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The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes*

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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.

A new phase in Sino-Soviet relations thus began. How and why did it come about? 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 article. After outlining 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 variables.

Aside from ascertaining the facts of the two March incidents and explaining the policies of the Soviet Union and China as they relate to their common border, the article was written with several other purposes in mind. First, here is explicit concern with the linkages between the domestic politics and foreign policies of these two states. The study demonstrates that those interconnections are complex, reciprocal, and knowable. Second, the inquiry shows that to understand specific foreign policy events it is necessary to grapple with details at many different levels of generality and of political administration, and that only a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach will succeed in providing a properly integrated analysis. Third, methodologically, the article represents an attempt to push to its limits the qualitative content analysis approach to political inquiry. As such, the bonds with quantitative content analysis—as well as the boundary between the two approaches—become clearer.

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Sino-Soviet Border Relations to March 1969

The Basis of the Sino-Soviet Dispute. The clash at Damansky Island[1] ushered in a new phase of Sino-Soviet relations, threatening for the first time open war between the two Communist giants. However, this particular border clash was not unusual except in its violence. There had been other incidents, some even at the same spot, and though they apparently increased in frequency immediately preceding March, border relations in general had 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.[2]

[1] The Russian name of this island (and other disputed islands) rather than the Chinese name (Chenpao, "Treasure" Island), is used for convenience only.

[2] I 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., those influencing the history of Sino-Soviet relations since, say, 1956) or immediate background factors (i.e., elements which 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 decision makers. They 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 pre-eminence; and the vague Russian fear of the "yellow peril."

Another set of factors relates to the way self-perceived Great Powers conduct their policies. Established Great Powers tend to be sensitive to challenges from aspiring Great Powers; competing Great

Overt Sino-Soviet difficulties originated during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956, when 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 on almost all topics of concern to the international Communist movement and to 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] 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 matters.[6] This situation continued until 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, to change the metaphor, as a convenient lightning rod to direct energies away from insoluble domestic problems during times of high tension. The Soviets, unable to resist the tempting target presented by the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, resumed and expanded their range of criticism.

In the Cultural Revolution, Chinese leaders launched an attack against followers of the "bourgeois reactionary line," purged the 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.

The frequency and severity of Sino-Soviet border difficulties parallel the decline in friendly relations between the two parties and states. For several hundred years, border problems often occupied the forefront of Sino-Russian attention.[7] But the post-1949 era is unique in that for the first time a relatively strong, dynamic, and centralized Chinese state faced a Russian government having the same qualities.

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.

[3] See especially Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc,* Revised and Enlarged 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.

[4] Zagoria, 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).

[5] See 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 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 E. Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1964), and idem., *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963).

[6] William Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations. 1964–196* (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).

[7] See, for instance, Klaus Mehnert, *Peking and Moscow,* trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 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' *Soviet Russia in China* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957) puts forth the Chinese Nationalist (and, to some extent, the Communist) case.

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, as well as agreements concerning civil aviation, mineral resources, shipping and railroads, and Soviet naval bases.[8] These treaties were modified, however, in 1952: the joint stock companies formed in 1950 for economic development were transferred to exclusive Chinese ownership, while the naval bases were returned in 1954.[9]

These modifications had the outward effect of normalizing Sino-Soviet relations for the next two years, but 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.[10] The next Chinese initiative seems to have been in January 1957, when Chou En-Lai met Khrushchev during Khrushchev's second trip to Peking. Chou "could not get a satisfactory answer from him then."[11]

Border Incidents and Negotiations. Incidents along the border itself began as early as 1959 and matched step-by-step the general decline in relations.[12] Indeed, in retrospect, it is apparent that border difficulties were an indicator of that decline and an important factor in Sino-Soviet relations as a whole during the next decade.[13] Both sides acknowledge sporadic border incidents. The Soviets charge that the Chinese initiated skirmishes in 1959, 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 incidents.

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 across our frontiers . . . in the Tien Shan mountains where China borders upon Kirgiziya."[14] Beginning in June

[8] 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: 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 L. Boorman, "The Borderlands and the Sino-Soviet Alliance" in Howard Boorman, Alexander Eckstein, Philip E. Mosely, and Benjamin Schwartz, *The Moscow-Peking Axis* (New York: Harper and Bros. for the 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; and *Jen-min Jih-pao,* December 17, 1949. The Soviets depend heavily on this statement to counter Chinese arguments concerning "unequal" treaties.

[9] 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." 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).

[10] 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.

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

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

[13] Many Russian and Chinese sources cited below make this point explicitly.

[14] Simonov, "Thinking Out Loud." 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*

1962, with "systematic provocations," the Russians allege that the number of border violations increased.

> 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.[15]

> At first there 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.[16]

> 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.[17]

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.

With one exception, China has always initiated public confrontation over the border, while the Russians have defended 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. Soviet criticism in turn gave China the opening it sought, and, foreshadowing its argument in 1969, China declared that the border treaties signed between Tsarist Russia and Ch'ing Dynasty China were "unequal" and hence subject to revision. The Chinese statement, published on 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?"[18] After this date public reports and charges of border violations began, and secret border negotiations were initiated.[19] The most important Chinese border statement of the time was made by Mao Tse-tung himself. In a Peking interview with visiting Japanese Socialist Party members 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.[20]

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.[21] 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. From that time they took the ideological offensive and began to strengthen their border defenses.[22] *Pravda* printed a long polemical editorial on September 2, 1964, charging the Chinese with Hitler-like expansionist plans to acquire *lebensraum* in Soviet territory, while Khrushchev challenged the Chinese title to Mongolia, Tibet, and especially Sinkiang.[23] The

Chinese Intellectuals (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 50, p. 163; and Dennis Doolin, ed., *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition* Hoover Institution Studies, 2 (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.

