispute, Chou did not refer to the border dispute. But the Soviets began to say that he did in order to provide "convincing" proof that Peking was the side responsible for returning Sino-Soviet relations to their previous irreconcilable status. On 14 November, the very day Chou left Moscow, Problems of Peace and Socialism appeared with an extra hastily written article, separately printed and inserted loose in its November issue, accusing the Chinese of border violations.

[ ] in late November that Chou had raised a "preliminary" condition--namely, the return to China of Siberian territories--before he would even begin discussing other political matters. This was a canard, but the Chinese leaders were impelled by such lies to put their claims in a more realistic context. Foreign Minister Chen Yi stated in January 1965 [ ] that "at present we are not demanding the return of Tsarist-seized territory, and in the summer of 1965, Mao and Chou demurred when Malraux suggested to them that they were out to recapture lost Chinese territory. Mao said that it was impossible to retake Siberia because the Russians were "at home" in that area. However, the Chinese leaders avoided discussing the pressing issue of the disputed river islands.

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## 2. Regular Army Buildup

The attitude of the Soviet leaders in early 1965 was one of deepened pessimism. In January 1965, CPSU Secretariat members discussed Sino-Soviet relations with a foreign Communist, who reported them as saying that disputes had "worsened," not improved, since Khrushchev's ouster. Party relations were on the worst possible basis, and they conveyed the impression that Mao really wanted to solve his border claims "only on the basis of force." Also in January, East German officials reportedly stated to a European Communist that the Soviets desired to increase their "conventional" forces on the Chinese border to a degree which would permit border control, from the regular military as well as the policing point of view. Commenting on the second Chinese nuclear test in mid-May, the Soviet minister to New Zealand stated privately that it had been "a very dangerous thing" for the USSR to have helped the Chinese get started on atomic development. He went on to say that Moscow would be willing to settle the border dispute by giving the Chinese some land if they would "change their attitude."

Mao's attitude, however, was obdurate. The Chinese imposed stricter border inspection controls in June 1965. In the same month, the Russians [redacted]

[redacted] significantly increased central control, suggesting that the Soviet leaders believed that the danger of firefights had increased to the point where a small clash might escalate, a development they hoped to prevent. At about the same time, a new unit was dispatched to bolster river guard forces on the Amur.

The decision to send a multidivision force to the border area may have been made before late October 1965. At that time, Brezhnev was trying to justify new deployments to Gomulka. He briefed the Polish leader in detail on border incidents and offered to provide him with the opportunity to send a Polish observer group to "certain border points" to see for themselves the seriousness of the situation. In the winter of 1965, the Chinese continued to dispatch patrols to

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protect their nationals from harassment on Soviet-claimed river islands, and one reported point of tense contact was the island of Pa Cha (Goldinskiy) near Fu Yuan on the Amur. In October, the Soviets began developing three airfields opposite Sinkiang. Finally, in November, a Soviet Army Corps headquarters moved from a point opposite Afghanistan to a point opposite Sinkiang, presaging the deployment of a multidivision force. The deployment of backup regular army units had begun.

By early 1966, the Soviet military intelligence establishment was reorganized to improve collection against China and collectors reportedly were told that China's "hostile" attitude had created an "urgent necessity" for acquiring Chinese military and political plans.

Chinese monitoring of Soviet deployments probably was not very precise or extensive, primarily because they lacked useful overhead photography. Nevertheless, they attained enough [redacted] to recognize the start of the new buildup and they also knew that "military maneuvers on the border which presuppose China as the enemy"--Chen Yi's 17 May 1966 statement to newsmen in Peking--had been conducted. In addition to earlier exercises, Chen may also have been referring to one near Vladivostok held in October 1965 when the Soviets simulated the use of their tactical nuclear weapons to counterattack a hypothetical Chinese aggressor force.

The Soviets also took steps to improve Mongolia's small military capability and increase Soviet forces in that country. They clearly believed that Mongolia could not defend itself. As a consequence of Brezhnev's visit to Ulan Bator in mid-January 1966, a new mutual assistance treaty was signed, and the Russians warned the Chinese that if necessary, the USSR and Mongolia will "jointly" take all necessary measures, "including military measures," to defend the territory of both countries. (Pravda editorial, 19 January 1966) In the same month, a Pravda journalist told a Western counterpart that the military men in Brezhnev's delegation had the mission of installing ground-to-air, and, possibly, ground-to-ground missiles in Mongolia. The Finnish attache in Warsaw claimed in March that unpublished

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provisions of the new Soviet-Mongol treaty in fact had provided for putting Soviet troops into Mongolia. This was to be the beginning of the establishment of a deterrent Soviet military presence in Mongolia.

The Soviets were concerned that encounters between Chinese and Mongolian patrols in 1965 on marker locations and the relative military inferiority of Ulan Bator might encourage Mao to take some Mongolian territory. The Mongolian Defense Minister used Soviet media to make two public warnings to Peking, declaring that his forces now had "rockets" (unspecified, but presumably nothing with a nuclear capability) and implied that they would fight jointly with Russian forces if necessary. (Speech of 17 March and Red Star article, 18 March 1966) The Chinese leaders were concerned over the new Mongolian buildup, and in mid-March, Liu Shao-chi, Teng Hsiao-ping and Peng Chen told the chief of the New Zealand Communist Party that Moscow had ordered complete mobilization in Mongolia "on the Chinese border." They also said that Peking might eventually have to fight the Russians as well as the Americans.

The Soviets used their increased presence in Mongolia to try to gain information on Chinese troop dispositions along the Mongolian border. According to the Chinese, on 1 April, Mongolian border guards crossed the border and captured a herdsman, and in the course of 27 days, interrogated him in the presence of "Soviet personnel" to acquire "information about the number of troops in the CPR's border region, the kinds of weapons, and the habits of border guards." (Chinese Government Note of 20 June 1966) Although the note was intended to warn the Mongolians against hubris now that they had new Soviet support, the Chinese did not publish it in the open press. They concentrated their open attack on the Soviets.

A new stage in the deterioration of party-to-party relations following the Chinese-boycotted 23rd CPSU Congress in March 1966 was reflected in stringent new travel regulations for border rivers. On 19 April, Peking declared that foreign--i.e., Soviet--ships entering Chinese ports "on border rivers" must report all weapons and radio and signal equipment. The implementation of this and other new regulations significantly increased tension along the Amur and

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Ussuri, and this tension was thereafter to escalate as the Soviets tightened up their own navigation rules.

It was during this new stage of eroded party relations that the Chinese made their most explicit statement rejecting the line of actual control as an argument for Soviet ownership. The Soviets had sent a secret letter to other Communist parties to stress the military intention of Mao along the border. The letter stated that at the 1964 border talks the Chinese had threatened to use "other ways"--i.e., other than talks--to regain territory. The Soviets insisted that "the territory of which the CCP leadership now speaks never has belonged to China." (CPSU letter of February 1966) In reacting to this important complaint, the Chinese rejected the doctrine of abiding by actual-possession to settle the border problem.

The Soviets...refused to take the treaties as the basis for settling the boundary question and insisted on going beyond these unequal treaties, delimiting the boundary in accordance with the 'historically formed line' and the 'actually guarded line.' That is, they want to include into the Soviet Union not only those parts of China annexed by the unequal treaties, but also those they have occupied in violation of the treaties; they want to draw the boundary line wherever Soviet troops reach.

We certainly cannot agree to these unreasonable and preposterous territorial claims. (Chen Yi interview of 17 May 1966) (emphasis supplied)

This was the first time that the Chinese publicly rejected the "line of actual control" doctrine--a basic principle which they had tried to impose on the Indians after Chinese troops surreptitiously had established a presence in Ladakh. Conveniently forgetting the earlier ploy against the Indians, they were now complaining that the Russians had no right to land in dispute even though it was actually controlled by Soviet border guards. As late as 9 February 1970, a Chinese official reasserted this double standard in a private conversation.

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That Khrushchev's successors were determined to hold Mao to the actual-control doctrine was suggested by Brezhnev's remark in Vladivostok: The Soviet Far East is a land "whose every foot" glorifies the courage of Russian man. (Speech of 19 May 1966)

The post-Khrushchev leadership still avoided making nuclear threats or deploying tactical surface-to-surface missile units. As they increased the strength of border guard forces they also moved army units to the border regions. Podgorny in Khabarovsk spoke on 1 June of the need to "guard" and "if necessary, defend" the USSR's Far East borders. At this time, a new problem of immediate concern began to worry them, namely, the probability that the revolutionary animus of Mao's Cultural Revolution would lead to firefights along the border.

### 3. Cultural Revolution Containment

A new phenomenon appeared at various points along the border starting in the spring of 1966. According to a CPSU apparatus official, who spoke to an American Communist in Moscow in late May, the Chinese had mobilized big segments of the populace in border provinces encouraging them to surge across the border to dare Soviet border guards to fire on them. The official appraised the situation as so dangerous that just one shot could cause a serious conflict. Uncertain about Chinese intentions, the Soviet leaders began to consider more seriously the proposition that Mao wanted to provoke border fights. Gromyko in late July privately referred to the Chinese leaders as "radical"; he said the "uncontrollable" Communism in China might break out "in any direction." In the U.S. in mid-October, he privately stated that the Soviets could not understand what was happening in China and must be ready with armed forces to fight if necessary. He went on to say that additional Soviet divisions had been sent to the border region as a precautionary measure because no one could predict what Peking's next move would be. Brezhnev, also in mid-October, complained to a Nepalese Communist leader that although the Chinese would never go to war with the U.S. they might very well attack the Soviet Union (as well as India or Mongolia).

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Insight into Soviet thinking at this time was supplied by a Soviet official who said that although they do not consider China a real military threat at present, they feel that Peking "might start a war out of stupidity." It was Mao's capricious style that worried them. Moscow's increased deployments to the frontiers were intended, according to a Soviet military officer's statement in mid-December, to indicate to Peking that no incursions into Soviet territory would be permitted.

In 1966 Chinese officials began to speak privately of the inevitability of war with the USSR, in contrast to their 1965 view that such a war was a mere possibility. This more troubled attitude was also reflected in their depiction of Moscow as Peking's number one enemy. They noted the continuing deployment of Soviet troops but declared that China's policy would be to insist on recovering lost territory.

The Soviet leadership decided to inform all levels of the CPSU and the populace that the border dispute would become more serious in the immediate future. The matter apparently was discussed in mid-December 1966 at the Central Committee plenum.

In this way,  
the leaders tried to justify Soviet troop reinforcement  
of the extensive border.

The Chinese were not deterred by the new Soviet deployments along the border. On the contrary, in late January 1967 Mao called for "All PLA frontline forces to be on guard." They continued their claims and their policy of harassment. For example, on the Sinkiang border in early February, they tried to move a truckload of Moslems into Soviet territory near the Dzungarian Gate, and when Soviet border guards blocked the way, a day-long firefight reportedly took place until the Chinese were beaten back. The immediate Soviet reaction indicates the seriousness of the incident. After 19 February an additional unit was [ ] along the Sinkiang border,

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and on 25 February aircraft from the Far East Long Range Air Army performed an unusual reconnaissance flight along the Sinkiang border. Later, in July, Soviet army units used bulldozers to destroy a strip of the Chinese patrol route in the Zhalanashkol area. In November, the Chinese again crossed at that point and were turned back. Pushing-and-shoving encounters of the Amur and the Ussuri river islands, incited by Red Guards and Chinese border patrols refusing Soviet border guard demands to cease patrolling and return to the Chinese bank, reportedly were widespread in the winter of 1967. Many of the 1969 firefights were at points which had been tense for at least two years.

The Soviets decided in early 1967 to publicize some of the encounters, in line with the December 1966 decision to prepare the CPSU rank and file as well as the populace for new Soviet deployments to the border. A Soviet militia officer made the first reference in the Soviet press to border shooting when he stated that on 10 February at Blagoveshchensk, "we heard rifle fire" and "the bullets whistled across the ice [of the Amur] toward our side." (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 23 February 1967)

Between 9 and 13 February, the most intensive air surveillance of the Manchurian border was conducted by Soviet planes; at this time, Kosygin privately informed [redacted] that a number of small armed clashes had taken place on the border. Heightened Soviet sensitivity was strikingly indicated by the Soviet army field exercises simulating defense against a Chinese attack in late March near Blagoveshchensk--the first time Soviet ground forces had run an exercise of this nature along the Amur.

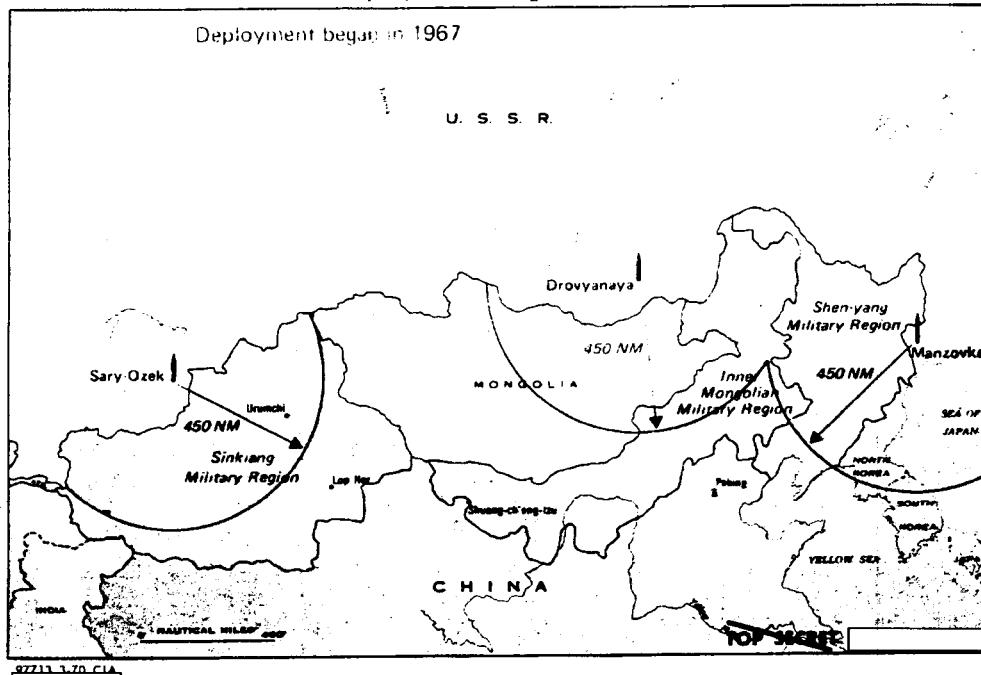
#### 4. Tactical Nuclears Deployed

Some time between February and October 1967 the Soviets first provided their field commanders with a tactical nuclear weapon which could hit targets--such as transportation centers and big military concentrations--up to 450 miles within China. This was the new land-mobile nuclear missile system (Scaleboard) which was deployed at three points along the Chinese border. At

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## **Mobile Missile (Scaleboard) Deployment Along Sino-Soviet Border**

Deployment began in 1967



the same time, however, the closest they approached to making a public nuclear threat was Deputy Defense Minister Grechko's remark that Moscow disagrees with the view of "people who declare that nuclear weapons are a paper tiger." (Izvestiya, 22 February 1967) They did not rattle their rockets publicly. It also seems likely that they did not try to convey private warnings to the Chinese about a nuclear strike if border encounters continued. The most specific public warning from a Soviet bloc source stressed conventional arms. A Czech domestic broadcast of 24 August stated that "It is no secret that the Soviet army has taken a whole series of measures in case Peking should decide to widen the so far occasional border provocations into a wider armed conflict.... I consider well-founded the opinion that some changes in Soviet military doctrine, above all the stress on the importance of conventional weapons and of land forces....and, to a certain extent, also some re-equipping of the Soviet air force....

