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THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE: BACKGROUND, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE MARCH 1969 CLASHES

Thomas W. Robinson

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PREFACE

The nature, extent, and persistence of difficulties between the two Communist giants, the USSR and the Chinese People's Republic, continue to concern military planners and policymakers in the U.S. government. Strategic plans, force structure, and deployments are all likely to be affected by the outcome of the Sino-Soviet confrontation. This Memorandum analyzes one aspect of the contention between the two -- the origin and development of Sino-Soviet border problems -- and focuses on two military clashes that took place at an isolated border outpost in March 1969. This study is to be followed by a companion piece dealing with border incidents and negotiations after March 1969, which will also consider the place of the border dispute in overall Sino-Soviet problems and its larger implications for U.S. military policy.

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SUMMARY

This Memorandum summarizes the role of the border conflict in overall Sino-Soviet relations; describes in detail the two military clashes on an island in the Ussuri River in March 1969; analyzes plausible reasons for their occurrence; sets them in the context of Soviet and Chinese foreign policy and domestic politics; and speculates on future developments as the two states move into renewed negotiations over the border.

Although the March 2 and 15 clashes at Damansky Island were the first instances of bloodshed between the two Communist powers, they culminated a stream of border incidents beginning in 1959 that had become a steady flow since 1966. Relations over the border have tended to parallel Sino-Soviet relations generally. Thus, in the decade after the founding of the Chinese People's Republic, relations were cordial. After 1960, when Sino-Soviet amity began to decline, border incidents began and increased in frequency. By 1963, open charges of border violations were being traded, and the two powers made an unsuccessful attempt to resolve the border dispute in secret negotiations in 1964. Border incidents resumed, spread in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, and became an increasing irritant in relations. By late 1968, the stage was set for more serious clashes.

What is at issue in the border dispute can be seen from the arguments put forth by both sides in the 1964 negotiations. The Chinese were mainly after an ideological victory. Their foremost claim was that all pre-1917 treaties were "unequal" and hence invalid. They demanded that the Soviets first acknowledge the inequality of the old treaties; then the Chinese were willing to renegotiate the boundary using the technical geographical data of the very same treaties. The Soviets were willing to sign a new treaty as long as the old treaties were not scrapped first. Though this disagreement was the main stumbling block, there were other substantive points of contention. The Soviets based their case on the official map of the 1860 Treaty of Peking, whose scale the Chinese considered much too small to determine precise boundary locations. For their part, the Chinese adhered to

the Thalweg principle in international law, whereby riverine boundaries must follow the deepest point of the channel, and claimed that most of the currently Soviet riverine islands were rightfully Chinese. The Soviets rejected the Thalweg principle. Thus, the negotiations foundered in October 1964 and were not reopened until late 1969.

The disposition of military forces along and near the boundary had effected a rough balance, with Soviet advantages in equipment offsetting Chinese superiority in numbers of effectives. This accorded well with the relative importance of the border regions to the two powers. The Chinese had to maintain large forces in the Northeast region (Manchuria) because of its large population, major industry, and its proximity to Peking and to the Korean problem area. Inner Mongolia and Sinkiang were less important strategically and economically, and Chinese forces were widely scattered in those regions. The Soviets had a need to protect the Trans-Siberian rail artery, major cities, and air bases, all of which, for geographic and climatic reasons, lie close to the Chinese border. But Soviet industry, population, resources, and attention have always been concentrated in European Russia. Hence, while Soviet forces were grouped close to the Chinese border, they were relatively small and mobile. With the onset of the Cultural Revolution and deepening of the Sino-Soviet rift beginning in 1966, this traditional arrangement was broken. The Soviets began a systematic transfer of equipment and men to the Soviet Far East. Bases were built or expanded, troops sent into Mongolia, and nuclear-tipped rockets emplaced. The Chinese, preoccupied by Cultural Revolution disorders, political and administrative intervention by the Army, and the Vietnam war on their southern flank, could not respond in kind. The result was that the balance of military forces progressively tilted in the Russians' favor.

The stage was thus set for the violent outbreak that occurred at Damansky Island on March 2, 1969. According to the reconstruction this study was able to make, a Chinese contingent of about 300 troops ambushed a Russian patrol, killing 7 outright and 23 others in the battle that followed. When the Soviets rushed in reinforcements, they too were ambushed from prepared positions. The Chinese withdrew to

their own side when the forces became more equal. On March 15, a larger and longer engagement was fought at the same spot. In contrast to the former, this seems to have been a set-piece battle either instigated or initiated by the Russians for revenge. Tanks and artillery were used, resulting in much higher Chinese casualties and conversion of the island into a no-man's-land.

These incidents began a new phase in Sino-Soviet relations. Why the critical March 2 incident occurred is impossible to answer definitively, but the analysis considers explanations ranging from possible local initiatives and regional and national politics to the foreign policies of the two states. The first possibility, local initiative, is that military leadership in Moscow and Peking accorded much freedom to border post commanders, which might have combined with hardening military resolve in the months before March to produce the Damansky incident. It is also possible that the incident occurred by chance, although at least the Soviets seem to have taken care to regularize procedures so as to avoid violence. On the regional level, there is some evidence on the Chinese side of a power struggle or regional-central differences that might be related to the incident.

The national politics of the two states offer more promising possibilities. On the Chinese side, three alternatives present themselves. First, the rampant factionalism associated with the Cultural Revolution may have affected the making of foreign policy in the face of the growing border crisis. But the available literature does not record any debates among the leadership over how to cope with the Soviet border buildup. Another possibility is suggested by the curious turn that Chinese propaganda took toward the Soviet Union and the United States in late 1968: through October and November Chinese declaratory policy softened significantly, then suddenly reverted to an even harder stance than before. This may indicate a policy decision to strike or to provoke a clash at Damansky. Finally, there is some chance that Mao Tse-tung, wishing to divert attention from unpopular Cultural Revolution reforms, deliberately perpetrated the ambush. The resulting war scare would unify the populace behind the Maoist

leadership and also assure passage of the new (and much debated) Party constitution at the upcoming Ninth Party Congress.

As regards Soviet national politics, there are four possibilities, only two of which appear promising. Unlike the Chinese case, Soviet domestic issues were debated by policymakers who agreed on socio-political goals. Thus, there was no undue need to divert the citizenry's attention from domestic problems. Nor do there seem to have been factional differences in the Soviet leadership that could have led to initiation of the border incidents: jockeying for position between pro- and anti-Brezhnev forces was muted and did not result in any change of personnel. Two other possibilities hold more interest. Soviet propaganda about the border issue ceased after October 1968, although on all other issues the frequency, volume, and intensity of anti-Chinese propaganda did not vary. On the other hand, some military writers attempted to extend the "Brezhnev doctrine" (justifying intervention in states where the "gains of socialism" are threatened) to China, which prepared the theoretical way for Soviet military action. While this must be set in the context of Party-Army differences on a range of problems, the evidence shows that the Army sought to lead the Party on the China issue.

Foreign policy considerations provide further explanations. Peking, noting the ever more threatening Soviet border buildup, may have decided to draw a line beyond which it would not allow the Russians to pass. Damansky may have been that line. A related possibility is that the Chinese, sensing an impending Russian attack, decided to throw the Soviets off balance by a local attack against a weak spot. Finally, there is the "dragon's teeth" argument: Mao, in his final years as Chinese ruler, no doubt wished to immunize the Chinese people permanently against the Soviet revisionist virus. A well-planned and -propagandized incident would serve as the proper serum.

It is possible that the Russians too decided to draw the line about the same time and that an incident thus became inevitable. But while the Soviet arms buildup in the border regions and possibly

toughened border patrol orders lends credence to this explanation, it is not supported by other pronouncements, acts, or events in the foreign policy sphere. In fact, the border dispute with China was only one of several external issues confronting Soviet leaders, which in the months before the Damansky incident seemed to concern them no more than before.

Thus, though it is impossible to offer a definitive explanation for the March events on the basis of the available evidence, it is clear that the Chinese and Soviet actions at Damansky resulted from a complex interplay of forces. Actions at each level both influenced and were influenced by decisions and acts at the other levels. The March events began a new phase in Sino-Soviet relations in which the Russians, seizing the initiative, pursued a "dual strategy" of threats of violence and offers of compromise to bring the Chinese back to the negotiating table abandoned in 1964. After another series of border clashes and Soviet diplomatic trial balloons, the Chinese gave way. They agreed to reopen border talks in Peking in October 1969, and even dropped insisting that the Soviets admit the inequality of the old treaties before renegotiating a new one. Thus, the Damansky events may have marked a turning point in Sino-Soviet relations in the sense that a new border treaty and less openly unfriendly relations may follow. Even if the new negotiations fail, March 1969 may signify the nadir of Sino-Soviet relations and may have caused both states to resolve to prevent their differences from getting out of hand.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On the morning of March 2, 1969, an armed incident took place along the Sino-Soviet border on a disputed, usually uninhabited island in the Ussuri River. Soviet authorities admit several score of dead and injured and the Chinese mentioned an undetermined but high number of casualties. Another incident occurred at the same spot on March 14-15, and disturbances later spread along the length of the Sino-Soviet border. In late March, the Russians suggested renewed talks on river navigation along the border; the Chinese accepted this initiative and the two sides met in Khabarovsk on June 18. Each side blamed the other for the rapid deterioration in relations following March 2, and each staked out in advance negotiating positions on the border issue that appear to be irreconcilable.

A new phase in Sino-Soviet relations has thus begun. How and why did it begin? Will it end in large-scale war between these two major powers? What are the merits of the case on each side, and can we determine the facts in the border dispute? Finally, what is the most reasonable explanation for the outbreak of fighting? These questions will be considered if not definitively answered in this report. After first outlining the development of Sino-Soviet border relations to March 1969, the study describes the March 2 and March 15 clashes on Damansky Island. It then attempts to explain why these incidents occurred, examining local, regional, national, and international (as well as parametric) variables. The study concludes with a short essay on the implications of the Damansky incidents for future Sino-Soviet relations as a whole.

II. SINO-SOVIET BORDER RELATIONS TO MARCH 1969

THE BASIS OF THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE

The clash at Damansky Island¹ ushered in a new phase of Sino-Soviet relations, in which for the first time the threat of open war between the two Communist giants loomed large. It does not appear, however, that this particular border clash was unusual except in its violence. There had been other incidents, some even at the same spot, and though they apparently increased in frequency in the months immediately preceding March, border relations in general had reportedly been growing more tense for at least a decade. More important, the decline in amity with respect to the border closely paralleled the downward course of Sino-Soviet relations as a whole. Therefore it is necessary to present at least a cursory outline of the general Sino-Soviet dispute from 1956 to 1969.²

¹We use the Russian name of this island (and other disputed islands) rather than the Chinese name (Chenpao, "Treasure" Island), but this convention is for convenience only and does not reflect preference for one or the other side.

²In this study we have abstracted from a number of long-term parametric variables which, because of their constant presence, are difficult to specify as developmental factors (i.e., as influencing the history of Sino-Soviet relations since, say, 1956 and more particularly since 1964) or immediate background factors (i.e., elements which, as we discuss below, seem to have been the short-term causes of the two March incidents). Nonetheless, such parameters must be kept in mind because they have shaped historic Sino-Soviet relations and still affect the attitudes of Soviet and Chinese decisionmakers. Those parameters include: the ancient Chinese view of China as the "Middle Kingdom," that is, the center of the world around which all other states must revolve as satellites or tributaries; the historic Russian urge to expand into Siberia and its hinterland and to find outlets on the Pacific; Chinese awareness of periods of past weakness, exploitation, helplessness, and frustration; Chinese recollections of Stalinist manipulations of the Chinese Communist movement and Stalinist errors in the 1920s; the Russian view that the Soviet Union is the rightful hegemon in the world Communist movement and will not tolerate an attempt by China to challenge its preeminence; and the vague Russian fear of the "yellow peril."

Another set of factors relates to the way Great Powers (or self-perceived Great Powers) conduct their policies. Established Great

Overt Sino-Soviet difficulties are thought to have originated during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), held in February 1956, at which First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev read the secret Central Committee report on Stalin's "crimes."³ This started a train of events that led to the Hungarian Revolution later that year and caused the Chinese to look suspiciously on Soviet de-Stalinization efforts. From this point until late 1960 the two parties engaged in an increasingly pointed campaign of mutual criticism that came to include almost all topics of concern to the two parties, the international Communist movement, and international politics in general.⁴ A period of much more direct criticism began in 1960, when the Soviets, having earlier unilaterally denounced the "atomic bomb treaty" of 1957, now decided to call back the large number of economic, technical, and scientific specialists who had been aiding the Chinese for some years. This period, during which the two parties directly referred to each other for the first time as adversaries, lasted until the dismissal of Khrushchev in October 1964.⁵

Powers tend to be sensitive to challenges from aspiring Great Powers; competing Great Powers often find that intersecting spheres of influence and common boundaries become sites for conflict; a state that perceives general hostility from (or expresses hostility toward) the outer world often feels encircled; and a state acquiring the sinews of modern industrial might may be perceived as a threat to its neighbors, no matter what the state's actual policy or the real relation of forces is.

I am indebted to Professor Robert C. North for reminding me of their relevance to Sino-Soviet border developments.

³See especially Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 180-184; Wolfgang Leonhard, *The Kremlin Since Stalin* (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 167-192; and Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), Chaps. 1-7.

⁴Zagoria, Chaps. 8-17; G. F. Hudson, Richard Lowenthal, and Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York: Praeger, 1961); Michel Klochko, *Soviet Scientist in Red China* (New York: Praeger, 1963); Brzezinski, Chaps. 12 and 15; David Floyd, *Mao Against Khrushchev: A Short History of the Sino-Soviet Conflict* (New York: Praeger, 1963).

⁵See Alexander Dallin, Jonathan Harris, and Gray Hodnett (eds.), *Diversity in International Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of*

Its main features were a much more intense level of polemics, failure to agree on specific issues raised at a series of bilateral meetings between the two parties and at international Communist conferences, and the beginning of competition for the loyalty of other Communist parties, ruling and non-ruling, a competition that effectively split the movement. With Khrushchev's ouster, the Soviets (but not the Chinese) ceased open polemics and tried to outdo the Chinese through appeals to rationality rather than ideology. Competition for the favor of other parties continued, however, and the range of divisive issues broadened to include state as well as party issues.⁶ This situation continued to the beginning of the active phase of the Cultural Revolution, after the August 1966 plenum of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). From then to March 1969, Sino-Soviet relations shifted with the twists and turns of the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese used the Soviets as a *bête noire* and as a convenient lightning rod to direct energies away from insoluble domestic problems during times of high tension. For their part, the Soviets could not resist the tempting target presented by the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. They resumed and expanded their range of criticism and sought to gain points with other parties at Chinese expense.⁷

The Cultural Revolution profoundly affected China's foreign relations as well as national life. Chinese leaders launched an attack against followers of the "bourgeois reactionary line," purged the

Soviet Foreign Policy (New York: Praeger, 1968), Part XI, Chap. 2; Edward Crankshaw, *The New Cold War: Moscow vs. Peking* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963); Chu-yuan Cheng, *Economic Relations Between Peking and Moscow* (New York: Praeger, 1964); William Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1964), and *idem*, *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963).

⁶William Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-1965* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966); U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific, *Sino-Soviet Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965); and Leopold Labedz and G. R. Urban, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict* (London: The Bodley Head, 1965).

⁷The period has not yet been studied as a whole. But see T. W. Robinson, "Sino-Soviet Relations During the Cultural Revolution: The Red Guard Phase," unpublished MS.

party, and began to reconstruct it along presumably more Maoist lines. Naturally, this altered the character of the Sino-Soviet dispute and ushered in a new phase in Sino-Soviet relations, but the precise manifestations of the change, which might have been revealed at the Ninth CCP Congress in April 1969, were obscured in the wake of the border clashes a month earlier.

Both the frequency and severity of Sino-Soviet border difficulties parallel the decline in friendly relations between the two parties and states. Over several hundred years, border problems often occupied the forefront of Sino-Russian attention.⁸ But the post-1949 era is unique in that for the first time since the two peoples came into contact, a relatively strong, dynamic, and centralized Chinese state faced a Russian government with the same qualities. For nearly a decade after the formation of the Chinese People's Republic, border relations with the Soviet Union were amicable. The two states by and large lived up to the commitment to respect each other's territory that was formalized in a Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, signed in 1950. On that occasion, the two powers also signed agreements that gave the Soviets special rights: "joint-stock companies" for civil aviation, development of mineral resources in Sinkiang, and shipping; joint control of railways in Manchuria; and the use by the Soviet navy of bases in Port Arthur and Dairen.⁹

⁸ See, for instance, Klaus Mehnert, *Peking and Moscow* (New York: Putnam's, 1963), Chap. 10; Henry Wei, *China and Soviet Russia* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1956); Tien-fang Cheng, *A History of Sino-Russian Relations* (Washington, D.C.: The Public Affairs Press, 1957); Harry Schwartz, *Tsars, Mandarins, and Commissars: A History of Chinese-Russian Relations* (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1964); Victor A. Yakhontoff, *Russia and the Soviet Union in the Far East* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931). The Soviet view is summed up in M. S. Kapitsa, *Sovetsko-kitaiskie otnosheniia* (Soviet-Chinese Relations) (Moscow: State Publishing House for Political Literature, 1958), Part I, and Chiang Kai-shek's *Soviet Russia in China* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1957) puts forth the Chinese Nationalist (and, to some extent, the Communist) case.

⁹ The English texts of these treaties can be found in Max Beloff, *Soviet Policy in the Far East, 1944-1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 260-266. The Russian texts are reprinted in I. F. Kurdiukov *et al.*, *Sovetsko-kitaiskie otnosheniia, 1917-1957* (Moscow:

These treaties were modified, however, shortly thereafter: the joint stock companies were transferred to exclusive Chinese ownership in 1952 and the naval bases were returned in 1954 at the time of Khrushchev's first visit to China.¹⁰ While these modifications had the outward effect of normalizing Sino-Soviet relations for the next two years (it is not until Khrushchev's secret anti-Stalin speech in 1956 that we date the onset of present Sino-Soviet difficulties), apparently Mao brought up the question of the Outer Mongolian border at a meeting with Khrushchev during the latter's 1954 visit. Although the Russians refused to discuss the matter, according to Chou En-lai's later testimony, this represented the earliest-known Chinese initiative to revise the borders.¹¹ The next Chinese initiative seems to have been in January 1957, when Chou En-lai met Khrushchev during the latter's second trip to Peking. Chou "could not get a satisfactory answer from him then."¹²

Eastern Literature Pub. House, 1959), pp. 217-229. The Chinese texts are found in *Chung-Hua Jen-min Kung-ho-kuo Tiao-yueh-chi*, Vol. 1, 1949-1951, pp. 3-5. See also Howard Boorman, "The Borderlands in Sino-Soviet Relations," in Howard Boorman *et al.*, *The Moscow-Peking Axis* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1957), pp. 142-197. Mao Tse-tung, upon his arrival in Moscow in December 1949 for negotiations leading to the Sino-Soviet treaty, stated that no more unequal treaties existed between the Soviet Union and Communist China. See Kapitsa, *Sovetsko-kitaiskie otnosheniia*, pp. 216-217; *Pravda*, December 16, 1949, p. 1; and *Jen-min Jih-pao*, December 17, 1949, p. 1. The Soviets depend heavily on this statement to counter Chinese arguments concerning "unequal" treaties.

¹⁰ See Boorman *et al.*, *The Moscow-Peking Axis*, pp. 2-53, and Kapitsa, *Sovetsko-kitaiskie otnosheniia*, pp. 299-307. The Chinese press at the time was full of complaints against Soviet "extraterritoriality." More recently, in the post-1963 series of accusations against the Soviet Union, the Chinese charged the Russians with "large-scale, subversive activities in Chinese frontier areas. . . ." ("Letter of the Central Committee of the CPC of February 29, 1964, to the Central Committee of the CPSU," *Hung Ch'i*, No. 6, 1964, pp. 12-18, and *Peking Review*, No. 19 [May 8, 1964], pp. 11-19).