[15] Moscow Radio in English to South Asia, March 25, 1969.

[16] "Statement of the USSR Government," *Pravda*, March 30, 1969.

[17] Dmitriyev, "Far Away on the Border."

[18] "A Comment on the Statement of the Communist Party of the USA," *Jen-min Jih-pao* editorial, March 8, 1963. The same editorial declared that existing boundary treaties perpetuated Russian occupation of Chinese territories.

[19] See especially the series of reports translated in Dennis J. Doolin, *Territorial Claims in the Sino-Soviet Conflict*, Hoover Institution Studies, 7 (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.

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

[21] *Asahi Shimbun* interview of Premier Chou En-lai, see above, fn. 12.

[22] 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 reprinted from a Nationalist Chinese secondary school history text and circulated for teaching purposes only.

As for changes in Soviet and Chinese troop dispositions, the annual *The Military Balance* (London: Inst. of Strategic Studies), 1963–1968, shows only minor order-of-battle changes along the border through 1966, intended to improve the readiness of existing units as well as their logistics and equipment.

[23] See *Pravda*, September 2, 1964, for a major statement rebutting previous Chinese charges and referring to the 1954 map. This editorial appears to be the first

situation might well have become more dangerous—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.

As the Chinese publicly attempted to humiliate the Soviets in this manner and the Russians defended themselves from what they probably considered Chinese imperialism, the two states initiated secret "consultations" on February 25, 1964.[24] The initiative apparently came from the Soviet side. The Russians claim to have suggested the talks on May 17, 1963 (just after the border issue came into the open following 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, the Chinese by Tseng Yung-chuan, 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 Russians, 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.

Since many of the same arguments reappeared after March 1969, a review of the 1964 events helps in assessing prospects for the more recent round of negotiations. Soviet and Chinese documents make both negotiating positions clear. The Soviets: (1) expressed willingness to sign a new, comprehensive border treaty that would abrogate the old treaties which the Chinese considered "unequal," as long as the new treaty would "strengthen" existing borders, i.e., maintain the *status quo* in all essential respects; (2) were willing to, and apparently did, make detailed proposals concerning certain unspecified sections of the border, proposals that would, "on the basis of mutual concessions," protect Chinese economic interests along the riparian boundary and accurately delineate the border; (3) to this end, submitted 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) refused in every case, however, to scrap the old treaties before signing a new one. (This would have destroyed their legal position by admitting the veracity of the Chinese contention that those treaties were "unequal.")

The Chinese advanced five points: (1) They challenged the validity of all Russo-Chinese border treaties made before 1917, concluded when power "was not in the hands of the people" and hence 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.[25]) (2) The Chinese did not expect the

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. 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).

[24] This 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; Moscow Radio to South Asia, March 25, 1969; 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; 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. 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.

[25] The Soviets have failed to point out an obvious contradiction in the Chinese argument. 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 nondemocratic, so was the Ch'ing government, being feudal in the Chinese Communist lexicon. Treaties signed between governments that are both nondemocratic can hardly be termed unequal by successor 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

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) The Chinese proposed that border questions should be solved through negotiation, with the *status quo* 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 Treaty of Peking. 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 would be Chinese. The Chinese delegation submitted a larger-scale map of the border to support this contention.

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

The main points of disagreement in the 1964 border negotiations concerned, first and foremost, a difference in procedures 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, taking the old treaties as a basis for negotiation. The Soviets, not trusting the Chinese to fulfill the latter half of their promise, proposed simultaneously (i.e., as part of the same document) to 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 still have extracted Soviet admission of the "unequal" nature of the old treaties.

But there were other, more substantive, differences. The Chinese based their case squarely upon the invalidity of the unequal treaties. The Soviets rejected this, pointing to the international law of 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.[26]

Furthermore, the Chinese claimed, according to the Thalweg argument (i.e., riverine bounda-

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 Public International Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); and Hungdah Chiu, "Communist China's Attitude Toward International Law," *American Journal of International Law,* 60, No. 2 (April, 1966), pp. 245–267.

[26] 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.

ries must follow the deepest point of the river channel)[27] most of the riverine islands belonged to China, and Soviet occupation was therefore illegal. This, of course, the Russians denied outright. Finally, there was the question of whether the Russians relied on the small-scale map of 1860 to obscure necessary details (however legal the map) or whether the Chinese large-scale map was anything more than an illustration of their claims.

On balance, points of agreement seemed to outweigh substantive differences. If, for instance, the Chinese had given way on the Thalweg argument, the Russians might have compromised on what map to use as a basis of settlement. The two states could then have bargained for ownership of the disputed islands and a new treaty could have been written. But since negotiations never even got to the point of specific bargaining and perhaps never 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 or both. Soviet testimony seems to indicate Chinese unwillingness to come to terms procedurally. It is also possible that China, on the offensive ideologically in 1964, did not then want a border settlement, which 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. Mao may also have thought he had the Russians "on the run" ideologically and that time was on his side. If differences with the Russians were to assume the character of a protracted, guerrilla-like war, he should avoid settling 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 where a definitive settlement would be harder to avoid.[28]

The border issue was not again aired publicly until the Chinese promulgated a set of "Regulations Governing Foreign Vessels on Rivers on the National Boundary," in April 1966.[29] For the previous decade, the Soviet Union and Communist China had cooperatively developed the Amur, Argun, and Ussuri River regions and had signed a number of relevant treaties and agreements.[30] The 1958 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation in fact represents the closest the two powers have come to specific contractual border arrangements.[31] 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.

[27] *Thalweg* is the German word for "channel course," i.e. the deepest part of the river, not necessarily its center.

[28] It 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, 1964. Were Sino-Soviet relations heading for a showdown, as Harold Hinton argues in *Communist China in World Politics* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1966), pp. 469–488? Unfortunately, evidence either way is lacking and Hinton's argument is, for the most part, unconvincing.