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are...the expression of a serious assessment of the potential danger which has developed in China." This statement reflected the serious long-term effort--started in the period between December 1966 and February 1967--to prepare not only domestic but also foreign Communist opinion for intensified border trouble and for the use of conventional forces to turn back any Chinese incursions.

More and more, the Soviet leaders authorized release of materials to the press to depict the nature of Chinese border probings. In the first explicit reference in the Soviet press on the KGB border guards' mission along the China border, a no-shooting order was implied: "If Chinese nationals cross into Soviet territory, you must immediately report to the post. Do not respond to provocations of Chinese border guards." (Izvestiya, 28 May 1967) A no-shooting order was also implied in the first detailed publicized report of Red Guard antics along the frozen Ussuri where "the Red Guards crossed the border demarcation line, moved in crowds toward our shore, and drove trucks against the border guards who were barring their way." There had been "no military clashes, in this area, in the direct sense of the word" because Soviet border guards refused to be provoked. Nevertheless, the border "will not be crossed by anyone and will not be spilled over by anything." (K. Simonov article in Pravda, 19 July 1967)

On balance, for all their talk about a no-shooting order, it is probable that the Soviet response to Red Guard border antics and bolder Chinese patrolling was to permit firing if the Chinese were wildly provocative. This would be in line with the 12 March 1969 statement of the Soviet ambassador in Norway to Foreign Minister Lyng, that bloodshed had "largely" been avoided only because of the strict instructions to Soviet border guards not to take to arms "except as a last resort."

Although the joint commission on border river navigation met annually, the summer 1967 session reflected Soviet reaction to increased Chinese probes, particularly on the river islands. On 24 August, Soviet border guards expelled Chinese fishermen from Wu Pa Lao, an island on the upper

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Wu Pa Lao Island



Photo published in *China Pictorial*, No. 8, 1969. Same photo published in *Peking People's Daily*, 27 April 1969.

Wu Pa Lao is in the Amur immediately west of Hu Ma and about 500 miles north-east of Chitaevsk.

Caption states that "Wu Pa Lao Island which is on the Chinese side of the central line of the main channel of the Heilung River [Amur] has always been Chinese territory on which Chinese inhabitants have been carrying on production generation after generation. However, the Soviet revisionist fascist bandits unscrupulously trample on Wu Pa Lao Island, preventing the Chinese inhabitants from engaging in production there. Commanded by a field officer (standing on top of the slope) and two company officers (standing just below him), armed Soviet troops use poles to push away the boats of Chinese inhabitants, cruelly beat them up and even shove them into the river."

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reaches of the Amur under Soviet jurisdiction but on the Chinese side of the main channel. The Chinese complained at the joint session and insisted on discussing "where the border line should pass" in the rivers. (Tass, 31 August 1967) The Soviets refused to tolerate a new Chinese presence on the islands, and the session ended abruptly; the joint commission did not convene again until June 1969. In the meantime, the Soviets continued to expel Chinese fishermen from islands in dispute, and on some occasions, detained fishermen until Chinese border guard representatives petitioned for their release. For example, on 24 September, only after a meeting of border guards from both sides would the Russians release two fishermen who had come close to the Soviet shore.

In sum, the Soviets in 1967 assigned a greater degree of probability to the prospect of a border war than they had done in 1966. They met most, but not all, Chinese probes without shooting. They deployed their forces near the extensive border, provided their field commanders with a new tactical nuclear capability to handle a big Chinese attack, and acted more aggressively against smaller probes. Mao's Cultural Revolution had made it easy for them to deride Peking politically to other Communist parties, but it reduced their hope for the advent of a less hostile (less "revolutionary") leadership in China. Tito came away from his Moscow visit in November 1967 with the dismal appraisal that this dispute is "worse than ever," that it was difficult to believe that Moscow and Peking might "ever" reach a peaceful settlement.

The Soviet appraisal in 1967, that a border war with China had become somewhat more likely, was carried over into 1968 with an added seriousness. Regular ground forces were increased in strength. In June, the Soviets were in the initial stages of adding in the Trans Baykal Military District 160-mile wheeled tactical missile launchers (Scud). This was the first time the wheeled launcher was detected with Soviet combat troops anywhere. In Mongolia, the Soviet-forces buildup included by the winter short-range nuclear-capable Frog rocket launchers. This apparently was to be the military backup to the "firm policy and the hardened attitude" Moscow was adopting toward China--a phrase used in

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September 1968 by a Soviet Foreign Ministry official in describing the conditions needed in order to reach an "agreement" with Peking.

In line with Mao's strategic concept of absorbing a ground-forces attack deep within China, and in order to maintain a posture that would not provoke a large scale attack, the Chinese did not deploy additional ground or air combat units to the border areas. Their two-year-old effort to extend radar coverage of the Soviet border was continued. They noted Soviet reconnaissance flights along the borders, and on 6 June 1968, Chou En-lai and other leaders issued, but did not release to the press, "important instructions" on the need for "war preparations." But the Chinese adhered to their practice of keeping complaints of real Soviet-military actions along the border in private channels; they did not release for publication their protest notes to the Soviets regarding overflights.

##### 5. Czechoslovakia and China

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August changed this Chinese practice, partly because the Chinese were anxious to capitalize on the groundswell of international criticism of the invasion and partly because of real concern for border security. On 16 September, Peking for the first time publicized a note of protest concerning Soviet border overflights, explaining that the increased frequency of violations--"between 9 and 29 August 1968"--made publication necessary

Regarding the political aspect, they hoped further to blacken Moscow's image in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Chou En-lai on 29 September complained in a speech that the Russians had "massive troop concentrations" on their common border and on the Sino-Mongolian frontier and that overflights were taking place "even more frequently." Implying that China would not drop its border patrolling policy, he said that Moscow's "military threats and war blackmail" would have "no effect whatsoever."

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In fact, however, the Chinese leaders were showing some signs of real concern. On two occasions in early September, the Peking People's Daily carried exhortations to the PLA to strengthen border defense work.

[redacted] on 19 September were new indications of anxiety. Chen complained that the Russians were flying over the border "on purpose," that the Chinese had publicized the 16 September protest note to prepare the populace "for any eventuality." Chen also said that he could conceive of a situation in which the Soviets would cross the China border "on the pretext that it has come to defend socialism in China." Regarding long-range as distinct from imminent probabilities, he said, "Some claim that the USSR will not attack China. We do not believe this." In his exaggerated account of the border buildup, Chen became the first Chinese leader to complain, privately or publicly, of "rocket bases" in Soviet deployments. Increased Chinese concern was also reflected in the apparent decision to brief PLA troops in late September on the "critical frontier situation" which had arisen because of overflights.

Soviet air intrusions continued despite Moscow's public embarrassment. The Soviets did not respond to the Chinese protest note until 31 October. At that time in late October, the Soviet charge in Peking stated to a foreign diplomat there that "We have received such notes regularly, but we don't mind. You must understand that it is necessary for us to test Chinese ability to track and observe our movements." The Soviets almost certainly viewed publication of the Chinese note as partly intended to get them to stop their penetrations of China's airspace. They did not comply. On 26 September, a Soviet high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft penetrated deep into west China. Along-the-border reconnaissance also continued, and on 11 November three Soviet heavy jet bombers reconnoitered almost all of the Sino-Soviet-Mongolian border.

Brezhnev's public and private remarks in the fall of 1968 underscored his obsession with the China problem. In early October he reportedly offered to ease the shortage of barracks for Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia by sarcastically suggesting to Dubcek that he make room by sending the Czech

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army to the Chinese border. He attacked the "Mao group" publicly in his 12 November speech to the Polish party congress, as he had been attacking it in speeches since the advent of the Cultural Revolution, but in this one he no longer pretended to see "progressive forces" in the CCP.

B. Chen Pao Battle and Subsequent Threat Campaign

1. Skirmishes of 2 and 15 March 1969

Prior to and after the 2 March 1969 Chinese ambush of a Soviet border guard detachment on Chen Pao (Damanskiy) Island on the frozen Ussuri, the Soviets confined their activity to patrolling and to small-scale firefights.

Chi Li Chin No-Shooting Incident of 1967



Photo, released by Soviet news agency Novosti, said to show Soviet border guards in light coats scuffling with "intruding" Chinese near Kirkinskiy Island (Chi Li Chin).

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Chen Pao, and the islands immediately north and south of it, Chi Li Chin (Kirkinskiy) and Ka Po Tzu (Buyan), had been the scene of sporadic hand-to-hand combat since January 1967. The area became particularly tense as a result of Cultural Revolution excesses such as the 17 December 1967 incident when Chinese civilians went to the middle of the frozen Ussuri and demanded that the deep-water channel should be the border. Soviet blocking action led to a pushing-and-shoving incident. In 1968, in the same area, the Soviets disarmed the commander of the local (Kung Ssu) border post. Subsequently, in another incident in the area, the Chinese surrounded Soviet border guards and seized their captain, who was freed only after "resolute action" by the Soviet guards. Marshal Grechko later told Indian officials that there had been 1200 "clashes" between Chinese and Soviet border guards in 1968 alone and that in every case they had resulted from Chinese probing actions into Soviet territory. It is probable that most of these "clashes" were no-shooting encounters, such as the 5 January 1968 incident in which Soviet armored cars ran over and killed four Chinese civilians engaged in an anti-Soviet demonstration on the ice near Chi Li Chin. Some shooting, however, may have occurred.

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Chen Pao No-Shooting Incident of 23 January 1969



Photo, released by Soviet news agency Novosti, said to show Chinese using their rifles as clubs on Damanskiy (Chen Pao).

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Beginning in 1969, the Chen Pao confrontation intensified. In January, the commander of the Chinese post at nearby Kung Ssu refused to withdraw his patrol from the island, and the ensuing rifle-swinging skirmish increased tension. The Soviets, who provided almost all of the detailed accounts of the clashes, claimed that in this skirmish, the Chinese post commander ordered his patrol to strike his counterpart, Lt. Strelnikov, and put him "out of action." (Pravda, 12 March 1969) Threats to use force were exchanged on 6 February and Strelnikov was again warned. But no shooting was reported until the Chinese ambushed his unit.

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Chen Pao Confrontation of 6 February 1969



Photo published in *Peking People's Daily*, 15 March 1969.

Caption states that "Our frontier guards carried out, by means of reasoning, a frontal struggle with Soviet frontier troops who had intruded into the area of our Chen Pao Island. They were at a loss for arguments, and had no alternative but to withdraw their armored vehicles. But the little chieftan of the Soviet revisionist frontier troops (fifth from left) continued his unreasonable quarreling with our frontier guards." The Soviet officer apparently is patrol-leader, Lt. Strelnikov, who was the first to be killed in the Chinese ambush of 2 March.

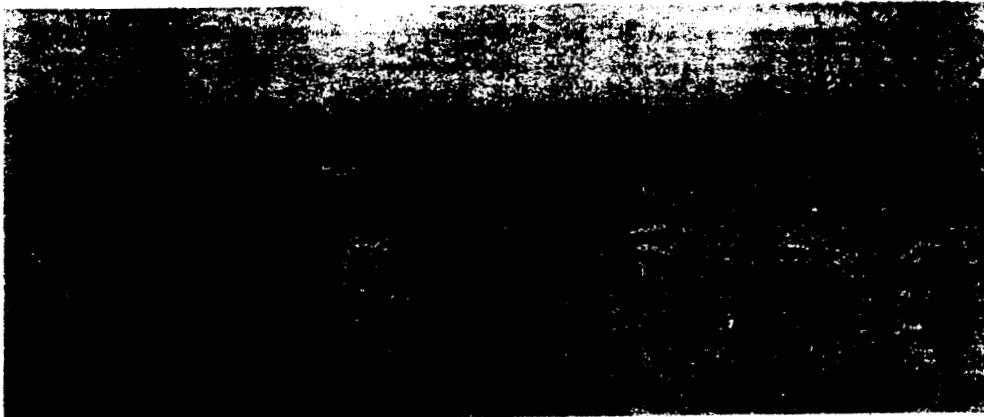
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On 2 March, Chinese border guards with the help of regular PLA forces skillfully ambushed Strelnikov's unit on the ice near Chen Pao, killing him and 30 Soviets in the subsequent skirmish. The Soviets described the ambush as follows. A group of Chinese near Chen Pao arranged themselves in two frontal rows and appeared to be unarmed. When they were about 20 feet from Strelnikov's advancing group, the first row scattered to the side to allow the second row of Chinese to pull submachineguns from under their coats and open point-blank fire on the Russians. Strelnikov and six of his men were killed outright. At the same time, from hidden foxholes on Chen Pao on the Soviet right flank, some 300 Chinese opened fire, catching

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the other part of the Soviet group by surprise. Thereafter, another Soviet border guard unit moved up and engaged the entrenched Chinese.

Chen Pao Ambush of 2 March 1969



FASS photo said to show Soviet border guards approaching Chinese troops on Da Nien Shih (Chen Pao) just before the firing started. Also said to have been taken by a soldier subsequently killed in the clash.

For the first time in a Sino-Soviet border clash, the Chinese used mortars and grenade-launchers and even "anti-tank guns," according to the Soviets. In size and in its premeditated nature, "It differs from all previous minor and medium conflicts that occurred earlier on the Soviet-Chinese frontier." (Soviet Foreign Ministry Press Department Account, 7 March 1969) Finally, by bringing up Soviet mobile reserves, the Chinese were driven off the island.

claimed that "123" (of about 300) Chinese had been killed.

The 2 March attack had been a Chinese initiative in the form of a well-conceived and well-executed ambush. This is suggested by the moral outrage infusing the entire Soviet public commentary, by the fact that the Russians supplied almost all of the details, by the hasty nature of flight

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arrangements for the investigation group dispatched from Moscow, and by the fact that the Russians broke precedent, publishing their protest on a patrol encounter for the first time in the border dispute.

The question arises whether the ambush was Peking-directed or whether the commander of the Shenyang Military Region acted on his own under a general order to use force if necessary to sustain the Chinese right to patrol on Chen Pao. Hand-to-hand combat in the previous winter months had developed a strong hatred among the Chinese border guards for Lt. Strelnikov: "They maliciously hated the courageous frontier officer and more than once threatened him with physical violence." (Moscow Trud, 9 March 1969) But their animus against him probably was not sufficient to cause a breach of discipline at the border post level or at the Regional command level. It is more likely that the ambush was directly ordered by Peking. [Redacted]

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The interpretation presented here of an ambush pre-planned with full knowledge of the central leadership in Peking is slightly weakened by the emergency nature of two VIP Chinese air force transport flights to the closest air-field, 200 miles west of Chen Pao, on 3 and 4 March. They may have carried officers whose mission was to investigate the reason for the clash and to report back to Peking. Soviet VIP flights to the area were hastily arranged [Redacted]

[Redacted] There is no evidence of comparable value to use in determining the purpose of the Chinese VIP flights. It is likely, however, that even a pre-planned ambush directed from Peking would still require on-the-spot investigation by a higher authority.