¹¹ See "Chairman Mao Tse-tung Tells the Delegation of the Japanese Socialist Party that the Kuriles Must be Returned to Japan," *Sekai Shuho*, August 11, 1964.

¹² Interview with Premier Chou En-lai by Okada [Haruo], a Socialist member of the Japanese Diet, *Asahi Shimbun*, August 1, 1964.

BORDER INCIDENTS AND NEGOTIATIONS

Incidents along the border itself began as early as 1959 and matched almost step-by-step the general decline in relations.¹³ Indeed, in retrospect, it is possible to argue not only that border difficulties were an indicator of that decline but that, to an extent as yet unclear, they were an important factor in Sino-Soviet relations as a whole during the last decade.¹⁴

Both sides acknowledge the occurrence of sporadic border incidents beginning about 1959. The Soviets charge that the Chinese initiated the skirmishes that year, stepped up their frequency in 1962, and further increased them during the Cultural Revolution. Evidence suggests that the Chinese were not always to blame for the border flare-ups before 1969, nor were they following some preconceived plan in those they did perpetrate. Despite Soviet protestations of innocence, the Russians were probably responsible for some of the incidents.

The record of Sino-Soviet border incidents and negotiations during the ten years before March 1969 clarifies these points and provides background for a consideration of the recent events. In a series of articles in *Pravda*, Konstantin Simonov, a Soviet novelist and sometime correspondent, wrote about the first of the border incidents: "Border guards told me . . . in 1959 about the first intrusions

¹³Dates and descriptions of incidents are found in the following sources. On the Soviet side, Moscow Radio to China, March 6, 1969, 1600 GMT; Moscow Radio to South Asia, March 25, 1969, 1000 GMT; B. Pavlov, "Preposterous Ambitions," *New Times*, No. 12 (March 26, 1969), pp. 8-10; "Statement of the USSR Government," *Pravda*, March 30, 1969, p. 1 (translation in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press (CDSP)*, Vol. 21, No. 13 [April 16, 1969], pp. 3-5; Yuri Dmitriyev, "Far Away on the Border," *Trud*, March 16, 1969, p. 3 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 11 [April 2, 1969], p. 4); and Konstantin Simonov, "Thinking Out Loud," *Pravda*, May 3, 1969, p. 3. On the Chinese side, "China Lodges Strong Protest with Soviet Government," *New China News Agency (NCNA)* and *Jen-min Jih-pao*, March 3, 1969; Report on Border Film, NCNA Domestic Radio, April 18, 1969, 2343 GMT; "Statement of the Government of the PRC," *NCNA* and *Jen-min Jih-pao*, May 24, 1969.

¹⁴Many Russian and Chinese sources cited below make this point explicitly.

across our frontiers . . . in the Tien Shan mountains where China borders upon Kirgiziya."¹⁵ Since that time the Russians allege that the number of border violations increased, beginning in June 1962 with "systematic provocations."

In various places masses of Chinese soldiers and civilians crossed over. They tried to put up buildings, farm, dig canals, and fish in Soviet territory.¹⁶

* * *

At first these were small, minor violations of existing border regulations and were as a rule committed by the civilian population or, at any rate, by people not wearing military uniform. In certain areas Chinese servicemen attempted an ostentatious violation of the Soviet Union's state border.¹⁷

* * *

Then suddenly the Chinese side, contrary to the traditional agreement, refused to let our specialists make water fences on their sectors of the Amur. . . . Then they interfered with the work of our fishermen and the navigation of Soviet ships.¹⁸

It is against this background that we should consider the public charges on the subject traded between Russia and China after late 1962, as well as the then-secret border talks conducted during 1964.

¹⁵ Simonov, "Thinking Out Loud," p. 3. It is also true that during the Hundred Flowers Campaign in China in 1957, a number of Chinese intellectuals openly questioned Soviet occupation of "Chinese" territory, including the Amur River region, the Maritime Province east of the Ussuri, Sakhalin, and areas in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. But contrary to current Soviet allegations, the official Chinese press has repudiated these charges. See Pavlov, "Preposterous Ambitions," p. 8. For translations of anti-Soviet remarks during the Hundred Flowers episode, see Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Praeger, 1960), pp. 50, 163; and Dennis Doolin (ed.), *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution, 1964). The Chinese press was filled during the early 1950s with refutations of anti-Soviet feelings expressed by apparently large numbers of Chinese citizens. What was contrary to policy but widely felt during the 1950s became official policy during the 1960s.

¹⁶ Moscow Radio in English to South Asia, March 25, 1969, 1000 GMT.

¹⁷ "Statement of the USSR Government," *Pravda*, March 30, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁸ Dmitriyev, "Far Away on the Border."

China has always initiated public confrontation over the border, with one exception, and the Russians have been the defender of the *status quo*. The exception occurred when Khrushchev, replying to Chinese charges of Soviet "adventurism" and "capitulationism" in the Cuban missile crisis, applied these same terms to China's border policy toward Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. The Soviet criticism in turn gave China the opening it sought, and, foreshadowing its argument in 1969, it charged that the border treaties signed between Tsarist Russia and Ch'ing Dynasty China were "unequal" and hence subject to revision. The Chinese statement, published March 8, 1963, concluded with the now-famous query: "In raising questions of this kind, do you intend to raise all the questions of unequal treaties and have a general settlement? Has it ever entered your heads what the consequences will be?"¹⁹ After this date public reports and charges of border violations began to be made and secret border negotiations were initiated.²⁰ The most important statement of the time concerning Chinese intentions in regard to the border was made by Mao Tse-tung himself. In an interview with visiting Japanese Socialist Party members in Peking on July 10, 1963, Mao stated:

About a hundred years ago, the area to the east of Baikal became Russian territory, and since then Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Kamchatka, and other areas have been Soviet territory. We have not yet presented our account for this list.²¹

¹⁹"A Comment on the Statement of the Communist Party of the USA," *Jen-min Jih-pao* editorial, March 8, 1963, p. 1. Previously, on March 8, 1963, a *Jen-min Jih-pao* editorial declared that existing boundary treaties perpetuated Russian occupation of Chinese territories.

²⁰See especially the series of reports translated in Dennis J. Doolin, *Territorial Claims in the Sino-Soviet Conflict* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution, 1965), pp. 31ff. These include Chinese charges and Soviet denials of Soviet subversion in Sinkiang; Soviet charges of border violations; feelers on both sides about border talks; reports of the beginnings of border talks; and various Soviet initiatives in the United Nations on the inviolability of state boundaries. Most of the developments that were hinted at in 1964 have been substantiated by subsequent Russian and Chinese testimony.

²¹"Chairman Mao-Tse-tung Tells . . . that the Kuriles Must Be Returned to Japan."

This statement, the accuracy of which was verified by Chou En-lai on July 19, could only confirm the worst Soviet fears concerning Chinese intentions.²² Manifesting their anxiety, the Soviets cited a Chinese map of 1954 listing these claims (and Mongolia) among China's "lost" territories as proof of what the Chinese were after, and from that time took the ideological offensive and began to beef up their border defenses.²³ On the level of polemics, *Pravda* printed a long editorial on September 2, 1964, charging the Chinese with Hitler-like expansionist plans to acquire *lebensraum* in Soviet territory, and Khrushchev challenged Chinese title to Mongolia, Tibet, and especially Sinkiang.²⁴ The situation might well have become more dangerous at that point -- indeed, in his interview Mao had charged that the Soviets were concentrating troops along the border -- had not Khrushchev been removed in October from his post as First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

²² *Asahi Shimbun* interview of Premier Chou En-lai, see p. 6, n. 12.

²³ The map is in Liu P'ei-hua (ed.), *Chung-kuo Chin-tai Chien-shih* (*A Short History of Modern China*) (Peking: I-Ch'ang Shu-chu, 1954), following p. 253. It is also reproduced in Doolin, *Territorial Claims*, pp. 16-17. The map was never intended by the Chinese to be used as a basis for claims on Soviet territory. It was reproduced from a Nationalist Chinese textbook in a secondary school history text and circulated for teaching purposes only.

As for changes in Soviet and Chinese troop dispositions, while information is very difficult to come by, the Institute of Strategic Studies' annual *The Military Balance*, 1963-1968, shows only minor order-of-battle changes along the border through 1966. These changes were intended to improve the readiness of existing units as well as their logistics and equipment. We discuss this matter in more detail below.

²⁴ See *Pravda*, September 2, 1964, p. 1, for a major statement rebutting previous Chinese charges and referring to the 1954 map. This editorial appears to be the first instance of the Soviet tactic of fighting fire with fire: if China claimed that certain areas of the Soviet Union do not, because of "historical circumstances," "belong" to that state, the Russians would then claim that certain areas of China were historically non-Chinese and disputed by more than one state and hence, Chinese title to those areas is open to question. This line of argument, essentially a debating point, was elaborated in a Soviet statement to the PRC of June 13, 1969 (text in *Pravda*, June 14, 1969, pp. 1-2).

While publicly the Chinese were busy attempting to humiliate the Soviets in this manner and the Russians were defending themselves from what they probably considered Chinese imperialism, the two states initiated secret "consultations" on February 25, 1964, that were to lead to "talks."²⁵ The initiative for preliminary border talks apparently came from the Soviet side. They claim to have suggested the talks on May 17, 1963 (just after the border issue came into the open after the Cuban missile crisis exchange reported above), with the intention of preparing the way for a "precise" determination of the boundary. The Soviet side was represented by P. I. Zyryanov, a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Chinese were represented by Tseng Yungchuan, of similar rank. Apparently it was felt that if enough progress was made at this "consultation" level, negotiations could proceed to the "talks" stage. According to the Soviets, agreement was reached "in principle" after several meetings stretching over six months, and the Soviets proposed that "talks" begin in Moscow on October 15. At this point, according to the Russians, the Chinese rejected the idea, making no reply to the Soviet note of September 26, 1964. There matters stood for more than five years, until the Damansky incidents compelled the two powers to meet again in Peking on October 20, 1969.

²⁵The following analysis relies on the following Soviet and Chinese sources. On the Soviet side: interview with Major-General of Border Troops A. N. Anikushin, "The USSR Borders Are Inviolable," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 19, 1969, p. 3; Moscow Radio to South Asia, March 25, 1969, 1000 GMT; Pavlov, "Preposterous Ambitions"; "Statement of the USSR Government," *Pravda*, March 30, 1969; Note of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the CPR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 11, 1969, *Pravda*, April 12, 1969, p. 1; O. Borisov and B. Koloskov, "The Anti-Soviet Course of the Mao Tse-tung Group," *Kommunist*, No. 7 [May 6, 1969], pp. 86-97; and the Soviet Government *Statement*, *Pravda*, June 14, 1969, pp. 1-2. On the Chinese side: Information Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, "Chenpao Island Has Always Been Chinese Territory"; *NCNA* and *Jen-min Jih-pao*, March 10, 1969; *NCNA* report on border film, April 18, 1969; and "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China," *NCNA* and *Jen-min Jih-pao*, May 24, 1969.

It is instructive to investigate why this initial attempt at border settlement failed, because many of the same arguments reappeared after March 1969; a review of the 1964 events will help us to assess the prospects for the more recent round of negotiations. The Soviet and Chinese literature makes both negotiating positions clear. The Soviets (1) expressed willingness to sign a new, comprehensive border treaty that would abrogate the series of old treaties which the Chinese considered "unequal," as long as such a treaty would "strengthen" existing borders, i.e., maintain the *status quo* in all essential respects; (2) were willing to, and apparently did, make specific proposals concerning certain unspecified sections of the border, proposals intended to meet the Chinese halfway that would "on the basis of mutual concessions" both protect Chinese economic interests along the riparian boundary and accurately delineate the border; (3) to this end, submitted to the Chinese a copy of the map that accompanied the 1860 Treaty of Peking defining the Russo-Chinese border along the Amur and the Ussuri Rivers, on which a red line was drawn denoting the boundary the Soviets considered a valid starting point for any marginal changes; (4) would in no case, however, scrap the old treaties before signing a new one. This would have destroyed their legal position and have admitted the veracity of the Chinese contention that those treaties were "unequal."

The Chinese advanced five contending points. (1) They challenged the validity of all Russo-Chinese border treaties made before 1917; they were concluded when power "was not in the hands of the people" and hence were unequal. (Soviet acceptance of this point would have destroyed their entire case and opened almost all of Siberia east of Lake Baikal and the Soviet Far East to renegotiation on whatever comparative merits the Chinese and the Russians could adduce.²⁶) (2) The

²⁶ There is an obvious contradiction in the Chinese argument, which the Soviets have failed to point out. On the one hand, the Chinese claim the treaties are unequal because they were signed when "power was not in the hands of the people." But if the Tsarist government was non-democratic, so was the Ch'ing government, being feudal in the Chinese Communist lexicon. Treaties signed between governments that are both non-democratic can hardly be termed unequal by successor

Chinese did not expect the Russians to accept this contention without reservation. Thus (and this remains their central point, aside from the unequal treaties claim), the Chinese were willing to take the nineteenth-century treaties as the basis for boundary determination and revision. There could be "necessary readjustments" at particular localities "by both sides on the basis of the treaties and in accord with the principles of consultation on an equal footing and of mutual understanding and mutual accommodation." (3) Border questions in general should be solved through negotiation, with the *status quo* being maintained in the meanwhile. If, however, the Soviets did not admit the unequal nature of the old treaties and also refused to take those treaties as the basis for settlement, i.e., if the Soviet state "perpetuated in legal form its occupation of Chinese territory by crossing the boundary line defined by the unequal treaties," then the Chinese side "would have to reconsider its position as a whole." (4) The Chinese totally rejected the Soviet-submitted map of the

governments. The question is irrelevant, and either all old treaties should be regarded as having ceased effect (international law gives no credence to that argument, however: treaties are signed between states, not governments), or new treaties should be signed. But the Chinese have accepted the old treaties as continuing in effect, both *de facto* and *de jure*.

On the other hand, the Chinese contend that the treaties are unequal because the Ch'ing government allegedly was forced to sign them under duress. But if the Communist government of China is complaining of this alleged treatment of a previous Chinese government, then it is defending that government's integrity, which it need not do if "power was not in the hands of the people" then. Further, international law does not recognize this argument. Treaties signed under duress are as legal as treaties signed in other circumstances; examples are peace treaties and terms of surrender. Without such a provision, the fabric of international law would be even more tattered than it already is. It is true that law is intimately related to politics, and hence to power, in international relations, but the line must be drawn somewhere and it has been a long-standing rule that states adhere to treaties even when conditions have changed since their signing. See, for instance, Herbert W. Briggs, *The Law of Nations* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), Part XI, "Treaties and Other International Agreements," pp. 836-946; Charles DeVisscher, *Theory and Reality in International Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); and Hungdah Chiu, "Communist China's Attitude Toward International Law," *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 1966), pp. 245-267.

Treaty of Peking, saying that such a map could not possibly be used to determine ownership, since, as "the Soviet representative had to admit," a scale of 1:1,000,000 was far too small to determine details with accuracy. Rather, the proper mode of determining both boundary lines and river island ownership was the center line of the main river channel, "something to which the Soviet representative could not but agree." (5) If this principle were followed, then 600 of the 700 islands in the river systems forming the present boundary between the two countries would be Chinese. The Chinese delegation submitted a larger-scale map of the border to support this contention.

There were three points on which the two sides agreed. First, both sides acknowledged the necessity and desirability of a new, comprehensive border treaty. Problems concerned only its content and the procedure for arriving at settlement. Second, both seemed to agree that the ancient rights, old treaties, and the historical practices associated with them should stay in effect until a new treaty was negotiated. Thus, the *status quo* would have to be maintained until a legal change of the border areas in question was agreed upon. Finally, both sides essentially agreed that the degree of adjustment necessary along the border was relatively small, mainly affecting riverine islands. In contrast to the present series of negotiations, the 1964 talks apparently did not raise the question of the Central Asian (i.e., Sinkiang) border.

The three main points of disagreement in the 1964 border negotiations were first, and perhaps more important, a crucial difference in procedure advocated. The Chinese apparently wanted the Soviets to admit the inequality of the old treaties *before* agreeing to sign (or perhaps even to negotiate seriously on) a new treaty. If the Russians would do so, the Chinese would then move rapidly to conclude a new treaty; and they would take the old treaties as a basis for negotiation. The Soviets, not trusting the Chinese to fulfill the latter half of their promise, refused to make this concession. Rather, they proposed to draw up a new treaty that would simultaneously (i.e., as part of the same document) bring into existence the new treaty and annul the old ones. If both parties were really serious about

settlement, this proposal should have been acceptable: the Chinese would thereby still have extracted Soviet admission of the "unequal" nature of the old treaties.

But there were other differences of a more substantive nature. The Chinese based their case squarely upon the invalidity of the unequal treaties. The Soviets rejected this, pointing to the continuing validity in international law of the old treaties and to the historic practice of the inhabitants of the area. In international law terms, it was thus a case of *rebus sic standibus* (conditions have changed and the old treaties are thus no longer valid -- the Chinese contention) versus *pacta sunt servanda* (treaties retain their validity until explicitly altered by the treaty signatories -- the Soviet argument). In law, the decision always goes to the latter contention, but in practice, the exigencies of power politics often allow the former argument to prevail.²⁷

Furthermore, the Chinese claimed, according to the Thalweg argument (i.e., riverine boundaries must follow the deepest point of the river channel)²⁸ most of the riverine islands belonged to China and Soviet occupation of them was therefore illegal. This, of course, the Russians denied outright. Finally, there was the question of the maps: whether the Russians relied on the small-scale map of 1860 in order to obscure the necessary details (however legal the map) or whether the Chinese large-scale map was anything more than an illustration of their claims.

It would seem, on balance, that the points of agreement outweighed the substantive differences. If, for instance, the Chinese had given

²⁷ See Briggs, *The Law of Nations*, pp. 917-918 for arguments against *rebus sic standibus*. The standard work on the subject is Chesney Hill, *The Doctrine of "Rebus Sic Standibus" in International Law*, University of Missouri Studies, No. 11, 1934, which concludes (p. 78) that "customary international law lays down the rule that a party who seeks release from a treaty on the grounds of a change of circumstances has no right to terminate the treaty unilaterally." This holds true even if a change occurs in the type of state (e.g., from a colony to a state), much less if in the form of government.

²⁸ *Thalweg* is the German word for channel course.

way on the Thalweg argument, the Russians might have compromised on what map to use as a basis of settlement. The way would then have been open to bargain for ownership of the disputed islands. If agreement could have been reached on this issue, a new treaty might have been written. But since the negotiations never even got to the point of specific bargaining and perhaps never got past agreement on the agenda, it must be concluded that failure stemmed from lack of procedural agreement or from lack of desire for an overall settlement by either state. Probably both causes apply. Soviet testimony seems to indicate Chinese unwillingness to come to terms procedurally. It is also possible that China, on the offensive ideologically in 1964 against the Soviet Union, did not want a border settlement at that time, for a settlement would have tended to set an end-point to the deterioration of relations. Keeping border tensions high might also have forced Soviet concessions in other areas. As long as the Russians did not take military retaliatory measures that China could not handle, postponement of a border settlement would not hurt. It is also possible that Mao thought that he had the Russians "on the run" ideologically and that time was on his side. If differences with the Russians were to assume a protracted, guerrilla-war-like character, surely it would not do to settle a major issue at the outset. Hence, the Chinese may have decided to break off the talks when it appeared either that the Russians would not give in on all points or that, more likely, negotiations were about to move to the "talks" stage and a definitive settlement would then be harder to avoid.²⁹

There matters rested, and the border issue was not aired publicly again until the Chinese promulgated a set of "Regulations

²⁹It is intriguing to speculate whether any connection exists between the Chinese decision to terminate negotiations in September 1964 and the removal of Nikita Khrushchev in October. Were Sino-Soviet relations heading for a showdown, as Harold Hinton argues in *Communist China's Foreign Policy* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1966), pp. 469-488? Unfortunately, evidence either way is lacking and Hinton's argument is, for the most part, unconvincing.

