

ABSTRACT

Sino-Soviet Border Clashes of 1969 and its Implications on the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy

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Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Sino-U.S. relations have experienced twists and turns. Along with the changing postwar international situation, both Washington and Beijing turned to develop their foreign policies favorable to the other. The Sino-Soviet military clashes at Zhenbao (Damanskii) Island broke out in March 1969, which played an important role in shaping the reorientation of US's China policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Within the context of both the development of the Sino-Soviet border conflict and the U.S.'s changing foreign policies in 1968 and 1969, America's own hostile stance towards China in the aftermath of the crisis was reduced, and the Nixon administration made it possible for the Chinese leaders to begin a major reorientation of its foreign relations with the U.S. The impact of Sino-Soviet tensions on the moves toward rapprochement was taken by both Beijing and Washington and Nixon managed to reestablish a new relationship with the People's Republic of China.

Sino-Soviet Border Clashes Of 1969 And Its Implications On The Making Of U.S.
Foreign Policy

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 1949, when the Chinese Communists drove Chiang Kai-shek and his troops to Taiwan and established a communist regime in China, America was shocked. Americans were unprepared to accept the rising of another Communist country in Asia; especially when the other communist nation was the Soviet Union. As Senator Mike Mansfield recalled, “At that time we saw not the birth of new hope in China, but rather the dashing of our hopes for a durable peace after World War II. The new government was not at all viewed as Chinese, but rather as an alien outpost of a worldwide Communist conspiracy led by the Soviet Union. We told ourselves that it was bound to be short-lived, soon to be overthrown by the righteous wrath of the Chinese people. The American mood in 1949 was one of fear, frustration, and fury.”¹

In spite of this gloomy mood, many in Washington still held a small ray of hope in the early 1950s. The Americans studied the differences and similarities between China and the Soviet Union, and concluded that the ideological differences existing between Beijing and Moscow would lead to Sino-Soviet rifts in the near future. Washington could then take advantage of the possible rifts to reestablish an Asian power balance favorable to American interests. In the perspective of Washington at that time, Beijing

¹ Francis O Wilcox, ed., *China and the great powers: relations with the United States, the Soviet Union, and Japan* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 50-51.

“could be won over eventually to a position friendly to the United States and opposed to the Soviet Union.”²

However, the Korean War broke out in 1950. With China’s unexpected entry into the war, America’s hope for China’s getting close to itself reduced greatly. Americans could no longer rely on the expectation of China’s possible move towards America. Thus, in order to block any further Communist China’s expansion, the U.S. changed to a rigid anti-China policy, namely, “a policy of economic boycott, political ostracism, and military containment.”³

This policy governed Sino-American relations for the following two decades. However, an event that took place in 1971 surprised many Chinese and Americans. During the 31st World Table Tennis Championship held in Japan, the U.S. Table Tennis team on April 6 unexpectedly received an invitation to visit China. Accepting the invitation, on April 12, 1971, the team, along with a group of journalists became the first American sports delegation to set foot in the Chinese capital since 1949. This one-week visit marked an opening for the possible developments of the Sino-American diplomatic relationship, as “a monkey bite of a monarch changed the destiny of a kingdom and the political lineup of a continent.”⁴

On February 21, 1972, at the invitation of Premier Zhou Enlai, President Richard M. Nixon with a delegation of thirteen American officials, including Secretary of State

² Robert G Sutter, *China-watch: toward Sino-American reconciliation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 32.

³ Fu-mei Chiu Wu, “The China Policy of Richard M. Nixon: from Confrontation to Negotiation,” (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1976), 2.

⁴ Tong-chin Rhee, *An Overview of Sino-American Détente* (Bruxelles: Centre d'étude du Sud-est asiatique et de l'Extrême-Orient, 1971), 178.

William Rogers and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, arrived in Beijing for one-week formal talks with Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai. The China's Central TV programs covered the President's visits to the Great Wall, Ming tombs, and the Forbidden City. The American people saw live evening scenes of official banquets and the revolutionary Beijing opera in the Great Hall of the People. It was estimated that an even larger audience worldwide followed Nixon's visit to China.

At the end of Nixon's visit, the U.S. and China issued a joint communiqué in Shanghai. In line with the principle of mutual respect, and seeking common ground while putting aside differences, Washington and Beijing told the world in this communiqué that the two hostile rivals reestablished a basis for normalizing bilateral relations between them. Meanwhile, guidelines were established for gradually working out the Taiwan issue and developing trade and cultural contacts between the two countries. Both sides expressed the intention to oppose any state seeking to establish "hegemony" in the Asia-Pacific region.⁵ At the end of this seven-day visit to China, President Nixon asserted that this was "a week that changed the world," and was an effort by the leaders of the world's most populous nation and the most wealthy to "bridge a gulf of almost 12,000 miles and twenty-two years of non-communication and hostility" that had broken up the Asian political landscape since the Korean War.⁶

Nixon's journey for peace contrasted sharply with the previous two decades, from 1949 to 1972, of no formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. This was largely because of the dramatic changes in the international and domestic situations.

⁵ "Communiqué from Shanghai," *New York Times*, February 28, 1972.

⁶ Max Frankel, "China visit ends," *New York Times*, February 28, 1972.

Since the later 1960s, both Washington and Beijing gradually recognized that only cooperation with each other could best serve their own country's interests. However, the process of political and ideological transformation, with respect to the possible rapprochement between Washington and Beijing, was complicated and lasted for a long period.

When traced back to the origins of Sino-American rapprochement, the year of 1969 proves important. That year was the first of the Nixon administration. More importantly, it witnessed the bloody military clashes between the Soviet Union and China, the two communist allies.

On March 2, 1969, an armed military clash took place on a small island along the Sino-Soviet border. Two weeks later, another incident occurred on the same island. Obviously, Sino-Soviet relations entered a new stage at that time. It has been accepted that the Sino-Soviet incidents of 1969 played an important role in shaping the Sino-American relations in the late 1960s and 1970s. This thesis seeks to analyze and explain how and why these incidents came about, what the intentions of each side were, to what extent the incident influenced the overall direction of Chinese and American foreign policies, and whether the border clashes led to the new relationship between the U.S. and China.

CHAPTER TWO

President Nixon's New Era and Old Policy

Nixon became the President on January 20, 1969, at a juncture in history when “chaos appeared to threaten,” and the United States was stuck in a vulnerable position.¹ On one hand, the increasing domestic criticism of the U.S. excess intervention in Vietnam needed appeasing. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the foreign policy strains caused by the Vietnam War required relieving. If not, the American power as a central role in world affairs could be consequently challenged. To Washington, the multiple pressures of Vietnam not only underscored the coherence of American foreign policy, but also deteriorated the domestic consensus sustaining it. Therefore, the new president, together with his administration had to find a fresh creation to get the U.S. back on the right track, that is, as Kissinger suggested, “not only to maintain the perfection of order, but to have the strength to contemplate chaos.”² Accordingly, Nixon and his administration sought to forge a new structure of peace – “a stable international equilibrium in which the philosophy and practice of American policy would be altered to meet the complexities and exigencies of the new epoch.”³

¹ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

² Henry A. Kissinger, *A world Restored: the Politics of Conservatism in a Revolutionary Era* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977), 213.

³ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 1.

Nixon's "New" Era

In the late 1960s, profound changes took place in international affairs. The world structure transformed from bi-polarization of United States and Soviet Union to the multi-polarization. As Pierre Hassner observed at the time:

Every period is by definition a time of transition. Some periods, however, trend to give an illusion of permanence, others an expectation of utopia or doom. The peculiar feature of the present time is that it is almost impossible to escape the impression that we are entering a new period of international relations – and almost as difficult to agree on where we go from here. Our feeling of change is based on our witnessing the decay of the old, rather than many concrete fears or hopes about the emergence of the new. Indeed, it sometimes seems as if a collective failure of imagination were at play, preventing us from seeing both how the present order could continue and by what it could be replaced.⁴

Even though the U.S. was in the leading global position, it was not able to avoid such a transition. Contrarily, the U.S. was the one that had been challenged most by this global transformation.

America's military involvement in the Vietnam was the most severe problem that Washington needed to solve. Since 1965, the U.S. had been entrapped in Vietnam. On January 31, 1968, nearly all the U.S. media covered the news that the Vietcong had captured the United States embassy.⁵ This news shocked many Americans. Though the fall of the U.S. embassy was militarily insignificant, it had a profound political and psychological impact. As Townsend Hoopes discussed in his work, the Vietnam war "as

⁴ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 74.

⁵ Charles Mohr, "Foe invades U.S. Saigon embassy," *New York Times*, 31 January 1968.

a decisive test case both of American will and the instrumentalities of American power.”⁶ The fall of the U.S. embassy shattered the illusion of American omnipotence and represented that American power as a supreme world police was sharply called into question. For the first time, the 20-year road of building the U.S. as a central global power challenged the Americans. To some degree, the Vietnam debacle had “arrested the growth of an implicit American universalism.”⁷ “The future course of US foreign policy appeared far from certain,” because to Washington, “The cost and futility of massive U.S. military involvement in Vietnam vividly demonstrated the limitations of the American power.”⁸

Domestically, the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam also threatened to undermine the social fabric of the United States. Facing millions of civilians and soldiers, both Americans and Vietnamese, being killed or wounded, the Americans grew frustrated and doubtful about the government and its political propaganda. More importantly, with the increase of domestic hostility, the unity of America was diminished. As Herbert Schandler discussed in his study of American decision-making in Vietnam:

The scope, intensity, and strength of the Viet Cong attacks caused extreme surprise and shock throughout the United States. Extensive television coverage of the offensive brought the blood, agony, and destruction of battle directly into American homes and was a key factor in forming the popular conception of what had happened on the battlefield during the Communist offensive... Daily press reports filed from all parts

⁶ Townsend Hoopes, *The limits of intervention: an inside account of how the Johnson policy of escalation in Vietnam was reversed* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1969), 30.

⁷ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 73-75.

⁸ Robert G Sutter, *China-watch: toward Sino-American reconciliation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 3.

of Vietnam also contributed to the sense of disaster, as they concentrated on reporting the destruction caused by the initial Communist attacks throughout Vietnam. One single quotation in a press report had a tremendous impact. “it became necessary to destroy the town to save it,” an American major was reported to have said to newsmen in explaining how it had been necessary to rout the Viet Cong who had occupied the delta village of Ben Tre. This widely repeated sentence seemed to sum up the irony and the contradictions in the use of American power in Vietnam and caused many to question the purpose of our being there. If we had to destroy our friends in order to save pose of our being there. If we had to destroy our friends in order to save them, was the effort really worthwhile, either for us or for our friends?⁹

To Washington, the Vietnam War dramatically underscored the efficacy of America’s global and domestic power, which had so long been sustained.

Apart from the dilemma of the Vietnam War, the United States confronted another challenging change in the international environment. That was the emergence of the Soviet Union as a truly global power. With the gradual elimination of British power in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean after the World War II, “the naval power and political influence of the Soviet Union in South Asia, particularly India, and in the Indian Ocean grew dramatically.”¹⁰ Meanwhile, given the assumption that Africa’s future international potential would be greater than their current strategic significance, Moscow took no pains to win the hearts of the newly emerging African countries in the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹ Together with its existing influence in the Middle East, the Soviet Union gradually developed a strong pro-Soviet atmosphere around the world. Realizing the

⁹ Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 80-81.

¹⁰ Frank N. Trager, “The Nixon Doctrine and Asian Policy,” *Southeast Asian Perspectives*, No. 6 (June, 1972), 1.

¹¹ Lowell Dittmer, “The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game – Theoretical Analysis,” *World Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 4. (July, 1981), 494-495.

cumulative impact of the Soviet developments on the world, Secretary of State William P. Rogers asserted that “the problem of our age is how to manage the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower.”¹² In order to encounter the expansionism of the Soviet Union, the American decision-makers had to work out a rather different set of policies.