[29] The Chinese 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.

[30] These 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.

[31] This treaty does not mention boundary settlement per se, and merely grants each state's vessels and

The degree of Sino-Soviet enmity along the river frontier at the time is reflected in the severity and provocative nature of the "Regulations."[32] 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. The regulations were probably never fully carried out, but their very existence explains some of the Russian acts about which the Chinese later complained, and increased Soviet use of late-model river gunboats.

Apparently border relations 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.[33] Border guards reported incidents on December 7–9 and 23, 1967, and in late January 1968 along the Amur and the Ussuri Rivers.[34] Such incidents apparently continued up to the March 2, 1969 clash, and the Soviets gradually evolved a nonviolent procedure for dealing with them. This procedure 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. The Chinese claimed that between that date and March 2, 1969, Soviet troops intruded sixteen times onto Damansky (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.[35] Further, the Chinese

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.

[32] The text of the 1966 "Regulations" was published in *NCNA*, April 19, 1966. 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 midriver 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.

[33] Dmitriyev, "Far Away on the Border," quotes border guards as saying the 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 officers and ministries were disorganized, policies radicalized, and the voices of moderates unheard. In the spring and summer of 1967 the Foreign Minister was under Red Guard attack and the Foreign Ministry 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 the Army was forbidden to interfere in Cultural Revolution activities except under the direction of local Red Guard-revolutionary rebel leftist forces.

British experience in Hong Kong in 1967 is germane: it was quite clear that local Red Guards were initiating outbreaks of violence along the border and in the city. 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.

[34] Dmitriyev, "Far Away on the Border."

[35] "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, (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" occurred during the ice-bound winter months. Sixteen intrusions over a period of about two years

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."[36]

Finally, the Chinese charged that the Soviets "provoked" a total of 4,189 border incidents from the breakdown of border negotiations on October 15, 1964, to the March, 1969 incidents.[37] Most of these charges refer to Soviet border patrol and reconnaissance and efforts to evict Chinese from "Soviet" areas without taking lives. The picture that emerges shows not much more than minor harassment between two unfriendly powers who disagreed upon some specifics of border demarcation and who found 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. 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.

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 another.[38] 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.[39] After the Cultural Revolution began, however, and as ideologically based incidents began to occur regularly, the Soviets 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 themselves from the blows of the Chinese with the butts of their machine guns.[40]

Diposition 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.[41] The Chinese had an edge near 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 two parties came to ideological separation, dispositions of forces on both sides remained de-

would give an average frequency of less than one 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.

[36] *NCNA*, May 27, 1969.

[37] "Statements of the Government of the People's Republic of China, May 24, 1969."

[38] Aleksandr Anikushin (Major-General of Border Troops), "Again Damansky Island," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 19, 1969, (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 12 [April 9, 1967], p. 3); V. Fomenko, "Far But Near," *Pravada Ukrainy*, April 2, 1969; and "Statement of the USSR Government," *Pravda*, March 3, 1969, (translation in *CDSP*. Vol. 21, No. 13 [April 16, 1969], pp. 3–5). That the border is fraught with potential conflict at many strategic 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.

[39] S. Kosterin, V. Mikhaylov, and P. Troyanovskiy, "Frontier Post on the Ussuri," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, May 7, 1969, quoting a Chinese request to procure hay on Damansky Island. The article says 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.

[40] Yuri Apenchenko and Yuri Mokeyev, "Report from Far Eastern Frontiers," *Pravda*, March 12, 1967, (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. As we shall see below, the Chinese, on March 2, took advantage of the Soviet practice of strapping their weapons to their chests when first meeting Chinese "intruders."

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

fense 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 supplemented these groups with the well-known Production and Construction Corps, paramilitary units of military-age youths (mostly Han males)[42] 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 380,000–480,000 men, figuring 11,000–12,000 men per average division.[43]

It is not difficult to understand the rationale for this disposition of forces. The Chinese have kept a sizable defensive force in the Northeast because there are large population concentrations in the area, because the capital, Peking, is one of the Military Regions in the Northeast sector, and because Manchuria is China's major industrial base. Moreover, the unsettled nature of the Korean conflict militates for a sizable backup force in the region. Finally, 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 east to the Ussuri River, north to the Amur River, and west to Mongolia. The transportation net in this region is the most highly developed of any in China. But considering the numbers of men that had to 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 more than 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. With a population of only one million and without a Soviet presence, Mongolia is no military threat to China. Inner Mongolia, furthermore, is sparsely populated. In Sinkiang, which has strategic resources, nuclear test facilities, and a not very 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 must be concentrated in important locations. The Production and Construction Corps, furthermore, provides a first line of defense against possible Soviet incursions.[44]

As for the Russians, the Soviet Far East is a long way from Europe, where Soviet foreign policy has traditionally focused. Because of this, and because China traditionally presented no significant strategic threat, having been either weak, friendly, or neutral, the Soviets have

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

[43] An issue of some importance is 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. 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 it extremely difficult to estimate precisely 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.

[44] *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."

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 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, 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.[45] Again, this is not true in China. Furthermore, the Soviets have always had an edge in equipment. Not only do they have 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 than the Chinese, who still depend largely on transportation by foot.[46] 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.

One would think that both powers would have increased their forces in proportion to the frequency, location, and severity of border incidents. But available information indicates no large-scale buildup, at least before 1967, by either side.[47] Around early 1966 (or perhaps late 1965), however, both states began to bring their existing forces to greater combat-readiness, to equip them with more and better weaponry, and to augment their numbers, if only marginally. The Soviets seem to have been the more active party in this process.[48] 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. Then the Russians began equipping their Far Eastern forces with 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) earmarked for eventual duty east of Lake Baikal. Soviet media 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.[49]

On the Chinese side, nothing of a similar scale seems to have been done. The Chinese were then in the throes of a debate about what military strategy to pursue in face of the American intervention in Vietnam.[50] This, together

[45] See Harrison Salisbury's article on Soviet airfields in *The New York Times,* May 24, 1969. 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. 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.