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In the event, the Chinese leadership had to accept a very bad international press. The ambush party had shot 19 prisoners they had taken on the island and bayoneted some, mutilating their bodies; the Soviets published pictures of the bodies, so mutilated. The fact that the Soviets published their note first (3 March 1969), the fact that the Soviets provided almost all of the details of the ambush, and the fact that the Chinese were embarrassed by the publicity--their note seems to have been hastily contrived and they were angry about publication of the Soviets' "so-called 'note of protest'"--reflected no original plan to exploit the ambush in open materials.

The Chinese clearly had not anticipated Soviet publication of Moscow's protest note, and upon its publication, took at least two days to start building a case of counterclaims. Two days after the battle, the Chinese printed a map (Peking People's Daily, 4 March 1969) showing Chen Pao (Damanskiy), Chi Li Chin (Kirkinskiy), and Ka Po Tzu (Buyan) clearly on the Chinese side of the main deepwater channel. But on 11 March, they had to reprint the map, adding new commentary to make a stronger legal argument. They also initiated, but took care to control, demonstrations against the Soviet embassy. But for the most part, they were defensive in their statements and by 13 March, [redacted] the Chinese charge was trying to determine the exact nature of French press reporting on the incident--reporting which tended to be pro-Soviet, with most of the information and photos coming from Soviet sources.

On the domestic scene, the immediate reaction of the Chinese suggested that the ambush had not been intended to galvanize the populace to produce more for "war preparedness." It took the leadership several days to realize the potential of the clash for harnessing anti-Soviet energies to production. Even then--that is, when on 6 March the People's Daily carried the first hint of a desire to link production with "war preparations"--the idea of inducing a contrived war fever had not fully developed. It was to become a major policy much later, in the summer. The first authoritative editorial, on 4 March, did not mention "war preparations" and was directed primarily toward Moscow.

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The editorial seemed to be intended to tone down the threatening aspect of Deputy Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei's warning of 3 March. He had warned that "if" the Russians continued to provoke "incidents, you will certainly receive resolute counterblows from the Chinese people." The editorial, coming after one more day of leadership consideration, spoke more vaguely of "severe punishment" and introduced a line used against the U.S., namely, that Peking will never attack without provocation, and only after being attacked would Peking counterattack. (People's Daily - Liberation Army Daily joint editorial of 4 March 1969) This was the first time that the no-first-attack principle had been applied by China to its dispute with the USSR, and it reflected increased concern among the Chinese leaders that the Russians might use the Chen Pao incident as reason for a big attack. However, this new concern only temporarily prevented the Chinese from sending out patrols in other border sectors. The no-first-attack principle provided them with a means of informing Moscow that military action would continue to be limited to small-scale patrolling and that, therefore, there was no reason for the Soviets to launch a big attack.

Mao's purpose was not to attain a victory for internal use or to blacken the Soviet image internationally, but rather to assert his claim to the island. In wiping out a Soviet border guard detachment, he gambled that the Russians would not escalate either by launching a big ground-force or conventional air attack or by attacking with nuclears. He apparently hoped that the Russians would not respond at all militarily because the Chinese claim to Chen Pao was so clearcut and had been implicitly conceded in the 1964 talks. He and his colleagues apparently believed that if there were to be any counterattack at all, most likely the Soviets would use small border units. He was right about the level of retaliation.

The Soviet leaders indeed conceived of subsequent retaliation in terms of a limited small-unit conventional punitive exercise. They retaliated at the same level relative to the initial Chinese ambush. But their superiority in armament enabled them to retaliate in more than equal measure in the second Chen Pao battle. Particularly

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with the use of artillery and tanks, they retaliated in such a way as to disabuse Mao of the idea that they could be kept off Chen Pao by force.

The second Chen Pao battle developed because the Soviets acted to show Mao that they would not stop patrolling on the island. They flaunted their presence there, landing a helicopter just east of the island on 4 March and in subsequent days sending armed personnel carriers onto Chen Pao. Mao refused to retreat from this challenge. On 12 March, at a meeting of representatives at the border, a Chinese officer of the big Hu Tou post (about 40 miles south of Chen Pao) read an "instruction from Chairman Mao" demanding that the Soviets stay off or face a new firefight. On 12 March also, a Soviet reconnaissance aircraft reported seeing truck convoys totaling some 70 vehicles in the border area not far from the island moving up forces. This was preparation for another Chinese attack to clear the island. Then, on 13 March, the Chinese declared in a note to Moscow that since the first engagement, the Soviets almost daily had been intruding into "Chinese territory on Chen Pao."

The Soviet leadership decided to hit hard at Chinese forces.

Directed that KGB border guards be placed on Chen Pao in white camouflage clothing and while it was dark to avoid observation. This was to be a Soviet border guard counterambush. On 15 March, the first Chinese detachment on Chen Pao was cut down in the ambush, and in the course of the day-long battle, in which Soviet tanks were used, "several hundred" Chinese were killed. The evidence indicates that this was the biggest defeat for Chinese border units since skirmishes began with the Soviets. Subsequent overhead photography confirms the Chinese complaint that Soviet forces used "artillery fire" (Chinese Foreign Ministry Note of 15 March 1969) and the Soviet assertion that a "mighty rain of artillery" came down on Chinese positions. (Pravda, 17 March 1969)

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Chen Pao Island (Damanskiy)



Photo published in *Peking People's Daily*, 21 March 1969.

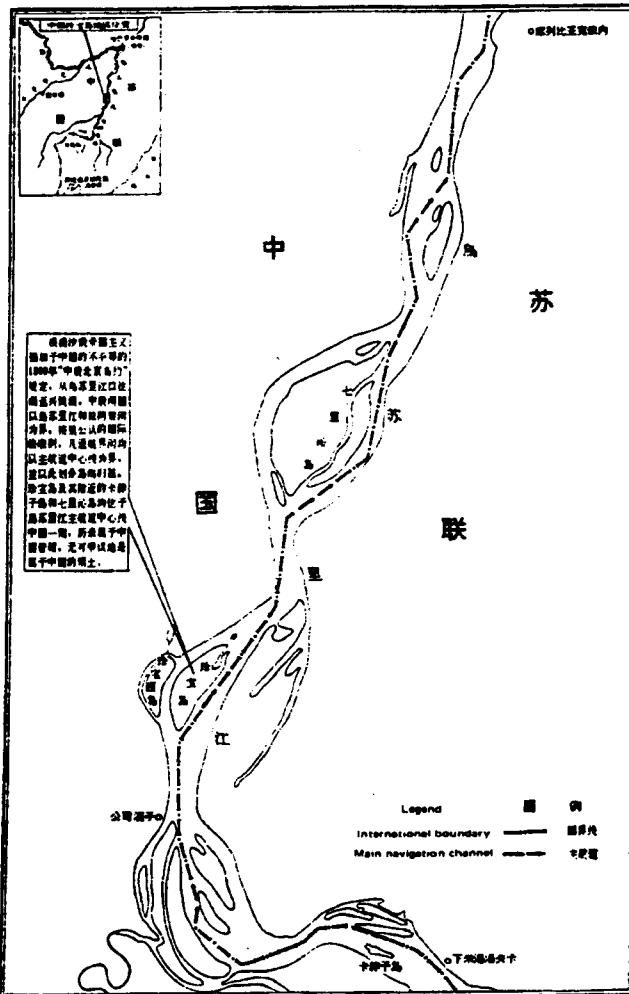
Caption states that "four Soviet tanks" are on the Chinese inlet to the west of Chen Pao on 15 March.

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The Chinese reacted with even more concern and greater care than they had reacted after the smaller first encounter. Their note of 15 March was less threatening than earlier notes, omitting previous threats of retribution, and more troubled, complaining that the Soviets have "continued to" use artillery and tanks and that, "The incident is expanding." They did not again launch demonstrations before the Soviet embassy. They did not mention their casualties, which the Russians claimed were "several hundred." In short, they had taken a beating in the field and had to retreat, temporarily.

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Chen Pao Island (Damanskiy)



Scene of 2 March 1969 Chinese ambush and 15 March Chinese rout.

Map, printed in *Peking People's Daily*, 15 March 1969, shows disputed Chi Li Chin Island (Kirkinskiy) to the north and Ka Po Tzu Island (Buyan) to the south. Area is about 140 miles south of Khabarovsk on the Ussuri River.

Caption states that according to the 1860 Treaty of Peking, the border is the Ussuri, and that international law fixes the main navigation channel as the central line.

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Subsequently, Mao refused to acknowledge defeat. At the Ninth CCP Congress in April, he and Lin made a point of praising a hero of Chen Pao. In his speech of 28 April at the Plenum immediately following the Congress, Mao made a basic statement on Chinese strategy. China, he said, would not attack across the border, would fight small battles at the border if necessary, and would fight on a large-scale only if the enemy made a big attack. In the latter case, the enemy would be impelled to fight in China's vast expanses, mired disadvantageously in a people's war.

When the other side strikes in at us, we will not strike back out at them. We do not strike out. I say we must not be provoked: if you invite me to go out, I will not go out. But if you attack in, I must deal with it. It is up to you whether to make a small attack or a big attack. A small attack will be an attack at the border. If a big attack is made, I suggest several areas should be opened out for it. China is not a small land. He will not get any advantages. In my view, he will not be able to come in. We want the whole world to realize that our fight is both just and in our favor. If he comes in, I see it as more favorable to us. It will not only justify our fight but will also make the fight easier and more favorable to us by plunging him into the encirclement of the people. As to things like airplanes, tanks, and armored cars, the experience we have just now gone through proves that they can be dealt with.

In order to counter the impression that Chinese forces had been badly beaten during the second Chen Pao battle, People's Daily one day prior to Mao's speech printed a photograph of a Soviet tank allegedly knocked out by border guards on the island.

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Soviet Tank on Chen Pao Island (Damanskiy)



Photo published in Peking People's Daily 27 April 1969.

The Chinese paper states, in bold-face: "WE WILL NOT ATTACK UNLESS WE ARE ATTACKED. IF WE ARE ATTACKED, WE WILL CERTAINLY COUNTER-ATTACK." It continues: "Gone are the days when the Chinese people could be bullied. Whoever dares to do so will be thoroughly buried by Chinese people and the Chinese People's Liberation Army who are armed with Mao Tsetung Thought and have been tempered in the Great Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This Soviet tank, which intruded into China's territory on Chen Pao Island off Macao ICS and carried out armed provocations, is reduced to ashes under the resolute blows of the Chinese frontier guards."

Regarding the validity of the Chinese claim to Chen Pao, it is not only clearly on the Chinese side of the main channel, according to overhead photography, but also according to Col. General P.I. Zyryanov, the KGB border guards chief who led the Soviet delegation to the 1964 Peking talks. He claimed, during a talk with an American embassy official in Moscow on 4 June, that the navigable channel had changed its course so that it now flows between the Soviet side and the island. But he maintained that the border markers were still along the old channel, and the Soviets would see to it that they will remain until a re-survey by a joint commission.

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- 44 -

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## 2. Chinese Return to Chen Pao

The Chinese withdrew from Chen Pao, but they returned sometime after the second battle of 15 March. Fragmentary evidence suggests that the Soviets were still on Chen Pao on 17 March. On that day, "At twilight, the Chinese again opened mortar fire against Damanskiy Island." (Pravda, 18 March 1969) On 20 March, two Soviet journalists told American embassy officers in Moscow that further "fighting" (unspecified in nature) had occurred on the island on the 17th, but the situation had been quiet since then. They said the Chinese were "digging in" on their side of the river and that they probably were bringing reinforcements to the area. Also on 20 March, a Soviet broadcast to China claimed that "Now, as in the past, Damanskiy Island is defended by Soviet frontier guards."

Sometime between 20 March and 3 April, the Chinese may have put patrols back on Chen Pao. The situation in the two-week period seems to have changed, and by early April, the Soviets were complaining that Chinese were on the island. The evidence for this is in the Chinese Government Statement of 24 May 1969:

Reading from a prepared text, the Soviet frontier representative even brazenly threatened on April 3: 'The Soviet Union will not cease fire unless the Chinese Government holds negotiations with the Soviet Government, nor will it cease fire unless the Chinese withdraw from Damanskiy Island. (emphasis supplied)

There would be no reason for the Soviets to fire on the island if the Chinese were not on it. The Chinese later indicated that between 15 March and 6 June 1969,

the Soviet Government has directed its troops to continue firing with light and heavy machineguns, and heavy artillery, at China's Chen Pao Island and areas deep within Chinese territory. (Chinese Foreign Ministry Note of 6 June 1969)

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This firing, according to the Chinese, continued into the summer not only against Chen Pao, but also against Chi Li Chin Island (Kirkinskiy) immediately to the north. (Chinese Foreign Ministry Note of 19 August 1969) The Soviets privately stated that Chinese armed troops continued "periodically" to come out to Soviet islands, including Damanskiy. (Soviet Letter to Communist Party of Australia, 13 August 1969)

Chinese "On Chen Pao Island"



Photo published in the Peking People's Daily, 22 August 1969.

Sign reads: "Chen Pao Island" "Chinese frontier guards absolutely will not allow an invasion"

Caption states that "frontier guards are victoriously defending our sacred territory...day and night firmly defending it on Chen Pao Island..."

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-46-  
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They also stated that on 20 July, a large unit of Chinese troops went out to Kirkinskiy, dug trenches and erected fortifications, and concentrated forces on the Chinese bank opposite the big island. By early September, overhead photography indicated that the Chinese also had dug trenches on Chen Pao.

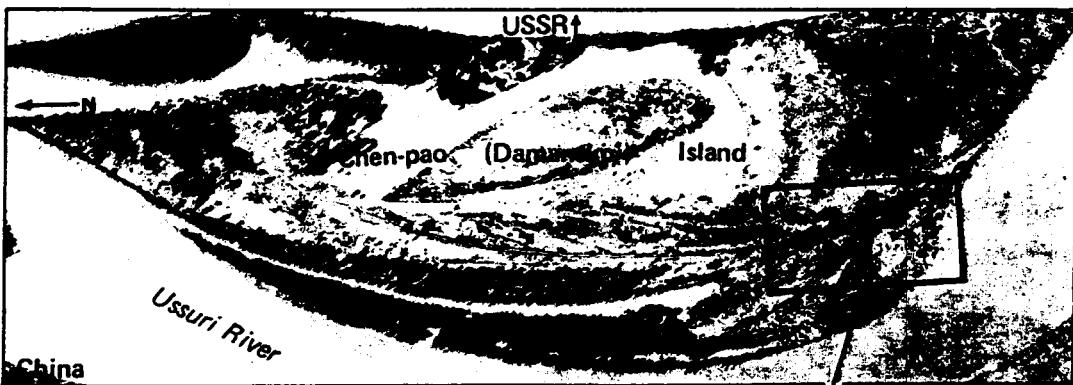
The main reason why the Soviets did not launch an attack to clear the Chinese off Chen Pao again was their concern that the clash would escalate, and would soon touch off clashes at other border tense-points. They preferred a political solution, and on 20 March, Soviet journalists were hinting at a formal proposal which would be sent to Peking asking for talks. They also began to downplay the importance of the island. Major General A.N. Anikushin of the Border Troops wrote in Soviet Russia on 19 March 1969 that there is "nothing attractive" about the island. "It has neither arable land nor woods. During the spring thaw the island is flooded with water." This was not a completely accurate description of Chen Pao and may have reflected a Soviet effort to justify a policy of no additional attacks against Chinese patrols on it.