Similarly, the spectacular emergence of Japan as a new superpower in Asia also attracted Washington’s attention. As a result of rebuilding after the devastation of the World War II, Japan had already grown into an affluent nation with high-ranking Gross National Product (GNP), following the U.S. and the Soviet Union.¹³ Although the weight of the US as a Pacific Ocean power was still high in Asia, according to the analysis of *Interplay* of December 1970, “the American withdrawal, no matter what form it might take and no matter how well disguised it would be, could ironically present serious detrimental effects on China’s problems in Asia.”¹⁴ To Washington, the withdrawal of American power in Asia would soon provide Japan with an opportunity to exert its influence in Asia. In the absence of the US power, those nations who used to be dependent on American guarantee would have little alternative but to increasingly rely on Japan. In this context, “China’s continued and unremitting hostility to small peripheral nations in Asia would be inexorably exploited for the benefit of Japan’s exclusive national interest.”¹⁵ Taiwan, Korea, and other Southeast Asian nations could all be

¹² *International Herald Tribune*, 12 April 1976.

¹³ Frank N. Trager, “The Nixon Doctrine and Asian Policy,” *Southeast Asian Perspectives*, No. 6 (June, 1972), 9.

¹⁴ *Interplay*, December 1970, 20-23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

negatively influenced. Hence, the development of Japanese power in Asia would tactically harm American interests in the long run.

Moreover, America had to confront China's unexpectedly rapid progress in nuclear and missile technology in the 1960s. From the perspective of Washington at that time, the rise of China's nuclear ability could tactically threaten not only the U.S. but also other Asian nations. According to the Atomic Energy Commission's report, China's first atomic explosion took place, probably in the desert area of Xinjiang Province, on October 16, 1964. This was followed by others on May 14, 1965, and May 8, 1966. The last of these was estimated to have been of 300 kilotons potency, fifteen times the strength of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. On October 27, 1966, China fired a 20-kiloton bomb with an estimated distance of 400 miles on a rocket missile, and entered the Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) class. Simultaneously, China's first hydrogen bomb, estimated at three megatons was exploded on June 17, 1967. By the end of September 1969, China had exploded at least ten atomic or hydrogen devices and was presumably well on the way to ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) capability.¹⁶ China successfully joined the "Nuclear Power Club", and became a major military regional power and an emerging military superpower that could compete with the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

China, since the explosion of its first atomic bomb, had claimed that its goal of nuclear buildup was to become a more credible deterrent against nuclear attack from the

¹⁶ Julius W. Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 451-452.

Soviet Union or the United States.¹⁷ But to Washington, its potential threat to the world community could not be ignored. Admittedly, China was demographically and geographically gigantic, but militarily and economically weak at that time. However, with the nuclear buildup, China established a Chinese sphere of influence in Asia, and might even exercise greater power within the world community of nations in the future. Although China had submitted a series of nuclear disarmament proposals after its first nuclear explosion to show its nonaggressive intentions, Washington predicted that in the near future, the United States would make a triangular nuclear confrontation in Asia with the China and its ally, the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union also became aware of China's nuclear progress. Hence by 1969, defensive deployment of the Soviet Union's Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM) which had been aimed only at the United States, were also directed toward Communist China. The Soviet Union and the United States shared a common interest in containing China. When asked whether Nixon would be willing to consider abandoning the ABM program if the Soviets showed a similar willingness, he answered:

I would imagine that the Soviet Union would be just as reluctant as we would be to leave their country naked against a potential Chinese communist threat. So the abandoning of the entire system, particularly as long as the Chinese threat is there, I think neither country would look upon with much favor.¹⁸

Previously noted, the United States faced a difficult global environment in the 1960s. On one hand, Washington had difficulty in reducing the involvement of military power in Vietnam. On the other hand, its political influence in the world was also being

¹⁷ Robert Carver North, *The foreign relations of China* (Belmont, Calif., Dickenson Pub. Co., 1969), 161-162.

¹⁸ Public Papers – Richard Nixon, 1969, 213-214.

gradually declined. Aware of this dilemma, Nixon administration began to reassess its foreign diplomacy. The traditional foreign policies to keep America's dominant position no longer worked well. The U.S. had to readjust its global commitments. To Nixon and his administration, maintaining the peace and development became a main agenda. Re-organizing a new world order on the basis of multi-polar balance was a realistic choice. As Kissinger discussed in *The Central issues of American Foreign Policy*, "the greatest need is an agreed concept of order."¹⁹ To Nixon, even though the U.S. had less power at that time, there would be no stability without America. Even if Washington could not exert decisive influence on the other nations any more, in order to pursue its interests, the U.S. needed to work with other nations in developing an "equilibrium of power", a system in which "the predominant powers had such a stake in international stability that none of the world [would] try to dominate, or overthrow, the system."²⁰

Nixon Doctrine

America's role in the world seemed gloomy in the 1960s. With the bitter experiences of Vietnam, the great rising of the Soviet Union, and the rising of Asian nations, America's presence in the world and Asia particularly decreased to an unprecedented low point. However, for Nixon administration, this transformation of the international political environment was a two-sided sword. On one hand, it negatively affected America's leadership throughout the world. On the other hand, if handled

¹⁹ Henry A. Kissinger, "The Central issues of American Foreign Policy", in Kermit Gordon (ed.), *Agenda for the Nation* (New York: 1972), 588-589.

²⁰ Kermit Gordon, ed., *Agenda for the Nation* (New York: 1972), 585-614.

properly, it could also be employed as a gold opportunity to escape from the deadlock of American foreign policy and to regain its dominant global position.

Equilibrium of Power

The move from a bi-polarized to a multi-polarized global structure reflected the importance and utility of different kinds of power. In face of the diffusion of power, the Americans called for a new realism in the U.S. foreign policy. Hence, Nixon and his administration had to develop “a new approach to foreign policy to match a new era of international relations.”²¹ As Kissinger claimed:

“We no longer live in so simple a world. We remain the strongest nation and the largest single factor in international affairs. Our leadership is perhaps even more essential than before. But our strategic superiority has given way to nuclear balance. Our political and economic predominance has diminished as others have grown in strength and our dependence on the world economy had increased. Our margin of safety has shrunk.

Today we find that – like most other nations in history – we can neither escape from the world nor dominate it. Today we must conduct diplomacy with subtlety, flexibility, maneuver, and imagination in the pursuit of our interests. We must be thoughtful in defining our interests. We must prepare against the worst contingency and not plan only for the best. We must pursue limited objectives and many objectives simultaneously.”²²

In order to solve the multitude of problems threatening the Americans, Nixon administration proposed a new concept of foreign policy, that is, international cooperation and a balance of power. As Kissinger stated:

We have learned irrevocably the central fact of the modern world; our security, our well-being, our very existence are intimately bound up with the kind of international environment we shall succeed in building.”

²¹ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 73-75

²² Harry Mason Joiner, *American foreign policy, the Kissinger era* (Huntsville, Ala.: Strode Publishers, 1977), 303.

Therefore, “the central focus of U.S. foreign policy is to help shape from this environment a new international structure based on equilibrium rather than confrontation, linking nations to each other by practices of cooperation that reflect the reality of global interdependence.”²³

This concept of “equilibrium of power” emphasized the balancing of multi-polarized world.²⁴ To Washington, though the U.S. was no longer able to assume the role of central balancer in the mediation of relations between the nations around the world, “the U.S. could continue, under these new conditions, to assert its primacy through the maintenance of this favorable equilibrium.”²⁵ This equilibrium of power was “the prerequisites for a creative new diplomacy that would enable the United States to capitalize on the potential of a pluralistic world.”²⁶

In order to ensure the implementation of “equilibrium of power,” Washington formulated two sets of strategic plans. The first one was to “reduce some of its military presence and at the same time maintain its Asian interests.”²⁷ America confronted political and military deadlock in Asia. Paradoxically, America also invested most of its time and energy in Asia. To Washington, though Asia posed the greatest threat to the world peace in 1960s, it also posed the greatest hope for progress. From the viewpoint of Nixon at that time, as Asian nations grew stronger, they were able to play a larger role in

²³ Harry Mason Joiner, *American foreign policy, the Kissinger era* (Huntsville, Ala.: Strode Publishers, 1977), 299-300.

²⁴ Lawrence W Serewicz, *America at the brink of empire: Rusk, Kissinger, and the Vietnam War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 98.

²⁵ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 77.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Qingshan Tan, *The making of U.S. China policy: from normalization to the post-cold war era* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 3.

shaping the international structure of their region. With their joining together in regional associations, these nations would become more influential in the policies of the greater powers and less dependent on the Soviet Union and China. In this case, the Soviet and China's regional influence and the U.S. involvement in Asia would be safely reduced, and the Asia would be better stabilized.

Second, in order "to attain this multi-polar approach's requisite degree of flexibility and maneuverability," the U.S. had to give up the traditional policy of separating allies from adversaries.²⁸ Rather than hostility and isolation, peace was the most important objective of foreign policy at that time. As Kissinger stated:

The United States will pursue the cause of peace with patience and an attitude of conciliation in many spheres. We shall nurture and deepen the ties of cooperation with our friends and allies. We shall strive to improve relations with countries of different ideology or political conviction. We shall always stand ready to assist in the settlement of regional disputes. We shall intensify our efforts to halt the spiral of nuclear armament. We shall strive to improve man's economic and social condition and to strengthen the collaboration between developed and developing nations. We shall struggle for the realization of fundamental human right.²⁹

These two general guidelines of "equilibrium of power" were later written in the foreword of Nixon's *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Richard Nixon, 1969* and materialized into "Nixon Doctrine." According to the foreword, the immediate goal of the United States policy in Asia was to end the Vietnam War, and the long-term goal was to look beyond Vietnam for "a larger and a lasting peace."

²⁸ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 77.

²⁹ Harry Mason Joiner, *American foreign policy, the Kissinger era* (Huntsville, Ala.: Strode Publishers, 1977), 300.

The first priority was ending the war in Vietnam, and building toward a stable peace not only there but worldwide. No problem so occupied my own time and attention during 1969. I considered it vital that the war be ended, but also that it be ended in a way which would contribute to a larger and a lasting peace. This required standing firm against those who pressed for a precipitate withdrawal regardless of the consequences. But it also called for new initiatives that would reverse the trend of ever greater U.S. involvement.³⁰

On July 25, 1969, in the Navy Officer's Club in Guam, Nixon met with his accompanying press corps and publicly disclosed his "Nixon Doctrine" again. According to his speech, the major elements of his new doctrine were:

First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments.

Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security.

Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.

Nixon concluded that these three principles would be "the guidelines for future American policy towards Asia."³¹ Meanwhile, the Nixon Doctrine also indicated far-reaching implications with respect to Asia and the Pacific area. First, Nixon would proceed to wind down the war in Vietnam, that is, "Vietnamization." Second, the United States would protect its friends and allies from any nuclear attack. Third, it would help out its friends and allies who might be under the threat of conventional aggressive and subversive Communists, "provided that they conspicuously exert themselves in their own defense, and also provided that it was in America's interest to do so." Finally, the U.S.

³⁰ Public Papers – Richard Nixon, 1969, v.

³¹ Public Papers – Richard Nixon, 1969, 905-906.

would keep all its commitments.³² Nixon further explained that the final goal of practicing these principles was to help the Asians fight the war if they could not fight it themselves.³³

Nixon's China Card

After taking office, Nixon understood that “his historic task was to manage the American retreat from the high watermark of global commitments without undermining the security of the West and American interests generally.”³⁴ In order to achieve this task, Washington had to give up their traditional foreign policy, namely to isolate and contain its rivals. With the rising of the Soviet Union and China, Americans were no longer able to fight with the Communists for whatever cause or people. Given the transformation of international environment, Nixon, in order to better conduct his role as President, exchanged his role from an anti-communist fighter to a communist negotiator. The rationale was simple: if you cannot fight your enemies, you make friends with them to avoid further confrontations. Though Nixon was still a staunch anti-Communist, he was aware of American's changing mood. Therefore, he laid out a new policy direction in his inaugural address on January 20, 1969:

Let us take as our goal: where peace is unknown, make it welcome; where peace is fragile, make it strong; where peace is temporary, make it permanent.

After a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation.

³² Frank N. Trager, “The Nixon Doctrine and Asian Policy,” *Southeast Asian Perspectives*, No. 6 (Jun., 1972), 4.

³³ Public Papers – Richard Nixon, 1969, 552.

³⁴ Robert Litwak. *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 74.

Let all nations know that during this administration our lines of communication will be open.