[46] *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.

[47] *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 *Sino-Soviet Military Relations,* ed. Raymond L. Garthoff (New York: Praeger, 1966).

[48] Information 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; *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* December 29, 1966, and *The New York Times,* August 17, November 22, December 11 and 29, 1966, and January 11, 1967.

[49] The 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 *CDSP,* Vol. 18, No. 3 [February 9, 1966], pp. 7–8).

[50] For an interesting, although admittedly speculative, account of that debate, see Uri Ra'anan, "Peking's Foreign Policy Debate, 1965–1966," in *China in Crisis,* ed. Tang Tsou, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 23–27.

with the power struggle preceding the Cultural Revolution, resulted in purges among Army officers, 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. 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.[51] But the Vietnam war and American intervention 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.

During 1966 and 1967, Chinese-initiated border incidents (which we have associated with the Cultural Revolution) seemed increasingly provocative to the Soviets.[52] In response the Russians continued the East Europe-Far East troop rotation plan and apparently stepped up the size of the border guard force by possibly 20,000.[53] These moves were sizable enough to cause a public complaint from Chinese Foreign Minister Ch'en Yi.[54] The Russians, moreover, began a campaign to explain Sino-Soviet differences to the Soviet citizenry, while high military officials toured Far Eastern troop contingents.[55] They continued to stress the aid that paramilitary groups were giving to border guards along the Chinese frontier.[56] 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 of the defense pact with Mongolia, and went into high gear in 1967.[57] By November 1967, enough Soviet troops (including tank and missile units) were reported to be in Mongolia to prompt rumors that several divisions were occupying permanent bases there.[58] On November 7, Soviet units took part in a parade in Ulan Bator celebrating the Bolshevik Revolution.[59]

By the summer of 1968, the Russians conducted their first large-scale maneuvers in Mongolia. 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 established. One estimate of Soviet strength inside Mongolia was six divisions, including one tank division.[60] By 1969, this was said to have increased to 8–10 divisions.[61] The magnitude of this buildup apparently 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 shipment to the Soviet border region.[62]

[51] *The Military Balance, 1966–1967.*

[52] An Austrian correspondent's account of a trip through Soviet Central Asia during 1967 conveys some interesting information. First, the Soviets were constructing a barrier of the Iron Curtain type 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).

[53] *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 patroling activity.

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

[55] *Krasnaia zvezda*, February 15, 1967.

[56] See *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'nii Vostok*, No. 1, 1968.

[57] Major 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.

[58] *The New York Times*, January 3, 1969.

[59] *Novosti Mongolii*, November 11, 1967.

[60] *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.

[61] *The New York Times*, May 24, 1969.

[62] 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, October 7, and December 9, 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

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.[63] 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).[64] The Chinese were also said to have tightened border security in response to similar Soviet moves.[65]

Bloodshed on the Ice: Sino-Soviet Military Clashes on the Ussuri

The Setting. Damansky Island is situated on the Ussuri River, which forms the boundary between the Soviet Union and China.[66] Located at 133°51′E 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 Kungszu, 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 passes 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 appears 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. About one mile in length, about one-third mile wide, it is flooded during the spring thaw.

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 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 patroling is necessary to determine Chinese presence on the island. The Chinese border post, named Kungszu after the local Chinese settlement, appears to be located on a hillock directly across from the island. There is extensive marshland on the Soviet, but not on 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, so it is possible to drive multi-ton vehicles over the ice.

The March 2 Incident. What happened on March 2? Unfortunately, no observers other than the participants were at the scene of battle, and most of them are dead. Further,

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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 in footnote 43 would still apply.

[63] 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."

[64] *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, quotes "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, air power logistics, and capacity to reinforce quickly.

[65] *The New York Times*, March 30, 1969.

[66] Primary sources for this section are maps of the area and W. A. Douglas Jackson, *Russo-Chinese Borderlands* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 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. Cressey, *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 67 and 68 below.

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, this analysis is likely to be slanted toward the Soviet side. Despite these limitations, it is possible to reconstruct what probably went on.[67]

On the night of March 1–2, about 300 Chinese troops (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. Sometime early in the morning, the man on duty at Strelnikov's outpost reported activity on the Chinese bank. Around 11:00 a.m., a group of 20 or 30 Chinese began 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. Chinese reports imply that an altercation took place. The Chinese now 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 and thus forced 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

[67] In 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 *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 10 [March 26, 1969], pp. 3–4); Moscow Radio to China, March 6, and March 9, 1969; Tanyug (Belgrade) Radio, March 8, 1969; "Press Conference in the USSR University of Foreign Affairs," *Pravda*, March 8, 1969 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 10 [March 26, 1969], pp. 4–5); Val. Goltsev, "What Happened on Damansky Island," *Izvestiia*, March 8, 1969 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 10, pp. 6–7); S. Kosterin and V. Anikeyev, "How It Was," *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 9, 1969 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21. No. 10, pp. 7–8); TASS Radio, March 12, 1969; "The USSR Borders are Inviolable," interview with Major General of Border Troops A. N. Anikushin, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, March 19, 1969 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 12 [April 9, 1969], p. 31); "Statement of the USSR Government," March 29, 1969, TASS and *Pravda*, March 30, 1969 (translation in *CDSP*, 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 (translation in *CDSP*, Vol. 21, No. 11 [April 2, 1969], p. 3); Col. S. Barents, "This Happened at the Ussuri," *Krasnaia zvezda*, April 2, 1969; Konstantin Simonov, "Thinking Aloud," *Pravda*, May 3, 1969, and May 4, 1969; and Mikhail Demidenko, "A Night on the Ussuri River," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 21, 1969, p. 13.