Governing Foreign Vessels on Rivers on the National Boundary," in April 1966.³⁰

For the previous ten years, the Soviet Union and Communist China had cooperatively developed the Amur, Argun, and Ussuri River regions and had signed a number of treaties and agreements registering that cooperation.³¹ The 1958 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation in fact

³⁰The Chinese to some extent did keep the border issue public through such occasional remarks as those uttered by Foreign Minister Ch'en Yi. Before a group of Scandinavian journalists, May 17, 1966, he declared that: China is willing to negotiate with the Soviet Union on the basis of modifications in the present series of treaties; the Russians have refused to negotiate on these terms; the Chinese have kept and will keep the *status quo* along the border, but the Soviets violate the border constantly -- 5000 violations since 1962; the Soviets occupy regions far beyond what the old treaties themselves lay out, provoking internal strife in China; and there is no truth to the charge that China wishes large areas of Soviet territory to be returned. See Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS) 36,136, *Translations on International Communist Developments*, No. 852, June 23, 1966, especially pp. 13-14.

³¹These include: (1) a 1951 Soviet-Chinese agreement on navigation along the Amur, Ussuri, Argun, and Sungari Rivers and on Lake Khanka (an agreement alleged by the Soviets, in their defense against Chinese charges, to be explicitly based on historic Russo-Chinese boundary treaties). Unfortunately, the text of this treaty seems not to have been published. It is referred to in a Soviet Government Statement of March 29, 1969 (*Pravda*, March 30, 1969); (2) joint investigation of the Argun River, completed August 19, 1956, *Survey of China Mainland Press (SCMP)* 1355 (August 22, 1956), p. 49; (3) Sino-Soviet Agreement on Heilungkiang Prospecting, *SCMP* 1355 (August 22, 1956), p. 49, and *Peking Review*, August 19, 1956; (4) Sino-Soviet Agreement on Commercial Navigation on Common Rivers and Lakes, December 21, 1957, *NCNA*, December 22, 1957, *SCMP* 1679 (December 27, 1957), p. 40, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, December 23, 1957, *Izvestiia*, December 22, 1957, and *United Nations Treaty Series (UNTS)*, No. 305, p. 215; (5) Treaty of Commerce and Navigation Between China and Soviet Union, April 23, 1958, *NCNA*, April 23, 1958; *SCMP* 1760 (April 29, 1958), p. 29; *UNTS*, No. 313, p. 142; (6) Plan for Shipping and Waterway Maintenance Along the Amur River for 1959, *NCNA*, No. 1975 (March 18, 1959), p. 47; (7) Sino-Soviet Agreement on Scientific Research Along the Amur River, August 18, 1956 (report of Committee Session of 1959), *NCNA*, April 17, 1962, *SCMP* 2724 (April 25, 1962), pp. 36-38; (8) Sino-Soviet Mutual Agreement on Survey and Classification of Ships, May 7, 1962, *NCNA*, May 16, 1962, *SCMP* 2743 (May 22, 1962), p. 30, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, May 17, 1962, and *Jen-min Shou-tse*, 1962, p. 106.

represents the closest the two powers have come to specific contractual border arrangements.³² The 1966 "Regulations," however, signify the collapse of the previous apparently cordial relationship. From this point, we can date with assurance increasing hostility along the river boundary and the Soviet buildup of forces.

The degree of Sino-Soviet enmity along the river frontier at the time is reflected in the severity of the "Regulations."³³ A more provocative set of regulations can hardly be imagined. Why they were ever promulgated is mysterious, for if the Soviet Union had acceded to them, it would automatically have lost all sovereignty along its riverine borders with China. It is doubtful whether the regulations were in fact ever fully carried out, but their very

³²This treaty does not mention boundary settlement per se, and goes no further than to grant each state's vessels and products most-favored-nation status while in the territory of the other. But throughout, it refers to the "territory of the other party," and the parties would be expected to have reached accord on the location of boundaries in order to have agreed on shipping and navigation practices.

³³The text of the 1966 "Regulations" was published in *NCNA*, April 19, 1966. Article One states, in part, that one purpose of the Regulations is for "safeguarding the sovereignty of the CPR." Article Two states, "All foreign vessels entering or leaving rivers and ports on the national border [China's riverine boundary is shared only with the Soviet Union] shall abide by these regulations." Article Three provides for the installation of "harbor superintendents" on each port and river, who would oversee the examination of ships, the approval of applications for entry and departure, mandatory pilotage, the maintenance of order and safety of navigation, and the investigation of maritime accidents. Article Four states that only countries that have signed commercial navigation agreements with China (as had the Soviet Union in 1958) may traverse these rivers, but their vessels would still have to obtain Chinese permission for each voyage. Article Six specifies the information to be given the Chinese concerning the vessels in question -- in effect, everything about the ship, its crew, and its cargo. Article Seven stipulates that on sailing vessels through these rivers and in Chinese ports, "a CPR flag shall fly at the top of the foremast." (That would be tantamount to admission of Chinese sovereignty over the entire river boundary and the mid-river islands.) Article Eight prohibits use of firearms except in distress. Article Nine requires vessels to obtain permission to enter and leave ports. The other articles are similar, though less peremptory.

existence explains some of the Russian acts which the Chinese later complained about and reports of Soviet use of increasing numbers of late-model gunboats on the Amur and Ussuri Rivers.

Apparently relations along the border became much worse in 1967. There were reports of a "clash" along the Ussuri River in January 1967, and the Soviets accused the Chinese of wildly provocative behavior in connection with the excesses of the Cultural Revolution.³⁴

³⁴Dmitriyev, "Far Away on the Border," quotes border guards as saying that Chinese "made attempts to provoke brawling and fighting," drove ostentatiously across Soviet territory in buses, cars, and trucks, "tried to run our border guards down and waved sticks and carbines," offered vodka to Soviet border guards, waved Mao-quote books and chanted phrases for hours, "pushed our border guards, tried to grab the lapels of their coats and urged our soldiers to disobey the officers."

For long periods during the Cultural Revolution, the central leadership in Peking was not unified. From January 1967 on, many State Council offices and ministries were disorganized, policies were radicalized, and the voices of moderates went unheard. In the spring and summer of 1967 the Foreign Minister was under Red Guard attack, and the Foreign Ministry itself was controlled by the Red Guards during parts of July and August. In such an atmosphere, border incidents could easily have been perpetrated without the knowledge or against the policy of the Peking leadership. Red Guards, not local residents, may have been behind many of the border incidents about which the Soviets complained. From January 1967 the militia was dominated by the Red Guards and until late summer of that year the Army was forbidden to interfere in Cultural Revolution activities except under the direction of local Red Guard-revolutionary rebel leftist forces.

The experience of the British authorities in Hong Kong in the summer of 1967 is germane: it was quite clear that local Red Guards were initiating most outbreaks of violence along the border and in the city. The British authorities, probably knowing that the situation in Peking was unsettled, decided to "roll with the punches" instead of themselves resorting to violence or evacuating the colony. The Soviets may, like the British, have recognized the border incidents as Russian-baiting by Cultural Revolution extremists rather than as deliberate policy from the center, and decided to put up with the temporary annoyance. Still, Russian nerves must have become frayed after two years of such antics.

Allen Whiting suggested these possibilities. For two studies of these aspects of the Cultural Revolution, see Melvin Gurtov, *The Foreign Ministry and Foreign Affairs in China's "Cultural Revolution,"* The Rand Corporation, RM-5934-PR, March 1969, and T. W. Robinson, *Chou En-lai and the Cultural Revolution in China,* The Rand Corporation, R-493, forthcoming.

Border guards reported incidents on December 7-9 and 23, 1967, and in late January 1968 along the Amur and the Ussuri Rivers.³⁵ Such incidents apparently continued up to the March 2, 1969, clash, and the Soviets gradually evolved a procedure for dealing with them in non-violent fashion. It was this procedure (see pp. 21ff.) that was in effect at Damansky in March.

The Chinese roster of Soviet border violations begins with a complaint about an "intrusion" on January 23, 1967, at Damansky Island. Between that date and March 2, 1969, they claimed Soviet troops intruded onto Damansky sixteen times (eight times during January and February 1969); eighteen times onto Chili Ching Island, north of Damansky; and on "many occasions" onto Kapotzu Island, south of Damansky, using "helicopters, armored cars and vehicles." The Chinese accuse the Russians of "ramming Chinese fishing boats, robbing Chinese fishing nets, turning high-pressure hoses on Chinese fishermen . . . kidnapping Chinese fishermen," assaulting and wounding Chinese frontier guards and seizing arms and ammunition, and violating Chinese air space by overflights.³⁶ Further, the Chinese charged, the Soviets sent tanks, armored cars, and boats onto Chinese territory, drove out "many Chinese inhabitants by force, demolished their houses and destroyed their means of production and household goods."

³⁵ Dmitriyev, "Far Away on the Border."

³⁶ "Soviet Revisionist Renegade Clique Directs Soviet Frontier Guards Flagrantly To Intrude into Areas of Chenpao Island, Heilungkiang Province, China, and Open Fire, Killing and Wounding Chinese Frontier Guards," "Note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China to the Soviet Embassy in China," *NCNA*, March 3, 1969, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, March 4, 1969, p. 1 (translation in *SCMP* 4372 [March 10, 1969], pp. 19-20); *NCNA* report on border film, April 18, 1969; "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China, May 24, 1969"; and "Down with the New Tsars!," *Jen-min Jih-pao*, March 3, 1969 (translation in *SCMP* 4373 [March 11, 1969], pp. 17-19). The Chinese claimed, in the April 18 *NCNA* report and elsewhere, that the Soviets' "intrusions" were during the ice-bound winter months. Sixteen intrusions over a period of about two years would give an average frequency of less than once a month. The Chinese also claimed that from January through February 1969, Soviet forces entered Damansky eight times. This would imply that the Soviets ordinarily stayed off the island for most of the year, leaving it to the Chinese for economic purposes.

Their gunboats on the Heilung and Ussuri Rivers have more than once borne down at full steam on small wooden fishing sampans, overturning them, and forcing Chinese fishermen overboard. They have unbridledly intercepted Chinese ships going about their normal business. They went so far as to open fire on Chinese buoy boats which were attending to the buoys in accordance with the agreement reached between China and the Soviet Union.³⁷

Finally, the Chinese charged that the Soviets "provoked" a total of 4189 border incidents from the time of the breakdown of border negotiations on October 15, 1964, to the March 1969 incidents.³⁸ Except for the buoy boats incident, these charges refer to Soviet border patrol and reconnaissance and efforts to evict Chinese from "Soviet" areas without taking lives. The picture that emerges actually shows not much more than minor harassment between two unfriendly powers who disagree upon some specifics of border demarcation and who find the border a convenient place to express the general tension. But each side may have taken the other's activities more seriously over time and a vicious circle of tit-for-tat reprisals may have begun after early 1967. While nothing can be stated with certainty, the testimony of the disputants indicates increasing border tension beginning with the "January Revolution" phase of the Cultural Revolution and extending to the very end of that period.

Most recent border incidents thus may be traced to the radicalizing effects of the Cultural Revolution on the Chinese population along the Sino-Soviet river frontiers. The Soviets evolved a procedure for dealing with incidents as they arose and relied on the weight of historical practice, to which both sides adhered until early 1969. The Soviets state (the Chinese appear not to have declared themselves on the subject) that they had long allowed Chinese border residents to use river islands for economic purposes -- haying, fishing, and logging -- and to drive livestock (and presumably vehicles) across Russian territory from one point in China to

³⁷NCNA, May 27, 1969.

³⁸"Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China, May 24, 1969."

another.³⁹ The Soviets' legal case for title to Damansky is, in fact, based partly on their allegation that the Chinese periodically made application for use of that island for such purposes.⁴⁰ After the Cultural Revolution began, however, and ideologically based incidents began to occur regularly, the Soviets lost patience and saw that new procedures had to be worked out, not to the benefit of the Chinese but in opposition to them.

This is the situation [quoting Vitaly Bubenin, commander of the border guards at Damansky]: A fisherman comes, sticks a pole with Mao's portrait on it in the snow and begins to dig a hole. We explain that it is forbidden to cross the border. We escort him back. The next day 20 fishermen come. Three have nets and each one has a booklet of quotations. They wave them around so that the fishing will be better. We escort them back to the border. About 500 people are brought to the border. They organize a rally and beat drums. They are loaded on trucks and head for the Soviet shore. Our fellows stand in a chain. The trucks race at them, intending to frighten them. Nothing happens, and they go away. They come with streamers: Quotations are attached to sticks, and there are iron pipes on top of the sticks. Again our men form a wall. Their people put the quotations in their pockets and start swinging the sticks. Never mind, we drove them away. Pvt. Lavrov was sent to the hospital. . . .

[On another occasion on Damansky before March 2]:
Sr. Lieutenant Strelnikov ordered the men to protect

³⁹[Major-General of Border Troops] Aleksandr Anikushin, "Again Damansky Island," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 19, 1969, p. 3 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 12 [April 9, 1967], p. 3); V. Fomenko, "Far But Near," *Pravda Ukrainy*, April 2, 1969, p. 4; and "Statement of the USSR Government," *Pravda*, March 3, 1969, p. 1 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 13 [April 16, 1969], pp. 3-5). That the border is fraught with potential conflict at many strategic (as well as out-of-the-way) points can be seen from a map of the Khabarovsk area. Just west of the city, a "winter road" (i.e., over the ice) originates on Soviet territory, and continues along the middle of the Amur River, cuts directly across Hsin hei tzu Island (parts of which the Soviets have long claimed as theirs and occupied), and reenters Soviet territory some miles distant.

⁴⁰S. Kosterin, V. Mikhaylov, and P. Troyanovskiy, "Frontier Post on the Ussuri," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, May 7, 1969, pp. 2, 3, and 4, quoting a Chinese request to procure hay on Damansky Island. The article says that the Soviets had maintained a frontier post in the area after 1922 but had abolished it in 1950 when the Chinese People's Republic was formed.

themselves from the blows of the Chinese with the butts of their machine guns.⁴¹

DISPOSITION OF MILITARY FORCES ALONG THE BORDER

The "traditional," i.e., long-term, disposition of Soviet and Chinese forces along the border was roughly balanced in numbers of men.⁴² The Chinese had an edge in the areas around Manchuria and the Soviets had an edge in the Sinkiang area. But the Soviets surpassed the Chinese in weaponry and logistics support. During the decade of relative Sino-Soviet friendship, the Chinese neither worried about the disparity nor were in a position to challenge it, and the Soviets never made much of it. In the early 1960s, when the Russians and the Chinese came to their ideological separation, force dispositions on both sides remained defense-oriented. The Soviets continued to direct most of their attention and military investment to Western Europe, the United States, and the strategic arms race. After 1960, the Chinese renewed their faith in guerrilla tactics and defense in depth. For some years they had stationed around 14 infantry divisions in the Northeast (Manchuria), 5 divisions in Inner Mongolia, and 5 more in Sinkiang. Additionally, in the latter two areas there were 2-3 division-equivalents of border guards, a regiment of artillery attached to each division, and other support elements. The Chinese have supplemented these groups with the well-known Production and Construction Corps, paramilitary units of military-age youths (mostly Han males)⁴³

⁴¹Yuri Apenchenko and Yuri Mokeyev, "Report from Far Eastern Frontiers," *Pravda*, March 12, 1967, p. 6 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 11, April 2, 1969), p. 3. Similar reports of Soviet nonviolent repressive tactics are in Fomenko, "Far But Near" and Konstantin Osanin, "Duplicity Chinese Style," Moscow Radio, March 29, 1969, 1620 GMT. As we shall see below, the Chinese, on March 2, took advantage of the Soviet practice of strapping their weapons to their backs when first meeting Chinese "intruders."

⁴²Information on this topic is scanty and inconclusive. Here we rely mainly on The Institute for Strategic Studies' *The Military Balance*, 1960-1969 annual issues.

⁴³For a study of the Production and Construction Corps, see George Moseley, *A Sino-Soviet Cultural Frontier: The Ili Kazakh Autonomous*

concentrated chiefly in Sinkiang and, more recently, in Inner Mongolia. This would give the Chinese a total of 35-40 division-equivalents in the military districts along the border, or 420,000-450,000 men, figuring 11,000-12,000 men per average division.⁴⁴

It is not difficult to understand the rationale for this disposition of forces. The Chinese have had to keep a sizable defensive force in the Northeast not only because there are large population concentrations

Chou (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 35-41. On March 4, 1969 (two days after the first Damansky Island incident), Inner Mongolian Radio announced the formation of the Inner Mongolian Production and Construction Corps of the Peking Military Region. Its purpose, according to an editorial in the *Inner Mongolian Daily*, May 8, 1969, is essentially similar to that of the Sinkiang Corps -- border defense and military-directed construction of bulwarks, waterworks and agricultural reclamation projects -- and its personnel similarly include demobilized army men and students (e.g., Red Guards). For an informative article, see Wu Yun-kwang, "Peiping's Military Region," *Chung-kung Yen-chiu* (Taipei), Vol. 3, No. 6 (June 1969), pp. 4-8. I am indebted to Mrs. Anna Ford for drawing this reference to my attention.

⁴⁴A point of some importance, but impossible to determine from available information, is just which troops within a given military district are actually earmarked for border defense, which actually guard the border, and which work exclusively at such other tasks as garrisoning interior regions. For instance, by no means all of the troops assigned to the Shenyang Military District guard the borders. Some must garrison towns and guard military installations and lines of communication. Others must watch over the Korean border. Moreover, what percentage of troops in the Peking Military Region have been assigned to border duty? Even though the Peking Military Region does not border directly on the Soviet Union, its proximity to that frontier means that some troops some of the time must train as defenders of the state boundary. Likewise, in the Inner Mongolian and Sinkiang Military Districts, garrison duties divert troops who otherwise would be assigned to border defense. The same factors operate on the Soviet side of the border.

These variances render extremely difficult precise estimation of the disposition of forces in the frontier region, to say nothing of calculating trade-offs in equipment, logistics, and strategy. Nonetheless, we have arbitrarily chosen to regard *all* forces in the Chinese military regions bordering the Soviet Union as working exclusively on border defense. While this is obviously erroneous, we postulate that the error is roughly compensated for by considering the number of forces in other military regions who are assigned to frontier defense.

in the area and because the capital, Peking, is one of the Military Regions in the Northeast sector, but also because Manchuria is China's major industrial base. Moreover, the unsettled nature of the Korean conflict militates for a sizable back-up force in the region. Finally, specifically for defense against the Soviet Union, 14 or more divisions in the Shenyang (Mukden) Military Region, backed up when necessary by part of the forces stationed in the Peking Military Region, give the Chinese strategic flexibility: they can easily move these forces to the Ussuri River on the east, to the Amur River on the north, and to Mongolia on the west. The transportation net in this region is the most highly developed of any in China. But considering the numbers of men that must be kept on the Fukien front across from Formosa (28 divisions on the coast and another 28 farther inland in reserve), the requirements for garrison duty (especially during and after the Cultural Revolution) in a huge country, and the limited number of men whom the nation can afford to equip and keep under arms (somewhat over two million, or 120 divisions in the People's Liberation Army), only small numbers would be available for duty in Inner Mongolia and Sinkiang. This is understandable. Mongolia has a population of only one million and, without a Soviet presence, is no military threat to China. Inner Mongolia, furthermore, is sparsely populated. In Sinkiang, where there are strategic resources, nuclear test facilities, and a not overly friendly local minority population with a history of rebellion, there is reason to station more troops. But Sinkiang is mostly empty space (desert and mountains) and troops thus can be concentrated in important locations. The Production and Construction Corps, furthermore, provides a first line of defense against possible Soviet incursions.⁴⁵

⁴⁵*The Wall Street Journal*, January 2, 1968, reported that in Sinkiang the Chinese authorities had replaced all Uighurs and Khazaks within 15 to 30 miles of the Soviet border with Chinese, equipped with rifles as well as plowshares. "Further back, Chinese army construction units are building roads and waterworks, and perhaps military bunkers as well. Further back still . . . are villages now inhabited by Chinese ex-soldiers still subject to militia duty. Only past these villages are minority-group members permitted to farm."