We seek an open world – open to ideas, open to the exchange of goods and people – a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation.

We cannot expect to make everyone our friend, but we can try to make no one our enemy.³⁵

On September 18, 1969, he again announced his new policy guidelines to a world audience in an address before the 24th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations:

In relations between the United States and the various Communist powers, I have said that we move from the era of confrontation to an era of negotiation.

I believe our relations with the Soviet Union can be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, recognizing our differences and also our right to differ, recognizing our divergent interests and also our common interests. Whenever the leaders of Communist China choose to abandon their self-imposed isolation, we are ready to talk with them in the same frank and serious spirit.³⁶

In the later 1960s, Washington continued to view Moscow as its major adversary. In order to ensure the “equilibrium of power” and prevent the Soviet’s further expansion, Nixon administration planned to implant an interacting relationship in Asia. But, the precondition to achieve this interacting relationship was to stop communist China from further expansion. Hence, the U.S. had to play the China card. To Nixon administration, Beijing could be employed as “a potential weapon in the diplomatic game of exploiting the tension to gain leverage over Moscow.”³⁷ According to Nixon’s “Vietnam after War”, the development of a “strong indigenous regional security system” in Asia would provide

³⁵ Richard M Nixon, Rick Perlstein ed., *Richard Nixon: speeches, writings, documents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 159-160.

³⁶ Public Papers – Richard Nixon, 1969, p. 727-28.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

the most effective “bulwark” against Chinese expansionism; and if possible, an effective leverage against China could also help accelerate the transformation of China into rational power:

The primary restraint on China’s Asian ambitions should be exercised by the Asian nations in the path of the dynamics of Asian development. Only as the nations of non-communist Asia become so strong – economically, politically and militarily – that they will no longer furnish tempting targets for Chinese aggression, will the leaders in Peking [Beijing] be persuaded to turn their energies inward rather than outward. And that will be the time when the dialogue with mainland China can begin.³⁸

The détente with China did not mean to collude against the Soviet Union, but, “to give the U.S. a balancing position for future constructive ends, and meanwhile to give each Communist power a stake in better relations with the U.S.”³⁹ If possible, such equilibrium could ensure stability among the major powers, and even eventually bring cooperation.

Clearly, Nixon indicated to Communist China his intention of taking steps towards improving practical relations with Beijing. To Nixon, the rapprochement with China could secure the U.S. a leverage against the Soviet Union, and in return helped materialize “equilibrium of power”. As demonstrated in “Asia after Vietnam” in *Foreign Affairs*, Nixon argued:

The central thesis of the American post-Vietnam foreign policy was based upon the belief that the establishment of a new relationship with its communist rivals would create a favorable political atmosphere which could beneficially facilitate the orderly devolution of American power to incipient regional powers, namely ‘equilibrium of power’, and eventually lead to a global stability. And if possible, the resulting stability along the periphery would, in turn, feed back into the central balance and thereby

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

sustain the momentum of détente through the preservation of mutual trust. In this way, each component of the Nixon Doctrine – that is, détente with China and the Nixon doctrine – would serve as the instrumentality for the achievement of the other.⁴⁰

Before assuming the presidency, Nixon treated the present and potential danger from Communist China as a problem with no particular bearing on U.S.-Soviet relations.⁴¹ He even ignored the growing Chinese threat to restrain the Soviet Union's international conduct. But, since the early 1960s, China's splits with the Soviet Union were increasingly explicit; and meanwhile China's Cultural Revolution provoked greater domestic crisis. For the first time, China turned "weak." Therefore, to Nixon, "exploring of the potentialities of Sino-Soviet rift for policy-making in the interest of the United States" became possible and feasible.⁴² Even though Nixon administration could not initially work out a method to cooperate with China, they believed that it was time to explore the ways to warm up the frosty US-Sino relations, because opening to the People's Republic of China was "of significance to the American national interests and security."⁴³

First, the rapprochement and cooperation with the China could be instrumental in limiting the expansion of the Soviet Union in the Asian area. Ideologically, the U.S. and its allies believed that the Soviet Union was an expansionist nation with an inherent political and military contention. The Soviet Union could keep increasing its power by

⁴⁰ Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969-1976*, 54.

⁴¹ Alan M Jones, *U.S. foreign policy in a changing world: the Nixon administration, 1969-1973* (New York, McKay, 1973), 263.

⁴² David N. Rowe, "The Nixon China Policy and the Balance of Power". *Issues and Studies*, May, 1973, vol. 9, no. 8, 14.

⁴³ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 163.

uniting a group of ideologically like-minded revolutionary nations. Under these circumstances, all the independent but internally weak nations, those located around the Soviet Union in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and the newly born nations, would be exposed to the Soviet's communist threat. The Soviet Union had already been perceived to have such a tendency. Hence, the U.S., as a global leader, had to defend against it, namely, to take tough measures against the Soviet Union, and finally to contain it.

However, this was no simple task. The power of the Soviet Union was continuing to grow and the United States could not prevent its rise to a superpower or destroy it completely. However, in the late 1960s, Sino-Soviet rivalry dramatically grew. To Washington, this Sino-Soviet rift had potential implications for the United States. Nixon and his administration took the possibility of a decisive Soviet attack against China very seriously. According to Kissinger, "what unnerved them was not that such an attack would make china's millions still angrier and still more isolated. Rather, they feared that the Soviet Union by subduing China, would radically improve its own standing in the international balance of power – at the expense of the United States."⁴⁴ The Soviet effort to overawe China militarily, including the buildup of theater nuclear forces could have a negative impact on the US-Soviet balance.

For the Nixon administration, the most urgent task was to ensure that the "equilibrium of power" did not collapse. If it could be kept in balance, the Soviet 'obsession' with China might then become a tool for restraining Soviet conduct."⁴⁵ For

⁴⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 171.

⁴⁵ Robert S Ross, *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy Making in the Cold War* (Armonk, N.Y. : M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 127.

Nixon administration, “if Washington could restore links with Beijing, they could employ China as a major weapon in the diplomatic game of exploiting the tension to gain leverage over the Soviet Union.”⁴⁶ Such a coalition established between the U.S. and China would also create a new counterweight to limit Soviet ambitions, and push the Soviets toward greater compromise and détente. Meanwhile, this détente with China could also block the advance of Soviet influence in Asia and draw Soviet forces away from Europe. Hence, American cooperation with China would enable the U.S. to maintain a global equilibrium and shape a more peaceful and positive international structure. Nixon and Kissinger decided to play the Chinese off against the Soviet Union, as Nixon told his aids, “We’re using the Chinese thaw to get the Russians shook.”⁴⁷

Second, the rapprochement of China could help speed the withdrawal of the US military forces from Vietnam, or even from Asia. Clearly, the large number of casualties and long military confrontations exhausted America and American people. The U.S. had already lost the war in Vietnam. Worse still, it also had lost the public support in America. So after Nixon took his office, he expected to withdraw the U.S. military forces from Vietnam and end the war within the year. However, this action would involve uncertainty, risks, and dangers. If it had been possible to establish new contact with China, the North Vietnamese would consider the possibility of losing one of its biggest allies, from which the North Vietnamese had received great military and material support. Without such a supporter, the war could be even harder to win. In that case, North Vietnam might prefer to pursue a cease-fire in hope that the political struggle

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman diaries: inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1994), 275.

would favor them more than the military struggle. Surely, this was more advantageous to the United States. If this rapprochement worked, the process of withdrawing US military forces from Vietnam could be facilitated and the risks of other conflicts in Asia would be further reduced. Strategically speaking, Washington “needed China to enhance the flexibility of American diplomacy,” and through détente with China, Washington could relax its tensions with the North Vietnam, and even other communist nations.⁴⁸

With the U.S. economy sagging, the legendary China market loomed large in American imaginations. China had rejected the 1968 Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which again shadowed China’s nuclear threat to the U.S. and its allies. So, Washington needed to seek Beijing’s adherence. Furthermore, China’s renewal of relationship with the U.S. might soften its previous hostility toward the United States. In return, the Chinese threat against many of America’s fiends in Asia would decline; at the same time, by evoking the Soviet Union’s concerns along its long Asian perimeter, it could also ease pressures on Europe.⁴⁹

Even if Nixon never saw communist China, whose communist nature was perceived aggressive, as a reliable partner, he still saw the positive effect of opening to China, as he claimed, “Taking the long view we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates, and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation.”⁵⁰ Nixon argued, “the world

⁴⁸ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), 1049.

⁴⁹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 173.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

would have to find ways to bring this outlaw force into the law, to open a dialogue, and to restrain aggressiveness.”⁵¹ He recognized the possibility that a triangular diplomacy could induce both Beijing and Moscow to improve their relations with Washington.⁵² Not long after Nixon took office in 1969, he embarked on a difficult course from previous U.S. presidents. He decided that things had to be changed in respect to China policy, and the former policy of containment and isolation of China must be abandoned.

In order to guarantee the Nixon Doctrine of détente with China to be effective, Washington’s unilateral efforts were far from enough. The precondition to achieve such a détente with China was a political mutual understanding between both China and the United States. Only drawing an agreement, desirable for both Washington and Beijing, could the U.S. achieve the necessary restraining and moderating force (over the Communist halves of Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan) and the reduction of regional tension, which would in turn enabled Southern Korea and Vietnam to desist Japan’s overtures for eventual dominance.⁵³ Such an agreement was also of tremendous assistance in defusing the potential complexity of the Taiwan problem.

Nixon was optimistic about the workability of the doctrine, because, in the long run, the Chinese and American interests in Asia would find a common ground for mutual benefit. So Nixon argued:

Through the Nixon doctrine, we provide aid but we don’t get involved in every little conflict around the world. I believe that through the Nixon doctrine, we have found a formula that has the best chance of

⁵¹ Richard Nixon, “Asia after Vietnam,” *Foreign Affairs* (October 1967): 121.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Gene T Hsiao, *Sino-American détente and its policy implications* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 26.

achieving that goal. We will stand by our treaty commitments. In Asia we will follow the principle that, when trouble breaks out, the people themselves must fight the fire. We'll supply the fire extinguisher but not fight the fire. We won't be the fireman.⁵⁴

Thus, since the late 1960s, Washington had been seeking ways to end the years of hostility and isolation against China and achieve mutual understanding. But the U.S. leaders did not find an appropriate time to carry out an appropriate plan. In the spring of 1969, a series of bloody border incidents over the sovereignty of the tiny Zhenbao (Damansky) Island in the Ussuri River broke out. This brought China and the Soviet Union extremely close to war. These incidents shocked the world. For Nixon and his administration, they became an unpatrolled golden opportunity to détente with China. If handled properly, these incidents would serve as a key to start a new era not only for the United State and China, but also for the whole world. Fortunately, Nixon and his administration, who valued “exploring of the potentialities of Sino-Soviet rift for policy-making in the interest of the United States”, leaped at this opportunity to move towards rapprochement with China.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Public Papers – Richard Nixon, 1969, 906.

⁵⁵ David N. Rowe, “The Nixon China Policy and the Balance of Power.” *Issues and Studies*, May, 1973, vol. 9, no. 8, 14.

CHAPTER THREE

Sino-Soviet Border Clashes, 1969

The Deterioration of Sino-Soviet Relationship

The “brotherly solidarity” between Communist China and the Soviet Union was once claimed to be “unbreakable” and “eternal.”¹ Even after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Mao Zedong had announced in *On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship* that China needed to develop a special relationship with the Soviet Union. According to this statement, China must “unite in a common struggle with those nations of the world that treat us as equal and united with the peoples of all countries – that is, ally ourselves with the Soviet Union, with the People’s Democratic Countries, and with the proletariat and the broad masses of the people in all other countries, and form an international united front.”² From 1949 to 1950, the Chinese leaders made great efforts to achieve a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union. On February 14, 1950, the Chinese signed an alliance treaty with the Soviets, in which Beijing agreed to allow the Soviets to maintain their privileges in China’s Northeast and Xinjiang; in exchange, Moscow agreed to increase military and other material support to China, including providing air-defense installations in coastal areas of China.³

¹ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 49.

² Mao Zedong, “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_65.htm.

³ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 52.