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### Chinese Trenches on Chen Pao Island

Most of the main defensive trench lines in the photos were present in early September 1969. Peking has complained that the Soviets have been firing at Chen Pao since March 1969, particularly between June and July. The *Peking People's Daily* on 22 and 27 August 1969 carried photos of border guards said to be "on Chen Pao Island."



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-48-

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Photo published in *Peking People's Daily*, 21 March 1969.

Caption states that "This is an overall view of Chen Pao Island on our side of the main channel central line of the Ussuri River. The arrow points to the Ussuri main navigation channel. The triangle is the southern tip of our Chen Pao; the circle is the northern part of our Chen Pao."

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### 3. A Veiled Nuclear Threat

The Soviet leaders were not confident about what they might be confronted with in the aftermath of Chen Pao. They did not anticipate a big Chinese attack, but they had to prepare for the contingency. They took political and military precautions privately, and they warned the Chinese against an armed adventure publicly.

Politically, in a new departure in acknowledging troubles with Peking, they took the unprecedented action

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of seeking out and informing foreign governments of their version of the 2 March clash. In these demarches, they implied that they would use greater force (presumably including nuclears), if necessary. Keeping their formulations vague, their ambassadors stated privately that "if measures so far taken by the USSR did not halt Chinese provocations, then other measures would be necessary" (11 March demarche to the Canadian Prime Minister) and that the USSR would take "any steps necessary" to cope with the border situation (13 March demarche to the British Minister of State). The decision to take further steps, however, depended entirely on what the Chinese would dare to do on the border.

Militarily, they alerted their Strategic Rocket Forces in the Far East between 15 and 19 March. On 20 March, this high-alert status was terminated. At about the same time, [Redacted] mobile missile launchers in firing positions at the Drovyanaya site near the border southeast of Lake Baykal. Conventional forces near Chen Pao remained on alert status, but were not significantly reinforced. Air reconnaissance was greatly increased. Some flights penetrated Chinese airspace and were tracked by the Chinese closely, but they were never challenged. In line with their defensive posture, and strategy, the Chinese had seven airfields in the area, but all were too far from the border to mount defensive patrols along the line.

Public warnings to the Chinese referred to "a crushing rebuff" to "further" attempts to violate Soviet territory. (Soviet Foreign Ministry Note of 15 March) Less official but more outspoken media were used to make the threat to use nuclears, if necessary, explicit. In a broadcast to China on 15 March, Moscow's Radio Peace and Progress declared:

...are we afraid of Mao Tse-tung and his pawns, who are making a display of might on our border? ....The whole world knows that the main striking force of the Soviet Armed Forces is its rocket units.

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Peking later, on 2 June, complained about this threatening language. The Moscow broadcast compared the Soviet nuclear arsenal with the virtually non-existent Chinese nuclear-missile capability, and conjectured that if a Sino-Soviet contest of strength were to occur "Mao Tse-tung and his group...would certainly end up in utter defeat." In order to further demonstrate that Moscow was capable of using nuclears in the aftermath of Chen Pao, Red Star on 20 March called on Soviet missile troops to raise their combat readiness. Having made the threat clear to Peking, Moscow began to deny Western press reports about Soviet nuclear threats, and in a broadcast to Britain on 21 March, derided as a "false rumor" such action against China which is an invention of "British" propaganda.

. The Chinese leaders apparently were concerned, and they implied that the Brezhnev doctrine of "limited sovereignty" could also be applied to China, inasmuch as there was nothing to prevent the USSR from sending its troops "outside" the Communist community. (NCNA article of 22 March 1969) But they calculated correctly the degree of provocation that the Soviets would tolerate, and they were not so worried as to withdraw from Chen Pao.

#### 4. "Consultations" Again

On about 20 March, the Soviet leaders decided to pursue urgently a political solution to the border dispute. They asked the Chinese to hold talks. So intense was their preference for a political solution (over a military showdown) that they subjected themselves to unprecedented humiliation at the hands of Mao, despite their military superiority.

Their initial approach, privately and at the highest level, was disdainfully rebuffed. Kosygin on 21 March telephoned Peking, on the Sino-Soviet version of the "hot line," and asked to speak to Mao personally. His request was rejected, the Chinese complaining that it was "a great insult" to Mao. The Russians then tried to reach the Chinese leaders directly through their Peking embassy. This too failed.

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Immediately thereafter, the Chinese cut their two "hot line" links with Moscow. Leadership-to-leadership contact was broken. On 22 March, Peking informed Moscow that telephone communication was "unsuitable" because of bad relations. "If the Soviet Government had anything to say, it is asked to put it forward officially to the Chinese Government through diplomatic channels." (Memorandum quoted by Lin Piao in his Report to the Ninth CCP Congress, 1 April 1969)

The Soviet leaders complied, issuing a government statement requesting a resumption of the "consultations" held in Peking in 1964. Ever since 1964, the Chinese had insisted on "negotiations" sufficiently broad in scope to consider the entire question of Soviet ownership, and they repeated this position on 10 March. But the Soviet government statement of 29 March, referring to the earlier talks, seemed to limit the scope to agreeing about "a precise definition of individual sectors of the line" only. By refusing to discuss the larger question of ownership at all points, the Soviets indicated that they wanted talks on their terms only--that is, on terms which rejected the validity of Chinese claims. In early April, Soviet ambassadors made a new series of demarches in Western capitols, disseminating the 29 March government statement on their position regarding border talks.

First Deputy Foreign Minister V.V. Kuznetsov reflected the leadership's thinking on future incursions. He said that the 29 March statement indicated Moscow would respond "appropriately," presumably at the same level of a Chinese military probe. He said nothing about the presence or absence of Chinese troops on Chen Pao, depicting it as "worthless land" which was symbolic of the bigger territorial issue. His reasons for taking the Chinese threat "seriously" were that it is a nation of "700 million people" with a leadership that is following "an adventuristic" course.

Throughout April, the Chinese leaders showed some concern over the possibility of a Soviet attack and made deterrent statements. Chou En-lai told two visiting Japanese on 6 April that Peking depicts the USSR as practicing

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"social imperialism" because it "invades" other countries. He also said that talks should settle land-claim issues because "it is not good to try to achieve territorial settlement by armed invasion or military pressure." (emphasis supplied)

Deterrent statements also appeared in Lin Piao's report. On the matter of Soviet nuclear power, Lin used the defensive Maoist formulation that although enemies should be despised strategically, they should be taken "seriously" in tactical situations. Referring to the U.S. and the USSR, he called for war preparations--that is, for preparations against "their launching a war at an early date, preparations against their launching a conventional war, and against their launching a large scale nuclear war." Lin's statement, and his follow-on remark that "if they insist on fighting, we will keep them company and fight to the finish," were partly intended to remind the Soviets that the Chinese would not bow submissively under a major attack.

Lin's report to the congress also reflected an apparent hard-line decision to raise a precondition for talks. Lin specified that Moscow had refused "to recognize" the old treaties as unequal, implying that such a Soviet declaration must precede talks. On the matter of the scope of talks, he noted that the Russians were still trying to keep them limited to "consultations," and he implied a rejection of such limitation. But he did not reject talks absolutely.

That the Soviet leaders genuinely desired to defuse the entire border dispute was indicated by their urging the Chinese, in a note of 11 April, to arrive in Moscow within four days for "consultations." The urgency in which they pressed for talks exposed them to a taunt, very characteristic of Mao, which was delivered derisively in an unpublished Chinese note of 14 April. "We will give you a reply; please calm down a little and do not get excited." The Soviets then proposed that Peking send a delegation to Khabarovsk to resume the joint commission talks on border river navigation which had not been held since 1967. (Soviet note published 2 May 1969) The Chinese

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on 11 May finally answered by accepting these lower-level talks, but suggested that they be held one month later. They began on 18 June, the Chinese intention having been to disclose no fear by seeming too anxious to begin.

In the apparent view of the Soviet leaders, the Chinese were prepared to live with a tense border situation indefinitely. They tried to change the Chinese attitude, using military pressure and superior conventional arms at the border to hit Chinese forces with overwhelming firepower to dissuade them from making more incursions.

The Soviets desired, however, to retain flexibility. Brezhnev personally was careful not to become committed to shooting in all sectors and during every probe. He probably also did not want to be committed to an attack on Chen Pao.

[redacted] on or about 30 April, Brezhnev suggested an important change in the wording of a message to the Chinese. He felt that the message committed the Soviets "to shoot" every time the Chinese station troops on Soviet-claimed land, and he wanted it changed to leave "a loophole" or "a middle course" so that such incursions could be handled in "talks"--presumably the river navigation talks they were at the time requesting.

The flexible policy was apparent in the restraint used by Soviet border guards in a 2 May incident. On that day, [redacted] more than 300 Chinese military personnel took up positions about one mile inside Soviet territory on the Sinkiang border just north of the Dzungarian Gate near Zhalanashkol. They claimed to be protecting herdsmen. Soviet border guards apparently did not shoot, and even after Moscow sent a private "strict warning" on 4 May, they did not attack the Chinese salient. They informed some of their foreign Communist supporters in mid-May that the Chinese were refusing to negotiate a solution to the incursion and they insincerely requested advice. Kosygin on 19 May told [redacted] that, as of that date, the Chinese had not fallen back. Nor had the Chinese responded to a second protest note. Soviet policy was not to eject these Chinese by force immediately and not to publicize the incident immediately in

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the press because, according to a Foreign Ministry official, the USSR does not want to exacerbate the situation and was waiting for the Chinese "to come to their senses." Finally, on 28 May, the Chinese withdrew and even though they tried to embarrass the Russians on the eve of the world Communist conference, their protest note of 6 June did not complain of Soviet shooting during the incident.

The Chinese, however, did complain of smaller acts of harassment at various points along the border, and it appeared from the Chinese note that Soviet policy did not entirely rule out chasing Chinese back across the line in the west and off of the river islands in the east. Actual firing from the Soviet shore did occur, but, unlike the Chen Pao battles, it was intermittent and not concentrated. Peking claimed that some shots had been fired against Wu Pa Lao Island in the Amur near Hu Ma--where "one" Chinese border guard was killed on 15 May--and against Chen Pao. The biggest encounter, in Sinkiang near Yu Min at the Ta Szu Ti River on 10 June, was not a battle of Chen Pao proportions. As a test of borderland ownership, Chinese border guards supported a border crossing of herdsmen and their flocks. The Soviets brought up armored vehicles and killed one herdsman and captured another in a brief exchange of fire. The Chinese withdrew and quickly protested publicly (note of 10 June), partly to expose the Soviets to criticism at the world Communist conference in session at the time in Moscow.

Thus, while the Soviets pressed the Chinese for talks, keeping their reaction to border probes below the level of retaliation used at Chen Pao in March, they conceded no territory. They appraised the CCP congress as indicating that Mao had "retained his hold on power," according to one deputy foreign minister, and believed that China would remain adventuristic "so long as Mao is alive," according to one Foreign Ministry China specialist. They informed the Soviet populace of the pressing reality of the Chinese threat. The Soviet leaders directly attacked Lin Piao as the man who ordered the ambush at Chen Pao (Pravda, 3 May 1969), indicating that Soviet troubles would not end should Mao's designated successor become China's top leader. Both Defense Minister Grechko and Warsaw Pact forces commander Yakubovskiy referred, on 9 May, to the "concern" aroused

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by the Maoist "adventuristic" policies. Politburo member Podgornyy in Mongolia warned, on 23 May, that an "unbridled anti-Soviet course is leading the leaders of China on an ever more dangerous path" and that any attempt to violate Soviet or Mongolian territory would be given a "shattering rebuff." But he declared a Soviet desire to settle problems by talks.

These statements and the border encounters were insufficiently alarming to impel the Chinese to accept talks. On the contrary, the Chinese kept the Russians waiting two months before replying to their March proposal for border "consultations." And when they did reply, in effect they laid down preconditions for talks.

The Chinese Government Statement of 24 May insisted that all treaties relating to the border must be "confirmed" as unequal and that the "entire" alignment of the boundary line must be negotiated. For the first time, the Chinese demanded openly and explicitly that a "new" equal treaty should be drawn up. It rejected the Soviet offer to "hold 'consultations' for 'clarification of individual sectors'" of the border.

The Statement also reflected the Chinese official view of the status quo, namely, that the Russians may not cross the main channel line, or they must withdraw if they have done so. Peking also insisted on an absolute no-shooting order. In the words of the Statement:

Each side ensures that it shall maintain the status quo of the boundary and not push forward by any means the line of actual control on the border, and that in sectors where a river forms the boundary, the frontier guards of its side shall not cross the central line of the main channel and of the main waterway; each side should ensure that it shall avert conflicts and that under no circumstances shall the frontier guards of its side fire at the other side; there should be no interference in the normal productive activities carried out by the border inhabitants of both sides according to habitual practices.

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To withdraw and to withhold firing would have deprived the Soviets of using their military force as leverage on Peking to enter talks. Soviet officials in Peking appraised the Statement as "hard" and as indicating that the Chinese were unwilling to start talking except under impossible conditions.

Nevertheless, the Statement reflected some anxiety on the part of the Chinese over a possible Soviet nuclear attack. For the first time publicly, Peking complained that Moscow had "brandished nuclear weapons at China." Although it claimed that the Chinese people will not be frightened by Moscow's "policy of nuclear blackmail," it added a new defense note to the deterrent statements made in March. Citing a Mao quotation, it declared:

As far as our own desire is concerned, we  
don't want to fight even for a single day.  
But if circumstances force us to fight, we  
can fight to the finish.

At the time, the Soviets were not publicly threatening the Chinese with nuclear weapons. Yet an NCNA report of 2 June listed Soviet nuclear threats--at least one seems to have been the 15 March Radio Peace and Progress threat, warmed over--claiming that Moscow was threatening to launch "all-out destructive nuclear counter-attacks" from ballistic missile units stationed at the lower Lake Baykal area and along the Sino-Mongolian border. The main intention seemed to have been to inflate and dramatize, for the purpose of intensifying internal "war preparations," the threat of war.

The Soviets did, however, make private statements which they probably intended would eventually be conveyed to the Chinese. Taking the form of a quasi-serious probe professedly to determine U.S. reactions, two senior Soviet officials--one, Kosygin's son-in-law, D.M. Gvishiani--expressed their opinion to Americans in Boston in early April that eventually it would be necessary for the USSR to destroy China's nuclear arsenal, even if this meant using nuclear weapons. Their view was that the time for such action was rapidly approaching. In June, an Izvestiya editor asked a U.S. official what the American response would be to a Soviet attack on China; he was told the U.S. was opposed

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to any such attack for any reason. In early July, a Soviet academician asked a Newsweek China specialist "What would be the Chinese people's reaction to a major Soviet attack on China?" His colleague, a Soviet journalist, told the reporter that the USSR "should, must, and can do something" about China, implying that in his opinion a major attack should be launched. This interview was later publicized.