As for the Russians, the Soviet Far East is a long way from Europe, in which most of the Soviet population is concentrated and to which Soviet foreign policy has traditionally been directed. Because of this and because China traditionally presented no significant strategic threat, having been either weak, friendly, or neutral, the Soviets have maintained only a thin line of regular Red Army divisions east of Lake Baikal. Until recently, that line consisted of 15-17 regular divisions (of which 10 were in a state of high combat-readiness, the remainder in a lower category, capable of full combat deployment in 30 days), supplemented by contingents of nondivisional forces and border guards. This would seem to give a sizable edge in numbers to the Chinese, since the emplaced Russian forces would not number more than 250,000-300,000 men, figuring 12,000 men per division and a total of 20-24 division-equivalents. But the Soviet logistical picture is much more favorable than the Chinese, despite long lines of communication. The Trans-Siberian railway parallels, or shoots spurs toward, the Soviet-Chinese border for its entire length. Except in the Northeast, the Chinese have no comparable rail line. Major Russian military and air bases and sizable cities are found along the length of the railroad.⁴⁶ Again, this is not true in China. Furthermore, the Soviets have always had an edge over the Chinese in equipment. Not only have they absolute superiority in numbers and quality of aircraft, tanks, artillery, armored cars, and personnel carriers, but their excellent surface and air mobility means they can concentrate large forces at a given spot much more quickly

⁴⁶See Harrison Salisbury's article on Soviet airfields in *The New York Times*, May 24, 1969. It should also be noted that, by contrast with the Chinese geopolitical situation, the Russians have fewer points of population concentration and less of a hinterland into which to retreat. Few Russian settlements exist north of the Trans-Siberian railway, which in places skirts the Chinese border. Were the Soviets to lose the railway and the land to its south, there would be no place for them to go. For this reason, the Soviets probably maintain a higher proportion of their available forces close to the border than do the Chinese and at specific points they may outnumber the Chinese.

than the Chinese, who still depend largely on transportation by foot.⁴⁷ So the Russians have balanced Chinese numbers with Soviet equipment and speed. Finally, if the two powers were to do battle on a large scale and the weight of Chinese numbers began to tell, the Soviets could transfer reinforcements from bases in European, Central, and Southern Russia, and have a mobilization potential that is probably as high in fully equipped and trained soldiers as the Chinese.

As we have seen, border incidents began in 1959 and annually increased in number. One would think that both powers would have increased their forces along the border in proportion to the frequency, location, and severity of those incidents. But the available information indicates no large-scale buildup, at least before 1967, by either side. Both the Soviets and the Chinese continued their traditional troop dispositions and strengths.⁴⁸ But around early 1966 (or perhaps late 1965), both states began to bring their existing forces to a higher state of readiness, to equip them with better and more weaponry, and to augment their numbers, if only marginally. The Soviets seem to have been the more active party in this process.⁴⁹ In 1966, first reports appeared of the transfer of highly trained Soviet forces from East Europe to the Far East. Although probably as many soldiers were sent back to the West as arrived in the East, the combat potential of Soviet troops along the Chinese border probably increased. At that time also, the Russians began equipping their Far Eastern forces with

⁴⁷*The Military Balance*, 1960-1969 annual issues, reported that the Soviets completely re-equipped their military forces, sometimes twice over, with the latest equipment. The Chinese, on the other hand, not only did not, until at least 1965, have the knowledge and industrial base to do so, but the withdrawal of Soviet aid in 1960 seriously crippled the Chinese military machine, especially those units dependent upon advanced weaponry, for several years.

⁴⁸*The Military Balance* figures vary only slightly up to that time. This estimate is suggested by that of Malcolm Mackintosh's article, "The Soviet Generals' View of China in the 1960s," in Raymond Garthoff (ed.), *Sino-Soviet Military Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

⁴⁹Information about the Soviet buildup in the Far East in 1966, aside from that contained in *The Military Balance* for that year, can be found in: *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1966, p. A34; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 29, 1966, and *The New York Times*, August 17, November 22, December 11 and 29, 1966, and January 11, 1967.

missiles, including surface-to-surface nuclear-tipped rockets. They were also said to have moved in additional regular and border troops, although not in substantial numbers. Some reports spoke of 7-8 divisions in Central Asia (part of 30 divisions located in the southern Soviet Union) being earmarked for eventual duty east of Lake Baikal. Soviet media also began to emphasize the importance of paramilitary training by citizens in border regions. Finally, the Soviets signed a new defense agreement with Mongolia that reportedly allowed the Soviets to station troops and maintain bases in that country.⁵⁰

On the Chinese side, nothing of a similar scale seems to have been done. The Chinese were then in the throes of a debate over what military strategy to pursue in face of the American intervention in Vietnam.⁵¹ This, together with the power struggle preceding the Cultural Revolution, resulted in purges in the Army, notably Chief-of-Staff Lo Jui-ch'ing, and may have weakened the Army somewhat, despite Lin Piao's efforts to induce greater military efficiency through inculcating Mao Tse-tung's Thought. By 1965 the Chinese were said to be capable of producing most armaments (except some types of aircraft and sophisticated communications equipment) in sufficient quantity to supply the regular PLA forces. This capability may have prevented a more than minimal decline in Chinese military efficiency.⁵² But the Vietnam war and American intervention in it meant that Chinese military attention had to be directed primarily to its southern, not its northern and western, flanks. Thus, the Chinese probably could counter the Soviet border buildup only marginally, if at all.

⁵⁰The twenty-year "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Aid Between the USSR and the MPR" was signed with great fanfare in Ulan Bator on January 15, 1966. It replaced a similar treaty signed in 1946. The earlier treaty made explicit the Soviet right to station troops on Mongolian soil; the 1966 treaty did not, although several of its articles could be construed as implying that right. Text in *Pravda*, January 18, 1966 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 18, No. 3 [February 9, 1966], pp. 7-8).

⁵¹For an interesting, although admittedly speculative, account of that debate, see Uri Ra'an, "Peking's Foreign Policy Debate, 1965-1966," in Tang Tsou (ed.), *China in Crisis*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 23-72.

⁵²*The Military Balance, 1966-1967.*

Over 1966 and 1967, Chinese-initiated border incidents (which we have associated with the Cultural Revolution) multiplied and seemed increasingly provocative to the Soviets.⁵³ In response they continued the East-Europe-Far East troop rotation plan and apparently stepped up the size of the border guard force by possibly 20,000.⁵⁴ These moves were sizable enough to cause a public complaint from Chinese Foreign Minister Ch'en Yi.⁵⁵ The Russians, moreover, began a campaign to explain Sino-Soviet differences to the Soviet citizenry, which included inspection tours of Far Eastern troop contingents by high military figures.⁵⁶ They continued to stress the aid that paramilitary groups were giving to border guards along the Chinese frontier.⁵⁷ The major aspect of the Soviet buildup, however, seems to have been the decision to station strong military units on Mongolian soil. This deployment seems to have begun sometime after the signing

⁵³An Austrian correspondent's account of a trip through Soviet Central Asia during 1967 conveys some interesting information. First, the Soviets were constructing an Iron Curtain-type barrier along the Sinkiang border. Second, the Russians described the public Chinese execution of Chinese citizens along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, on one occasion witnessed by 20,000 people, and another incident near Chita, where 30,000 elderly were allegedly pushed over the border by Chinese military authorities. Third, in September 1966, Moscow was said to have delegated responsibility and authority for handling border incidents to local commanders. That arrangement was said to hold two advantages for Moscow: it could repudiate the local commander if he failed to maintain order, and it enabled him to move promptly and independently when necessary. See Hugo Portisch, in the *Vienna Kurier* (translated in *Atlas*, Vol. 14, No. 3 [September 1967], pp. 15-19).

⁵⁴*The Military Balance*, 1965-1966 and 1966-1967, reports an increase in border troops from 230,000 to 250,000. It is difficult to say exactly where most of these additional men were assigned, but the increase coincides with reports of increased Soviet border patrolling activity.

⁵⁵See above, footnote 30. Also in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1966.

⁵⁶*Krasnaia zvezda*, February 15, 1967.

⁵⁷See *Krasnaia zvezda*, January 11, February 15, and March 10, 1967, for typical articles, and *The New York Times*, January 21, 1967. This emphasis continued throughout 1968, as reported, for instance, in *Krasnaia zvezda*, July 31, 1968, and *Dal'nyi Vostok*, No. 1, 1968.

of the twenty-year defense pact with Mongolia in January 1966, and got into high gear in 1967.⁵⁸ By November 1967, enough Soviet troops (including tank and missile units) were reported to be in Mongolia to prompt rumors of several divisions occupying permanent bases there.⁵⁹ On November 7, Soviet units took part in a parade in Ulan Bator celebrating the Bolshevik Revolution.⁶⁰

By the summer of 1968, the Russians were ready for their first series of large-scale maneuvers in the Mongolian area. Rail lines had been built between Chita, a major Soviet military base, and Choibalsan, Mongolia's second largest city, where a new Soviet base was said to have been established. One estimate of Soviet strength inside Mongolia was six divisions, including one tank division.⁶¹ By 1969, this was said to have increased to 8-10 divisions,⁶² although these numbers seem excessive in view of the lack of noticeable effect on Soviet troop strength in Europe. Nonetheless, the magnitude of this buildup was apparently such that it upset the balance of power between the two forces. It is unclear whether the Chinese were then in a position to redeploy their own forces in retaliation. Non-Communist Chinese sources in Hong Kong reported that after the Soviet-Mongolian maneuvers, several Chinese divisions were redeployed to the Soviet-Mongolian border and that significant numbers of artillery pieces were being withdrawn from the Fukien region, ostensibly for

⁵⁸Major floods in Mongolia in 1966 ripped out large stretches of railroad and, for a time, isolated Ulan Bator. The Soviets repaired the railroad connections with the Trans-Siberian but allowed the link between Ulan Bator and the Chinese border to remain in disrepair. The floods, however, probably set back the Soviet military construction schedule in Mongolia so that not until 1967 do we hear of Soviet troop presence and plans for military construction there. See articles by Harrison Salisbury in *The New York Times*, August 17, 1966, and May 24, 1969.

⁵⁹*The New York Times*, January 3, 1969.

⁶⁰*Novosti Mongolii*, November 11, 1967.

⁶¹*Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1968. Available information does not allow us to judge whether or not these maneuvers actually took place on Mongolian soil.

⁶²*The New York Times*, May 24, 1969.

shipment to the Soviet border region.⁶³ Finally, the Chinese again began to stress the importance of the Production and Construction Corps. With the Cultural Revolution drawing to a close, Peking rounded up many youths who had returned to the cities from these units during the turmoil of the previous two years and also evicted several million middle-class citizens from the cities and sent many to the frontiers.⁶⁴ While some of this movement of troops may have been temporary, indications point to an enhanced Chinese capability in the Northeast and in Inner Mongolia of 4 or 5 divisions (for a total of 40 in both areas, as compared with 35-36 divisions formerly).⁶⁵ The

⁶³ See Chiang Yi-san, "Military Affairs of Communist China, 1968," *Tsu Kuo*, No. 59 (February 1969), pp. 20-36. This article quotes *Sing-tao Jih-pao*, August 3 (p. 2), October 7 (p. 1), and December 9 (p. 3), 1968. Additionally, *Communist China 1967* (Kowloon: Union Research Institute), pp. 230-231, reports that at the end of 1967 China had completed transfer of 200,000 additional troops to the Soviet frontier, bringing the total to 600,000. This would be about 50 division-equivalents, which accords with earlier estimates. Two hundred thousand men were said to be in Sinkiang and 400,000 in Inner Mongolia and the Northeast. One of the Institute's sources was *The Japan Times*, Tokyo, March 19, 1967. But the limitations noted above, footnote 44, would still apply.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Lin Piao's July 1968 directive to the Peking Military Region, which mentions "the need of engineering endeavors for national defense, and specifically to construct defenses around desert areas" and the necessity of physical fitness of the construction corps; and the speech of Wang En-mao (then political commissioner of the Sinkiang Military Region) on October 8, 1968, in which he stated that "Sinkiang is the front line of our struggle against imperialism and revisionism" and that China was "vigorously strengthening war preparedness and border defense" there. Cited in Chiang, "Military Affairs."

⁶⁵ *The Economist*, March 22, 1969, states that the Soviets at that time had 300,000 men along the border (25-27 divisions, as compared with 15-17 divisions before) and that the Chinese had 500,000 men (40 divisions) in the same region. The latter figure probably excludes the Production and Construction Corps. *Le Monde*, April 14, 1969, quoted "informed Austrian sources" as saying that symbolic contingents of Warsaw Pact troops would soon be on their way to the Soviet-Chinese frontier. If these figures are not entirely erroneous, Chinese reinforcements have not kept pace with Soviet deployments: a ratio of 5 to 3 in men does not overcome the Soviet preponderance in weaponry, logistics, and capacity to reinforce quickly. Nor can obvious differences in air power in favor of the Russians and nuclear weaponry be overcome, or even defended against, by a 5 to 3 superiority in manpower alone.

Chinese were also said to have tightened border security in response to similar Soviet moves.⁶⁶

We conclude from this analysis of comparative border strengths first, that a rough balance of forces had long existed in the military regions along the Sino-Soviet frontier, with a trade-off between Chinese numerical superiority and Soviet equipment and mobility, and a balance between Chinese troop concentrations in Manchuria and Soviet defense bases along the Amur River and in Central Asia. Second, the balance began to change around 1964, when the Soviets began to improve the quality and, to some extent, the quantity of their forces. Third, the balance seems to have been definitely upset after 1966 by the movement of Soviet troops and equipment into Mongolia and close to the Sino-Mongolian border. Soviet maneuvers in the Transbaikal Military District in particular caused the Chinese to transfer additional, although still marginal, numbers of troops and equipment to Inner Mongolia and Manchuria. Fourth, increased patrolling by both sides and the shock waves of the Cultural Revolution increased tension all along the border. Although by early 1969 the imminent end of the Cultural Revolution promised to remove a disruptive and potentially dangerous element from both sides' calculations, the magnitude and continuation of the Soviet buildup more than offset that prospect and probably caused the Chinese to be fearful of the future.

⁶⁶*The New York Times*, March 30, 1969.

III. BLOODSHED ON THE ICE:

SINO-SOVIET MILITARY CLASHES ON THE USSURI

During the late morning of March 2, at Damansky Island in the Ussuri River, a skirmish occurred between Soviet and Chinese frontier formations. More than 30 Soviet border guards and a number of Chinese soldiers were killed or wounded. Tension all along the border quickly peaked and both armies went into an increased state of readiness. On March 15, at the same location, a second, larger clash took place, with greater loss of life. Whereas the first battle had lasted two hours, the new engagement took nine hours. Both sides used heavy weapons. The Chinese reportedly lost several hundred men, the Soviets an unspecified number. Sino-Soviet relations entered a new and dangerous stage. Incidents, if not actual military clashes, began to be reported all along the border. Finally, more than three months after the March 15 battle, the two sides entered into exploratory talks in Khabarovsk to see if the other was interested in temporary regulation or permanent settlement of border differences. Meanwhile, the two sides had staked out their public negotiating positions, slightly extending their arguments beyond those of 1964, and had carried propaganda attacks to new levels of vilification. Finally, each indicted the other for the March incidents as well as all intervening and subsequent events, incidentally providing material for a more detailed analysis of them. This section analyzes the March 2 and 15 events to investigate not only the merits of the Russian and Chinese cases for ownership of Damansky Island in particular and both sides' border positions in general but also to speculate on the motives (or causes, if the incidents were accidental) of the violence.

THE SETTING

Damansky Island is situated on the Ussuri River, which forms the boundary between the Soviet Union and China.⁶⁷ Located at 133°51'E

⁶⁷ Primary sources for this section are maps of the area and W. A. Douglas Jackson, *Russo-Chinese Borderlands* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand,

longitude and 46°51'N latitude, it is about 180 miles southwest of Khabarovsk. The nearest Soviet settlement is Nizhne Mikhailovskiy, about 5 miles south, and the nearest Chinese settlement is Kung-szu, just south of the island. The Chinese claim the island was once a part of the Chinese bank, became separated by erosion of the river, and during low water in late summer can be reached on foot from the Chinese shore. Maps of the area indicate that the main channel of the Ussuri passes to the east of the island; this fact (if it is indeed that) forms the basis of the Chinese case for ownership. The river at this point, as at many others, is wide, and the river-arm (as the Chinese describe it) or channel (the Soviet term) appears from photographs and maps to be nearly as wide, and may be as deep at high water, as the channel on the east. From the location of navigation markers on the two shores and the curvature of the river, it would appear that ships traverse the eastern channel. The island itself is, by testimony of both sides, uninhabited, although Chinese fishermen apparently use it for drying their nets, and both nationalities may do some logging on it. It is about one mile in length, about one-third mile wide, and is flooded during the spring thaw.

The water level of the Ussuri varies over thirty feet, and during the short but rainy summer flash floods are not uncommon. The characteristics of the immediate area are similar to those all along the Ussuri: boggy marshes along both sides, low elevation but slightly higher on the Chinese side, sparse population along the river front, and inhospitability to agriculture. The meager Soviet population is concentrated farther inland, along the Vladivostok-Khabarovsk sector of the Trans-Siberian Railway and the auto road that parallels it. The Chinese borderland at this point seems even less populated than

1962); Theodore Shabad, *Geography of the USSR, A Regional Survey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); idem, *China's Changing Map* (New York: Praeger, 1956); George B. Cressy, *Land of the 500 Million: A Geography of China* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955); and Erich Thiel, *The Soviet Far East: A Survey of Its Physical and Economic Geography* (London: Methuen, 1947). Secondary sources are those cited in footnotes 68 and 69, below.

the Soviet. The island is wooded for the most part, although there are some open areas, and the elevation rises in places to as much as 20 feet above the water's edge. Larger and more important islands, Kirkinsky and Buyan, are situated to the north and south, respectively, and most of the border incidents that had occurred in the area before March 2 took place on those islands. However, both sides acknowledge that Damansky itself had previously been the scene of several near-violent meetings between groups of Soviet and Chinese frontier guards.

The Soviets maintain two border outposts in the area, one just south of the island, which until March 2 was commanded by Senior Lieutenant Ivan Ivanovich Strelnikov, and the other just to the north, commanded at the time by Senior Lieutenant Vitaliy Dmitriyevich Bubenin. The southern post has the disadvantage that its line of sight does not include the island itself (although the river-arm and the Chinese bank can be seen) and thus on-the-spot patrolling is necessary to determine Chinese presence on the island. The Chinese border post, named Kung-szu after the local Chinese settlement, appears to be located on a hillock directly across from the island. Differing from the terrain in other sectors of the Ussuri boundary, there is extensive marshland on the Soviet, but not the Chinese, side of the river, in winter forcing vehicles to detour about two miles before they can move onto the ice toward the island. In March the river is frozen nearly solid, as it is possible to drive multi-ton vehicles over the ice, and the ice does not completely break up until nearly May. The average snow cover is only a few inches, meaning that frost penetrates several feet and delays the spring until late May.