On the Chinese side: NCNA Radio 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 (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, 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.

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 March 15 was different from that of March 2nd in several ways.[68] Preparations on both sides were much more complete, forces were much larger, losses were higher, and the engagement lasted much longer. There was also no element of suprise. 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.

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 fire. 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 to 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, apparently having 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 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 two thousand men) of infantry into the fray, charging across the ice and gaining possession of at least part of the island. The Russians, seeing 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 realized 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 tactics used by the American army in the Korean War, 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 four 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

[68] The 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 (translation in *CDSP,* Vol. 21, No. 11 [April 2, 1969], pp. 3–4); TASS Radio, March 15 and 16, 1969; interview with Major General Lobanov, *Pravda,* March 17, 1969; Moscow Radio to East Africa, March 18, 1969; Moscow Radio Peace and Progress to China, March 17, 1969; "The USSR's Frontiers are Sacred and Inviolable," *Pravda,* March 17, 1969; Yuri Apenchenko and Yuri Mokeyev, "They Have Defended With Their Hearts! A Report From the Far East Frontiers," *Pravda,* March 17, 1969; TASS Radio, March 20, 1969; Major Yuri Kuvshinnikov, "Report on Damansky," *Krasnaia zvezda,* March 20, 1969; Lt. Col. B. Prichkin and Major I. Dynin, "Three Attacks," *Krasnaia zvezda,* March 20, 1969; "Provocateurs Rebuffed," *Pravda,* March 17 (translation in *CDSP,* Vol. 21, No. 11 [April 2, 1969], pp. 5–6); Budapest Domestic Radio, April 21, 1969; and a series of eight articles, "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, also in *CDSP,* No. 4381, March 21, 1969, pp. 26–27. Additional sources are cited in footnote 67, above.

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 patroling. The battle was over at 7:00 p.m., having lasted more than nine hours.[69] Sources state that the Russians lost about 60 men (including the border post commander, Colonel D. I. Leonov) and the Chinese 800.[70] (The number of Soviet casualties was lower probably because the Soviets had an advantage in tactics and armament.)

Accounting for the Fighting

It does not seem possible to settle upon a single set of reasons for these incidents. The data necessary for such a precise determination are not at hand and are not likely to be so for a long time, if ever. Nonetheless, it is possible to set forth several explanations, match them with other known facts, note their mutual consistency or inconsistency, and thereby narrow the spectrum to several "most plausible" cases. One caveat: The data do not permit us—nor do I feel called upon—to explain in all possible detail why the incidents themselves occurred at Damansky and not some other place, why at the exact times they did, and so forth. The aim of this section is to explain policies or decisions more than specific occurrences.

In regard to both incidents, explanatory possibilities seem to resolve into three clusters. First, there are rationales 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.

The March 2 Incident

Local Initiative. The first possibility is that standing orders from Peking or Moscow may have given local commanders enough latitude to initiate military action if growing border tension seemed to warrant it. If this was the case, study of the outbreaks should focus on the chain of command, the policies behind such orders, and their probable content, rather than on the competing cases for ownership of Damansky Island. (See the discussion below of domestic Soviet and Chinese politics.)

Soviet border commanders apparently did have wide latitude, delegated on the theory that in an emergency they would not have time to cable Moscow for instructions. The possibility that they would exceed their authority was balanced by their having to answer to the center for all actions.[71] This is not an unreasonable administrative device for policing a very long border at a great distance from high-level decision makers.

Chinese border authorities may have 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.[72] 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 draw the line firmly at some geographical or psychological point. Even so, he would be expected to communicate with his superiors, and they, at some level between the local and the political center itself, would have to approve or disapprove his proposals. (Again, this possibility is elaborated below.)

Chance may have played a greater part than Soviet and Chinese sources lead us to believe. Although our reconstruction discounts this possibility, both sides may have put their "best" interpretation on the March 2 "ambush," which

[69] Russian 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.

[70] The 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.

[71] Portisch, see fn. 52. 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, see A. M. Nekrich, *1941 June 22* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), pp. 111–112.

If the same sorts of arrangements were in effect on March 2, 1969 (Soviet sources speak only of border troops involved at Damansky), the 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 amount of matériel necessary to assure victory over the size of force—more than 300 men—reportedly deployed by the Chinese.

[72] The 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 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.

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 the fact that they lost the battle. The Chinese would say nothing (aside from charging the Russians with trespassing) in hopes that the Russians would not retaliate or escalate. This explanation does not necessarily conflict with the interpretation of local initiative, of increasing border tensions leading to greater military readiness, or of explanations arising from domestic politics. But were chance the main element precipitating the battle, the Chinese should have given a more convincing and detailed account, while the many Soviet sources should have shown less moral outrage and less consistency.

It was Soviet and Chinese policies enacted above the local level that made such an outbreak likely in the first place. Interpretations based on 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, that differences of opinion or failure of communication occurred between the Heilungkiang Revolutionary Committee and the Shenyang Military District command. The Cultural Revolution in the Northeast saw great disorder and factionalism, but observers agree that the head of the Military Region was the commanding voice and dominated the Revolutionary Committee.[73] Differences of opinion or breakdowns in communication also may have existed between either or both of these two bodies and the central leadership (if indeed it was a singular entity) in Peking. This is more likely. One can 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. Ch'en Hsi-lien, the Shenyang Military Region commander, may have 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 edge out P'an Fu-sheng, the Heilungkiang Provincial Revolutionary Committee Chairman, for this honor.[74] Other than this, available evidence does not 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 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.[75] 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.[76] It is impossible to say whether Chernyshev's concurrent "promotion" and Lobanov's and Anikushin's prominence are anything but accidental.