The Sino-Soviet brotherhood did not develop as Beijing and Moscow expected. Even though they were political allies and China was particularly dependent on the Soviet's military and economic support, the ideological rifts between them never entirely disappeared, as the Westerners speculated about "the reality and durability of the Sino-Soviet partnership,"

It was from the outset reasonable to assume that the Chinese Communists' heritage of national pride, their consciousness of the vast size and population of China and their sense of achievement in having carried through their revolution with a minimum of Russian aid would render them unwilling blindly to follow the lead of Moscow and inclined to formulate foreign as well as domestic policies of their own.⁴

The Western speculation had its cause. Sino-Soviet conflicts had a long history. Ever since the early days of Mao's revolutionary movement in 1930s and 1940s, Mao had been reluctant to accept Stalin as a reliable communist leader. So Mao conducted the Chinese revolutionary struggle by his own conception. Later, during the World War II, with very little material assistance from Moscow, Mao again succeeded in carrying on guerrilla warfare against Japanese forces and the Nationalist armies. After the War, Stalin was so suspicious about Chinese Communist ability to overturn Chiang Kai-shek's government, he recognized the Chiang Kai-shek government, and planned to work out with Chiang Kai-shek an agreement through which the Chinese communists could hopefully hold some posts and exert a certain amount of influence. But the Chinese communists had unexpectedly conquered the mainland and drove the Chiang Kai-shek government to Taiwan. Though the Soviet Union served as a moral leader for China, the communist Chinas actually received very little material assistance for the Soviets.

⁴ G. F. Hudson, Richard Lowenthal, and Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1961), 1.

The Soviet Union and China were in different stages of revolution and separate phases of economic and technological development as well. No matter when China turned to the Soviets for help, Moscow always assumed an air of distrust and superiority over China. The Soviet arrogance made the Chinese leadership feel a deep sense of inequality. So, they determined to pursue possible equality and eventually become an independent superpower. Undoubtedly, this political determination caused friction with the Soviets. The Soviets could also see China's ambition. With the Soviet's determination to prevent China from being independent, the Sino-Soviet rifts were further deepened.⁵

The resentment accumulated gradually over the years. Finally, an oral attack burst out in the year of 1956. In the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Khrushchev delivered a speech attacking the late Stalin at a secret session without inviting any Chinese delegations. This greatly offended Mao and caused Beijing's repulsion. For Mao and his comrades, Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin was equal to criticizing China's own experience of building socialism.⁶ The Chinese regarded Khrushchev's de-Stalinization as a great opportunity to tell the world that China had then been strong enough to voice on questions about not only China but also the Soviet Union. According to Beijing, Khrushchev's de-Stalinization in February 1956 was the single most important factor that triggered the Sino-Soviet dispute:

⁵ William E. Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-1965* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), 4; Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 42-43.

⁶ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 64.

To be specific, it began with the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) in 1956. The 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. was the first step along the road of revisionism taken by the leadership of the C.P.S.U.... And by a gradual process, too, people have come to understand more and more deeply the revisionist line of the C.P.S.U. leadership.

From the very outset we held that a number of views advanced at the 20th Congress concerning the contemporary international struggle and the international communist movement were wrong, were violations of Marxism-Leninism. In particular, the complete negation of Stalin on the pretext of “combating the personality cult” and the thesis of peaceful transition to socialism by “the parliamentary road” are gross errors of principle.⁷

Despite China’s protest over the Soviet de-Stalinization, the Sino-Soviet relations seemed to continue smoothly in 1956 and 1957. The Soviet Union kept on providing China with economic and military assistance, while China openly recognized the Soviet’s leadership in the international Communist community. In November 1957, during Mao’s visit to Moscow to attend celebrations for the fortieth anniversary of the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Mao talked about his idea that the Communists should not be frightened by any possible nuclear war started by the imperialists. At the same time he added that such a war, although carrying a high price, could bring the imperialist system to its grave. To Khrushchev and his comrades, Mao was deliberately challenging to Moscow’s policy of peaceful co-existence with Western imperialist countries.⁸

On June 20, 1959, the Soviets surprisingly informed the Chinese that due to the Soviet-American agreement to ban nuclear weapon test, Moscow could no longer provide China with any assistance on nuclear technology. The Soviets had to cancel the agreement of 1957 on supplying aid to China in manufacturing nuclear weapons. This

⁷ *People’s Daily*, 6 September, 1963.

⁸ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 71.

reversal of policy was deeply criticized by Beijing, and further again contributed to the growing split between the two countries in this early period. A Chinese broadcast on August 15, 1963, which first revealed details of the agreement, asserted that its repudiation was intended “as a gift for the Soviet leader to take to Eisenhower when visiting the U.S.A. in September.”⁹

Greater resentment was provoked in China when the Soviet government notified the Chinese government on July 16, 1960 of its decision to withdraw all soviet technicians working in China in August. At that time, China was suffering from a series of natural disasters described by Beijing Radio as “without parallel in the past century.”¹⁰ This unilateral decision to cancel the economic and technical support gave a huge blow to China’s economy. According to later Chinese statements, 1,390 experts were withdrawn, 343 contracts concerning technical aid were cancelled, and 257 projects of scientific and technical cooperation were never completed.¹¹

Two years later in August 1962, a Sino-Indian border conflict broke out. On September 9 the Soviet media issued a statement expressing “regret” at the conflict between India and China. This statement failed to express that the Soviets stood clearly on Beijing’s side. To China, this statement meant that Moscow “had virtually adopted a policy to support India’s position.”¹² Later in 1962, Khrushchev retreated from the

⁹ Keesing’s Research Report, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 19.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Keesing’s Research Report, 29.

¹² Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 80.

Cuban missile crisis. Beijing sought this opportunity to again rail at Moscow for its appeasement and cowardice.

The mid-1960s witnessed the continuation of worsening relations between the two communist neighbors. The escalation of the war in Vietnam in the early months of 1965 further widened the gap between the Soviet Union and China. In the settlement of the Vietnam War, Moscow and Beijing had different views. Moscow made efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement, while Beijing contrarily opposed any form of compromising. Evidently, the Chinese and Russians were struggling for power and influence in Hanoi.

The violence of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 gave another blow on Sino-Soviet relations. With the Red Guards' rampage in Beijing, Soviet diplomats were harassed; even the name of the street in front of the Russian Embassy was changed into "Struggle against Revisionism Street." When Soviet students were ordered to leave China before October 10, 1966, Soviet Union, in return, expelled Chinese students. Their departure from Moscow was another defiant affair, including a farewell ceremony at the Chinese Embassy filled with the Thought of Mao, songs for the antirevisionist fighters, and a wreath placed on the tomb of Stalin.¹³ In Beijing, a series of well-organized demonstrations were held in front of the Soviet Embassy. Its walls were defaced and the embassy was kept under siege for days in protest against "fascist atrocities" and the "bad

¹³*People's Daily*, 29 October, 1966.

egg,” (referring to Brezhnev and Kosygin).¹⁴ On some occasions, effigies and coffins of Brezhnev and Kosygin were carried there.¹⁵

Simultaneously, with the intensification of the conflicts, both China and the Soviet Union reinforced their military strength along its northern frontier. Although both the Soviet and the Chinese denied publicly the possibility of any kind of military attacks, the incidence of border clashes had risen dramatically. By early 1969, eventually, the relations between China and the Soviet Union had deteriorated from ideological dispute to military confrontations.

Sino-Soviet Border Clashes: a Historical Review

The new Nixon administration had no specific plans to move towards China in the early 1969. Thus by March 1969, Sino-American relations were in the same hostility of mutual incomprehension and distrust, which lasted for twenty years. However, according to Kissinger, “policy emerges when concept encounters opportunity.” Such an opportunity came about when Soviet and Chinese troops clashed on a small island called Zhenbao in Chinese or Damansky in Russian. At that point, Washington’s ambiguity about China’s détente vanished. Nixon determined “to move without further hesitation toward a momentous change in global diplomacy.”¹⁶

China and the Soviet Union shared one of the longest borders in the world, a frontier of 7,300 kilometers. It fell into two major sections – the eastern or the Far East with over 4300 kilometers, and the western or the Central Asian with about 3,000

¹⁴ *People’s Daily*, January 27, 1967.

¹⁵ *People’s Daily*, 6 February, 1967.

¹⁶ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 171.

kilometers.¹⁷ Since the middle of the seventeenth century, boundary conflict had been a major factor affecting the overall bilateral relations between China and the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. But, due to their relationship as communist allies since 1949, they had met each other “along an oft-proclaimed ‘friendship’ boundary that carved a broad arc across Asia from the Pamir ‘roof’ to the chilly waters of the Pacific.”¹⁸ However, this “friendship” boundary caused a global concern in 1969 and offered an opportunity to the U.S. to lift leverage over not only the Soviet but also China.

The Ussuri River (Wusuli Rivier in Chinese) was used as a demarcation for the northeast Sino-Soviet border. And at a desolate point in the river about two hundred fifty miles from Vladivostok and about one hundred miles from Khabarovsk was situated a tiny island called Zhenbao island by the Chinese or Damansky by the Russians.¹⁹ The island was about a third of a square mile in area, wooded but uninhabited. The nearest Soviet settlement was Nizhne Mikhailovskiy, about 5 mile south. The nearest Chinese settlement was Kung-szu, just south of the island. Apart from occasional fishermen and loggers from both sides, the only human presence in the region was the border outposts, Soviet and Chinese, guarding their respective river banks.²⁰

¹⁷ Tsui Tsien-hua, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 9.

¹⁸ W.A. Douglas Jackson, *The Russo-Chinese Borderlands: Zone of Peaceful Contact or Potential Conflict?* (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1962), iii.

¹⁹. Keesing's Research Report, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 115.

²⁰Thomas W Robinson, “The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes,” *The American Political Science Review*, Dec., 1972, vol. 66, no. 4, 1187.

The Soviets maintained two border outposts in the area: one south of the island, and the other to the north. The southern post had a disadvantage, that is, its lines sight did not include the island itself (although the river-arm and the Chinese bank could be seen), and thus on-the-spot patrolling was necessary to determine Chinese presence on the island.²¹ The Chinese border post, named Kung-szu after the local Chinese settlement, was located on a hillock directly across from the island.²²

The border with respect to the islands in the Ussuri River had never been delimited. (See Appendices B, C) So, both China and the Soviet Union had been attempting for some time to establish claims to the islands. According to The treaty of Peking of 1860, the Sino-Russian border along the Ussuri was delimited but did not assign the river islands to either party.²³ (See Appendix D) Under such circumstances, one of two alternatives was usually accepted under international law, namely, either the line of the channel or the median line of the stream could become the boundary. The former was most often used if the river was navigable; the latter if the river was not. The Chinese some times asserted that the demarcation line ran down the middle of the river, which would have made the island Chinese. The Soviet Union based their claim on an alleged map that accompanied the border treaty of 1860, maintaining that the historical

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Tsui Tsien-hua, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 75.

border put the entire Ussuri riverbed under Russian control.²⁴ However, the map was too small in scale to show accurately either the river boundary or island ownership.

Since the late 19th century, Russia acquired 590,000 square miles of territory that had been under the nominal control or domination of Manchu China. The Chinese contended that these “unequal treaties” were invalidated by Lenin in 1920 when the new Soviet government renounced “all seizure of Chinese territory and all the Russian concessions in China.”²⁵ Beijing also contended that this renunciation was incorporated in the Sino-Soviet agreement of 1924, which stipulated the annulment of “all conventions, agreements, treaties, protocols, contracts, etc., concluded between the government of China and the Tsarist Government.”²⁶ But, Moscow flatly rejected these contentions, arguing that the boundary treaties were the results of historical developments, and they were freely arrived at between representatives of imperial Russia and imperial China. Thus, these treaties remained valid. The Soviets asserted that “all the ‘unequal treaties’ were eliminated in 1920 and 1924, and that no document of the Soviet state or any statement by Lenin ever qualified the border treaties with China as unequal or subject to revision.”²⁷ According to the Soviets, there was no “territorial issue” between the USSR

²⁴ Tsui Tsien-hua, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 122.

²⁵ Tsui Tsien-hua, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's*, 66.

²⁶ A.S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 277.