THE MARCH 2 INCIDENT

What happened on March 2? Unfortunately, only the participants were at the scene of battle and most of them are dead. Further, only the Soviets have given a detailed view of the events, gleaned from testimony of survivors and from a special investigative team. Because almost no factual reports are available from the Chinese, our analysis is likely to be slanted toward the Soviet side. Despite these

limitations, it is possible to reconstruct a composite account of what probably went on.⁶⁸

On the night of March 1-2, about 300 Chinese troops (the Chinese say their defenders were a mixed group of frontier guards and regular PLA soldiers) dressed in white camouflage crossed the ice from the Chinese bank to Damansky Island, dug foxholes in a wooded area overlooking the southernmost extremity, laid telephone wire to the command post on the Chinese bank, and lay down for the night on straw mats.

⁶⁸In this section, the following sources were used. On the Soviet side: "Note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the CPR," March 2, 1969, Moscow Domestic Radio, March 3, 1969; Yuri Dmitriyev, "Dangerous Provocations," *Trud*, March 5, 1969 (also TASS of the same day), "Provocative Sally of Peking Authorities," *Pravda*, March 8, 1969 (translation in *Information Bulletin*, Vol. 7, Nos. 5-6, 1969, pp. 66-70, and *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 10 [March 26, 1969], pp. 3-4); Moscow Radio to China, March 6, 1969, 1600 GMT, and March 9, 1969, 1530 GMT and 1930 GMT; Tanyug (Belgrade) Radio, March 8, 1969, 2125 GMT; "Press Conference in the USSR University of Foreign Affairs," *Pravda*, March 8, 1969, p. 4 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 10 [March 26, 1969], pp. 4-5); Val. Goltsev, "What Happened on Damansky Island," *Izvestiia*, March 8, 1969, p. 2 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 10, pp. 6-7); S. Kosterin and V. Anikayev, "How It Was," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 9, 1969 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 10, pp. 7-8); TASS Radio, March 12, 1969, 1132 GMT, "The USSR Borders are Inviolable," interview with Major General of Border Troops A. N. Anikushin, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 19, 1969, p. 3 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 12 [April 9, 1969], p. 31); "Statement of the USSR Government," March 29, 1969, TASS and *Pravda*, March 30, 1969, p. 1 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 13 [April 16, 1969], pp. 3-5); Yuri Apenchenko and Yuri Mokeyev, "That's How It Is on the Border," *Pravda*, March 12, 1969, p. 6 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 11 [April 2, 1969], p. 3); Col. S. Barents, "This Happened at the Ussuri," *Krasnaia zvezda*, April 2, 1969, p. 3; Konstantin Simonov, "Thinking Aloud," *Pravda*, May 3, 1969, p. 3, and May 4, 1969, p. 3; and Mikhail Demidenko, "A Night on the Ussuri River," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 21, 1969, p. 13.

On the Chinese side: NCNA Radio, March 3, 1969, 0324 GMT and *Jen-min Jih-pao*, March 3, 1969; "Note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China to the Soviet Embassy in China, March 2, 1969," NCNA Radio, March 3, 1969, 0244 GMT (translation in *SCMP* 4372 [March 10, 1969], pp. 18-19); "Down with the New Tsars," *Jen-min Jih-pao* and *Chieh-fang-chün Pao* joint editorial, March 4, 1969 (translation in *SCMP* 4373 [March 11, 1969], pp. 17-19); *Jen-min Jih-pao*, March 19, 1969, six photographs on p. 4; NCNA Domestic Radio, April 18, 1969, 2343 GMT, describing the film, "Anti-China Atrocities of the New Tsars"; and "Statement of the Government of the PRC, May 24, 1969," *Jen-min Jih-pao*, May 24, 1969, p. 1.

Sometime early in the morning, the man on duty at Strelnikov's outpost south of the island noticed activity on the Chinese bank, which he reported to his superiors. Around 11:00 a.m., a group of 20 or 30 armed Chinese were seen to begin moving toward the island, shouting Maoist slogans as they came. Seeing them, Strelnikov and an undetermined number of his subordinates climbed into two armored personnel carriers, a truck, and a command car, and set off for the southern extremity of the island to meet the Chinese. Arriving on the island (or perhaps remaining on the ice covering the river-arm to the west of the island) a few minutes later, Strelnikov and seven or eight others, including his deputy, Senior Lieutenant Buinevich, dismounted and moved out to warn the oncoming Chinese, as they had several times previously. Following a procedure developed for such occasions, the Russians strapped their automatic rifles to their chests (reports differ: some say they left their weapons behind). The time was now about 11:15 a.m. The Russians linked arms to prevent the Chinese from passing. It is not clear whether any verbal exchange occurred, although the Chinese reports imply that an altercation took place. In any case, the Chinese arrayed themselves in rows and appeared to be unarmed. But when the Chinese had advanced to about 20 feet from the Russian group, the first row suddenly scattered to the side, exposing the second line of Chinese, who quickly pulled submachine guns from under their coats and opened fire on the Russian group. Strelnikov and six of his companions were killed outright. Simultaneously, from an ambush to the Russians' right, the 300 Chinese in foxholes also opened fire, catching the entire Russian unit by surprise. Mortar, machine gun, and anti-tank gunfire also commenced at that moment (it was now between 11:17 and 11:20 a.m.) from the Chinese side. The Chinese apparently then charged the Soviets, and hand-to-hand fighting ensued. The Soviet unit was apparently overrun, and the Chinese (according to Soviet charges) took 19 prisoners and killed them on the spot. They also carried away Soviet equipment, which they later put on display. Evidently the Russian survivors were able to fight back, however, now under the command of Junior Sergeant Yuri Babinski.

Seeing the battle, Senior Lieutenant Bubenin and nearly his entire border post north of Damansky set out for the scene. Racing up in an armored car, he succeeded in gaining the right flank of the Chinese, forcing them to divide their fire. But he also found himself in the middle of the island and in the middle of the ambush that the Chinese had prepared for Strelnikov (the latter had not proceeded that far). Bubenin's vehicle was hit and disabled, and he himself was wounded and shell-shocked. He managed to get into another armored car and direct the battle from it. A series of melees ensued, with charges by both sides. Finally, the Russians state, they pinned down, for a time surrounded, and then forced the remaining 50 to 60 Chinese to retreat to their side of the bank. The Chinese took all their wounded with them, although they left behind some equipment. The entire battle lasted about two hours, and the Russians were so short-handed that civilians had to be pressed into service as ammunition bearers. Although both sides claimed victory, neither Russian nor Chinese forces remained permanently on the island after the battle was over, although the Soviets periodically moved off and on at will.

THE MARCH 15 INCIDENT

The battle on the 15th was somewhat different than that of the 2d.⁶⁹ Preparations on both sides were much more complete, forces

⁶⁹The main sources for this section are, on the Soviet side: "Statement of the Government of the Soviet Union to the Government of the People's Republic of China," TASS, March 15, 1969, and *Pravda*, March 16, 1969, p. 1 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 11 [April 2, 1969], pp. 3-4); TASS Radio, March 15, 1969, March 16, 1969, 1330 GMT; interview with Major General Lobanov, *Pravda*, March 17, 1969, p. 1; Moscow Radio to East Africa, March 18, 1969, 1800 GMT; Moscow Radio Peace and Progress to China, March 17, 1969, 1100 GMT; "The USSR's Frontiers are Sacred and Inviolable," *Pravda*, March 17, 1969, p. 1; Yuri Apenchenko and Yuri Mokeyev, "They Have Defended With Their Hearts! A Report From the Far East Frontiers," *Pravda*, March 17, 1969, p. 6; TASS Radio, March 20, 1969, 1708 GMT; Major Yuri Kuvshinnikov, Report on Damansky, *Krasnaia zvezda*, March 20, 1969, p. 2; Lt. Col. B. Prichkin and Major I. Dynin, "Three Attacks," *Krasnaia zvezda*, March 20, 1969, p. 2; "Provocateurs Rebuffed," *Pravda*, March 17, p. 1 (translation in *CDSF*, Vol. 21, No. 11 [April 2, 1969], pp. 5-6); Budapest Domestic Radio, April 21, 1969, 1100 GMT; and a series of eight articles,

were much larger, losses were higher, and the engagement lasted much longer. There was also no element of surprise. In contrast to the encounter on March 2, it is not clear who began the battle on the 15th: Soviet and Chinese sources differ, of course, and the Soviet documentation is again much more voluminous. This time the Russian case is much less convincing, and the moral overtone present in reports of the earlier battle is muted, if not entirely absent. Both sides probably had built up their forces in the intervening fortnight, intending to wrest permanent control of the island away from the other or, failing that, to deny the other side its unhindered use.

Although initial reports seem somewhat vague, apparently the Russians increased the frequency of their patrols of the island after March 2. They still did not station a permanent force on the island, however, lest the Chinese zero in on them with artillery and mortar. A small scouting party did spend the night of the 14th-15th on the island, and it is possible that this group was used as bait to lure the Chinese into a frontal attack. The Chinese say that the other side sent "many" tanks to the island and the river-arm ice about 4:00 a.m. on the 15th, attacking Chinese guards on patrol. It is not clear why such a large force would be needed to attack a patrol. The Soviets state that their own early-morning patrol, consisting of two armored cars led by Senior Lieutenant Lev Mankovsky, discovered a group of Chinese lodged on the island, who had apparently sneaked over the previous night. Whatever the initial cause, the battle began in earnest around 9:45 or 10:00 a.m., with mortar and artillery fire from the Chinese bank and, by 10:30, according to Soviet accounts, heavy fire from three points on the Chinese bank.

The Chinese now threw more than a regiment (around 2000 men) of infantry into the fray, charging across the ice and gaining possession

"Frontier Post on the Ussuri," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, May 7-17, 1969.

On the Chinese side: "Note of the Foreign Ministry of the PRC to the Soviet Embassy in Peking," *NCNA*, March 15, 1969; *NCNA* Radio, March 16, 1969, 0415 GMT, also in *CDSP*, No. 4381, pp. 26-27 (translation in *CDSP*, No. 4381 [March 21, 1969]). Additional sources cited in footnote 68, above.

of at least part of the island. The Russians, when they saw this wave of Chinese, sought to block their advance with fire from machine guns mounted on armored personnel carriers, but moved back, either entirely off the island or to its eastern extremity, when they saw that the Chinese had a clear superiority in men. (Russian accounts speak of a ratio of ten Chinese to every Russian.) The Chinese directed intense artillery fire not only at the Soviet troops but also at the eastern channel of the river separating the island from the Soviet bank, evidently in the hope of slowing or stopping the movement of heavy vehicles over the ice. The Russians, adopting American Korean War tactics, allowed the Chinese to advance, and then counterattacked with large numbers of tanks, armored cars, and infantry in armored personnel carriers. Soviet artillery, brought in since the March 2 incident, launched a fierce barrage at 1:00 p.m., raking Chinese positions as far inland as 4 miles. Three such attacks were launched, each breaking through the Chinese positions. The first two faltered when ammunition was expended. The third apparently broke the Chinese position on the island, and the Chinese retreated to their own bank, taking their dead and wounded. The Soviets state that they did not follow up the Chinese retreat with large-scale garrisoning of the island, although they continued intense patrolling. The battle was over at 7:00 p.m., having lasted more than nine hours.⁷⁰ Sources state that the Russians lost about 60 men (including the border post commander, Colonel D. I. Leonov) and the Chinese 800.⁷¹ (The number of Soviet casualties was lower probably because the Soviets had an advantage in tactics and armament.)

⁷⁰Russian sources are themselves inconsistent. They all state that the battle began around 10:00 a.m. and was finished by 7:00 p.m., an elapsed time of nine hours. Yet they also say the battle lasted seven hours. The Chinese, however, agree with the Soviet end points.

⁷¹The breakdown between dead and wounded is not clear in the statistics of either side. Surely the Chinese figure, even if accurate, represents both dead and wounded.

IV. ACCOUNTING FOR THE FIGHTING

We are now in a position to explore alternative explanations for these Chinese and Russian actions. It does not seem possible to settle upon a single choice as the most probable set of reasons for the occurrence of the two incidents. The kinds and range of data necessary for such a precise determination are not at hand and are not likely to be in our possession for a long time, if ever. Nonetheless, it is possible to set out a string of explanations, group them into clusters, match them with other known facts, note their mutual consistency or inconsistency, and thereby narrow the spectrum to what seems to be several "most plausible" cases. One caveat must be entered, however: the data do not permit us -- nor do we feel called upon -- to explain in all possible detail why the incidents themselves occurred, why at Damansky and not some other place, why at the exact times they did, and so forth. We are trying to explain policies or decisions more than specific occurrences.

In regard to both the March 2 and the March 15 incidents, explanatory possibilities seem to resolve into three clusters. There is, first, a series of rationales for the incidents which flow from the local situation. A second cluster concerns national domestic politics in China and the Soviet Union. Finally, several possibilities derive from the foreign policies of the two states, both toward each other and toward third states and parties, as motives for military action. This section considers the incidents in turn, laying out these possibilities and discussing their interrelation.

THE MARCH 2 INCIDENT

Local Initiative

The first possibility is that either the Chinese or the Soviet local border force commander may have had much freedom of action. Standing orders from Peking or Moscow may have given local commanders enough latitude so that they might initiate military action if growing tension along the border seemed to warrant it. If this was the case,

study of the outbreaks should focus on the chain of command from the political center through the military, the policies behind such orders, and the probable content of the orders, rather than on the competing cases for ownership of Damansky Island. (We do this below, in the discussion of domestic Soviet and Chinese politics.)

We know from one source that the Soviet border commanders had what would seem to be a great deal of latitude, delegated to them on the theory that in an emergency they would not have time to cable Moscow for instructions and the possibility that they would exceed their authority would be balanced by their having to answer to the center for all actions.⁷² This is not an unreasonable administrative device for

⁷²Portisch, op. cit. Soviet border troops, being a functional subdivision of the Committee of State Security (KGB), would not necessarily report first to local Red Army units. Although the information is somewhat dated, at the time of the German invasion in 1941, MVD border units reported vertically to Moscow and not horizontally to local army units or to the military district. In this regard, Oleg Hoeffding, in a note to the author, refers to A. M. Nekrich, *1941 June 22* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965) and writes:

"After reciting the rapid rise in the number of border infiltration incidents prior to June 22, Nekrich first observes (p. 111):

All this information, going through service channels from the border posts up, reached the appropriate section of the Main Directorate of border troops (GUPV), which immediately reported it to the General Staff of the People's Commissariat of Defense and to the Government.

However, Nekrich then adds some important qualifications (p. 112):

The commanders of Red Army formations stationed near the border did not always have a clear picture of incidents involving penetration by enemy infiltrators, and of the border situation in general, because at that time there was no well-defined information channel between the border security unit and the rifle division. There was such a link at the level of Border Security District-Military District. In some cases, however, such information went directly to the Main Directorate in Moscow, and it was only there that it was passed on to the People's Commissariat of Defense. The latter, in its turn, decided whether or not to transmit such information to the troops. Such was the complicated path traveled by information that often was important for a particular Division at a particular moment."

If the same sorts of arrangements were in effect on March 2, 1969 (Soviet sources speak only of border troops involved at Damansky), the

policing a very long border at a great distance from high-level decisionmakers.

It is possible that Chinese border authorities had similar rights and duties, but in China the administrative situation is less clear. Regular border troops may have been supplemented by People's Liberation Army units and the Heilungkiang Production and Construction Corps.⁷³ Both sides allege that there had been previous incidents in the neighborhood of Damansky Island. If one or both of the local border commanders decided that unless he took action his patrol and construction operations would be so severely impaired as to threaten the safety of his men or the border security in his area, he would feel it his duty to stoutly draw the line at some geographical or psychological point. But even if he resolved to do so, he would be expected to have made some sort of communication to his superiors and they, at some level between the local and the political center itself, would have approved or disapproved his proposals, however indefinite. (Again, this possibility is elaborated in the discussion of domestic politics and administration.)

Another local possibility is that chance played a greater part than we have been led to believe by Soviet and Chinese sources. Although our reconstruction discounts this possibility, both sides may have put their "best" interpretation on the March 2 "ambush," which in reality may have been a local firefight between ordinary patrols that happened to meet at the southern tip of the island. In the Soviet case, the "best" interpretation would be to claim an ambush in order to cover

Soviets either were surprised by the Chinese, or the clash followed from a meeting of patrols, for it is unlikely that a local Soviet commander would have had the numbers of men and matériel necessary to assure victory over the size of force -- 300 plus men -- reportedly deployed by the Chinese.

⁷³The Heilungkiang Production and Construction Corps was founded sometime in April 1968 and by March 1969 was several tens of thousands strong. Their arrival on the scene undoubtedly caused some administrative confusion, which may have added to any latitude that local commanders already possessed. See Heilungkiang Provincial Broadcasting Station broadcasts of June 14, July 1 and 20, August 11, September 18, October 8, and November 11 and 23, 1968.

the fact that they lost the battle. In the Chinese case, the "best" interpretation would be to say nothing (aside from charging the Russians with trespassing) in hopes that the Russians would not retaliate or escalate. The explanation from chance does not necessarily conflict with the interpretation of local initiative, of ever increasing border tensions leading to increased states of military readiness, or of some explanations arising from domestic politics. But were chance the main element precipitating the battle, one would expect that the Chinese would have given a more convincing and detailed account of what happened, and that the many different Soviet sources would have shown less moral outrage and less inconsistency.

It was Soviet and Chinese policies enacted above the local level that made such an outbreak likely in the first place. Interpretations based on some sort of initiative by Chinese regional authorities fail to be convincing, although in the context of regional Cultural Revolution disorders they should not be abandoned entirely. It is possible, for instance (though not likely), that an important difference of opinion or failure of communication occurred between the Heilungkiang Revolutionary Committee and the Shenyang Military District command. The history of the Cultural Revolution in the Northeast is one of disorder and factionalism, but observers agree that the head of the Military Region was the commanding voice and dominated the Revolutionary Committee.⁷⁴ It is also possible that differences of opinion or breakdowns

⁷⁴For evidence of such disorders, see Heilungkiang Provincial Broadcasting Station, 1968 broadcasts of March 1, 3, 4, and 24; April 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, and 21; May 1, 14, 24, 28, and 29; June 1, 17, 20, and 22; July 10, 14, and 27; August 18, 27, and 29; September 14, 17; November 30; December 1, 2, 6, and 16; and almost continually during the first three months of 1969.

The Cultural Revolution saw much friction between the Military Region and Peking and even outright disobedience of the center. The most notable instance was the Wuhan incident of July-August 1967, when both provincial political authorities and the local military conspired (in Peking's eyes) against the center. See Robinson, *Chou En-lai and the Cultural Revolution*. The continuing disorganization and factionalism at all levels in China even more than a year after Wuhan make it possible to accept an explanation based on intra-regional or regional-center disagreement or failure of communications.

in communication existed between either or both of these two bodies and the central leadership (if indeed it was a singular entity) in Peking. This is a more likely possibility. One can, for instance, conceive of regional authorities misinterpreting or changing standing orders concerning the handling of border incidents in order to demonstrate zealousness in guarding against Soviet revisionism. Perhaps Ch'en Hsi-lien, the Shenyang Military Region commander, wanted to demonstrate his importance to Lin Piao (Ch'en appeared as one of the 25 members of the Politburo at the close of the Ninth Party Congress) and hoped to edge out P'an Fu-sheng, the Heilungkiang Provincial Revolutionary Committee Chairman, for this honor.⁷⁵ Other than this, there is no available evidence to substantiate the explanation of regional initiative. In any case, possibilities of regional-center differences cease to be relevant after the March 2 incident, for once apprised of it, Peking asserted strict control over regional authorities on the frontier.