National Politics

Chinese Domestic Politics. Here, the range of possibilities opens up. Factionalism was rife in China at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, the political history of the Cultural Revolution can be told in terms of groups and factions competing for power. By 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, jockeying for power as the important Ninth Party Congress, April 1969, approached. 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 mass

[73] For 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. The continuing disorganization and factionalism at all levels in China more than a year after Wuhan make it possible to accept an explanation based on intraregional or regional-center disagreement or failure of communications.

[74] This 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.

[75] See *Izvestiia,* March 19, 1969, p. 3.

[76] See TASS, Vladivostok, March 16, 1969; *Pravda,* March 17, 1969; and *Sovetskaia Rossiia,* March 19, 1969.

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 over how to deal with the threat posed by the massive Soviet deployments to the Sino-Soviet border region.[77] The dearth of authoritative articles, editorals, 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,[78] 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.[79] Thus, at least until further information comes to light, it does not seem that military problems with the Soviet Union engendered a factional debate among China's top leaders or that factionalism at the center 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.[80]

One curious development in Chinese foreign policy of this period does support the hypothesis of a debate 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, 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, surprising many observers not only because of its very 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.[81] Although the Chinese declaration tried to blame the United States for the 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.[82]

[77] Our survey included a study of articles and editorials in the central press and the public statements of the following individuals: Mao Tse-tung; Lin Piao; Chou En-lai; Ch'en Po-ta; Chiang Ch'ing; Yao Wen-yuan; Ch'en Yi; Hsieh Fu-chih; Huang Yung-sheng; Hsü Hsiang-chen; Yeh Chien-ying; Nieh Jung-chen; Wu Fa-hsien; and Su Yu.

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.

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

[79] Nanch'ang (Kiangsi) Provincial Broadcasting Station on July 31 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."

[80] This 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.

[81] *NCNA*, November 25, 1968.

[82] The 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

Nor does it seem coincidental that at just this ime 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.[83] The speech seems to have been a surrogate for Mao's (as yet unpublished) speech at the Twelfth Plenum that had just ended. Although dealing 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 hould not refuse to enter into negotiations beause we are afraid of trouble and want to avoid complications, nor should we enter into negotiations with our minds in a haze." This statement hints that Mao did not want war with the Soviet Union and was opposed in that desire. If this is so, then the central Peking leadership either 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.

Another possible explanation is that the Chinese Maoist leadership perpetrated the March 2 ıcident 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.[84] 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. Increasingly open resentment was being expressed against the severity of these measures and against military rule at all levels. 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 make it impossible, once and for all, to prevent a "restoration of capitalism" in China.

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. Knowing that the popularly resisted reforms might not work, and realizing that the Soviet border threat was increasing, some may have urged that domestic strictures be relaxed and that the Army be

too much of such an argument, even if implied: the possibility of backfire was too great.

[83] See *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, :e *NCNA,* December 11, 1968; January 16, 20, 22, ıd 30, and February 8, 1969; and *Jen-min Jih-pao,* anuary 27 and February 2, 4, and 18, 1969.

[84] Changes instituted about the time of the Twelfth Plenum included the permanent relocation of several tens of millions of urban residents to the countryside; 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; the reform of the educational system, to put production teams in charge of staffing and financing basic education (where the state had helped before); 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.

The 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.

See Radio Harbin, June 26, *Jen-min Jih-pao,* July 9 and 22, and Radio Canton, November 6, 1968, for information on medical problems.

For educational reforms, consult *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.

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

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 to maximize their power, may have argued for continuing the program with redoubled effort. These counterpressures were probably the major reason for the continual postponement of the Ninth Congress, which was to ratify these changes and set the framework for the future political and economic life of the country.[85]

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 attack on a Soviet border outpost might do the job, not only because the resulting war scare would overcome popular resistance to the Maoist reforms and the reluctance of many Congress delegates to give Mao and Lin a blank check for China's future,[86] but also because popular enmity toward the Soviet Union would insure the banishment of "capitalist" and "revisionist" influence from China for some time to come. The counterargument that the Soviets' superior force would overwhelm a Chinese attack was possibly met with the assertions that the communist movement in China has faced such situations before and had won; that the Soviet Union is a "paper tiger" who would not retaliate in a manner that could not be handled at the border; and 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.[87]

Chinese Foreign Policy. Three possible explanations for Chinese actions flow from Chinese foreign policy considerations. Their plausibility derives from their presumed persuasiveness to the 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 leadership, noting the Soviet military buildup and the increasingly aggressive Russian border stance, decided that further Soviet moves would have to be met head-on. Thus Peking decided to "draw the line" against the Russians, 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, countered the Soviets with force. While this argument's weakest point is the obvious disparity of total power in favor of the Russians, 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. The chance that the Russians would retaliate in a major way would have to be taken, with the presumption that they would not so retaliate.

A second possible explanation is the "preemption" argument, which stresses Chinese recognition of the need to do something about the increasing disparity of forces in border military districts. 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.

[85] The 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.

[86] The 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 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.

[87] 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.

A third foreign policy explanation, the "dragon's teeth" argument, presumes that Mao was in full control of politics and that his policy continued to be based upon his view of the Soviet Union as the hated and feared revisionist "enemy within" the world Communist movement. In this explanation, Mao feared that despite the overall success of Cultural Revolutionary struggle against revisionist influences in China, the possibility remained of reimpregnation of the revisionist virus, both internally from within the Chinese body politic and externally through Soviet influence. A vaccination was needed 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. 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.[88] On no issue was there evidence of fratricidal conflicts or disorders whose effects might spill over into foreign policy.[89]

Were there differences among the Soviet ruling elite 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.[90]

A survey of 306 periodical articles and radio broadcasts from October 1, 1968, through the end of February, 1969,[91] reveals four general categories of Soviet comments on China: (1) criticism of Chinese internal politics during the Cultural Revolution;[92] (2) rejection of the Maoist ideological line;[93] (3) opposition to Chinese foreign policy toward both "socialist" and "capitalist" countries;[94] and (4) defense of

[88] The periodicals surveyed were *Kommunist; Partinaia 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. 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.