²⁷ Li Huichan, “Crux of Sino-Soviet Boundary Question,” *Beijing Review*, No. 31, 1981, 16.

and China, but only a matter of defining the few specific areas in which there was not a clear or agreed demarcation of the border.²⁸

Zhenbao Island was situated on the Chinese side of the main channel of the boundary river Ussuri but claimed by both sides. The other two larger and more important islands, Kirkinsky and Buyan, were situated to the north and south, respectively. These areas had always been a source of friction, especially since the two sides began exchanging propaganda accusations over the border since 1963. Minor incidents involving gunfire and other provocations had apparently occurred along the frontier, although both sides tried cautiously to keep the situation under control. This pattern of unpublicized and contained tension was abruptly changed on March 2, 1969. A large-scale clash broke out on the Ussuri and began an overt military confrontation of seven months. No one could adequately explain why either side attached so much importance to this uninhabited island. But, both sides did acknowledge that, prior to the March 2 clash, Zhenbao Island itself had indeed seen the scene of several near-violent meetings between groups of Soviet and Chinese frontier guards.

What actually happened on March 2 may be forever unclear since most of the participants at the scene of battle were dead. However, thanks to the published accounts of both sides in these years, it is possible to reconstruct what probably came about along the Ussuri River.

On the night of March 1, about 300 Chinese troops (a mixed group of frontier guards and regular PLA soldiers) dressed in white camouflage crossed the ice from the

²⁸ G. Ginsburg, "The Dynamics of the Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute: the case of the River Island," in J.S.Cohen, ed., *The Dynamics of China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs), no. 39, 1970, 3.

Chinese bank to Zhenbao Island. Around 11 a.m. on March 2, another group of 20 or 30 Chinese began moving towards the island, shouting Maoist slogans as they moved. The Russian soldiers found them, moved out to warn the oncoming Chinese of further passing, as they did several times before. But, different from previous times, oral warnings did not work, and a military clash broke out. As for who opened the first fire, each side persisted in its own views. The Soviets claimed that it was the Chinese that fired at them suddenly; while the Chinese accounted that the Soviet soldiers shot at them while warning. No matter who began shooting first, the entire battle lasted about two hours, killing twenty-three and wounding fourteen. Although both sides claimed victory, neither Russian nor Chinese forces remained permanently on the island after the battle was over.²⁹(See Appendix A)

On March 2, TASS (The Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) reported this border clash, protesting an alleged incursion by Chinese Communist troops into Soviet territory. On March 4, the Chinese Communists replied with a counter-protest accusing the Soviets in *People's Daily* claiming that the Soviet Union sent armed soldiers into Zhenbao Island in the Ussuri River, who fired upon the frontier guards of the Chinese Army, killing and wounding many of them. According to the editorial, this was “an extremely grave armed border provocation carried out by the Soviet revisionists, a frantic anti-China incident created by them and another big exposure of the rapacious nature of Soviet revisionism as social-imperialism. And it had done its utmost to collaborate with

²⁹ Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History*, 1, no. 1 (2000), 25; Thomas W Robinson, “The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes,” *The American Political Science Review*, Dec., 1972, vol. 66, no. 4, 1187-1189.

U.S. imperialism and reactionaries of all countries in an attempt to form a so-called ring of encirclement against China.”³⁰

On March 7, 1969, the *Peking Review* again reported that the Soviet Union completely disregarded the repeated warnings of the Chinese government and had again and again violated their territorial and aerial integrity and sovereignty, with the incidents often involving bloodshed. Meanwhile, China strongly attacked the Soviets, claiming that between January 23, 1967 and March 2, 1969, the Soviet frontier guards had penetrated into Zhenbao Island on sixteen occasions, and several times had wounded Chinese frontier guards and looted arms and ammunition.

Also in this report, Beijing strongly warned the Soviets:

We warn the Soviet revisionist renegade clique: we will never allow anybody to encroach upon China’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. We will not attack unless we are attacked; if we are attacked, we will certainly counter-attack. Gone forever are the days when the Chinese people were bullied by others. You are utterly blind and day-dreaming if you can deal with the great Chinese people by resorting to the same old tricks used by tsarist Russia. If you continue making military provocations, you will certainly receive severe punishment. No matter in what strength and with whom you come, we will wipe you out resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely.³¹

Along with China’s protests, since the morning of March 3, the Chinese began to launch massive demonstrations all over the country denouncing the Soviet as “revisionists.” Crowds of demonstrators gathered at the Soviet Embassy in Beijing shouting anti-Soviet slogans. Throughout the rest of the mainland, mass parades and rallies involving soldiers and civilians were also organized to repulse the Soviets.

³⁰ “Statement of the Government of the People’s Republic of China,” *Peking Review*, March 7, 1969.

³¹ *Peking Review*, March 7, 1969.

According to *Peking Review*, “the powerful demonstrations by the nation’s 700 million people in angrily denouncing the Soviet revisionists’ armed provocation have witnessed one new upsurge after another, reaching such a large scale as was never known before.

The Soviet revisionist renegade clique has reached a feverish point in its frenzied opposition to China. They are digging their own graves and will end up in a shameful and complete defeat. Armed with the great thought of Mao Zedong, the 700 million Chinese people are determined ... to heighten their vigilance, strengthen preparedness against war, united as one against the enemy, and be ready at all times to resolutely repulse Soviet revisionist social-imperialism’s provocations and aggression!”³²

In spite of the continuing Chinese denunciation, border clashes continued. On the morning of March 15, a second border clash on Zhenbao Island broke out. In contrast with March 2, this time both sides, especially the Soviet troops, were better prepared. The Soviets had increased their patrolling, and a scouting party had camped on the island on the night of March 14, probably to set a trap. The battle lasted longer and casualties were higher. Heavy fighting broke out and continued on and off for nine hours. Tanks, armored cars, artillery, and antitank rockets were used. 800 Chinese and about 60 Soviet were wounded or killed. Similarly, both sides claimed victory.³³

On August 13, another military incident broke out on the border between Kazakstan and the strategically important Xinjiang province, where China’s missile and nuclear weapons testing activities took place. According to the analysis of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), August 13 border clash was an “action-reaction on a local scene.” The Soviets had planned this attack as a retaliatory move. With their

³² *Peking Review*, March 14, 1969.

³³ Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History*, 1, no. 1 (2000), 25-26; Thomas W Robinson, “The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes,” *The American Political Science Review*, Dec., 1972, vol. 66, no. 4, 1189.

advantage in armor, the Soviets drove the Chinese out, killing at least 20 soldiers and taking a few prisoners. To Washington, the Sino-Soviet border situation was becoming seriously deteriorated and continued border clashes were bound to escalate. According to a report by the CIA on September 4, the Soviets “would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons against the Chinese if they attacked with major forces.”³⁴

China's War Scare

Since the beginning of border clashes, China had been rigid at its attitude toward the settlement of border disputes because, as Beijing proclaimed, its initiate was not to regain the territory lost to imperial Russia, but to ask for a negotiation of a new, “equal” treaty.³⁵ Hence, Beijing stated their willingness to accept the existing frontier as the basis for a permanent border demarcation, provided that Moscow could first acknowledge the 19th century treaties establishing it as “unequal.” For China, the settlement of border dispute was an issue of keeping prestige and announcing its strength. According to Lin Biao’s report on the Ninth Party Congress in April, shortly after the initial Ussuri clashes, Moscow called Beijing for the settlement of the intensive situation along the Ussuri River. But Beijing refused to accept this call, because the Soviets failed to revoke these “unequal” treaties.³⁶ Therefore, the “unequal” treaties issue became an integral part of Beijing’s ideological and political challenge of Moscow.

³⁴ “Soviet-Chicom Hostilities,” 4 September, 1969.

³⁵ Tsui Tsien-hua, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 64-67.

³⁶ Fu-mei Chiu Wu, “The China Policy of Richard M. Nixon from Confrontation to Negotiation,” (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1976), 123.

To Washington, China's strong action on the Ussuri and its eagerness to exploit the resulting tension was the distinctly Maoist method of deterrence. By assuming a hard-line posture, Beijing could demonstrate to the Soviet Union and the world that despite its preoccupation with its internal problems, China was determined to resist Soviet pressures and to defend its territorial rights.

However, the Soviets did not want to make such a concession, largely because they also did not want to lose their national prestige either.³⁷ For the Soviets, even if new "equal" treaties were signed confirming Soviet possession of the Far Eastern territory, a Soviet admission that the old treaties had been unequal would give the emergence that the territory had come to Moscow only through Beijing's generosity. Undoubtedly, this was a circumstance Moscow found extremely unacceptable. Moreover, most of Russia's borders were determined in a no more equitable manner than was the one with China. The admission of the "unequal" nature of the border agreements with China could conceivably lead to agitation on the part of others who adjoined the USSR. In particular, "it could aid Japan's frequently stated case for the return of territories seized by the Russians at the end of the World War II."³⁸

Negotiations between Beijing and Moscow reached an impasse, with both sides refusing to compromise. China appeared weaker in this situation, so it had to be even more aggressive to offset its weak position. So for eight months following March 2, Beijing's foreign policy was largely dominated by anti-Soviet concerns. The Chinese publicized widely the Russian military activity and air intrusions along the Sino-Soviet

³⁷ T.W. Robinson, *The Border Negotiations and Future of the Sino-Soviet-American Relations* (Santo Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1971), 5.

³⁸ G. Ginsburg, *Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute*, 9.

frontier. By the exploitation of Sino-Soviet border tension, Beijing took no pains to portray Moscow “as an aggressor in the frontier dispute, and furthermore derived that Moscow was a practitioner of fascist policies at home and imperialist aggression menacing all socialist states.”³⁹ In spite of this pointed criticism, Moscow showed no sign of backing away from the border conflict. On the contrary, the Soviets became increasingly tough on China. Obviously, “the Soviets planned to implement its forcing policy to press for Beijing to the conference table without preconditions, meanwhile displaying its intention of military action against China.”⁴⁰

One of the most pressing issues that Beijing had to deal with was the greatly increase of the Soviet military buildup along the border throughout 1969. Since the beginning of the 1960s, border disputes had become a common phenomenon. In April 1962, both Beijing and Moscow began to reinforce their military disposition in the border areas.⁴¹ The 1964 border talks between Beijing and Moscow further made the future of Sino-Soviet border dispute gloomier. In the latter half of the 1960s, “both states began to bring their existing forces to a higher state of readiness, to equip them with better and more weaponry. The Soviets seem to have been the more active party in this process.”⁴²

By the summer of 1969, China and particularly the Soviet Union had dramatically increased their military strength. It was estimated that the Russians had massed some 25

³⁹ G. F. Hudson, Richard Lowenthal, and Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1961), 42.

⁴⁰ G. F. Hudson, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute*, 64.

⁴¹ Tsui Tsien-hua, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 42.

⁴² Thomas W Robinson, “The Sino-Soviet border dispute: background, development, and the March 1969 clashes,” 26.

to 30 divisions and air and missile units along the frontier, twice the number in 1965. Their clear superiority in armor, artillery, and air power made them stronger than Beijing's forces in most border areas. Meanwhile, Soviet had deployed many hundreds tactical nuclear missiles and rockets along the eastern sector of the Sino-Soviet boundary. One such type of weapon systems was the solid-fuel mobile nuclear missile, which was estimated to have a range of about eight hundred kilometers.⁴³ Aware of the danger existing along the Sino-Soviet border, William Rogers, the U.S. Secretary of State, disclosed on August 20 that "Moscow had the military capacity to seize a considerable portion of Chinese territory, including Beijing."⁴⁴ To Washington, even though China had already had nuclear weapons, it was still unmatched at the Soviet Union.

What was worse, during the summer 1969, China also faced an out-of-control domestic upheaval. The Cultural Revolution became more violent. Factional fighting reached the highest levels since the summer of 1968, with clashes reported in about a dozen provinces, including four in which a key rail line ran to central and western China. Robberies, murders, and gang fights were widespread. Popular disrespect for local authority was found everywhere. Students sent to the countryside were returning illegally and with impunity. Labor indiscipline and unrest – slowdowns, malingering and tardiness, and widespread demands for more pay were at high levels.