On the Soviet side, the First Secretary of the Maritime Territorial Party Committee, V. Ye. Chernyshev, was "promoted" out of the region (to the CPSU Central Committee's Party Control Committee) shortly after the second March incident, on March 18.⁷⁶ Major General of Border Troops Aleksandr Anikushin and Chief of Troops of the Pacific Border Military District Major General V. F. Lobanov were authoritative voices in describing the Damansky situation and denouncing the Chinese.⁷⁷ It is impossible to say whether Chernyshev's concurrent "promotion" and Lobanov's and Anikushin's prominence are anything but accidental.

⁷⁵This competition may have been reflected in the kinds and number of appearances of the two men during the period from the close of the Twelfth Plenum, October 31, 1968, to the March incidents. P'an appeared eleven times and Ch'en five times: the one who is behind in the race has to run faster. Ch'en reserved his appearances for the more important occasions.

⁷⁶See *Izvestiia*, March 19, 1969, p. 3.

⁷⁷See TASS, Vladivostok, March 16, 1969; *Pravda*, March 17, 1969, p. 1; and *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 19, 1969, p. 3.

National Politics

Chinese Domestic Politics. Turning to explanations arising from national domestic politics, the range of possibilities opens up. First, factionalism was rife in China at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, the history of the Cultural Revolution can be told in terms of groups and factions competing for power: Red Guards, revolutionary rebels, revolutionary committees, Maoists, anti-Maoists, military professionals, the political military, the bureaucracy, the Cultural Revolution Group, and the individuals heading these groups. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, which we date at the Twelfth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, October 16-31, 1968, many of these groups and individuals had either been eliminated as contenders or had been brought under control by the central leadership. Factions remained in Peking, however, all jockeying for power as the important Ninth Party Congress, April 1969, approached. During the months between the Twelfth Plenum and the Ninth Congress, the main factions -- the ideologues of the Cultural Revolution Group under Chiang Ch'ing, the bureaucracy led by Chou En-lai, the military led by Lin Piao (the military may have been split), the mass revolutionary organs, the provincial revolutionary committees, and Mao himself -- attempted to maximize their positions. It was the military, however, supported by a very small number of other political leaders, that dominated the country and hence determined the course of future political life in China. But this group did not seem to have been plagued by factionalism that could have affected Chinese decisions concerning border strategy, nor is there evidence of a debate among policymakers over how to deal with the threat posed by the massive Soviet troop and equipment deployments to the Sino-Soviet border region. There is little evidence of differences on either of these issues.⁷⁸ The dearth of authoritative

⁷⁸Our survey included a study of articles and editorials in the central press and the public statements of the following individuals: Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of the Party; Lin Piao, Vice Chairman of the Party and Minister of National Defense; Chou En-lai, Premier; Ch'en Po-ta, Mao's personal secretary and a leading member of the Cultural Revolution Group; Chiang Ch'ing, Mao's wife and Head of the Cultural Revolution Group; Yao Wen-yuan, reputedly Mao's son-in-law and Deputy

articles, editorials, and speeches by central leaders on international or military issues from the Twelfth Plenum to the Ninth Congress may signify that a debate was under way within the highest chambers. But on previous occasions when China faced a foreign threat,⁷⁹ such debate was evident (although only faintly reflected in the open literature). With regard to Sino-Soviet border relations, only near the end of July 1969 does one begin to pick up echoes of a debate.⁸⁰ Thus, at least until further information comes to light, it does not seem that military problems with the Soviet Union engendered a factional debate

Chairman of the Shanghai City Revolutionary Committee; Ch'en Yi, Foreign Minister; Hsieh Fu-chih, Minister of Internal Affairs; Huang Yung-sheng, Chief of Staff of the Army; Hsu Hsiang-chen, Vice Chief of the Military Affairs Committee; Yeh Chien-ying, elderly military figure and member of the Military Affairs Committee; Nieh Jung-chen, head of the scientific establishment and elderly military figure; Wu Fa-hsien, Commander of the Air Force; and Su Yu, Vice-Minister of National Defense.

Of the foregoing persons, only Lin Piao, Ch'en Yi, Huang Yung-sheng, and Wu Fa-hsien spoke at length on public occasions. None of them wrote authoritative articles in the press. Only Huang Yung-sheng's two speeches in Albania in early December 1968 could be interpreted as more rabidly anti-Soviet than the pronouncements of the others, and this can be rationalized by the necessity to please his Albanian audience. Of the 34 major reports, editorials, and speeches noted between October 31 and March 1, almost all are standard, relatively undeviating anti-Soviet polemics. If there were debates or differences of opinion as to how to handle the Soviet Union (as is possible), they were thus kept quiet. The very absence of indicators might itself be taken as an indication of a debate. But this does not seem to accord with the pattern of known previous debates.

⁷⁹For example, the summer of 1965 (American intervention in Vietnam), the summer of 1958 (Quemoy crisis), and early fall 1950 (Korean War).

⁸⁰Nanch'ang (Kiangsi) Provincial Broadcasting Station on July 31 carried a broadcast at 1100 GMT that reported, "Some time ago, some PLA personnel failed to understand clearly the relationship between preparedness against war and the task of 'three supports' and 'two militaries' [the ideological expression of military rule at the local level and correct popular attitudes toward it], thinking that in the face of major enemies, these tasks should be suspended." Others, the broadcast reported, "felt that since our country was so powerful, the imperialists, revisionists, and reactionaries would not dare to invade China and there would be no war."

among China's top leaders or that factionalism at the center⁸¹ was severe enough to cause a faction to use a particular strategy toward the Soviet Union as a weapon with which to attack its opponent.⁸²

One curious development in Chinese foreign policy of this period does support the hypothesis of a factional debate in the Chinese leadership over what to do about the Soviet buildup. Chinese declaratory policy toward the United States suddenly changed in the period from Nixon's election as President to the cancellation of the Warsaw talks on February 20, 1969. Until the end of the Twelfth Plenum, October 31, 1968, Chinese comments about the United States were standard, hard-line fare stressing the twin themes of the insolubility of American domestic problems and worldwide collusion with the Soviet Union against China and other "revolutionary" peoples. For about a month and a half thereafter, however, the anti-American tone of Peking pronouncements was muted, and in fact positive overtures to the United States seem to have been made. On November 3, 1968, *Jen-min Jih-pao* published without comment President Johnson's speech announcing a bombing halt over North Vietnam, which surprised many observers not only because of the very fact of its publication but also because no adverse comment was appended. The first *NCNA* comment on Richard Nixon's election as the new President, November 8, although not friendly, was still muted and did not mention Nixon's strong anti-Communist background. This trend culminated in a Chinese declaration, November 25, which included a proposal to resume the Warsaw talks with the United States on February 20, 1969.⁸³ Although the Chinese declaration tried to blame the United States for the

⁸¹We discussed above the possibility of factionalism in the North-east between Ch'en Hsi-lien and P'an Fu-sheng.

⁸²This does not exclude, of course, the possibility of non-Sino-Soviet related factionalism at the center. Many of the 34 statements referred to above spoke of differences, reluctance, misunderstandings, ideological deviations, and shortcomings on a wide variety of domestic issues. Differences on some of those issues might have masked, or included, differences on relations with the Soviet Union. But evidence is lacking.

⁸³*NCNA*, November 25, 1968.

previous postponement of the talks, it also demanded that the five principles of peaceful coexistence (along with, to be sure, settlement of the Taiwan question on Chinese terms) be made the basis for Sino-American relations in the future. This could be considered an invitation to settle differences with the United States in the face of the growing Soviet threat.⁸⁴

Nor does it seem coincidental that at just this time -- late November to early December -- when the foregoing "advances" were being made to the United States, Chinese propaganda attacks against the Soviet Union abated. The most striking evidence that a new balance of power policy was being evolved and that more moderate elements within the Chinese leadership were gaining ascendancy (many cite Chou En-lai and Ch'en Yi) is the republication on November 25, 1968 of Mao Tse-tung's speech of March 5, 1949.⁸⁵ The speech seems to have been a surrogate for Mao's as-yet unpublished speech at the Twelfth Plenum that had just ended. Although it dealt mainly with domestic political and economic questions, it contained two locutions that are surprising, considering China's policy toward the Soviet Union (and, for that matter, toward the United States). First, the speech called for negotiations with the enemy: "We should not refuse to enter into negotiations because we are afraid of trouble and want to avoid complications, nor should we enter into negotiations with our minds in a haze." This hints both that Mao did not want war with the Soviet Union and was opposed in that desire. But if this is so, then either the

⁸⁴The other possibility, of course, is that the Chinese overture was designed to deter the Russians from taking military action against China. It is doubtful, however, whether the Chinese would want to make too much of such an argument, even if implied: the possibility of backfire was too great.

⁸⁵See *Jen-min Jih-pao*, November 25, for the speech and the joint editorial with *Hung Ch'i* (*Red Flag*) and *Chieh-fang-chün Pao* (*Liberation Army Daily*), "Consciously Study the History of the Struggle Between the Two Lines"; translation in *Peking Review*, No. 48 (November 29, 1968). The 1949 speech also stressed the diplomatic, not military, struggle against the enemy. For later pronouncements that indicate a renewed hard-line attitude toward the United States, see *NCNA*, December 11, 1968; January 16, 20, 22, and 30, and February 8, 1969; and *Jen-min Jih-pao*, January 27 and February 2, 4, and 18, 1969.

central Peking leadership did not order the Army to initiate action on March 2 or there was a change in policy between late November and March. Second, the speech contained the phrase, "the world anti-imperialist front headed by the Soviet Union." This phrase leaps out as the only example in years of a favorable word about the Soviet Union in an official Chinese Communist publication. Leaving it in the text (the speech was doctored at a number of other points) would seem to indicate Chinese willingness, in late November, to settle differences with the Soviet Union peacefully.

Nevertheless, we must exclude most explanations of Chinese behavior on the Ussuri based on factionalism and disagreements at the center. Another possibility, however, is that the Chinese "Maoist"⁸⁶ leadership perpetrated the March 2 incident as a means of diverting attention from tensions built up during the Cultural Revolution, and that it planned to use the resulting war scare as an incentive to carry through reforms that had run into popular opposition. Among the latter, which were instituted about the time of the Twelfth Plenum, were the permanent relocation of several tens of millions of urban residents to the countryside;⁸⁷ reform of the medical system through the "barefoot doctors" campaign, which, although it extended rudimentary medical services to the lowest levels, also disrupted the medical system and temporarily lowered medical standards and impeded disease control;⁸⁸

⁸⁶We use quotation marks because it is not clear just how much Mao himself was concerned with day-to-day policy. Some observers believe that Mao has been more and more relegated to the position of a figure-head, and a coterie of central and provincial military leaders is actually in control.

⁸⁷The relocation campaign may be traced in *Jen-min Jih-pao*, October 5, 1968, and January 16, 1969; *Chieh-fang-chün Pao*, October 5 and 9; *NCNA*, October 12, 13, 18, and 21; Radio Honan, October 20 and 22; Radio Hunan, October 23; Radio Hupeh, October 12, 15, 21, and 23; Radio Canton, October 7, 23, and 25; Radio Szechuan, October 13 and 24; Radio Anhwei, October 11; Radio Heilungkiang, October 7 and 11; Radio Kiangsi, October 12; Radio Kweichow, October 12, 22, and 25, and November 1; and Radio Wuhan, February 3, 1969.

⁸⁸See Radio Harbin, June 26, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, July 9 and 22, and Radio Canton, November 6, 1968.

the reform of the educational system, to put production teams in charge of staffing and financing basic education (where the state had helped before);⁸⁹ and the militarization of industry and education, by elevating "worker-peasant propaganda teams" to leadership positions and by installing military leadership and organization, ending hopes of putting the economy on a rational basis.⁹⁰ In addition, the military dominated and then began to dissolve the "mass organizations," as the Red Guards and their revolutionary rebel allies were now called.⁹¹ Increasingly open resentment was being expressed against the severity of these measures and against military rule at all levels.⁹² The collective weight of these tensions by the end of the year may have frustrated the determination of provincial and central authorities to push through the Cultural Revolution and to make it impossible, once and for all, to prevent a "restoration of capitalism" in China.

⁸⁹ See *Hung Ch'i*, Nos. 3 and 4, 1968; *Jen-min Jih-pao*, July 22, August 25, September 11, October 18, 21, 26, 27, and 31; November 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, and 25; and December 2, 5, 6, 10, 12, 16, and 27; *NCNA*, October 12, 13, 18, and 21; *Wen Hui Pao*, December 24; Radio Honan, October 20; Radio Hunan, October 23; Radio Hupeh, October 12, 15, and 23; Radio Canton, October 25; Radio Szechuan, October 13; Radio Anhwei, October 10 and 11; and Radio Kiangsi, October 9, 1968.

⁹⁰ For these developments in industry, see *Jen-min Jih-pao*, August 26, October 22, and November 15; and *Kuang-ming Jih-pao*, October 30, 1968.

⁹¹ For the development of the movement against Red Guard and other leftist mass organizations, see especially *Jen-min Jih-pao*, August 5 and 26; Radio Shenyang, August 6, 20, and 31; Radio Shanghai, August 17; Radio Szechuan, August 20; Radio Hunan, August 24; Radio Anhwei, September 13; Radio Chekiang, September 4 and October 9 and 22; Radio Chinghai, September 5; Radio Harbin, October 23 and November 19; Radio Hunan, September 25 and November 7; Radio Hupeh, August 30, September 8, and October 24; Radio Kiangsi, October 30; and Radio Kirin, October 31 and September 4, 1968.

⁹² See reports on the "support the Army and cherish the people" campaign conducted, among other times, before the Spring Festival (in 1969, February 17) and the "struggle-criticism-transformation" campaign, which summed up the campaigns described above. For example, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, January 5, and 7; Radio Chengtu, January 31; Radio Szechuan, February 11; Radio Hunan, January 14; Radio Wuhan, January 16 and 18; and Radio Canton, January 17, all refer to problems between the Army (or such other centers of authority as the Provincial Revolutionary Committee) and the people over the campaigns.

Such popular resistance and resentment would have been expressed first against provincial revolutionary committees who, knowing that their political influence at and beyond the upcoming Ninth Party Congress was dependent upon their success in carrying out the Maoist line, were confused as to what to do. Some, knowing that the popularly resisted reforms would not work and, being mostly military men, realizing that the Soviet border threat was increasing, may have urged that domestic strictures be relaxed and that the Army be shifted from civil administration to military activities and preparations. Others, knowing that if this were done the Cultural Revolution would have failed, and wishing to cast their lot with the Maoist leadership in hopes of maximizing their power, may have argued for continuing the program with redoubled effort. In any case, these counter pressures were probably the major reason why there was a continual postponement of the Ninth Congress, which was to ratify these changes and to set the framework for the future political and economic life of the country.⁹³

Mao (the Maoists?, Lin Piao?), seeing this threat to the success of the Cultural Revolution and the future, may have resolved to break the impasse by a sudden and spectacular move. A surprise move against a Soviet border outpost would do the job, not only because the resulting war scare would overcome popular resistance to the Maoist reforms and the political reluctance of many Congress delegates to give Mao and Lin a blank check for China's future,⁹⁴ but also because popular enmity

⁹³The arguments developed here are entirely heuristic; no factual evidence is available to support them. The Ninth Congress had, during early 1968, been termed "imminent." Later that word was dropped. In early 1969, indications pointed to a March 1 opening date, then March 15. The Congress finally opened April 1.

⁹⁴The 1968 draft Party constitution contained many provisions that would be seriously questioned by many Chinese. For example: Lin Piao is specifically named as Mao's only successor; Mao's Thought alone is placed at the center of Marxism-Leninism in the present era; improved living standards are no longer mentioned as the goal of the Party; class struggle is stressed to the extreme; the previous warning against great-Han chauvinism is dropped; the united front policy of cooperation with other parties is abrogated; the policy of peaceful coexistence is replaced by one of outright enmity toward the Soviet Union and the United States; the section on rights of party members is truncated; election

toward the Soviet Union would ensure the banishment of "capitalist" and "revisionist" influence from China for some time to come. The latter is, of course, something that Mao personally wanted to see very much. The counter argument that the Soviets possessed superior force along the border and would overwhelm a Chinese attack was possibly met with the assertions that first the communist movement in China has faced such situations before and has won; second, that the Soviet Union is a "paper tiger" that would not retaliate in a manner that could not be handled at the border; and third, that such incidents could only be useful to China in teaching "by negative example" the nature of Soviet "social imperialism." Hence, this argument concludes, Mao sent out the signal to perpetrate an incident, the exact location and timing of which was left to military commanders.

This argument possesses the virtue of joining a large number of domestic political considerations with foreign policy developments. Its defect is that it is entirely circumstantial; we have no factual evidence to confirm or deny such an interpretation.⁹⁵

Chinese Foreign Policy. Three possible explanations for the Chinese actions on March 2 flow from Chinese foreign policy considerations. Their plausibility derives from their presumed persuasiveness to Maoist leadership in light of the Soviet "paper tiger" thesis, the political machinations associated with the approaching Ninth Party Congress, and the hope of circumventing popular opposition to Cultural Revolution reforms by invoking a war scare. One explanation is that the Chinese political and military leadership, noting the Soviet military

of party organs by the membership is replaced with vague wording suggesting appointment from the top down; the length of tenure of office in central party organs is not specified; power is specifically concentrated in the Politburo, with a concomitant downgrading of the Central Committee; the Secretariat is not mentioned, nor are the control organs of the party; and no room is made for an Honorary Chairman, meaning that Mao will retain his present position for life.

⁹⁵ On the other hand, it is surprising that in his major report to the Ninth Congress Lin Piao devoted disproportionate space (for a report of that nature) to his handling of Kosygin's telephone calls concerning the incident of March 15. If Lin felt constrained to speak in such detail to justify his actions at that juncture, it is possible that the entire Maoist anti-Soviet policy was under attack at, and presumably before, the Congress.

buildup and the increasingly aggressive Russian border stance, decided that further Soviet moves would have to be met head-on. Thus, it can be argued, Peking decided to "draw the line" against the Russians and ordered border patrols to increase the frequency of their movements and, when the Russians stepped out of what the Chinese defined as their proper place, to counter the Soviets with force. This argument's weakest point is the obvious disparity of total power in favor of the Russians, but along the frontier itself the balance may have been more even and in some places in China's favor. This seems to have been the case in the vicinity of Damansky. At any rate, this argument states that the Chinese had little choice but to attempt to stop the Russians before the latter became too bold and began to occupy territory instead of merely trespassing. The chance that the Russians would retaliate in a major way would have to be taken, with the presumption that they would not.

A second possible explanation is the "preemption" argument, which stresses the Chinese recognition of the need to do something about the increasing disparity of forces in border military districts in favor of the Soviets. Concluding that a clash was inevitable unless the Russians were thrown off balance, Peking may have decided to initiate action in an area where the Soviets were comparatively weak, hoping to convince the Soviet Union not to proceed further in its plans.

A third foreign policy explanation, the "dragon's teeth" argument, presumes that Mao was in full control of politics in China and that his policy toward the Soviet Union in 1969 continued to be based upon his view of that country as the hated and feared revisionist "enemy within" the world Communist movement. In this explanation, Mao feared that despite the overall success of four years of Cultural Revolution struggle against revisionist influences in China, the possibility remained of the re-impregnation of the revisionist virus, both internally from within the Chinese body politic and externally through Soviet influence. What was needed was a vaccination against revisionism that would hold its potency well beyond Mao's own demise. If the Chinese people could be convinced, once and for all, of the threat of Soviet revisionism, they might not be tempted again by the "bourgeois

revisionist line." Perhaps Mao hoped that permanent national hatred for the Russians would follow a serious military clash, properly exploited in the press, and that anti-Soviet demonstrations held throughout the country would serve to drive the point home. Hence, this argument concludes, the Damansky incident was staged to sow "dragon's teeth" between China and Russia.