[89] The 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.

[90] 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* (New York: Harper and Row, Torchbooks ed., 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.

[91] Based on the following Russian sources: *Pravda, Izvestiia,* TASS, *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.*

[92] The following subthemes are included: the Maoist "military-bureaucratic dictatorship"; the revolutionary committees as Mao's personal political machine; Mao's overreliance on the PLA; worker-peasant-student-soldier resistance to Mao; repression of national minorities; and great-Han chauvinism.

[93] 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.

[94] 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,

Soviet policy toward China and other areas.[95] Two general conclusions emerge. First, with one significant exception, the frequency, volume, and intensity of these themes varied little throughout the period.[96] Second, there was almost no change in emphasis throughout the period between themes or subthemes. The overall impression 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. Some attempted to enhance the status of Leonid Brezhnev as general secretary of the Party; others opposed these efforts. The general picture is 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 that emerged in February 1969 between Moscow and Leningrad may have reflected policy differences.[97] But none of these veiled developments seems serious enough or sufficiently 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.

Differences between the Soviet Party and the Red Army, if they existed and are detectable, could have influenced Soviet activities along the frontier. Perhaps the Army had a more militant (or a less militant) attitude toward Chinese border "provocations" than the Party, and this difference may have affected military postures and tactics. Such differences are possible but extremely difficult to discover, since the empirical evidence is not available.

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 whether the "Brezhnev doctrine," enunciated in 1968 in connection with the Czechoslovak crisis, had been applied to China.[98] (The latter would indicate whether the Russians were planning a tougher

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as seen by common policies on the Vietnam and Czechoslovak questions.

[95] 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.

[96] 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, 2, and 7; Radio Peace and Progress, October 21; 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. See also *Izvestiia,* November 2, 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.

We can speculate on explanations for Soviet silence on the border issue after October. It might signify resolution of a difference within the Soviet leadership on the matter or actual power changes in the Kremlin. Perhaps the Soviets dropped the subject, intending "negative conditioning" (allowing a hiatus so as to take up another issue). 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, 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: 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.

[97] On 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, with the speech as carried on Moscow Domestic Radio, December 28.

[98] *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil (KVS)* is a semimonthly journal published by the Main Political Administration of the Armed Forces. Our survey covered issues from October 1968 to March 1969, and sought statements about China, border problems, and general strategic policy. A survey of *Krasnaia zvezda (Red Star),* the daily military newspaper, from October 1968 to February 1969, was not fruitful, and the other major military journal, *Voennaia mysl' (Military Thought)* was impossible to obtain because its circulation is restricted to the Red Army command staff.

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 such perennial issues as the military's relative independence from the Party and the nature and kinds of war in the contemporary era. Articles in *KVS* take a harder position than the traditional Party view of these subjects. Previously military preparedness was stressed as a way of preventing the universal destructiveness of nuclear war; articles in the period surveyed now 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 to actively support armed proletarian struggles in civil wars abroad and to stop foreign interference in the internal affairs of other countries.[99] The Larionov article is one of several in which we can trace the outlines of a debate over military independence from Party control,[100] but evidence is lacking that such differences concerned policy toward China or resulted in actions before March that could have contributed to the Sino-Soviet border clash.[101]

Nevertheless, *KVS* does indicate a military attitude toward China that holds implications for border policy. There was an attempt, for instance, 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.[102] 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 "gains of socialism" one sees in a given country.[103] When a "direct threat" to the gains of socialism exists, action must be taken 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.[104] Since Maoist policy has brought a threat to socialist gains in China,[105] it might be necessary to "extirpate" such "leftist" deviationists.[106] This is particularly true when the "imperialist" enemy without allies itself with the

[99] "The Political Side of Soviet Military Doctrine," *KVS*, No. 22 (November, 1968), pp. 11–18. In advocating opposition to "imperialism" by more direct means, this article seems to have been a new departure from the prevailing Party opinion.

[100] In 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, wrote of the necessity for Party control over military thought and operations, particularly over the scientific-technical aspects of the modern military machine. The Larinov 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 author's 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). 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, including military affairs, there is a relatively independent 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."

[101] 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.

[102] 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.

[103] 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.)

[104] See Korolev, p. 12; "Editorial," *KVS*, No. 3 (February, 1969), pp. 3–8; Demidov, and Parnev and Ermakova.

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

[106] M. Abdrakhmanov, "V. I. Lenin on the Strategy

deviationist enemy within.[107] One must then eliminate the latter in order to block attack from the former.

Thus Soviet 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 pushing for a showdown with China.[108] Whether or not 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 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 and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Strategic issues, too—arms limitations talks and the anti-ballistic missile question—were matters of concern. The September and November Budapest meetings of the Preparatory Committee for the long-postponed International Communist Conference claimed some attention, as did treatment of Communists in Indonesia, NATO and sea power in the Mediterranean, and Yugoslav revisionism. But the Berlin question, which erupted again in late February, worried Moscow less than did similar previous events.[109] Judging from the public media, then, the Chinese question seemed to rate no more concern than did these other problems.