The Chinese began to complain about threats of this nature for the first time publicly on 26 June. They referred to probes made by Soviets to officials in Western capitols. A NCNA report of 26 June 1969, for example, stated:

The US paper Christian Science Monitor on June 5 quoted 'reliable diplomatic sources' in Washington as disclosing that the Soviet revisionist renegade clique had even 'conversationally' made 'soundings' in 'Washington and other Western capitols,' asking them to prepare for 'the possibility of a nuclear war in the Far East.' ...

But the Chinese did not act, politically or military, as they would have, with crash mobilization and anxious demarches in Western capitols, if they had believed an attack was imminent.

A preemptive attack on Chinese nuclear facilities may have been proposed to the politburo in the period between early April and early July, but there is no evidence that it was. If the Soviet leadership had been seriously considering a plan to launch a preemptive air strike or a major ground-forces attack and, for this very reason, had to determine the nature of the prospective reaction of the other major nuclear power, the U.S., the probe would have come at a very high level. That is, it would have been directed to foreign premiers, ministers, and heads of state. It was at this level that Soviet ambassadors in March had made serious demarches.

Concern over China and its threat to border security strongly influenced Soviet tactics at the world Communist conference in Moscow in June. Brezhnev's attack on the

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Chinese in his speech of 7 June surprised delegates who had been led to believe that the conference would not be used as an anti-Chinese forum. It was the most detailed complaint against the Chinese, and Mao personally, made by any member of the Soviet leadership since the ouster of Khrushchev.

Brezhnev "categorically" rejected as "groundless" Peking's 24 May demand that Moscow recognize Chinese land claims. He described as "fabrications" Peking propaganda regarding a Soviet intention to attack China: The Soviets "have never attacked nor intend to attack anyone." Policy toward China, he said, is conceived in a "long-term perspective" because the "basic interests" of the two peoples coincide. He revealed that a reply was being prepared on the matter of negotiations, leaving the future to show whether Peking is "really eager to negotiate."

His speech set the tone of the Soviet Government Statement of 13 June, which proposed a resumption within two or three months of the 1964 border "consultations without any preconditions, of course." The Statement tried to support Soviet claims to Chen Pao by asserting that the "protocols" supplementing the Peking Treaty of 1860 show the border line, in the area of the disputed island, as having been "drawn directly along the Chinese bank." On the matter of Chinese efforts to contest land ownership by moving border guards in behind herdsmen and fishermen, on the west and east sectors, the Statement asked that Peking issue "orders" to border guards and civilians not to try to cross "under any pretexts whatsoever." The implication was that the Soviets would continue to use force, if necessary and at selected places, to expel intruders. Soviet ambassadors delivered the Statement to various foreign governments; in some cases (e.g., Rome) they warned against establishing formal relations with Peking, and in other cases (e.g., Washington) they warned against trying to exploit the border dispute.

Brezhnev's 7 June speech and the Statement carried forward the fundamental policy of using the "long-term perspective" to guide actions. This meant that Moscow intended to avoid a major war--a goal which in turn required

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no extreme action, such as a preemptive air strike against China's nuclear facilities. It impelled the leaders to pursue the long road to border negotiations. Both the speech and the Statement explicitly denied any intention to "attack anyone," reflecting the Kremlin's recognition that even a hypothetical attack was already being used by the Chinese and other opponents to demonstrate the aggressive nature of the USSR.

In sum, the politburo policy was to balance off the continuing long-term military preparations in border areas with the effort to open border negotiations. Meanwhile, the limited talks on rules for navigating in the border rivers opened on 18 June. These specialized talks tended to lessen tensions temporarily. On 25 June a Soviet embassy official in Peking reported that things were becoming much better for Russian diplomats there.

On 26 June, a Soviet Foreign Ministry official told [redacted] that at the Khabarovsk talks, [redacted] there have been "no harsh words" from the Chinese side. But he also made it clear that there had been no concessions, either. On the 27th, the Chinese charge in Moscow told [redacted] that Peking was approaching the Khabarovsk talks seriously and with no desire for polemics. By 4 July, however, the Soviets began to show signs of irritability. They described the talks as "without results" and as "similar to the U.S.-Chinese talks." They complained that the Chinese refused to "settle anything." They did not repeat what they had volunteered to American officials in late June--that Moscow would be willing to surrender Chen Pao and to accept the main-channel principle in the border rivers, if Peking would drop its demand for Hei Hsia Tzu and agree to a general border settlement.

The precise nature of the Chinese demands at the talks was later disseminated by the Soviets to various Communist parties in a secret letter. In the 13 August 1969 letter sent to the Australian party, the Soviets claimed that the Chinese wanted to discuss a redefinition of the entire border and tried to get the Russians to recognize existing treaties as unequal. According to the

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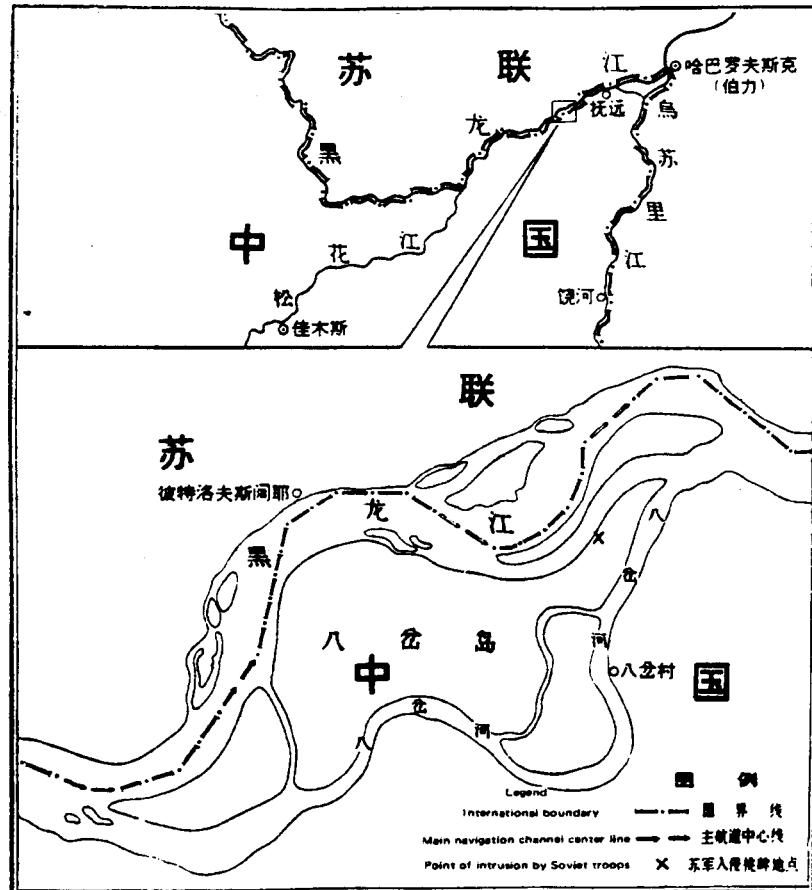
Soviets, the Chinese also demanded the transfer to China of the right to erect and to service river-bank and floating navigation markers in Soviet waters and "including Soviet islands." It was apparently with the intention of taking over this right that the Chinese ambushed Soviet river-marker workers during the river navigation talks.

On 8 July, when three Soviet river-marker workers landed on Pa Cha Island (Goldinskiy), near Fu Yuan on the Amur and about 60 miles west of Khabarovsk, to repair a toppled navigation marker, Chinese militia fired from "ambush" (Soviet version) at them, killing one and wounding the remaining two. A Soviet gunboat was called in; Soviet border guards later landed on the island, but the militiamen had withdrawn. The Chinese protest note claimed that Soviet border troops had initiated the action by landing on Pa Cha and, without provocation, opening fire, but it did not explain why the Soviets should have started shooting and why no Chinese were hit. The purpose of the ambush was implied in a new phrase appearing in the Chinese note, namely, that Peking demands that Moscow "in deed and not in mere words" stop encroaching on China's territory. The Soviet note said the Chinese were aware that the marker had always been serviced by Russians.

Pa Cha is clearly on the Chinese side of the main channel of the Amur and is similar to Chen Pao in that its river position affords a good case for Peking's claim of ownership. On 9 July, one day after the ambush, the Peking People's Daily carried a map showing the island to be on the Chinese side and marking the point of the Soviet landing. (Although Peking had complained of other crossings at various points along the border, the Chinese have shown only Chen Pao and Pa Cha in enlargements in their newspapers.) That Moscow recognizes its case for ownership to be weak is suggested by the failure of the Soviet note to claim ownership and by the strained formulation that their river-workers had landed on the "Soviet part" of Pa Cha. The Soviet note concluded with a phrase reminiscent of language used during Moscow's outrage over the Chen Pao ambush, warning that they would take "additional measures" against such Chinese actions.

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Pa Cha Island (Goldinskiy)



Scene of 8 July 1969 clash, located about 60 miles west of Khabarovsk on the Amur River, west of Fu Yuan.

Map printed in Peking People's Daily, 9 July 1969.

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The Soviets complained that the Chinese continued to send out fishermen, "acting on orders," to Soviet-claimed river areas. In June and July, the Soviets "turned out" 113 of them from Amur waters, according to a statement of a Khabarovsk official (Izvestiya, 13 July 1969)

The Soviet leadership continued to take the "long-term perspective" as enunciated by Brezhnev on 7 June. In practice, this meant keeping the Chinese involved in talks in order to retain the contact the Soviets had earlier found difficult to make, while denying them any territory. They tried to mobilize foreign Communist support by intensifying Brezhnev's attack on Mao, underscoring border encounters, and exaggerating the danger of the outbreak of a major war. They tried to isolate Peking among non-Communists by suggesting to at least four countries that diplomatic relations should not be established with China. They acted to make their relations with the U.S. and Bonn somewhat less tense, but warned that the West would be foolish to try to mollify the Chinese because such encouragement could lead to a major war in which many countries would be involved.

Gromyko's 10 July speech to the Supreme Soviet was conciliatory toward the U.S.--for example, he said that Moscow was ready for SALT--but vituperative toward China. In his warning to Peking, he indicated that Moscow would continue to meet Chinese border probes at a level below nuclear or large-scale retaliation, but still sufficiently strong to hurt the border guards. Speaking in the context of retaliation directed at the Chinese on Chen Pao, Gromyko said that these attempts to talk to the USSR in the language of threats, and even more in the language of arms, have met and will continue to meet an "appropriate rebuff." According to a Soviet embassy official in Laos, following Gromyko's speech, a Foreign Ministry directive was sent to Soviet embassies, emphasizing that the harsh retaliation against the Chinese "at the Ussuri"--i.e., at Chen Pao in March--was the only way to deal with the Chinese. Soviet ambassadors were informed, in effect, that further Chinese probes would be met in a way similar to the earlier use of conventional force.

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Gromyko then indicated that the Soviets not only wanted to keep the river navigation talks in session, but also hoped to begin broader negotiations. Implying a desire to keep the Khabarovsk talks from breaking down, he complained that Chinese statements--i.e., a demand to discuss whether the border is in the rivers--and the recent Pa Cha clash were creating impediments. He repeated the request for "consultations" to delimit certain sectors more precisely. He then suggested even more extensive "negotiations on a large range of questions dealing with relations," provided that these negotiations should not be "burdened with preliminary conditions."

When the Chinese representative in Khabarovsk indicated on 12 July that he would withdraw his delegation, the Soviets tried to prevent a walkout by immediately publicizing his intention. According to a Soviet Foreign Ministry official, the Chinese did walk out on the 12th, but returned on the 13th presumably after having received instructions from Peking. The Chinese leaders were showing some concern regarding a possible big war, but their "war preparations" campaign was moving along on a long-term basis far short of any crash mobilization. Nevertheless, they wanted to prevent any military escalation, and not only did they send their delegation back but also refrained from mounting demonstrations against the Soviet embassy in Peking following the Pa Cha clash. In late July, the Chinese charge in Moscow reflected Peking's concern with Soviet military deployments and was reported inquiring of another diplomat whether he believed the Soviets would begin a major war. He denied the Soviet complaint that the Chinese were breaking off the talks.

The Soviets were trying to "cool off Chinese hot-heads," as it was put in July to an American official by V. Likhachev, Chief of the Far East Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This meant no major Soviet military action, as was also implied in Brezhnev's article on 25 July in the journal, Problems of Peace and Socialism. He wrote that the USSR's position is "firm and resolute," but that "At the same time, our position is represented by calm and restraint. We will not allow the Soviet Union to be provoked into thoughtless acts of any kind."

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Kosygin told Finland's President Kekkonen during their talks in late July that China was ruled by a "military regime," that Chinese kidnappings of Soviet citizens could lead to "clashes," and that relations were "difficult." But he reportedly said nothing to suggest that the Russian leaders believed there would be a big war. Although their fundamental policy was to play for time, the Soviets were not predicting a reconciliation with Peking even after Mao died. Likhachev did not predict a rapid post-Mao rapprochement, and a Soviet lecturer in Leningrad on 19 July said that "there is no hope" for better relations "as long as Mao, or any of his clique, remain in power."

In early August, the Chinese still seemed prepared to live with a tense border situation indefinitely. They probably detected the unprecedented standdown of all Soviet air forces flights from 1 to 10 August, which apparently was intended to improve the general combat preparedness status of the air forces. Nevertheless, beginning in the second week of August, they challenged what they believed to have been a new Soviet encroachment on their territory in Sinkiang.

On 12 August, they began to move about 100 troops up to two hills, crossing the border near the Tieh Lieh Ko Te River, about six miles east of Zhalanashkol. On the 13th, these troops began to dig in and lay communication wire. The Soviet border unit commander ordered them to pull back, and when they refused, he ordered his unit to attack. Soviet armed personnel carriers cut off the Chinese by encirclement, and in the subsequent Soviet attack, "several dozen" Chinese were killed and two were captured. Both Soviet and Chinese versions of the clash indicate a severe defeat for the Chinese, and a Soviet official stated privately that he was "satisfied" with the victory.

The Chinese motive was to contest the mid-June Soviet action of building a road and setting up new markers on Chinese-claimed territory. The challenge does not seem to have been timed to take advantage of any relaxation in the

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wake of the 8 August agreement at Khabarovsk to handle river markers on certain sectors of the eastern waterways. The overall border situation was still tense. The Chinese strategy of contesting territory seemed to be to avoid concentrating their challenges into a small time-frame, apparently calculating that a concentration of probes in a short time period might provoke a big Soviet attack.

##### 5. A Credible Threat

Chinese military challenges were small in size, but they were all pointed toward disrupting Soviet jurisdiction. Ten years of patrol encounters and about four years of a gradual buildup of Soviet regular force levels near the border had not reduced the vigor of Mao's determination. Thus far the Soviet policy designed to end Chinese probing had failed because of certain self-imposed restraints.

The basic fact was that the Soviet leaders were very reluctant to get into a war with Communist China, and Mao apparently was aware of the fact. Air strikes or nuclear missile strikes against major targets in China, would not hurt the dispersed Chinese forces in the countryside sufficiently to end Chinese ability and will to resist. Politically, the losses would be irreversible for Moscow in the international Communist movement, and any hope of improving relations with China's post-Mao leadership would be destroyed. Moreover, a large-scale ground force invasion of China would create roughly similar political difficulties and difficult military problems.