Soviet Domestic Politics. The general atmosphere of Soviet domestic politics from late fall of 1968 to the March 2 incident, was, of course, quite different from that in China, where there was such turmoil and struggle over basic forms of social organization and long-range policy. In the Soviet Union, policy disagreements tended to reflect differences of emphasis, and were argued out within a relatively stable sociopolitical framework by participants with more or less common goals. A survey of the two central newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, important periodicals, and the translation journal *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, from October 1968 through February 1969, reveals trends, to be sure, but none that shows causative buildup toward either of the Damansky incidents.⁹⁶ On no issue was there evidence of fratricidal conflicts or disorders, as in China, whose effects might spill over into foreign policy.⁹⁷

⁹⁶The periodicals surveyed were *Kommunist*; *Partinaiia zhizn'*; *Voprosy filosofii*; *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*; and *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*. The reportage showed the Soviet Union to be experiencing the problems of advanced industrialization and the increasingly apparent contradictions between the concomitants of economic progress -- easier communication, social mobility, more bureaucracy, and higher education levels -- and the Party's desire to preserve monolithic rule by a tiny percentage of the population. The regime was having success in coping with these problems and contradictions, though they were growing more difficult. The Brezhnev-Kosygin group had for some time decided (or had been forced by its reluctance to move away from rigidly collective leadership) to apply "neo-Stalinist" techniques. The repercussions of this policy of selective repression were particularly apparent in the arts and in nationality policy. There was also evidence of continuing differences over agricultural policy in the debate over the proposal to institute "mechanized links" at the lowest rural administrative level.

⁹⁷The only exception is the rise of local nationalist sentiment in Central Asian Soviet republics, which the Soviets increasingly repressed after March 2 by appeals to pan-Soviet nationalism in the face of the border crisis.

Were there differences among the Soviet ruling elite -- in the Central Committee or the Politburo -- that might relate directly to the border clash? Soviet leaders may have debated alternative policies toward China and decided to "get tough" with the Chinese beyond merely increasing Soviet military strength in the Far East. Evidence for such a resolution would take two forms: (1) a noticeable change in Soviet propaganda toward China, and (2) changes in the composition of the Soviet leadership as a result of displacing the opposition.⁹⁸

A survey of 306 periodical articles and radio broadcasts from October 1, 1968, through the end of February 1969,⁹⁹ reveals four general categories of Soviet comments on China: (1) criticism of the nature and direction of Chinese internal politics during the Cultural Revolution;¹⁰⁰ (2) rejection of the Maoist ideological line;¹⁰¹ (3) opposition to Chinese foreign policy toward both "socialist" and "capitalist"

⁹⁸ A methodological note is in order. Nearly every major decision of the Soviet Politburo (or Presidium) in the past has been accompanied by either or both of these indicators. See, in this regard, Leonhard, *The Kremlin Since Stalin*; Robert Conquest, *Power and Policy in the USSR*, Torch Books ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); and Michel Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin* (New York: Viking, 1969). But often some time must pass before evidence of intra-elite dissension or struggle appears in any but the most esoteric manner. Propaganda change, on the other hand, is a more reliable short-term indicator of unannounced policy changes. Thus, absence of detectable leadership changes in the short run does not necessarily indicate absence of a change in policy, but absence of propaganda changes in the same period would indicate absence of policy change.

⁹⁹ Based on the following Russian sources: *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, TASS, Radio Moscow, *Kommunist*, *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, Radio Moscow (Domestic and International), Radio Peace and Progress, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Radio Tashkent, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, *Pravda Ukrainy*, *Krasnaia zvezda*, *Trud*, and *International Affairs*. This list was drawn up and initially analyzed by Betsy Schmidt, to whom much thanks is due. The author has a more specific list of the articles and reports drawn from the above sources.

¹⁰⁰ The following sub-themes are included: the Maoist "military-bureaucratic dictatorship"; the revolutionary committees as Mao's personal political machine; Mao's over-reliance on the PLA; worker-peasant-student-soldier resistance to Mao; repression of national minorities; and great-Han chauvinism.

¹⁰¹ Including: Maoist betrayal of the principles of Marxism-Leninism; diminution of the leading role of the Party; syndicalist, anarchist deviations; and Maoist subversion of Marxist-Leninist principles of armed struggle and national liberation.

countries;¹⁰² and (4) defense of Soviet policy toward China and other areas.¹⁰³ Two general conclusions emerge from this survey. First, with one significant exception, the frequency, volume, and intensity of these themes varied little throughout the period.¹⁰⁴ Second, there

¹⁰² Includes charges that: anti-Sovietism is the main content of Chinese foreign policy; China provokes border disputes with the Soviet Union; China tries to sow dissension in the socialist camp and is thus anti-proletarian internationalist; anti-Sovietism acts to consolidate Mao's dictatorship and channels domestic discontent away from the leadership; Maoist China is like traditional China -- imperialist and hegemonic; and China is in collusion with "capitalist" countries, as seen by common policies on the Vietnam and Czechoslovak questions.

¹⁰³ For example, protestations of solidarity and friendship with the Chinese people, as opposed to the Maoist leadership, invocations of Soviet defense of "proletarian internationalism" and world socialism; and explanation and defense of the "Brezhnev doctrine" justifying Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia.

¹⁰⁴ The one significant exception occurred in treatment of the border issue. Only from October 2 to 31 did Soviet sources mention the problem of the Sino-Soviet border. From then until the March 2 incident there was total silence on the issue. See Moscow Radio, October 1, 1700 GMT; October 2, 1230 GMT, and October 7, 1100 GMT; Radio Peace and Progress, October 21, 0900 GMT; and the Soviet note to the Chinese Foreign Ministry of October 31 (rebutting the Chinese charge of border provocations in a note of September 16); *Pravda*, November 1, p. 4. See also *Izvestia*, November 2, p. 3, for an interview on the subject with the Deputy Chief of Staff of the USSR Armed Forces, and Chou En-lai's Albanian banquet speech of September 29, 1968, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, September 30, pp. 1-4.

We can speculate on explanations for Soviet silence on the border issue after October. It might signify resolution of a difference within Soviet leadership on the matter or actual power changes in the Kremlin (though available evidence cannot confirm or deny this). Perhaps the Soviets dropped the subject intending "negative conditioning" (allowing a hiatus so as to take up another issue), but the hiatus was interrupted by the March 2 incident, which demanded Russian comment, so we cannot test this hypothesis. Third, Soviet propaganda on the border may have so irked the Chinese that they threatened punitive action if the Russians continued it. This seems highly unlikely, considering Chinese inability to coerce the Soviets, given the Soviet military buildup along the frontier. On the other hand, with the end of the Cultural Revolution in sight and foreseeing Mao's resumption of control over Chinese politics, perhaps the Soviets were hesitant to provoke just the kind of violent incident that finally took place in March. Finally, cessation of propaganda can be taken as a signal to the Chinese of Soviet desires to settle the border dispute, now that the Cultural Revolution had subsided and the "professionals" were presumably back in control of Chinese foreign policy. Unfortunately, the opposite interpretation is possible:

was almost no change in emphasis throughout the period between themes or in sub-themes. The overall impression, therefore, is one of invariability of policy, as reflected in overt propaganda directed at both the Soviet and Chinese populations.

As for the composition of the Kremlin leadership, clearly there was intramural pulling and hauling behind the scenes over various issues of power and policy. Some people attempted to enhance the status of Leonid Brezhnev as general secretary of the Party, and others opposed these efforts. The general picture is one of the ups and downs of Brezhnev's status, with a slow but perceptible increase. Shelepin's status continued to slip. The Ukrainian and Belorussian presses differed from each other and from Moscow in their treatment of the central leadership. A possible ideological rift emerged in February 1969 between Moscow and Leningrad that might reflect policy differences.¹⁰⁵ But none of these veiled developments seems serious enough or connected even indirectly with Sino-Soviet relations to warrant the hypothesis that after a certain date the presumed debate was resolved in favor of one group (and hence policy) over another.

with troops moving eastward and rumors sure to flow through the Soviet populace about the buildup, perhaps the Russians did not wish to alert the Chinese or cause concern among Russians regarding Soviet intentions. In any case, it seems likely that a decision was indeed made after a certain date (early November 7) to speak with acts, rather than words, about the border dispute. Half of the new policy involved frequent and intensified patrolling by newly stationed troops. The other half, visible after late October, was cessation of propaganda related to the border problem. This seems to be the most likely and consistent evaluation of Soviet intentions.

Konrad Kellen suggested some of these possibilities.

¹⁰⁵On Brezhnev's varying status, compare *Pravda*, September 13, 1968, p. 6, with *Izvestiia*, September 15 (the latter article slighted Brezhnev's war role); see *Izvestiia*, October 25, p. 3, extolling his war role (*Pravda* did not carry a similar story); compare *Pravda*, December 11, p. 1, showing Katushev, Brezhnev's protégé, in an unusually prominent place, with *Pravda*, December 19, p. 1, where Katushev's title was conspicuously lowered from Secretary of the Central Committee to Secretary *under* the Central Committee; and compare the doctoring of Brezhnev's Belorussian liberation anniversary speech in *Pravda*, December 28, p. 102, with the speech as carried on Moscow Domestic Radio, December 28, 0952 GMT.

Is it possible that differences between the Soviet Party and the Red Army, if they existed and are detectable, could have influenced Soviet activities along the frontier so as to contribute to the outbreak of the March 2 incident? Perhaps the Army had a more (less) militant attitude toward Chinese border "provocations" than the Party and this difference affected military postures and tactics. While such differences are possible, they are extremely difficult to discover, since the empirical evidence is not available. Relative Army militancy on the border issue, for instance, would have had to result in actual insubordination to have affected the border forces in the Damansky region, which is quite unlikely. On the other hand, it is possible to analyze Soviet literature to ascertain whether the Party and the Army differed on how to deal with the Sino-Soviet border situation and whether differences over strategic questions might hold implications for practical policy toward China.

A survey of *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, a major Soviet military publication, was undertaken to discover evidence of top-level policy disagreements on strategic matters and in regard to China, and to learn in particular whether the "Brezhnev doctrine," enunciated in 1968 in connection with the Czechoslovak crisis, had been applied to China.¹⁰⁶ (The latter would indicate whether the Russians were planning a tougher military stance toward China.) During the six months before March 1969, there were differences between the Party and the Army on strategic issues and over the perennial issue of the military's relative independence from the Party. For instance, the question of the nature and kinds of war in the contemporary era was again made subject for debate.

¹⁰⁶*Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil* (KVS) is a semimonthly journal published by the Main Political Administration of the Armed Forces. Our survey, begun by Lilita Dzirkals, covered issues from October 1968 to March 1969, and sought statements about China, particularly border problems, and about strategic policy in general that would bear on Soviet policy toward China. A survey of *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star), the daily military newspaper, from October 1968 to February 1969, was not fruitful, and consultation of the other major military journal, *Voennaya mysl'* (Military Thought) was impossible because its circulation is restricted to the Red Army command staff.

Articles in *KVS* seem to take a harder position than the traditional view of the Party on these subjects. Whereas previously the stress was on military preparedness as a way of preventing war and on the universal destructiveness of nuclear war, articles in the period surveyed also declared it the duty of the Soviet Union to make long-term political changes if war were to begin. For instance, Colonel V. Larionov states that the "international duty" of the Soviet state is twofold: first, to actively support armed struggles of the proletariat in civil wars abroad, and second, to stop foreign interference in the internal affairs of other countries.¹⁰⁷

The Larionov article is one of several in which we can trace the outlines of a debate over military independence from Party control,¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷"The Political Side of Soviet Military Doctrine," *KVS*, No. 22 (November 1968), pp. 11-18. He goes on to state, p. 15:

The Communist Party considers its duty to do all that will prevent a new world war. But if it becomes a fact, the Soviet Union will be compelled to utilize all material and moral forces and possibilities to crush the aggressor and forever to finish with imperialism as a system. In full correspondence with these theses, Soviet military doctrine devotes main attention to preparing the country and the Armed Forces for world nuclear war. And on p. 18 he writes, "Soviet military doctrine considers the decisive rout of the enemy to be the best means of defense of the interests of socialism against imperialist aggression." In advocating opposition to "imperialism" by more direct means, this article seems to be a new departure from the prevailing Party opinion.

¹⁰⁸In October 1968, Colonel A. Babakov, in "The Unity of Science and Policy in the Military Activity of the CPSU," *KVS*, No. 19, pp. 61-67, had written of the necessity for Party control over military thought and operations, particularly over the scientific-technical aspects of the modern military machine. The Larionov article in November dissented from this somewhat by stressing the "military-technical" factor. Although this "side" of Soviet military doctrine was still dominated by the political, the very use of the term "side" signifies an enhanced view of the nonpolitical elements of warfare.

The hints thrown out by Larionov were explicitly developed in a major article by Lieutenant Colonel V. Bondarenko a month later. ("The Contemporary Revolution in Military Affairs and the Combat Readiness of the Armed Forces," *KVS*, No. 24 [December 1968], pp. 22-29). Colonel Bondarenko argued expressly that "the military field is a relatively independent area of social life" and hence "has its own logic of development." True, science, economics, and politics (i.e., Party policy) all influence military doctrine and developments (and Party policy directs the development of the first two); but within each of these fields, including military affairs, there is a relatively independent

but evidence is lacking that such differences either concerned policy toward China or resulted in actions before March that could have contributed to the Sino-Soviet border clash.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, *KVS* does give evidence of the development of a military attitude toward China that holds implications for border policy. First, there was an attempt to tar Maoist China with the imperialist brush, so that arguments against imperialism, the main external enemy of the socialist "commonwealth," might also be used against China.¹¹⁰ Second, and more important, there was an attempt to extend the Brezhnev doctrine to deal with "leftism," the main enemy inside the camp. The Brezhnev doctrine can be stated positively, neutrally, or negatively, depending on the degree of threat to the

development, and external sources (politics being external to military affairs) can only "facilitate or hinder the process which has objectively matured and is developing directly."

As if to emphasize the point, he stated, p. 24, that "In some studies, the sole cause of the revolution in military affairs is declared to be politics, and sometimes individual political organizations alone, or even just their leaders."

Victor Zorza and Joseph Alsop, writing in the *Washington Post* on January 8 and 10, 1969, respectively, see an article, "A Great Legacy," in *Krasnaia zvezda*, December 25, 1968, pp. 2-3, by Major General Ye. Sulimov, as a direct rebuttal to the Bondarenko article. Hence, they conclude, there must be differences between the Party and the Army over important military-political questions. For a number of reasons which will not be gone into here, it seems to this writer that the Sulimov article is not a rebuff. In fact, the two commentators seem to be reading too much into that article. This does not mean, however, that Party-Army differences did not exist: the Larionov and Bondarenko articles themselves are cases in point.

¹⁰⁹ It is true that strategic weapons arguments could have been used in regard to China since it now possesses a nuclear capability. But they are much more likely to have been used in the debate over the strategic balance with the United States. Further, if China policy figured in a debate over military investment, we would expect to see arguments about the relative weight to be accorded conventional versus nuclear weapons. Such arguments do not appear in the sources consulted.

¹¹⁰ See Captain 2nd Rank A. Skryl'nik, "The All-Conquering Force of Lenin's Ideas," *KVS*, No. 24 (December 1968), pp. 14-21, and Captain 1st Rank B. Demidov, "For the Unity of Action of Communist and Worker Parties," *KVS*, No. 3 (February 1967), pp. 18-25.

"gains of socialism" one sees in a given country.¹¹¹ When the situation becomes so serious that a "direct threat" to the gains of socialism exists, action must be taken to prevent further deterioration and to restore the *status quo ante*. Although the doctrine usually referred to the Czechoslovak case, several of the *KVS* articles either mentioned China in the same context or implied that the doctrine in its negative sense must be applied to China.¹¹² Since Maoist policy has brought a threat to socialist gains in China,¹¹³ it may be necessary to "extirpate" such "leftist" deviationists.¹¹⁴ This is particularly true when the "imperialist" enemy without, which poses an increasing, direct threat to socialism, allies itself with the deviationist enemy within.¹¹⁵ One must then move to eliminate the latter in order to block the attack from the former.

Thus these several military writers set the theoretical stage for military action against China. Since their articles antedated the first March incident, it is possible that some sectors of the Soviet armed forces, in alliance with some Party officials, were

¹¹¹ Thus, in the positive sense, "the Soviet Union, as the most powerful socialist state, in carrying out its internationalist duty, gives and will give all that is necessary for the strengthening of the socialist system as a whole and each of its links taken separately." (N. Korolev, "V. I. Lenin on Social Democracy and Proletarian Internationalism," *KVS*, No. 2 [January 1969], p. 14.) See also M. Parnev and T. Ermakova, "The Most Influential Political Force of the Present," *KVS*, No. 4 (February 1969), pp. 20-26.

Neutrally, "internationalism cannot remain indifferent to the fate of socialism in fraternal governments. . . . The defense and consolidation of the gains of socialism in fraternal countries is the sacred international duty of communists." (Korolev, p. 13.)

And negatively, "the negation or denigration of the leading role of the party leads to the deformation of socialist democracy, and creates a direct threat to the gains of socialism." (Korolev, p. 12.)

¹¹² See Korolev, p. 12; "Editorial," *KVS*, No. 3 (February 1969), pp. 3-8; Demidov, and Parnev and Ermakova.

¹¹³ F. Khrustov, "V. I. Lenin's Works on the Socialist State," *KVS*, No. 23 (December 1968), p. 19.

¹¹⁴ M. Abdrakhmanov, "V. I. Lenin on the Strategy and Tactics of World Communists," *KVS*, No. 3 (February 1969), p. 10.

¹¹⁵ Demidov, p. 20, and Skryl'nik, p. 19.

pushing for a showdown with China.¹¹⁶ It is of course impossible to say whether this affected the events leading to the first violent outbreak. It undoubtedly did contribute heavily to the Soviet initiative on March 15 (the danger posed by China having by then been "proved") and to the new Soviet policy after the border clashes.

Soviet Foreign Policy. Does the tenor of Soviet foreign policy during this period substantiate the hints of a planned showdown with the Chinese? Major Soviet foreign policy pronouncements lead us to the reverse conclusion. From the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 through February 1969, the Russians were preoccupied with Eastern European problems. The Arab-Israeli conflict also occupied Moscow's attention, as the Kremlin attempted to prevent its client states from entering another unwinnable war, which would also threaten the Soviet Union with direct confrontation with the United States. Strategic issues, too -- strategic arms limitations talks and the question of escalation of the arms race through competitive anti-ballistic missile systems -- were matters of concern. The September and November Budapest meetings of the Preparatory Committee for the long-postponed International Communist Conference claimed some attention. Treatment of Communists in Indonesia, NATO and sea power in the Mediterranean, and Yugoslav revisionism claimed attention in Moscow. But the Berlin question, which erupted in late February over the West German installation of its recently elected president in West Berlin, worried Moscow less than did similar previous events.¹¹⁷ Judging from

¹¹⁶ Several options present themselves: Army-Party differences, each institution taken as a whole; intra-Army debates; intra-Party debates; or an alliance of subgroups within each. The last is most probable, because of its generality, because of the difficulty of imagining debates on these subjects taking place within only one of the concerned institutions, and because *KVS* is a creature of the Party within the Army.

¹¹⁷ The Soviets claimed after the March 2 incident that the Chinese had stabbed them in the back by attacking while their attention was taken up with the Berlin mini-crisis. This claim strains credulity, since no one, including the Russians, thought the Berlin problem would develop any threat proportions. The claim was a formal exercise, and the Soviets as much as told Washington so.

the public media, then, the Chinese question seemed to rate no more concern than did these other problems.