In the face of such an internal disturbance and foreign aggression, Beijing became worried about the Soviet's exploitation of China's weak point. Beijing began to show a more intense concern over Soviet intentions. Thus, Beijing media started to dwell on the

⁴³ Tsui Tsien-hua, *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's*, 44.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, 21 August 1969.

ominous possibility that Moscow would soon initiate large-scale hostilities against China. Simultaneously, Beijing conducted a national campaign warning that the Soviet Union was preparing to launch a war against China which might involve nuclear weapons. The campaign appeared motivated “by the need for an issue to coalesce internal unity at a time of social and political upheaval; by a desire to blacken the Soviets on the eve of the internal communist conference; and, by no means the least, a genuine fear of attack.”⁴⁵ The Chinese, from the U.S. perspective, was probably now acting out of a combination of real fear of Soviet intentions and a sober calculation that national consciousness of the Soviet danger must be made manifest to Moscow and the world as an element of Chinese deterrence of the threat. Obviously to Washington, Beijing “was extremely sensitive to the presence of hostile forces on its borders and credible threats to its integrity, and was ready to reacting even when faced by superior power.”⁴⁶

Apart from the Soviet Union and its own domestic upheaval, China’s efforts to expand its international influence against the Soviet Union during 1969 did not achieve significant breakthroughs either. It in large part resulted from “China’s continued unwillingness to overlook its differences with a number of nations of crucial importance in the Sino-Soviet dispute.”⁴⁷ Apart from the Soviet Union, Beijing did not show any sign of moderating its strained relations with two strategically important neighbors, North Vietnam and North Korea. In case of North Vietnam, the Chinese strongly expressed its opposition to Hanoi’s participation at the Paris peace talks with the United States. And as

⁴⁵ “Sino-Soviet Border Talks: Problems and Prospects,” 10 November 1969.

⁴⁶ “Communist China: Peking Inflates Soviet War Threat,” 3 June 1969.

⁴⁷ Robert G Sutter, *China-Watch: toward Sino-American reconciliation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 85.

for North Korea, Beijing's refusal to support Pyongyang's successful attack against a U.S. military aircraft in April probably acted to sour bilateral relations more.

Another element that should not be ignored was the U.S. military involvement in Asia. Beijing was afraid of Soviet-America collusion against China. In the view of China, any close cooperation between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. was aimed against China. In order to consummate their worldwide package deal, the Brezhnev-Kosygin clique would become "more brazen and more unbridled than ever in spreading its anti-China propaganda and putting together a ring to encircle China." In order to achieve its ambition, Moscow would undoubtedly "sing in tune with Washington and collaborating with it ever more closely."⁴⁸ After the breakout of Zhenbao clashes, the Soviets had more than once asked for Washington's reaction to a possible Sino-Soviet war, and deliberately disclosed them to China. For Beijing, even though Americans gave no clear line of response to Soviets' inquiries, it seemed that Americans had tacit acceptance of such a prospect of a Soviet strike.

Therefore, Communist China was beset with difficulties on all sides. Beijing, faced with this increasing Soviet military power along the border and virtually lacking international support, must have predicted with alarm the application of the "Brezhnev Doctrine" to Czechoslovakia and, in Chinese eyes, its implications for China.⁴⁹ Besides the fact that the border clashes between China and the Soviet Union threatened for a time to involve the two communist giants in all out-out war, China had the rising fear that it was being encircled the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan and India (the Soviet ally),

⁴⁸ *Peking Review*, March 8, 1978.

⁴⁹ "Sino-Soviet Border Talks: Problems and Prospects," 10 November 1969.

and might be attacked jointly by them any moment. That fear was correspondingly reflected from Premier Zhou Enlai's speech at a reception marking the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in October 1969 and what the joint editorial of the *People's Daily*, and *Red Flag*:

U.S. imperialism and social imperialism are now intensifying their collaboration and are wildly plotting to launch wars of aggression against China. They have even spread talk for nuclear blackmail against. People of the world, united and oppose the war of aggression launched by any imperialism or social imperialism, especially one in which atomic bombs are employed; if such a war breaks out, the people of the world should use revolutionary war to eliminate the war of aggression, and preparations should be made right now.⁵⁰

Any large scale frontier strife, if continued, could eventually bring the two countries to a general war which China possibly could not afford. So, Beijing changed its propaganda, which since then focused less and less on China's territorial case against Moscow and more and more on the details of Moscow's military buildup and its nuclear threat. To Washington, the Chinese were now agreeing to drop their early demands that Moscow must meet certain conditions before the border talks could begin.

Nixon and his administration were not surprised about Beijing's change of attitude, because they knew that the Chinese had no alternative but to moderate their intransigent position. In order to alleviate the border crisis, to avoid a potentially disastrous war with Moscow, and to reduce Soviet military pressure against China along the frontier and elsewhere around china's periphery, China had to adjust its policies. This motivation was emphasized by Beijing's October 7 statement, which portrayed China's most urgent goal was the disengagement of forces along the frontier. The statement

⁵⁰ "Union Research Institute, *Communist China, 1969*," (Communist China Problem Research Series; Kowloon: Union Research Institute, 1970), 124.

maintained that, “in order to relax the situation along the border between the two countries and enable the Sino-Soviet boundary negotiations to be held free from any threats, the Chinese side put forth the proposal that the Chinese and Soviet sides first of all reach an agreement on the provisional measures for maintaining the status quo of the border for averting armed conflict, and for disengagement.”⁵¹

To Washington, this was a commonly-used diplomatic tactic by the Chinese. As Mao had mentioned before, China was weaker than its enemies and it must adopt Trojan horse tactics and send agents into the enemy stronghold, while mobilizing the masses below for the final assault:

“How to wage diplomatic struggles against the imperialists. We must learn how to carry out overt struggle against them, we must also learn how to carry on covert struggle against them.”⁵²

Based on this strategy, the Chinese changed its attitude to open the way for Premier Kosygin’s unprecedented trip to Beijing on September 11, 1969, to provide the final nudge toward negotiations on the border issue. Premier Zhou Enlai met Premier Kosygin at an airport near Beijing. Apart from reaching an understanding on the resumption of border talks, the two Premiers also agreed that “China and the Soviet Union should not go to war over the boundary question.”⁵³ So on October 7, Beijing formally announced that the Chinese would meet with the Russians. However, Beijing abandoned purposely the contention that any discussion about the border clashes should

⁵¹ *DR China*, 20 October 1969, A2-A4.

⁵² *NCNA*, November 24, 1968.

⁵³ Li Huichuan, “Crux of Sino-Soviet Boundary Question,” *Beijing Review*, No. 31, 1981, 13.

be based on “unequal treaties.” As a result, during the following months, border incidents were almost eliminated.

However, Moscow continued to apply heavy pressure on the Chinese leadership and refused to recognize and implement the disengagement agreement, or the plan of withdrawing the troops of both parties from all the disputed areas. On September 13, a deputy defense minister of the USSR engaged in what was characterized in the West as a “rocket-rattling” speech against China, emphasizing the importance of offensive nuclear missiles in a “Blitzkrieg” attack.⁵⁴ On 16 September a widely known Soviet journalist, Victor Louis, published an article in a London newspaper claiming that Moscow was still ready, if necessary, to launch a military strike against China.⁵⁵ Therefore, given the failure of the border talks and the increasing military buildup along the border, further frontier strife appeared inevitable.

In order to offset the continuing buildup of Soviet military along the Chinese border, together with continuing efforts by Moscow to isolate China diplomatically, Beijing shifted its incentive to continue the development of more normal diplomatic activity. Due to this complex situation, Premier Zhou Enlai disclosed in a secret directive sent out in November 1969 that Beijing currently called for a more flexible stance in Chinese diplomacy in order to protect China’s international position against Moscow. Zhou implied, for example, that Beijing would agree to resume talks with the U.S. in Warsaw so as to keep the Soviets off balance and deflect Chinese would follow “flexible tactics” abroad in order to set Moscow and Washington against one another and to

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, 14 September 1969.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, 18 September 1969.

increase China's international influence. Zhou also strongly implied, however, that Beijing intended to make no substantive change in its foreign policy, that it would continue firmly to uphold longstanding "revolutionary principles" while developing a limited flexible approach abroad. Clearly, the Chinese intended to use the prospect of improved state relations as a major bargaining tool in maneuvering away from possible military confrontation with the USSR.⁵⁶ So, in April 1969, Vice-Chairman Lin Biao in his Political Report addressed to the Ninth party Congress:

The foreign policy of our Party and Government is ... to develop relations of friendship, mutual assistance and cooperation with socialist countries on the principle of proletarian internationalism; to support and assist the revolutionary struggles of all the oppressed peoples and nations; to work for peaceful co-existence with countries of different social systems on the basis of the five principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence, and to oppose the imperialist policies of aggression and war.⁵⁷

From Lin Biao's report, two elements of departure from China's former foreign policy are evident: (1) the "Red Guard diplomacy" of the Cultural Revolutionary period was to end; and (2) China would develop friendly relations with both socialist countries and those with different social system. In short, China was frightened and needed friendship from any country that would extend it. At this critical moment Richard Nixon, the new President of the United States, offered American friendship to the Chinese. From then on, the road to a Mao-Nixon summit was open.

⁵⁶ "Sino-Soviet Border Talks: Problems and Prospects," 10 November 1969.

⁵⁷ *Peking Review*, April 28, 1969.

CHAPTER FOUR

Washington's Reaction: Dangers and Opportunities

In early 1969, Kissinger had already written about the possibility of a Sino-Soviet rift. Such a prospect, Kissinger argued, “must not be overlooked” and if it occurred “we should take advantage of it. But we could not promote this rift by our own efforts and we could not build our policy on the expectation of it.”¹ However, how and what Washington should do with this possible rift was not clear for Washington.

On March 2, 1969, a piece of shocking news came that Sino-Soviet border disputes eventually developed into military clashes. Nixon and his administration did not follow this issue immediately at the beginning, because at that time, they were still “too preoccupied with Vietnam to respond to these events whose origin could not be understood and whose significance took some weeks to become apparent.”² Not until Soviet officials began to continuously solicit America's reactions to the possibility of Sino-Soviet hostilities, including a Soviet pre-emptive strike against China's atomic installations, did Washington seriously divert their attention from Vietnam to China, as Nixon told his cabinet, “the worst thing that could happen to us would be for the Soviet Union to gobble up Red China.”³

¹ Henry Kissinger, “Sino-Soviet Border Talks: Problems and Prospects,” 10 November 1969; Kissinger, *The necessity for choice; prospects of American foreign policy* (New York, Harper, 1961), 220.

² Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 172.

³ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 296.

According to Kissinger's recollection, Nixon and Kissinger regarded the Sino-Soviet border clashes as geopolitical opportunities for the U.S. with respect to the Soviet Union or the possibility that the Chinese might have an incentive to move toward the U.S. without American concessions because of their need for an American counterweight to the Soviet Union.⁴ Ironically, it was actually China's weakness rather than Soviet's strength that made China appear on the Nixon administration's agenda, because China evidently could not restrain the Soviet Union any longer; and it was also the heavy-handed Soviet diplomacy that made Nixon and his administration think about their opportunities to détente with China.

Soviet Leaders Sound their Intentions

A significant turn for a better U.S. policy toward China was present on August 18th, 1969, a week after the August 13 Xingjiang-Kazakstan border clash, when Boris N. Davydov, the second secretary of the Soviet embassy and William L. Stearman, an Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) specialist on North Vietnam, had a luncheon together at the Beef and Bird Restaurant. According to the INR reports, during the dinner, Davydov, unlike any previous conversations, quickly changed their talking subject to China with a rather startling line of questioning about America's intention towards China. He then moved to ask directly what the U.S. would do if the Soviet Union attacked and destroyed China's nuclear installations. After Stearman queried whether Davydov was serious about this question, Davydov answered that destroying China's nuclear capacity would eliminate a serious nuclear threat for decades and it would also weaken and discredit the Mao clique, thereby allowing dissident senior officers and party cadres to

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 164.

take charge. Even though Stearman didn't give any substantial answers, Davydov repeated similar questions three times during the lunch, which seemed to Washington that the Soviets were at least thinking about a strike against China. Washington began to take the possibility of a decisive Soviet attack against China very seriously, because for the Nixon administration, "what unnerved them was not that such an attack would make China's millions still angrier and still more isolated;" rather, they "feared that the Soviet Union, by subduing China, would radically improve its own standing in the international balance of power – at the expense of the United States."⁵ Undoubtedly, this was what Washington expected least.