On a smaller scale, an attack on China's nuclear facilities--i.e., a "surgical" strike to deprive Peking of its ability to produce nuclear weapons--would still leave border guards and PLA ground forces intact to continue a border war indefinitely. A "surgical" strike might temporarily destroy Peking's ability to produce nuclears but might not destroy all of the nuclears already in Chinese possession. The Soviets would have no assurance that afterward Mao would not retaliate with China's small nuclear capability--a retaliation which would be

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suicidal for the Chinese but not inconceivable. The Soviet leaders apparently believed that the most they could do without risking Chinese retaliation and without incurring huge political losses was to threaten to launch a big attack, but to go no further than threats to alarm the Chinese. But even these threats had to be carefully floated because they could be turned back against the Soviets as instances of bullying tactics.

The Soviets groped their way toward creating anxiety among the Chinese regarding Soviet intentions to strike at China. They began to hint publicly and privately about a possible major ground-forces attack, and privately only about a possible preemptive strike against China's nuclear facilities.

Regarding a possible ground-forces attack, the Soviet press between 6 and 19 August reminded the Chinese that in 1939, Soviet troops fought with the Mongolians to beat back the Japanese and had remained for some time thereafter "on Manchurian territory." More important, however, was the behind-the-scenes effort to use Communist and non-Communists to convey, through leaks, the contents of private Soviet communications. A deliberately planted message to the Chinese was given to a [redacted] journalist by the Chief of the China Section in the Academy of Sciences, who invited the [redacted] to dinner on 19 August to speak at length of the 1939 Soviet advance into Manchuria. The Soviet official said that border clashes with the Japanese had begun in 1931, but that in 1939, the Russians finally concluded that only an offensive operation against the Japanese would put an end to their incessant border probing. The journalist came away from the dinner believing that he had been supplied with a hint regarding the scale of a military operation that the Soviets might launch at some future time. On the same day, Pravda explicitly warned the Chinese that the 1939 attack should be a "lesson" to them.

The justification to take some new form of action against the Chinese was set forth in a private CPSU Central Committee letter to the Communist Party of Australia. The letter was delivered by a Soviet embassy officer in Canberra on 13 August, and in it the Soviets referred to the sequence

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of border clashes. The central point was a threat to act, in some unspecified way, to ensure that the Chinese protracted patrolling would end.

On the whole, there develops a situation where Peking, not risking to begin a big war, is calculating on turning the Soviet-Chinese frontier into a 'bleeding wound,' to create here endless armed conflicts which the Mao group tries to use for their speculative political aims....

Naturally, the Soviet Union cannot permit events to develop in such a way as to bring about protracted frontier war and will undertake additional measures to safeguard the interests of the Soviet people and the frontiers of our country.  
(emphasis supplied)

Most Australian Central Committee members who read the letter concluded that the Soviets were about to attack China in some way. The Chinese almost certainly were informed of the contents of the Soviet letter, probably by the head of the pro-Peking Communist Party in Australia who departed for Peking on 19 August. Furthermore, they no doubt received a copy of an Australian party letter of late August mailed to various Communist parties, stating that "a preemptive strike" should be rejected to permit negotiations.

In other private communications intended, in some indirect way, to be relayed to the Chinese, the Soviets explicitly hinted at a preemptive strike against China's nuclear facilities. On 18 August, B.N. Davydov, the second secretary of the Soviet embassy in Washington--probably a member of the Russian Intelligence Service--asked a State Department official how the U.S. would react to a Soviet attack which destroyed China's nuclear installations. (Davydov asked the same question of an American scholar in early September prior to the Kosygin-Chou meeting at a time when the Soviets were still engaged in the campaign of floating indirect threats.) This private communication was delivered at a time when Moscow was beginning

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to stress a new public theme, namely, that the Chinese were engaged in a feverish effort to develop nuclear weapons. (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 17 August and Pravda, 18 August 1969) The Chinese charge in Moscow informed an Asian diplomat on the 19th that Peking is concerned at signs that the USSR is preparing for a "major military engagement" with China in the near future. He reportedly displayed less confidence than previously in China's ability to handle a Soviet military action and referred to Peking's continuing readiness to negotiate with Moscow.

While continuing their threat campaign, the Soviets in effect professed innocence. By 22 August, Soviet officials began to deny that the USSR was preparing a land-forces or air attack against China. China-specialists M.S. Kapitsa and S.L. Tikhvinskiy, two veterans of China service and important Foreign Ministry advisers on Asia policy, told the abovementioned Canadian journalist that a Soviet preventive air strike against China was unimaginable. Kapitsa said that "It is something thought up by the Western press." On the matter of a ground-forces attack, Kapitsa said his guess was that border incidents would continue for a long time, some being serious, but that none of them would lead to a pocket war like the 1939 clash with the Japanese. The overall thrust of his argument was that the USSR had no need to attack since the Soviets are superior to China in nuclear and conventional striking power, will continue to be superior, and the Chinese know that if they triggered a major war, "we would wipe them out."

In this way, the Soviets, who had been trying to warn the Chinese that their border actions might now lead to war, denied to others that they had been engaging in such a warning campaign. Their theme was that only Peking could start a big war. For example, Gromyko during his talks [Redacted] between 23 and 25 August, stated that he had been assured by the Soviet military that Moscow has the capability to collapse the Chinese in 48 hours but that no one in Moscow believes that Mao or anyone else in China would be so mad as to open the way for such a counterattack. The USSR, he concluded, has "time." There apparently was no discussion of a possible Soviet-initiated war. In late August, Soviet diplomats in various foreign

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capitols privately disparaged Western press speculation concerning a Soviet preemptive air strike.

However, Peking's view of the public Soviet threats and Western speculation was one of deepening anxiety. The Chinese no doubt monitored the unprecedented Soviet air forces standdown between 2 and 10 August. They no doubt were aware, from Paris and Tokyo accounts of a 28 August Washington Post article attributing to American intelligence the view that the Soviets might launch an air attack against China's nuclear facilities in the northwest, that the Soviets seemed to be trying to establish a justification for such action. They probably had been informed by their charge in Paris that some French officials believed that the possibility of a Soviet air strike could not be entirely excluded.

Throughout August, there were signs of increasing anxiety. On 1 August, an NCNA report noted that the Soviets had set up "missile launching sites" in Soviet central Asia and had concentrated a large number of troops there--the first public reference to missile units in this sector of the border. (On 2 June, NCNA had claimed some such units had been established in the Trans Baykal area and along the "Chinese-Mongolian" border.) On 5 August a Chinese Communist official in Hong Kong, when asked privately if he thought that the USSR would make a preemptive strike against China's nuclear installations, replied that the USSR was "foolish enough" to take such action. [redacted]

[redacted] This command had been activated in two earlier crisis situations: in 1962 during the Sino-Indian clashes and in 1965-1966 during the India-Pakistan war when Peking was threatening to support the Pakistanis militarily, if necessary. The possibility of a Soviet "surprise attack" on China was underscored in a Nanking provincial broadcast of 28 August. This phrase was used in the 28 August Decree on Combat Readiness issued with particular reference to border-area commanders, reflecting in part the intention of Peking to make

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a show of nation-wide preparedness in order to deter a possible "surprise attack."

The Soviets tried to put the Chinese leaders under greater psychological pressure in early September by hinting more realistically at an intention to attack. The routine formulation that further border incursions would be met with a "decisive rebuff" (Pravda editorial of 28 August) was made more explicit than ever before publicly when Soviet Chief of Staff Marshal M. Zakharov discussed Soviet action in the Far East at the end of World War II in Izvestiya on 2 September. He hinted at a Soviet attack of greater size and deeper penetration into Manchuria than the small 1939 operation near Khalkin-Gol, entitling his article "An Instructive Lesson" and using graphic description.

The design of the [August 1945] Manchurian offensive operation was a simultaneous delivery of two converging strikes--with forces of the Trans Baykal Front from MPR territory and the First Far Eastern Front from the Primorye region--and a number of auxiliary blows converging on the center of Manchuria...

The defeat of [Japan's] Kwangtung Army convincingly and graphically testifies to the fact that any attempt to encroach on the Soviet Union's Far East frontier...from whatever direction it may come, will undoubtedly be doomed to failure. (emphasis supplied)

Relatively larger Soviet troop concentrations existed opposite Manchuria than elsewhere on the border, and the Soviets considered that the Chinese could hardly fail to detect this. As Defense Minister Grechko later put it [redacted], "The Chinese have the means to know or the movement of our motorized troops, our tank columns, and our infantry." Chou was later to complain to Kosygin about Soviet troop concentrations.

The Soviets were also a shade more explicit than they had been in August in hinting at what they might do

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to put an end to further border incursions. B.N. Sedov, second secretary of the Soviet embassy in Washington, told an American official on 4 September that the USSR would not strike at China's nuclear facilities. However, he did say that it might become necessary to give the Chinese "a more large-scale" local rebuff on the border. They privately suggested that Moscow would escalate a necessary future retaliation. On 4 September, the deputy editor of a Soviet journal, Berezhkov, sought out an American embassy official in Moscow to pass on the thinking of the "highest levels" (unspecified). He discounted "Western press" reports about a possible pre-emptive air strike, but stressed that if the Chinese persist on the border, the Soviets will use "new weapons" (unspecified) to demonstrate that Moscow does not intend to be "bled white". He did not deny nor assert that rockets or related weapons--such as tactical nuclears--might be used, declaring only that Moscow would inform the Chinese before "new weapons" were used. Berezhkov's statement reflected an effort to demonstrate to American officials the seriousness of the border conflict, the unthinkable nature of the pre-emptive strike alternative, and the determination of the Soviets to do something more on the border with their forces to impel the Chinese to disengage.

Publicity concerning a possible pre-emptive strike was hurting Moscow's political case against Peking. In early September, Kosygin added his disclaimer to that of other Soviet officials, depicting the idea to Foreign Minister Aichi as "total nonsense" contrived by the "Western press." These disclaimers pointed up the two-fold nature of the Soviet threat campaign against Peking. On the one hand, they were angered by one result of their own campaign, namely, the growing international image of Moscow as a bully about to strike an inferior military power. On the other hand, they were determined to sustain that kind of imagery in the eyes of the Chinese, refusing to reduce psychological pressure on them.

Chinese nervousness regarding a possible Soviet "surprise attack," already visible in August, increased in September. It continued even after the 11 September Kosygin meeting with Chou En-lai at the Peking airport --a meeting solicited by the Soviet premier in an unpublished letter to Chou on 4 September, one day before Kosygin

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left for Ho Chi Minh's funeral in Hanoi. The Kosygin-Chou meeting was a retreat for Mao. Mao had refused to accept leader-to-leader contacts since he had met with Kosygin in Peking in February 1965, and now all he could do to conceal his retreat was to treat the Soviet premier imperiously.

At the meeting at the Peking airport, Kosygin's main concern was to warn Chou that border tension was now "dangerous" and that talks were necessary to relax the tension. His request for restoration of government, party, and economic relations was a secondary matter; it was subsequently rejected by Mao.

Kosygin provided the Chinese with an ostensible, or procedural, reason for accepting talks. He made a small concession when he told Chou that the USSR was now willing to discuss some of the "basic" border issues in addition to certain changes in border alignment. Chou then made a concession by not asking for preconditions to hold talks--that is, he did not demand that Moscow "recognize" the unequal nature of the old treaties. These concessions were reflected in Soviet and Chinese published statements in early October.

Kosygin also provided the Chinese with a far more important reason for accepting talks. Although Chou complained about the "heavy troop concentrations" on the Soviet side, Kosygin apparently did not promise to pull troops back from the border. When Kosygin briefed [redacted] officials on his meeting with Chou, one official reported that Kosygin's remarks had slight overtones of a threat: either China would accept a disengagement and talks immediately, or else. It is conceivable that when Kosygin told Chou of the "dangers" of border skirmishes, he warned Chou that Moscow would take "additional measures" in the event of a new clash. Such a warning, even though vague, would help to explain Chou's tentative agreement to disengage by keeping Chinese troops in place: Chou said, "Where you are there you shall remain, and the same applies to us." With the probable exception of Chen Pao and nearby islands, Chinese patrolling apparently had ceased, and on 22 September, KGB headquarters affirmed that on the border "there is nothing special there, as usual."

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Evidence indicates that Kosygin attained from Chou an assurance that Peking was not planning military action on the border and a tentative agreement to avoid conflicts and to begin talks. The modalities for disengagement at the border, which was to become a central issue, probably were worked out, on the Soviet side, by aides to marshals Grechko and Zakharov. The marshals were involved with the "draft response to Chou En-lai" that was mentioned on 22 September in a highly sensitive source. Moscow informed Peking on 26 September that it had given "strict instructions" to its border guards to avoid clashes and that it had taken certain "measures" (unspecified) to preserve the border status quo. Peking replied on 6 October that "similar measures had been taken by the Chinese side," apparently in regard to a cease patrolling order. In addition, Moscow unilaterally agreed "to provide substantially broader possibilities for the economic activity of the Chinese population in the Soviet frontier zone," apparently in regard to allowing fishing and woodcutting to resume in river island areas.

Following the 11 September meeting, the Soviets temporarily ceased their public polemics, kept their forces on the border, and waited for Kosygin's words to take effect with Mao and the CCP politburo. They kept the Chinese under pressure pending a formal acceptance of the tentative agreement reached with Chou. Following the 13 August rout of the Chinese near the Dzungarian Gate in Sinkiang, the Soviets moved more ground forces units including tanks to that general border area, and the gradual filling out of forces continued at other sectors along the border.

Indications that the Chinese felt themselves to be in danger from some form of Soviet attack appeared in various statements and actions between the 11 September summit and Peking's 7 October formal acceptance of negotiations.

The Chinese were aware by late August that some American officials believed that a Soviet preemptive strike was a possibility. They directed their officials to survey seriously the views of other Western governments. One Chinese official on 15 September asked a [redacted] contact

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what he knew about the Soviet military buildup and the possibility that the Soviets might "attack China." He went on to say that Peking does not know whether the Soviets will attack, but "if they try to blitz us, they will be devoured." Apparently acting under a general directive, on about the same date, Chinese diplomats in Moscow and Tirana asked [redacted] "Do you believe the Soviets are going to attack China?", and a Chinese embassy officer in Algiers stated that precautions had been taken against any Soviet attempt to destroy Chinese "nuclear weapons." The Chinese ambassador in Paris complained on 19 September that the Russians were now "threatening China with nuclear war" and have moved their best rocket expert to the border as commander of the armed forces in the area. This was a reference to the long-time Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Strategic Missile Forces, General V.F. Tolubko, who had used historical analogy to warn the Chinese about a Soviet "sudden and decisive strike" in Red Star on 6 August--an article which revealed that he had been appointed as Commander of Forces, Far Eastern Military District.