But if the public media do not indicate growing concern over Sino-Soviet border questions that might have affected the March outbreak, other possible foreign policy explanations present themselves. The possibility that the Russians, not the Chinese, took preemptive action and initiated the March 2 incident is so remote that we reject it. More plausible is the likelihood that the Russians, like the Chinese, decided to draw the line and that a battle therefore became inevitable. This explanation is supported by the information that the Soviets increased troop and equipment transfers to the Far East. It also accords with the possibility that Moscow ordered local commanders to toughen their border patrols. It also allows for the contingent nature of events which, in historical writings, looms ever larger as time passes. This explanation does not agree, however, with other developments in Soviet domestic politics and foreign policy. The Soviet Union can probably still disguise basic shifts in foreign policy for some months after the basic decision has been made. The absence of border propaganda after the beginning of November (see p. 57, note 104) enhances the probability that such a basic decision was made after that date. But the other indicators discussed above would be expected to have signified a policy change. Though our reading of Soviet military writing indicated a growing hard-line attitude toward China by the military, that interpretation is inferential and tenuous.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ It was easy for Soviet military writers to arrive at those conclusions, given the anti-China atmosphere in the Soviet Union. That such conclusions were not expressed in print probably means either total control over every written expression on the subject or a policy that did not recognize overt military action against China as a viable alternative. The former is possible; the latter is more probable.

Summary

Despite the fact that the Chinese "caused" the March 2 incident by carrying out an ambush, in a larger sense both sides must be held "responsible" for it. Chinese developments on several levels -- local, domestic, and foreign policy -- combined to precipitate the incident. Although evidence is lacking, the local Chinese border commander probably took the initiative in response to changes in standing orders from Peking. At the national level, the October-November 1968 softening of propaganda attacks and diplomatic treatment of the United States and the Soviet Union indicates differences within the Maoist leadership on how to approach the two superpowers. That hard-line propaganda toward both was restored after late November indicates a decision to remain "tough" with the Russians along the frontier. This development dovetails with the argument concerning the Center's awareness of popular resistance to post-Cultural Revolution reforms and the need to rally the populace with perhaps a war scare. These developments in turn accord with the three plausible foreign policy arguments: a new policy of drawing the line; sowing "dragon's teeth"; and using preemption as a local tactic to throw the Soviets off balance and deter larger blows.

On the Soviet side, the most plausible explanations approximate a mirror image of those on the Chinese side. Stronger standing orders were probably sent from Moscow to local border commanders, resulting in more frequent and aggressive patrolling. The Russians probably thought that when the Chinese became aware of this and of the Soviets' intensified border fortification, they would be awed into staying in line. The conjunction of this Soviet policy and the local Chinese policy of enhanced border patrolling and a strategy of preemption of what they saw as an increasingly certain Soviet attack made the Damansky clash inevitable. Although arguments concerning the general trends of domestic politics, war scare, and "dragon's teeth" are absent on the Soviet side, there is evidence of some sort of change in foreign policy after November 1968. Apparently, after a debate, the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership decided that it would have to deal much more firmly with

China. Once that decision was taken, it was merely a matter of time before an incident would occur.¹¹⁹

Finally, we have rejected as without empirical foundation the following possibilities. On the Chinese side, a regional initiative stemming from differences between the Heilungkiang Provincial Revolutionary Committee and the Shenyang Military Region; factionalism in Peking (other than the evidence noted in connection with the October-November change in propaganda toward the United States and the Soviet Union); and, at the most local level, chance as a cause of the outbreak. On the Soviet side, chance is also rejected, together with regional initiatives; the need for a foreign diversion from the effects of domestic sociopolitical developments; differences within the Kremlin leadership over China policy (except for the evidence from cessation of border propaganda, which seems to indicate an *agreed* policy change); the general trend of Soviet foreign policy; and the possibility of Soviet preemptory attack.

THE MARCH 15 INCIDENT

Explaining the March 15 outbreak is easier than accounting for the March 2 incident: the interval between the two incidents is short (hence the amount of material to be surveyed is much less); the motives of the two parties are much more obvious; and what took place is fairly well documented.

The March 2 incident seems to have brought the Sino-Soviet border issue to the center of attention in Moscow, and a major change was wrought in Soviet policy toward China. Evidently the Soviets decided henceforth to pursue a dual strategy. On the diplomatic front, the Russians moved to convince the Chinese of the necessity to settle the border problem definitively through a new and comprehensive border treaty, with the possibility of far-reaching agreements. Pressure

¹¹⁹Whether the Soviets had thought out the second half of the decision, namely, that such a policy might lead to war, cannot be assessed. But the outlines of what we call a "dual policy" came into clearer focus after the post-November decision.

for talks was to be applied by constant, aggressive border patrolling, willingness to engage in firefights and other battles with Chinese military personnel, and possibly even initiation of border incidents at strategic moments. On the military front, additional troops and equipment were immediately sent to the frontier in anticipation that the first strategy might not work and, therefore, that the Soviet Union might have to undertake major military action against the Chinese.¹²⁰

The March 15 incident was the beginning of the Soviet dual strategy. Hence, that strategy was the major "cause" of the second Damansky incident. The essence of the strategy was to pursue two lines simultaneously without having to choose between them until forced to. The Soviets hoped that giving the Chinese periodic bloody noses would convince them of the wisdom of an overall border settlement along the lines of the 1964 Soviet proposals. If this did not work, then direct action might have to be taken. And if the latter alternative were "forced" upon the Russians, then they would have to decide either to gird for prolonged military conflict with China (and add to their investments in military strength, collective security overtures to Asian states on China's periphery, and settlement of troublesome matters with the West), or attack in a quick, preemptive strike.

Given the nature of the Soviet system, of course, the conclusion that the Soviets adopted a new strategy is a matter of inference rather than of direct evidence. Serving to support this inference and explain the Soviet part in the March 15 event are the following: the Soviet

¹²⁰ Various stages of increasing violence can well be imagined: demands for Russian co-determination of Sinkiang's political status; division-sized temporary incursion across the border; more than temporary occupation of small portions of Chinese territory; pinching off a chunk of Sinkiang and providing a Soviet-installed "autonomous" government; conventional attack against Chinese nuclear installations; nuclear attack against Chinese nuclear installations; turning Sinkiang into an Outer Mongolia; frontal attack at several points along the border, i.e., extending the range of large-scale hostilities to Inner Mongolia and Manchuria; and all-out attack with the goals of partitioning China, overthrowing the Maoist leadership, and installing a government in Peking favorable to the Soviet Union.

handling of the March 2 incident; a desire for revenge; local preemption; desire to protect Soviet standing in the international Communist movement, and Soviet nationalism.

Revenge seems to have been a primary motive on the Soviet side. The Russians felt that the Chinese carried out a premeditated, treacherous attack. The Soviets felt that the Chinese should be made to pay for the Soviet blood expended. This motive stands apart from arguments, surely made, about the necessity to defend every inch of Soviet soil from foreign attack. Soviet domestic propaganda from March 3 to 15 bears out the theme of revenge.¹²¹

Local preemption would have been a factor if the Soviets noted the Chinese military buildup near Damansky after March 2, sensed an attack coming, and decided to attack first themselves. Indeed, the Chinese may have attacked first, as the Russians claim. But the Russians readied themselves for a fight, and had every intention of answering any Chinese initiative in full.

No doubt a factor in Soviet calculations was the fear that a weak response or no response to the first Damansky incident would impair Soviet standing in the international Communist movement. A weak response, they figured, would neutralize the gains made in recouping prestige lost during Khrushchev's regime. It would also hinder the ongoing Soviet effort to convene an international Communist conference on the same scale and with the same ideological authority as the 1960 conference in Moscow.¹²² Weakness in the face of the Damansky

¹²¹Official Soviet reports and eyewitness accounts of the March 2 events as well as the mass meetings held throughout the country after March 7 called for revenge.

¹²²The Soviet Communist Party had been working with non-pro-Chinese branches of the movement for over four years to schedule the conference. At meetings of the Preparatory Committee in Budapest in September and November 1968, member parties had finally agreed to hold the conference in May 1969. For documentation of these meetings, see *CDSP*, Vol. 20, No. 40 (October 23, 1968), pp. 10-11, and Vol. 20, No. 47 (December 11, 1968), pp. 3-5. The Soviets had the remaining task of ensuring the attendance of the signatories to the Budapest Declarations and enticing other Communist parties, particularly the Italian and Rumanian, to the meeting.

crisis might have convinced many nonruling (as well as some ruling) parties that Soviet strictures on the dangers of China, and possibly on other issues as well, should not be taken seriously. Since a major Soviet goal at the upcoming conference was to show *de facto* condemnation of the Chinese (if not to elicit anti-Chinese declarations), the Russians could ill afford not to take action.¹²³

Soviet domestic propaganda played heavily upon the theme of Soviet nationalism during the time between the two incidents. Demonstrations were staged in many Russian cities.¹²⁴ Russians have historically exhibited extreme nationalism in times of military crisis affecting Soviet territory. The appeal to nationalism invoked with this fresh crisis benefited the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership, which had been plagued with increasing, local, anti-Great Russian nationalist sentiment.¹²⁵ The leadership thus probably found the effects

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On the other hand, a too severe Russian action might drive the Italians and the Rumanians away from the May meeting. These parties opposed the Russian efforts to turn the conference into an anti-China diatribe. The Soviets therefore had to carefully modulate their response at Damansky on the 15th. They might have been more severe with the Chinese had not this factor been present. As it was, the May meeting had to be postponed to June because of the border outbreak, and the Rumanians and the Italians agreed to attend only if no adverse mention of the Chinese was made in the official declarations of the conference.

¹²⁴The few meetings held immediately after the March 2 event did not swell to any climax. Only when the Russians were certain that the March 2 attack was not part of a larger military operation did they turn on the propaganda machine in earnest. Five days after the initial announcement of the fighting and the exchange of diplomatic notes, massive demonstrations and commentaries began on March 7, reached a peak on the 8th, and declined to a constant, low-keyed effort by the 14th. A demonstration at which ink bottles were thrown was held in front of the Chinese embassy March 7 and demonstrations spread to the following Soviet cities during the week of March 4-11: Moscow, Leningrad, Frunze, Vladivostok, Kiev, Blagoveshchensk, Khabarovsk, Kishinev, Tashkent, Tallinn, Sverdlovsk, Minsk, Baku, Yerevan, Dushanbe, Iman, Alma-Ata, Zabaikalsk, and Nizhny Tagil.

¹²⁵On nationalism in the Soviet Union, see "The Soviet Moslem World," *Studies on the Soviet Union* (Zurich), Vol. 7, No. 4 and Vol. 8, No. 1, 1968 (entire issues); Richard Pipes, "The Solution of the Nationality Problem," *Studies on the Soviet Union*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1967,

of the Damansky Island incidents not entirely unwelcome in submerging if not eradicating a dangerous tendency.

Since it was the Russians, not the Chinese, who initiated action on Damansky Island on March 15, Chinese motivations are less important than Soviet ones.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, it is useful to record the Chinese reaction to the March 2 incident, for it gives clues about continuing Chinese attitudes toward border problems. Demonstrations in Peking began within 24 hours of the incident and spread rapidly throughout the country. The Soviet embassy in Peking was besieged for the fourth time since the Cultural Revolution began. Every group in the country was called on to issue anti-Soviet statements, and the press and radio gave extensive coverage to the demonstrations and denouncements of the Russians. The demonstrations continued through March 15, and Peking claimed that over 400 million people (over half the entire population of China) had marched at one time or another.¹²⁷

Several reasons can be given why the Chinese went to such extremes. First, to Maoists, who denied Chinese initiation

pp. 35-47; and P. Urban, "A Soviet Discussion of the Concept of Nationhood," *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR* (Munich), Vol. 14, No. 5 (May 1967), pp. 37-48.

¹²⁶As we have noted above, it is possible, but not probable, that the Chinese did begin action on the 15th as well as on the 2nd of March. If they did, the reason was simply a desire to gain a tactical advantage over the Russians. In other words, the Chinese may have attempted to forestall the expected Russian attack. The difference between the two incidents then would lie in the relative success of the Chinese: this tactic worked in the first instance but not in the second. The reason, of course, was that the Russians were ready for them the second time and by then had a clear local superiority in equipment, if not in men.

¹²⁷See especially NCNA Domestic Radio, March 4, 0017 GMT; NCNA International Radio, March 3, 2134 GMT; joint *Jen-min Jih-pao* and *Chieh-fang-chün Pao* editorials, "Down With the New Tsars," March 3, p. 1; Budapest MTI Domestic Radio, March 3, 2001 GMT; NCNA International Radio, March 5, 0852 GMT, 1420 GMT, and 1205 GMT; March 6, 0600 GMT; Kweiyang Radio, March 5, 0330 GMT; Chentu Radio, March 5, 1030 GMT, and 1330 GMT; Kunming Radio, March 5, 1030 GMT; Chengchow Radio, March 5, 1000 GMT; NCNA International Radio, March 6, 1730 GMT, 2015 GMT, March 7, 0800 GMT; Budapest MTI Domestic Radio, March 6, 1800 GMT; NCNA International Radio, March 8, 0600 GMT, 1247 GMT, 0607 GMT, March 7, 1243 GMT,

of the March 2 incident, it was final proof of the iniquity of the "social imperialism" of the "new Tsars" in the Kremlin. What Mao had been telling the Chinese people about "modern revisionism" could now be seen in fact. The incident demonstrated the link between ideological deviations associated with Soviet development and foreign policy and what could happen to a formerly socialist state that had "changed color." In a sense, the March 2 incident as a Soviet attack justified the Cultural Revolution (which by then needed more than ever to be justified to the Chinese people).

Second, and more important, the demonstrations helped the central leadership push through the reforms of the preceding several months. As we have seen, many of these reforms had not met with popular success, and the Maoists seized upon the Damansky incident to create a work incentive. Many of the propaganda statements against the Russians also urged the people to work even harder in "grasping revolution and promoting production," which was the overall slogan for the various reform campaigns.

Finally, the demonstrations served an important foreign policy goal: to convince the Soviets of the unity of the Chinese body politic, ready and able to repulse any Russian attempts to take more general military action in retaliation for Damansky. This probably was convincing to the Soviets, although they had no intention of escalating the Damansky conflict. The ploy did not work at Damansky itself, however, and the difference in Chinese reaction to the second incident (there were very few demonstrations and of short duration only) as compared with the first shows that the Chinese leadership hoped that the magnitude of the propaganda response would keep the Russians from even a local military response.

March 9, 0611 GMT, and March 10, 1325 GMT; *SCMP* 4373 (March 11), pp. 18-20; *SCMP* 4374 (March 12), pp. 20-27; *SCMP* 4375 (March 13), pp. 26-33; *SCMP* 4376 (March 14), pp. 18-20. *Current Background*, No. 876 (April 11, 1969), gives 50 pages of translations of these and other similar reports.

V. CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS

Several conclusions emerge from our exposition and analysis. Those relating to the chronological development of the border dispute include the following. First, problems relating to the border did not occupy a major place in either state's relations with the other until relations began to deteriorate for other reasons. Once the question of the border was brought up, however, it tended to take on a life of its own. Second, the 1964 effort to solve the problem before it became serious was not successful chiefly because the Chinese, again for reasons unconnected with the border itself, did not wish it to be settled. But in theory there are no insurmountable obstacles to a final settlement of the issue. Third, the controversy became serious with the beginning of the "active phase" of the Cultural Revolution in mid-1966. Both parties are to be blamed for the ensuing situation. The Chinese apparently allowed extremist partisans of the Cultural Revolution to cross at will over the border, causing the Russians to worry about allegedly irrational Chinese behavior and conjuring up old fears about large numbers of Chinese sweeping in from the East to settle like locusts upon Soviet soil. The Russians, for their part, overreacted to Cultural Revolution incursions by fortifying their border forces much beyond the level necessary to cope with propaganda demonstrations by unruly Chinese crowds and by policing the border with an iron hand (although, to their credit, adhering to procedures designed to prevent bloodshed).

As for the two border incidents themselves, their causes differ considerably. The more important March 2 incident seems on balance to have been "caused" by the Chinese, who fired the first shots and organized the ambush on Damansky Island. A basic explanation for Chinese actions depends upon the complex interplay of historical, local, national, personality, and foreign policy forces. No single explanation suffices, and it is difficult even to establish priorities among those that do not conflict. The attempt to assign relative weights to the above factors and arrive at a composite explanation

does point up, however, the close linkage between Chinese domestic politics and foreign policy, a connection that always exists but is rarely made explicit. The March 15 incident is less easy to describe but is easier to explain. The Russians either pulled the trigger first or led the Chinese into a trap. Once again, the search for the explanation reveals a complex of motivations deriving from the interplay between Soviet domestic politics and foreign policy.

After March 15, the Soviets pursued their "dual strategy" of threats of violence and offers of compromise to bring the Chinese back to the negotiating table abandoned in 1964. When that did not bring immediate results, the Russians made a major transfer of forces to the Far East, preparing in earnest for a military showdown. The second, military, half of the strategy served to buttress the first, diplomatic, half. As for the Chinese, they gradually gave way under the new and intensified Russian pressure. In May they abandoned insisting on Soviet admission of the "unequal" nature of the 19th-century border treaties as a condition of entering negotiations. In June, they caught the Russian trial balloon in agreeing to sit with the Soviets in Khabarovsk to work out a one-year river navigation agreement, essentially a dry run for the full-scale negotiations to begin in the fall.¹²⁸ The agreement was signed in mid-August. Meanwhile, the Russians kept the pressure on by a steady stream of border incidents, the most serious of which occurred in the touchy Sinkiang border region and demonstrated what was in store for Peking if it refused to negotiate. The Russians had openly laid on the table the threat of turning Sinkiang into a new Mongolia. And behind that lay the threat of attack upon Chinese nuclear and missile facilities, rumor of which the Russians did nothing to deny and even helped spread.

The result, in retrospect, seems foregone. The Chinese knuckled under and agreed, following the meeting of Chou En-lai and Alexei

¹²⁸ The Chinese evidently felt themselves under considerable pressure. When, within a day after these talks began, a border skirmish erupted at Goldinsky Island, less than 40 miles from the negotiating site, the Chinese delegation denounced the Russian action and walked out of the talks, but walked right back in the next day.

Kosygin at the Peking airport on September 20, to meet the Russians in full-scale talks in October. It did not follow, of course, that the talks would lead inevitably to settlement, even though the Chinese statement of October 8 seemed to remove all further substantive objections to it. The Chinese strategy in entering the talks in the first place was to try to squirm out of the Russian politico-military vice by using the negotiations as a lightning rod to deflect the Russian threat. Evidence for this was graphically provided by the republication in internal Party communications of Mao's 1946 article "On Chungking Negotiations," in which he argues that the purpose of negotiating with the enemy is to gain time to fight a winning battle later.¹²⁹ But the Soviets surely understood this game and will have to decide whether or not to reimpose military pressure in order to prevent the Chinese from prolonging negotiations indefinitely.

The importance of the two March incidents lies not merely in their being the first and the largest military clashes between the two major Communist powers. The events also punctuated a phase in Sino-Soviet relations and began a new trend that culminated in the Sino-Soviet agreement to renew border negotiations in October 1969. In retrospect, the Damansky events may have marked a turning point in Sino-Soviet relations, if the current border negotiations succeed in producing a document that will authoritatively delineate the border. Such an agreement might well set a limit below which Sino-Soviet relations cannot fall and might even symbolize a partial return to the close cooperation that marked their relations in the years immediately after 1950. Early March 1969 might come to be regarded as the nadir of Sino-Soviet relations. Even if the Peking negotiations fail to bring the two contending parties to agreement -- either through the breakdown of negotiations and the possible resumption of fighting, or through *pro forma* prolongation of negotiations merely to avoid the consequences of failure -- the two March incidents will have exerted a major influence on long-term Sino-Soviet relations and hence on world politics.

¹²⁹ Nanking Radio, October 17, 1969, 2200 GMT.