On September 10, 1969, Secretary of State Rogers presented Nixon a memorandum on the Davydov-Stearman meeting, more details on Soviet threats against China, and an INR's analysis of Davydov's probe for U.S. reactions to Soviet military action. According to this memorandum, the Soviet Union sought to probe U.S. reaction to Soviet military action. Even though the possibility of a Soviet strike at Chinese nuclear facilities could not be ruled out, the chances of this particular course of Soviet attack of China were still substantially less than fifty-fifty. But escalation of border clashes was more likely. However, Kissinger held differing views. He wrote on this memorandum, "I disagree with State analysis. Soviets would not ask such questions lightly. They intend to attack."⁶

⁵ Robert S Ross, *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: tripolarity and policy making in the Cold War* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 126.

⁶ "The Possibility of a Soviet Strike against Chinese Nuclear Facilities," National Archives, National Security Council Files, box 710, USSR Vol. V 10/69.

Meanwhile, Dovydov once more put the same question to an official of the Research Analysis Corporation. In Moscow, a Soviet editor, while denying the plans to strike China, claimed that the Soviets would show some “new weapons” to deal with the Chinese. Simultaneously at the UN, a Soviet officer said the Chinese were making the erroneous assumption that the Soviets would not use larger-than-tactical nuclear weapons against them. Hence, for the U.S., it seemed increasingly apparent that the Soviets were probing for foreign reactions to a strike against China. In order to confirm whether Soviet diplomats were raising the similar questions of preventive strikes with foreign governments, the department alerted major embassies and consulates in Europe and Asia to report on Soviet probes.⁷ Even though the reports were inconclusive, Soviet diplomats showed hostility towards China and recognized the possibility of escalation of the border fighting. In spite Moscow gave fairly authoritative denials towards any military strikes. These suspicious probes from Moscow definitely called Washington’s attention to the possible attacks on China.

Moscow enjoyed an absolute military supremacy over Beijing in terms of nuclear strike capability. Chinese sources indicated that since 1965 “the Soviet Union deployed 150 new intercontinental missiles each year.”⁸ In addition to those in Siberia, many of the Soviet ICBMs based in Europe could be targeted against major cities in China. Furthermore, medium-range nuclear missiles had been placed by the Soviets not only

⁷ State Department cables 14209 and 142939 To Hong Kong consulate, 21 and 23 August, 1969, SN 67-69, POL CHICOM-USSR.

⁸ “Soviet Military Strategy for World Domination,” Peking Review, No. 4, January 28, 1980, p. 15.

along the Sino-Soviet border, but also the Sino-Mongolian boundary.⁹ Immediately after the Zhenbao incidents of 1969, the Kremlin more than once made it clear to Beijing that the USSR would definitely employ nuclear weapons in the event of a full-scale Sino-Soviet war.¹⁰ The Soviets had entered into combat readiness.

On September 18 1969, another INR report came to the White House. It analyzed China's war scare and its domestic political unrest. According to this report, the Chinese leaders found that the tensions with Moscow were worrisome. What they found even worse was the lack of control over the Cultural Revolution throughout the country. In order to make preparations for border war and to facilitate stricter internal controls, Mao signed off on a Central Committee directive on August 28 urging the entire country to prepare for war "ideologically, materially, and physically." Meanwhile, it also authorized troops to arrest "counter-revolutionaries" and travelers without proper identification, which conveyed such an air of concern that another major incident on the Sino-Soviet border would lead to a declaration of war.¹¹ On October 1, twenty-nine slogans were published for China's 20th anniversary celebrations to intensify the current stress on the danger of war and warn of possible nuclear war. Four of them stressed the danger of war. Two called generally for increased production and preparedness. Another one called for readiness "at all times" to destroy "enemy intruders." And another one asked peoples of all countries to oppose "especially a war of aggression in which atom bombs are used as

⁹ Washington Post, August 15, 1970.

¹⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, "Soviet says a war with the Chinese would peril all," *New York Times*, August 29, 1969.

¹¹ "The CCP Central Committee's Order for General Mobilization in Border Provinces and Regions," 28 August 1969, *Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project 11* (Winter 1998), 168-169.

weapons” launched by the “imperialists” or the “social imperialists” i.e., the Soviets undoubtedly.¹²

On November 1969, the CIA, together with the directorate of Intelligence and Office of Current Intelligence, further analyzed the high possibility that both the clashes and the subsequent seven months of conflict were prompted in large part by the more aggressive and provocative China. That was a Chinese reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. However, since Moscow had shown no sign of backing away from the border conflict, Beijing had to consider that “the adoption of a totally uncompromising position would provide Moscow with a perfect opportunity for restoring to harsher military measures.”¹³

At that moment, it seemed to Washington that Moscow was politically and militarily tough with respect to their China policy and he was preparing for a “war” with China. Since China was weaker in all its aspect, Washington’s priority task then was to make sure that China would not be smashed and would not collapse. Consistent with this interpretation, Henry Kissinger explained in his *White House Years* his motives in undertaking the secret diplomacy that would lead to the opening to China: “If the Soviet Union was the aggressor [in the Sino-Soviet clashes] ... we had ... an opportunity.”¹⁴ As far as Washington was concerned, if balance could be kept, the Soviet “obsession” with China might then become a tool to restrain Soviet conduct. As Kissinger told Nixon after an meeting with Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin – in which the latter had become highly

¹² “Communist China: War Fears and Domestic Politics,” National Archives, SN 67-69, Pol Chicom.

¹³ “Sino-Soviet Border Talks: Problems and Prospects,” National Security Archive.

¹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 177.

agitated on the subject of China – the United States “stood to gain a great deal strategically” by playing on Soviet anxiety.¹⁵ In this sense, rapprochement with China might become a device to secure Washington’s power against Moscow.

Washington’s Move towards China

Department of State analysts estimated that Soviet leaders wanted to find ways to contain China but may also have been seeking closer relations with South Asian nations to forestall collusion in the area between China and the United States. In this context, suspicions on both sides of the Sino-Soviet border gave Washington an opportunity to influence the situation through this triangular diplomacy. For example, by taking initiatives toward China, the United States could “both attract and needle” Moscow into a more cooperative approach on the conflicts in Vietnam or Laos.¹⁶ Under the consideration of above factors, Nixon and his administration began their steps toward China.

The U.S. should first endeavor to counter the impression that the Soviets and the Americans were colluding with each other against China, just as Rogers’s earlier recommended that “we should make clear to the Chinese that we were not colluding with the Soviets.”¹⁷ And in order to correct this impression, Washington needed to draw up instructions for a common line to take in response to Soviet and other inquiries concerning the U.S. view of a possible Soviet strike; and if possible, Washington should

¹⁵ Robert S Ross, *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: tripolarity and policy making in the Cold War* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 127.

¹⁶ William Burr, “Sino-American relations, 1969: the Sino-Soviet border war and steps towards rapprochement,” *Peace Research Abstracts*, 39, no. 1 (2002): 3-152.

¹⁷ “NSSM 63 – Meeting with Consultants,” 19 August 1969.

also convey its position directly or indirectly to Beijing. According to a memorandum by Marshall Green on October 6, 1969, State Department officials at the request of the President were “looking for any and all possible signs that Beijing was taking a new tack in its approach to Washington.”¹⁸

One of Nixon’s first steps toward reaching the Chinese came on July 21, 1969, when the State Department announced a slight easing of travel and trade restrictions. American tourists and residents abroad were allowed to bring into the United States goods of Chinese communist origin worth \$100 for noncommercial purposes. In addition, scholars, professors, journalists, university students, members of Congress, scientists, physicians, and Red Cross representatives were all entitled to have their passports validated for travel to mainland China.¹⁹ In a news conference, Nixon also disclosed that these were the suggestions that, at his request, came from the National Security Council after three months of deliberations.

Unexpectedly, the Chinese gave no public comments on the U.S. trade and travel moves in July. But the Chinese indeed had told a number of foreigners that they were aware of the fact that U.S. policy toward China was under review in Washington. They also privately noted that trade and travel moves as having been made in the context of this review but said these were insufficient. They had continued to emphasize that more moves relating to Taiwan were necessary. For Washington, it seemed that what Beijing considered the settlement of Taiwan as a key step for the Sino-US final rapprochement. But according to the State analysts, Beijing was not seeing the settlement of Taiwan as

¹⁸ “Next Steps in China Policy,” National Archives, SN 67-69, Pol Chicom-US.

¹⁹ Congressional Quarterly, *China and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington: congressional quarterly, 1971), 12.

the only bargaining counters in the deals with Washington; instead, they were only trying to seek some “symbolic” gesture such as a minor troop withdrawal from Taiwan or of the patrol ships in the Taiwan Strait.²⁰

Based on this assumption, later in November 1969, the Nixon Administration further quietly ended the regular two-destroyer patrol of the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Straits (much to the chagrin of the Chinese Government in Taiwan) under the pretext of budget consideration.

Until the fall 1969, no channel of communication existed between China and the United States. The last talk of the Sino-American ambassadorial was held in Warsaw in January 1968. Therefore, when President Nixon intended to let the Chinese know his “readiness to open communication with Beijing,” he had to travel a circuitous path.²¹ Since Nixon had become aware of the pressures that the Chinese were under, he had to ensure that their friendly signals could be received in a right manner. Nixon, during an around-the-world trip beginning in late July 1969, talked about his intention to détente with China with Pakistani president Mohammad Yahya Khan and Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu, both of whom maintained good relations with Beijing. Nixon asked them to convey to the Chinese leaders his belief that “Asia could not move forward if a nation as large as China remained isolated. And he was interested in concrete discussions.”²² Zhou Enlai received this message from Yahya; he reported to Mao on

²⁰ “Next Steps in China Policy,” National Archives, SN 67-69, Pol Chicom-US.

²¹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 178.

²² Congressional Quarterly, *China and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington: congressional quarterly, 1971), 180-181.

November 16, 1969 that “the direction of movement of Nixon and Kissinger is noteworthy.”²³ But Mao made no immediate response to the message.

At this time, Washington’s move toward China seemed even clearer to Chinese leaders. According to an INR report, Zhou Enlai met Etienne Manach’h, the French ambassador to China in late September. During the talk, Manach’h delivered a long-delayed message from Washington that Nixon was interested in improving relations with Beijing. Zhou, cautious, simply noted that “the current situation is evolving and complicated.” However, Zhou privately told Etienne Manach’h that Beijing noted that the U.S. had no intention to take advantage of the Sino-Soviet dispute or to worsen it, but the question of renewed Sino-US talks was still “complicated.”²⁴ For the Nixon administration, it was encouraging to see a slight “softening” of China’s position. Though China expressed no major shift in its policy towards America, Nixon knew that Beijing was waving to Washington.

Hence, on December 15, the United States announced that all nuclear weapons on Okinawa, which had been installed as a nuclear deterrent against Communist China, would be removed by the end of 1969. And on December 19, the U.S. government again lifted the \$100 limit on purchase of Communist Chinese goods by individuals and permitted foreign subsidiaries of American companies to trade nonstrategic goods with Communist China.²⁵

²³ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 250.

²⁴ “Next Steps in China Policy,” National Archives, SN 67-69, Pol Chicom-US.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

At the almost same time, Beijing changed its Red Guard diplomacy of 1966-1967. The increasingly menacing Soviet military situation along the Sino-Soviet border awakened the Chinese leaders that China was domestically weak and internationally isolated. As a result, this sense of inferiority triggered a sharp change in Beijing's approach to foreign affairs. According to a CIA memorandum, Zhou Enlai issued a secret directive calling for more diplomatic suppleness to protect China from the Soviet Union. Zhou declared that Beijing would follow flexible tactics "by resuming talks with Washington, by keeping the Soviets off balance, and by encouraging US-Soviet tensions." However, to conciliate the ideologues, Zhou also stated that Beijing would not abandon "revolutionary principles."²⁶

From Zhou's declaration, Washington concluded that the Soviet threat would prompt China to assign a far greater priority to improve its diplomatic position vis-à-vis Moscow, i.e., to resume the diplomatic offensive. In Eastern Europe, the Chinese "adopted a more flexible policy as part of their continuing efforts to turn Soviet bloc discontent with Moscow to China's advantage."²⁷ In May 1969, the Chinese sent National Day greetings to Czechoslovakia for the first time since 1966 and made a statement in the greetings to Chinese support for the "unyielding" people of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, Beijing also reprinted an Albanian editorial that voiced strong support for the government of Romania. In late May, Beijing again sent a trade delegation to Czechoslovakia, Romanian and Poland – a move that increased China's

²⁶ "Signs of Life in Chinese Foreign Policy," National Security Archive.