While these soundings were made in foreign capitols, the Chinese leaders took some preliminary measures designed in part to deter the Soviets and in part to prepare against the possibility of some form of attack. They did not begin a crash mobilization effort. The populace was not told that a war was imminent, but rather that the best way to prepare for a future war was to begin now. They were also asked not to fear a "surprise attack" because the Soviets were engaged in "nuclear blackmail." The only defense offered up against Soviet threats--such as an earlier threat by Chief of Staff Zakharov that Soviet rocket forces were able to deliver an "unexpected blow against the enemy"--was Mao's noisy evasion that any Soviet or U.S. attack on China would lead to destruction of the aggressor. (Peking People's Daily article of 12 September 1969) Mao's own preparedness slogan of 16 September called for international pressure to deter the Russians:

People of the world, unite and oppose any war of aggression launched by imperialism or social-imperialism, especially one in which atom bombs are used as weapons! If such a war

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breaks out, the people of the world should use revolutionary war to eliminate the war of aggression, and preparations should be made right now! (emphasis supplied)

On the same day, Victor Louis, an agent of the Soviet state, published an article in the London Evening News hinting at a possible Soviet attack on "Lop Nor, China's nuclear center." Chinese contingency planning was reflected in various ways, including the placing of Yang Tze River merchant shipping under local military control--an action taken in 1950 just prior to Chinese intervention in Korea and in 1962 when Peking feared a Nationalist invasion from Taiwan. Aside from internal political reasons, one goal of war preparations was deterrence, as witness the remark of politburo member Chen Po-ta on 10 October that the more China prepared for war, the "less likely" it was that the Soviets would attack.

In short, the Soviet leaders had threatened the Chinese in a campaign sufficiently realistic to establish a credible possibility that they would attack. The 7 October Chinese Government Statement formally accepting negotiations explicitly stated:

Should a handful of war maniacs dare to raid China's strategic sites in defiance of world condemnation, that will be war, that will be aggression, and the 700 million Chinese people will rise up in resistance and use revolutionary war to eliminate the war of aggression.

Peking's fears of a preemptive Soviet strike never before had been expressed so directly and authoritatively as in this statement. On balance, the Chinese leaders probably believed that an attack was not imminent; their preparations were preliminary and not a crash mobilization. But they could not entirely rule out the possibility. Their uncertainty impelled them to try to get the Soviets to agree formally that they would not attack. They also tried to get the Soviets to pull back their troops, inasmuch as they now feared that another skirmish might finally provoke the Russians to retaliate on a big scale. These two military matters were made the first order of business in the Peking negotiations.

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## 6. Chinese Desist and Negotiate

- The next step following success in stopping Mao's probing policy was to compel the Chinese to reach an agreement as rapidly as possible. In contrast to the situation during the talks of 1964, the Soviets had established a threatening military presence on the border with a conventional and tactical-nuclear capability. In addition, the Soviets continued a low-key background campaign, vaguely threatening a possible preemptive air strike against Peking's nuclear installations.

The prospect of such a strike loomed larger in Chinese calculations than it should have, given the Soviet leaders' reluctance to ignite a protracted war by going beyond retaliation at the border. There is no evidence that any Soviet politburo member was advocating preemption as a course of action. The evidence is that they were--and will continue to be, no doubt--worried about China as a future nuclear power. But the policy has been to avoid a general or border war and to try to defuse the situation by tying the Chinese up in negotiations. In mid-October, Kosygin again disparaged preemption as "a lie" [redacted] and on the 27th Brezhnev referred publicly to "our presence of mind and restraint" in defending national security.

Permitting the low-level, low-key threat campaign to continue was another matter. The Chinese continued to worry. China's ambassador to France on 24 October showed concern about the possibility of preemption--a feature of the campaign. Regarding the specifics of Chinese concern, Deputy Foreign Minister Lo Kuei-po complained [redacted] on 28 October that the Chinese began to negotiate because they had been pressured by threats of surprise attack, by Soviet conventional weapons, and by threats of renewed border troubles. At the same time, Soviet diplomats in Peking privately conceded that the main Chinese motive in accepting negotiations was anxiety over Soviet military intentions.

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Since the start of negotiations in Peking at the deputy foreign minister level on 20 October, the Soviets have been pressing for an overall agreement which finally settles the alignment of Chinese-disputed sections, including the river islands. They are prepared to concede Chen Pao and other islands, but not Hei Hsia Tzu opposite Khabarovsk. Before such an overall agreement is reached, they refuse to withdraw from the Chinese-disputed sections. As a Soviet official in Peking put it, any Soviet withdrawal first would amount to acknowledging China's claims before real negotiations began.

Chinese negotiations strategy is not pointed toward a final settlement, but rather centers on the need to attain a military agreement. Moscow has complained that at the start of negotiations, the Chinese delegation put forward a draft "Agreement on Provisional Measures" and made the signing of the Agreement a pre-condition for beginning real negotiations. More precisely, the Chinese demanded a Soviet pullback of no less than 15 to 20 miles away from most areas in dispute. "Areas in dispute" presumably now include points at which firefights occurred in Sinkiang in 1969, although Chinese maps have shown the border at these points as demarcated and fixed. "Areas in dispute" also include the Man Chou Li strip and the Pamirs, and the Chinese now demand a Soviet pullback of 60 miles in that mountain region. Disputed areas presumably also include most of the islands in the eastern rivers. A Soviet pullback of 15 to 20 miles from their bank at points where islands are contested would mean not only withdrawal from the island of Hei Hsia Tzu, but also complete military evacuation of Khabarovsk. The improbability of such a Soviet concession strongly suggests that the Chinese have raised demands which are not intended for real bargaining purposes. This position and Peking's domestically disseminated view that no one should put any faith in these negotiations because they will not solve the border dispute suggests that Mao does not want a border alignment agreement except under conditions of major Soviet political and territorial concessions.

Just as Moscow in previous years tried to weaken NATO by proposing a nonaggression pact with the West, Peking has also proposed as a "provisional measure" an

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agreement on a mutual pledge not to attack each other with armed forces, including nuclear weapons. The Soviet negotiators countered this by proposing a nonaggression pact to be concluded "simultaneously" with the signing of a final border treaty, but the Chinese did not respond. As for Peking's additional demand that Soviet forces should be withdrawn from Mongolia, the Soviets rejected it. In short, the Soviets refuse to withdraw and seem determined to maintain military pressure on the Chinese to force them to settle the border dispute.

The only agreement Chou attained from Kosygin at their summit was that of disengagement, or avoiding conflicts, at the border. He apparently did not attain a withdrawal guarantee. Following the meeting, however, the Chinese "further proposed" that disengagement must mean withdrawal. (Chinese Government Statement of 7 October 1969) Their definition of maintaining the status quo in fact meant a Soviet pullback. Since it is the Chinese and not the Soviets who dispute the present line, most of the "disputed" areas are now under Soviet jurisdiction. An agreement to withdraw troops from these areas would, therefore, primarily involve unilateral Soviet concessions.

While the deadlock continued on these issues, both sides moved some forces to the border areas, including the disputed areas, such as Chen Pao. Minor incidents have been occurring. For example, the Soviets complained that on 12 October one of their vessels which had run aground in the middle reaches of the Amur was "fired upon" by the Chinese from the bank, and on 16 November, KGB headquarters reported that Moslems who had crossed the border (presumably in Sinkiang) and had been sent back. The Chinese have continued trenching activity on their side of Chen Pao and certain other islands, and they may have troops permanently stationed there. The Soviet Foreign Ministry in February 1970 sent an unpublicized formal protest to Peking complaining that Chinese troops had been "trying" to land on some Soviet islands (unspecified), that this was a breach of the 11 September pledge Chou had made to Kosygin to keep Chinese troops in place, and that Peking was intent on provoking incidents. Other than warning of "possible grave consequences," the Soviets apparently did not specify that they would take any military action to bloc these Chinese efforts.

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C. Prospects

The Soviet leaders believe that the only feasible course for the near future is to sustain the talks while keeping Peking under military pressure. The most authoritative statements of this view were made by Brezhnev himself. Publicly, he referred to talks as "the only way" of solving disputes with Peking. (Speech of 27 October 1967) Privately, he told the mid-December 1969 plenum that the Chinese have a concept of time which takes some getting used to, that the USSR must continue as long as necessary to try to reach a border settlement, that the very "fact" that negotiations exist is important, and that although Soviet armed forces could easily handle any military confrontations, it is "more important" to try to reach a settlement--even if it is only a "partial local settlement" of the border issue. Statements implying high-level support for this policy were made by various officials, including Chief of Staff Zakharov, who said that the Soviet people are resolved "not to permit new bloodshed in the future" in the aftermath of World War II. (Pravda Ukrainskaya, 16 January 1970) Politburo-member Kirilenko told the French Communist Party Congress in early February that Moscow's China policy is based on the "long-term perspective."

This policy would seem to rule out any greatly increased military pressure on the Chinese, such as a pre-emptive air strike or a limited ground attack in Northern China. Such action would be used only in retaliation for a big Chinese incursion, and then might also include the use of tactical nuclear weapons. The Soviets intend to be firm in the talks where their interests are directly affected, as witness their refusal to concede Hei Hsia Tzu or the Chinese-claimed area of the Pamirs in the west. However, as one Soviet official in Peking admitted when the talks began, any settlement would have to be based on Moscow's recognition of the main navigational channel as the border at most river points.

The view of the Chinese leaders, however, is that under the existing degree of Soviet military pressure, they can still avoid making any concessions beyond continuing to

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negotiate. They are somewhat less nervous than they were in September 1969. Chou En-lai cited an instance of what he said was Soviet pressure, only to insist on an unyielding attitude.

Instead of striving to reach an agreement with China, the USSR has actually stepped up her military pressure along the borders of Heilungkiang, Sinkiang, and Inner Mongolia and has established the Central Asia Military District [announced in early November 1969] in an attempt to compel us 'to sign a treaty under pressure.' We are definitely not afraid. No matter how many armies she sends we will not be intimidated.  
- (Chou En-lai Report on the Current International Situation for CCP Cadres, 29 November 1969)

A Chinese official told a visitor to Peking in early November 1969 that China was prepared for long drawn-out negotiations, and having negotiated with Chiang Kai-shek for "four years," she would if necessary negotiate that long with the Soviets. It is unlikely that the Chinese will try to provoke a breakdown of the talks as they had done in 1964, when Mao made his provocative statement to the Japanese at a time when talks were still underway. Unlike the situation in 1964, the Chinese view talks now as vital to their national security and do not seem to be prepared to risk the consequences of a complete breakdown.

The apparent intention of both the Soviets and the Chinese is to sustain the talks, for years if necessary. They may be interrupted for several months on occasion and the leading negotiators may be changed, but both sides have indicated that they consider continuation to be a matter of importance. Negotiator Kuznetsov reportedly said that since 1 March 1970, the negotiations are being conducted in two committees: a legal committee dealing with border issues (presumably matters of alignment of the border) and a military committee dealing with "withdrawal." In late March, Chou En-lai reportedly told Pakistan's ambassador that the Soviets had made a "token" withdrawal of their forces at "a

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couple of points"--a probable reference to Soviet failure to displace Chinese troops on Chen Pao and several other river islands and to Soviet toleration of "economic activities" by Chinese civilians on some islands. Chou also stated that the Chinese were waiting for new signs of Moscow's abandoning military pressure.

Minor incidents almost certainly will continue, however. The Soviets apparently do not now intend to use military force to clear the Chinese off the river islands they have returned to. However, they may revise their apparent reluctance at some future time, using artillery at least to harass the Chinese.

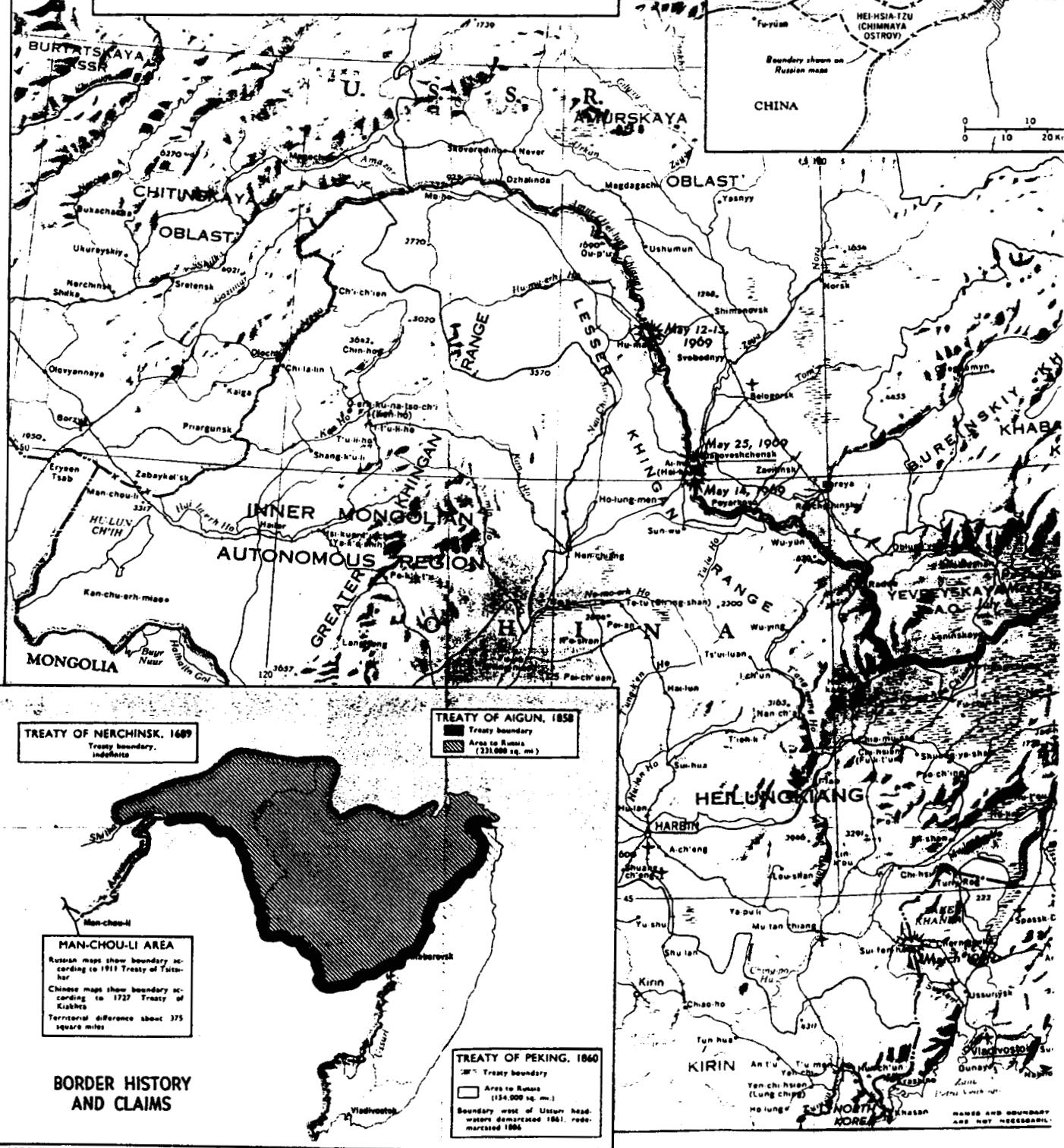
# CHINA-S.S.R. BORDER: EASTERN SECTOR

Border Incident  
 - - - International boundary  
 - - - International boundary, in dispute  
 - - - Internal administrative boundary  
 Birobidzhan Internal administrative center