While it is thus highly unlikely that the Russians took pre-emptive action and initiated the March 2 incident, it is not implausible that the Russians, like the Chinese, decided to draw the line and that a battle therefore became inevitable. This explanation is supported by the increase in Soviet troop and equipment transfers to the Far East and accords with the possibility that Moscow ordered local commanders to toughen their border patrols. It also allows for the contingent element in explanation which, in historical writings, looms ever larger as time passes. This explanation does not accord, 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 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. They did not. And though Soviet military writing indicated a growing hard-line attitude toward China, that interpretation is inferential and still tenuous.[110]

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 about how to approach the two superpowers. The restoration of hard-line propaganda toward both after late November indicates a decision to remain "tough" with the Russians along the frontier. This development dovetails with the argument concerning Peking's awareness of popular resistance to post-Cultural Revolution reforms and the need to rally the populace. These developments in turn accord with the three plausible foreign policy arguments: a new policy of drawing the line; sowing "dragon's

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and Tactics of World Communists," *KVS,* No. 3 (February, 1969), p. 10.

[107] Demidov, p. 20, and Skryl'nik, p. 19.

[108] 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 the difficulty of 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.

[109] 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.

[110] 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 openly 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.

teeth"; and using pre-emption 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 patroling. The Russians probably thought that when the Chinese became aware of this step-up and of the Soviets' intensified border fortification, they would be awed into staying in line. The conjunction of this Soviet policy with the local Chinese policy of enhanced border patroling 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 occurred.[111]

Finally, we have rejected as without empirical foundation the following possibilities. On the Chinese side, a regional initiative stemming from differences between Heilungkiang Provincial Revolutionary Committee and 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 somewhat easier: the interval between the two incidents is short; the motives of the two parties are much more obvious; and what took place is fairly well documented.

[111] Whether or not the Soviets had thought out the second half of the decision, namely, that such a policy might lead to war, the outlines of a "dual policy" came into clearer focus after the post-November decision.

The March 2 incident 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. Diplomatically, the Russians moved to convince the Chinese of the necessity to settle the border problem definitely through a new and comprehensive border treaty. Pressure for talks was to be applied by constant, aggressive border patroling, 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.[112]

The March 15 incident was the beginning of the Soviet dual strategy. Hence, that strategy was the major "cause" of the second Damansky incident. Essentially, 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 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 or attack in a quick, pre-emptive strike.

Given the nature of the Soviet system, the conclusion that the Soviets adopted a new strategy is a matter of inference rather than of direct evidence. Supporting this inference and explaining the Soviet part in the March 15 event are the following: the Soviet handling of the March 2 incident; a desire for revenge; local pre-emption; 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. Considering that the

[112] Various stages of increasing violence can well be imagined: 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.

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.[113]

Local pre-emption would have been a factor if the Soviets noted a 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 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.[114] Weakness might also 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 gain *de facto* condemnation of the Chinese (if not to elicit anti-Chinese declarations), the Russians could ill afford not to take action.[115]

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.[116] Russians have historically exhibited extreme nationalism in times of military crisis affecting Soviet territory. The appeal to nationalism benefited the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership, which had been plagued with increasing, local, anti-Great Russian nationalist sentiment.[117] The leadership thus probably found the effects 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.[118] 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 exten-

[113] Official 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.

[114] The Soviet Communist Party had been working with non-pro-Chinese branches of the movement for over four years to schedule the conference. At the 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.

[115] On the other hand, too severe a Russian action might have driven 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 modulate carefully their response at Damansky on the 15th, being less severe with the Chinese than they otherwise might have been. 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.

[116] The 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. Massive demonstrations and commentaries began on March 7, five days after the initial announcement of the fighting and the exchange of diplomatic notes, 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 major Soviet cities during the week of March 4–11.

[117] On 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, 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.

[118] 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.

ive coverage. Demonstrations continued hrough March 15, and Peking claimed that more than 400 million people (over half the entire population of China) had marched at one time or another.[119]

Several reasons can be given for the extreme reaction of the Chinese. First, to Maoists, who denied Chinese initiation 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 thus demonstrated the link between Soviet ideological deviations and foreign policy, and it showed 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 ver to be justified to the Chinese people).

More important, the demonstrations helped the leadership push through the reforms of the preceding several months. As we have seen, many of these had not met with popular acceptance, and the Maoists seized upon the Damansky incident to create a work incentive. Many of the propaganda statements also urged the people to work even harder in "grasping revolution and promoting production," 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 repel 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 id not work at Damansky itself, however, and ıe difference in Chinese reaction to the second ıncident (there were very few demonstrations and of short duration only) shows that the Chinese leadership had hoped that the magnitude of the propaganda response would keep the Russians from even local military action.

[119] See especially NCNA Domestic Radio, March 4; NCNA International Radio, March 3; joint *Jen-min Jih-pao* and *Chieh-fang-chün Pao* editorial, "Down With the New Tsars," March 3; Budapest MTI Domestic Radio, March 3; NCNA International Radio, March 5 and 6; Kweiyang Radio, March 5; Chengtu Radio, March 5; Kunming Radio, March 5; Chengchow Radio, March 5; NCNA International Radio, March 6 and 7; Budapest MTI Domestic Radio, March 6; NCNA International Radio, March 7, 8, 9 and 10; *SCMP* 4373 (March 11), pp. 18–20; *SCMP* 374 (March 12), pp. 20–27; *SCMP* 4375 (March 3), pp. 26–33; *SCMP* 4376 (March 14), pp. 18–20. *'urrent Background,* No. 876 (April 11, 1969), gives ›0 pages of translations of reports on the demonstrations.

Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge. First, border problems did not occupy a major place in either state's attitude toward 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 harder to describe than it is 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.

The importance of the two March incidents lies not merely in their being the first 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 agreement to renew border negotiations in October 1969. In retrospect, the Damansky events may have marked a turning point in Sino-Soviet relations, if 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. Hence, early March 1969 may come to be regarded as the nadir of Sino-Soviet relations. Even if the Peking negotiations fail—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.