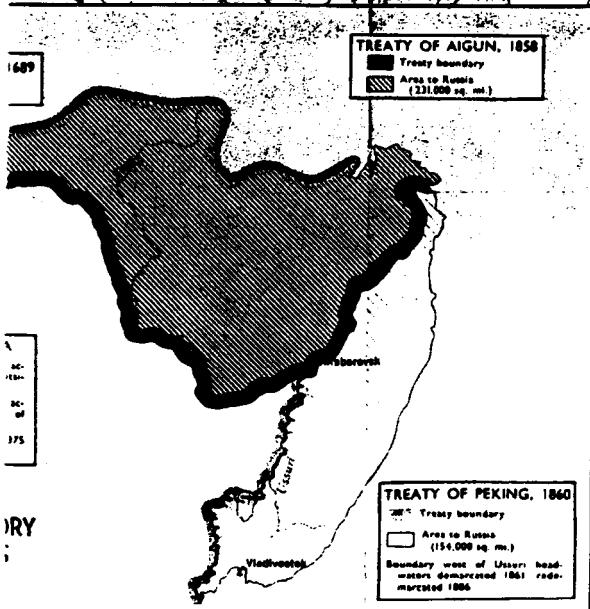
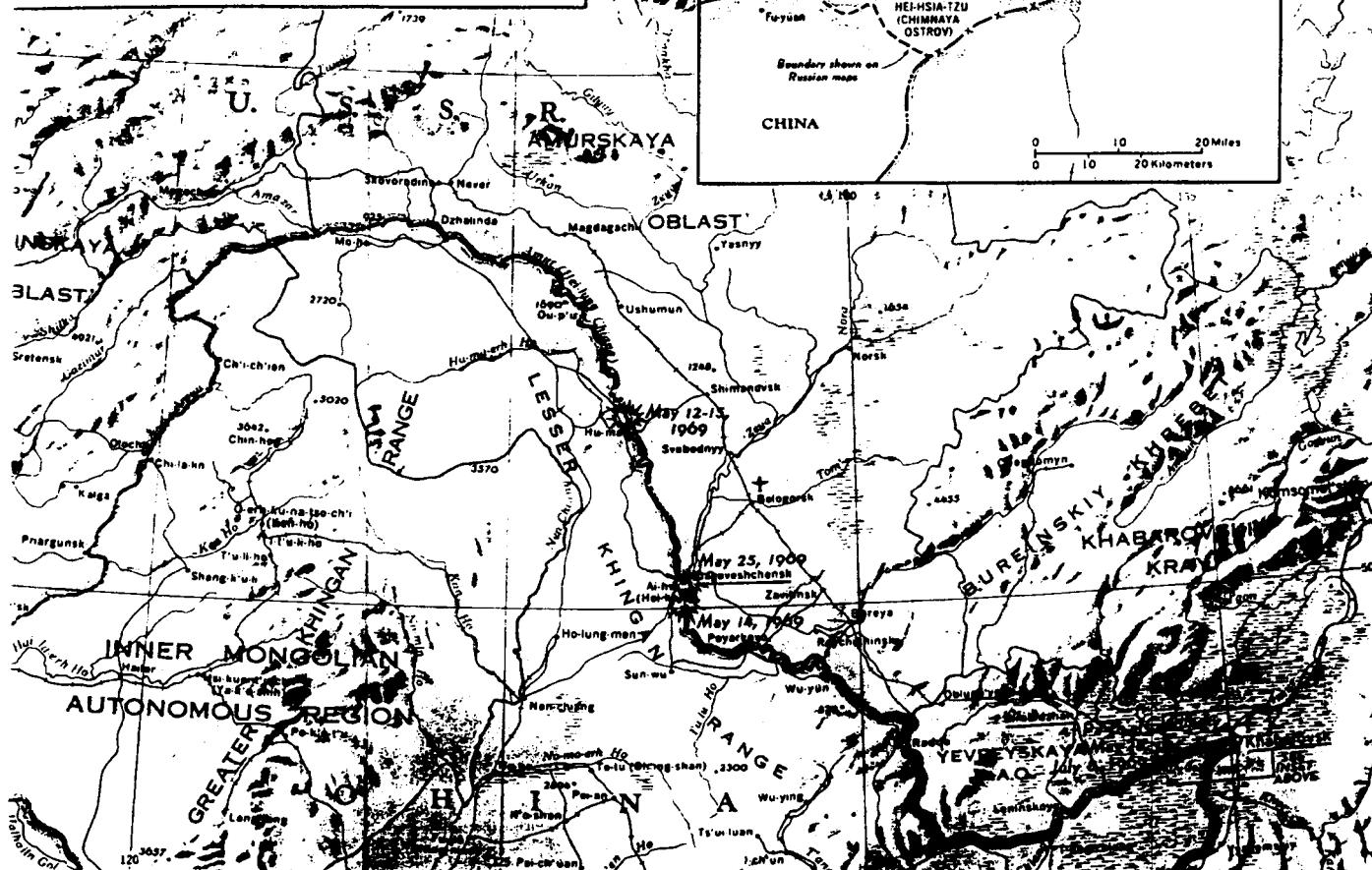
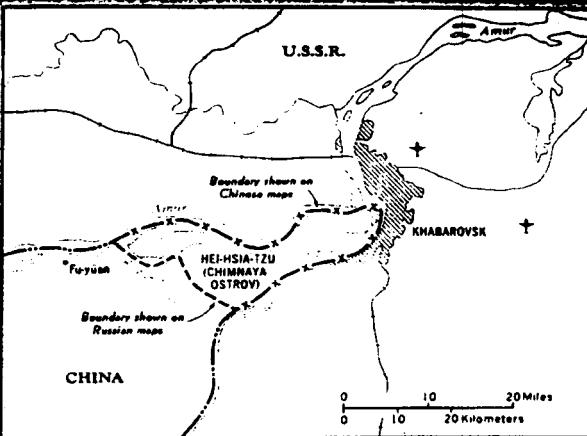
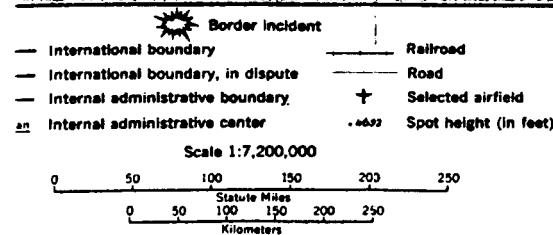
Railroad  
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Scale 1:7,200,000

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 Statute Miles  
 0 50 100 150 200 250  
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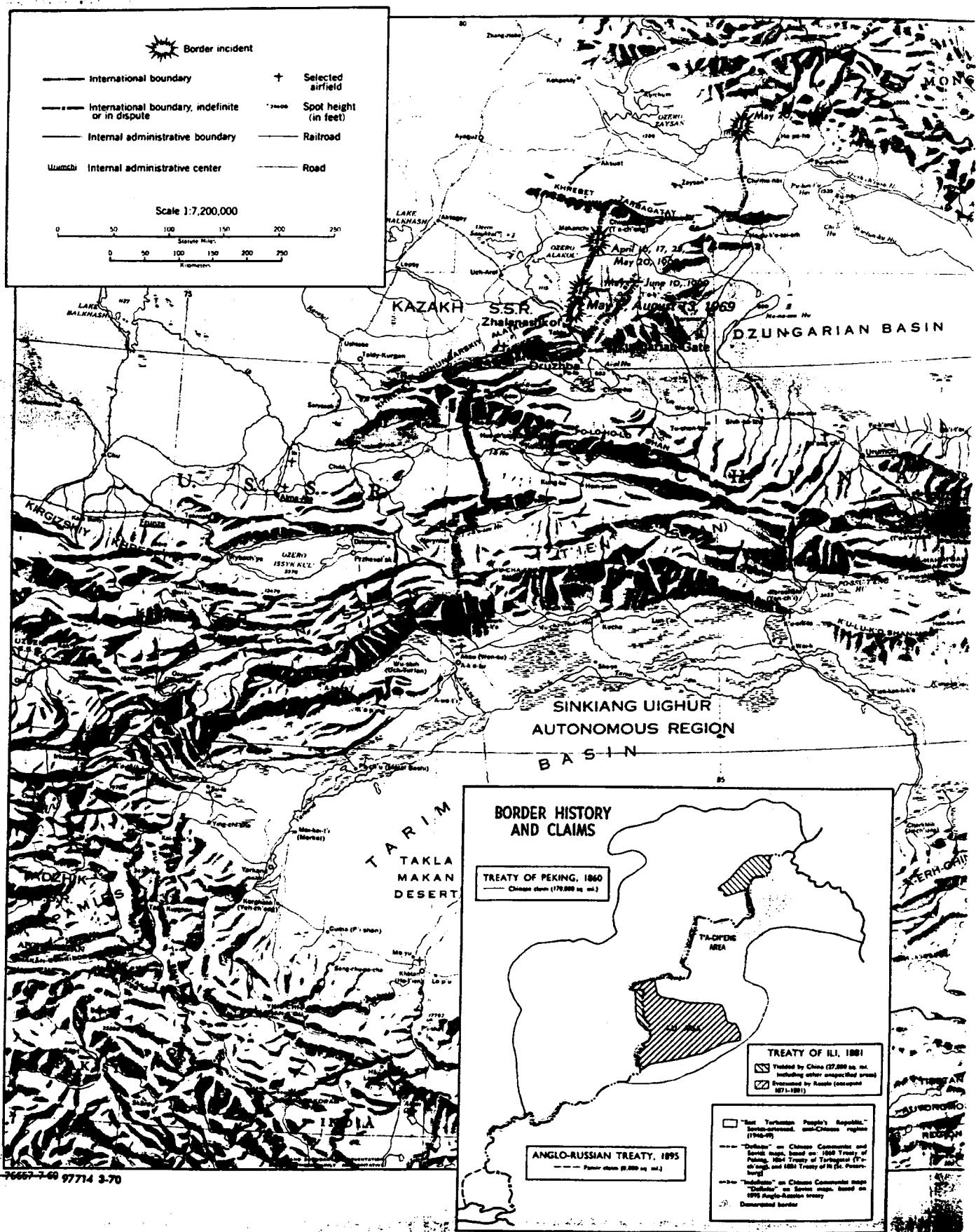


# CHINA-S.S.R. BORDER: EASTERN SECTOR



NAMES AND BOUNDARY REPRESENTATION ARE NOT NECESSARILY AUTHORITATIVE

## CHINA-U.S.S.R. BORDER: WESTERN SECTOR



76657 7-60 97714 3-70

## CHINA-U.S.S.R. BORDER: WESTERN SECTOR

Border incident

try + Selected airfield

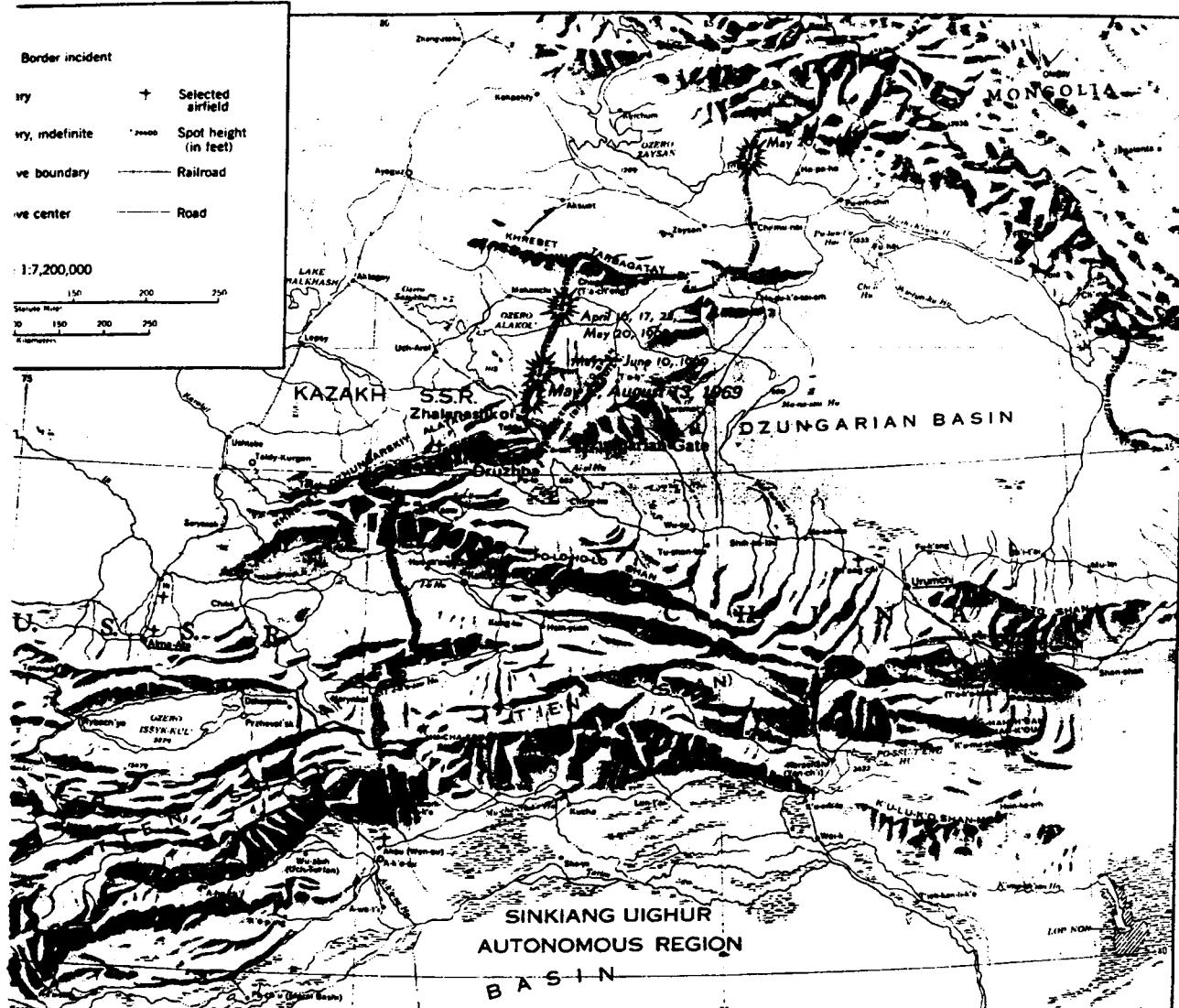
try, indefinite + Spot height (in feet)

ve boundary — Railroad

ive center — Road

1:7,200,000

Scale: Miles  
0 150 200 250 Kilometers  
0 150 200 250



### BORDER HISTORY AND CLAIMS

#### TREATY OF PEKING, 1860

Chinese claim (170,000 sq. mi.)

#### TREATY OF ILI, 1861

- Taken by China (27,000 sq. mi., including other unoccupied areas)
- Enclosed by Russia (concessions 1871-1881)

#### ANGLO-RUSSIAN TREATY, 1856

Poor claim (8,000 sq. mi.)

#### "Turf" Turkistan People's Republic, 1944-49

- "Turf" on Chinese Communist side, established 1944 Treaty of Tashkent (Turan), 1945 Treaty of Tashkent (Turan), 1947 and 1951 Treaty of Tashkent (Turan).
- "Turf" on Chinese Communist side, established 1945 Treaty of Tashkent (Turan), 1950 Anglo-Russian treaty.

Occupied border



~~Top Secret~~



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