²⁷ Robert Carver North, *The foreign relations of China* (Belmont, Calif., Dickenson Pub. Co., 1969), 134.

influence in these states immediately prior to Moscow's unsuccessful efforts to align them, and other communist regimes, against China.²⁸

Furthermore, the Chinese had also demonstrated a relatively open attitude toward improving diplomatic relations with several neighboring Asian countries. These countries were those who had been estranged from China. A development first appeared in October 1969 when Peking began a special effort to repair its relations with Hanoi, which had been strained since the start of the Paris talks in 1968. Meanwhile, the Chinese also turned to their other estranged communist neighbor, North Korea. Meanwhile, the Chinese, for the first time in over a year, showed a willingness to consider modifying China's bitter opposition to the Ne Win regime in Burma. Similarly, its efforts to improve the foreign relations in Asia also extended as far as Ceylon.²⁹ Undoubtedly, China made all these attempts to broaden its diplomatic appeal in Asia and to offset Moscow's sphere of influence.

Until then, both Washington and Beijing seemed for rapprochement. But Washington aimed to move further. The Americans had publicly and repeatedly expressed their willingness to renew the bilateral talks with the Chinese in Warsaw or elsewhere.

In early October 1969, Nixon authorized Walter J. Stoessel, Jr., the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, to seek an opportunity to convey the President's wish to discuss an improvement in relations to the Chinese Charge d'Affaires in Warsaw. However, the attempts to contact top-ranking Chinese envoy lasted for almost two months. Finally on

²⁸ "Signs of Life in Chinese Foreign Policy," National Security Archive.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

December 3, Stoessel's opportunity came at a Yugoslav reception where he spotted Lei Yang, Charge d'Affaires at the Chinese Embassy. After several tries, Stoessel caught Yang going down a flight of stairs and exchanged a few words inviting the Chinese to begin serious talks. On December 6, Beijing released two Americans who had been held since February 16, 1969, when their yacht strayed into Chinese waters off Guangdong Province. A week later, Ambassador Stoessel was invited to the Chinese Embassy – the first invitation in any Sino-American contact since the Communists had taken power in China. The two had a cordial meeting lasting an hour and 15 minutes, during which Stoessel delivered a long-prepared statement conveying Nixon's interest in "greater communication", avoiding "sterile ... ideological arguments", and reducing tensions by exploring "state-to-state differences."³⁰ By far, this was the most substantial change in China's posture. As a result, the Warsaw ambassadorial talks were resumed on January 20, 1970, after two years' suspension.

For Nixon and his administration, China's continuous concern over the Soviet pressure, its persistent fear of Soviet-American collusion against China, and its preoccupation with gaining foreign leverage against the Soviet Union at this time, all together set the stage for this attempt to enhance China's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union through utilization of the American connection.

Meanwhile, Washington also thought about the possibility of trade expansion. By early December 1969, Rogers presented Nixon specific recommendations about the softening of trade restraints on China. As Rogers wrote to Nixon, "this initiative could serve U.S. economic interests and if possible, they would go in the direction of opening

³⁰ "Sino-US Meeting," 11 December 1969.

the doors towards China a little more.” He recommended to Nixon in this memorandum that the U.S. government should make the following modifications to embrace a wide-range of regulations involving the extraterritorial aspects of current US trade policy toward Beijing, which included (a) unblocking of letter of credit accounts held by banks, (b) removing of FAC restrictions on American subsidiaries abroad, (c) removing of FAC restrictions on third-country trading activities of American firms involving possible presumptive Chinese goods, and (d) putting an end to current POL bunkering restrictions. These moves improved the “competitive strength of American business concerns overseas”, while relaxing US “extraterritorial controls” over overseas subsidiaries. This latter would even remove a contentious issue in US relations with European and Asian allies.³¹

In December 1969, Mao told the visiting American journalist Edgar Snow that he would welcome Nixon to China, “either as a tourist or as President.”³² Nixon responded by lifting restrictions against Americans’ travelling to China. Early in 1970, Chinese diplomats resumed talks with U.S. officials in Warsaw, which was suspended by China two years earlier as a protest against American warfare in Vietnam. In April 1971, the U.S. table Tennis team competing in Japan accepted an invitation to visit China.

According to Kissinger’s recollection, between November 1969 and June 1970 there were at least ten instances in which United states officials abroad exchanged words with Chinese officials at diplomatic functions.³³ This was in sharp contrast to earlier

³¹ “Next Moves in China Policy,” 2 December 1969.

³² Maxwell Hamilton, *Edgar Snow* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 269.

³³ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 187-188.

practice in which the Chinese would invariably break off contact as soon as they realized they were encountering Americans. On at least four occasions, Chinese officials initiated the contact. Contacts then started to go beyond social banter. In December 1969, a “private” view of a Chinese communist official was delivered to the U.S. Deputy Consul General in Hong Kong through a reliable intermediary. This view stated that some form of relationship could be established before 1973, though all the differences between the United States and the People’s Republic would take years to resolve.³⁴ Until then, the dawn of hope to détente with China came.

³⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 187-188.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In conclusion, the US-Sino rapprochement was the result of the increasing tension that had accumulated along China's northern borders during its Cultural Revolution years and China's fear of entering a major military conflict with Moscow. If the Nixon administration had not taken the initiative in summer and fall 1969 to improve relations with China, the actual process of the rapprochement could have been much delayed. More importantly, Beijing's leaders noticed signs that Washington was relaxing its hostile attitude towards China and gave their response in due time. It was the concomitance of these two developments that formed the stage on which the rapprochement of China and America of the early 1970s came about.

Nixon, the first among U.S. presidents, visited Beijing during 21-28 February 1972. The highlight of Nixon's trip was his meeting with Communist Party Chairman Mao, but its substance lay in a series of almost-daily extended conversations with Premier Zhou Enlai. Their talks focused on exchanging views on the general world scenes, and specific regional issues that influenced both sides, such as the South Asia, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea, and also Japan. On February 27, the United States and China, under Zhou's formula of "seeking common ground while reserving differences," co-issued a joint communiqué.¹ Affirming existing ties with South Korea and Japan, Nixon assured Beijing that a continued U.S. military presence in Asia was

¹ Ronald C. Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai* (New York: New Press, 1998), 199.

“China’s best hope for Japanese restraint.”² The Americans then stated their opposition to “outside pressure or intervention” in Asia, namely Vietnam. The Chinese declared they would continue to support “the struggles of all oppressed people” against large nations that attempt to “bully” the smaller nations; all foreign troops should be withdrawn from Asia, especially Vietnam. As for Taiwan, which the United States still recognized as the official government of China, the Chinese part of the communiqué admonished the United States to remove its military forces from the island. There was only one China. Having promised the Chinese Nationalists that “I will never sell you down the river,” Nixon equivocated, calling for a “peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.” Both parties agreed, however, that “neither should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony” – a slap at the Soviet Union. Finally, both sides appealed for increased cultural and commercial contacts.³

With diplomacy finished, on the seventh day of his trip, Nixon bade farewell at Shanghai and proclaimed that “this was the week that changed the world.”⁴ In the 1970s, Sino-American relations moved from an era of confrontation to an era of negotiation. China ended its isolation and joined the United Nations in 1971. Open communication had been established between the Chinese and the American people. Mutual differences had been recognized, discussed and negotiated. More importantly, the right to differ was accepted by both people. The issue of Taiwan was temporarily in abeyance, waiting for

² Michael A. Schaller, *Altered States* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 227.

³ Department of State Bulletin, LXVI (March 20, 1972), 435-438; *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1972.

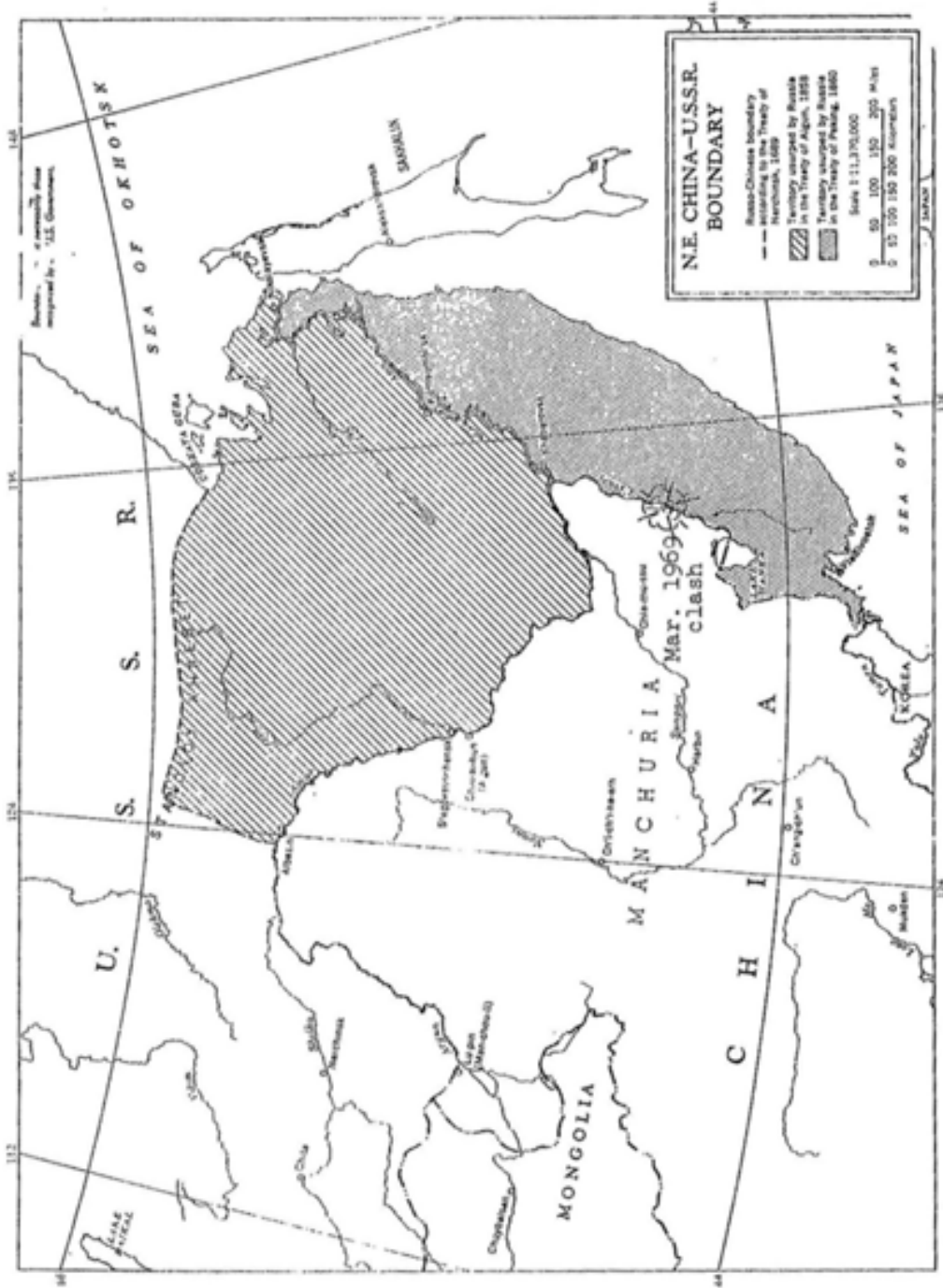
⁴ *New York Times*, Feb 28, 1972.

an acceptable settlement. The war in Vietnam had been concluded. As a result, the risk of war between China and the United States had been minimized.

There were high hopes for the positive impact of normal US-Sino relations on global affairs for Nixon and his first administration. However, it took most of the 1970s to bring about the full normalization of America's relations with the People's Republic of China, to overcome the confrontation and hostility of the two prior decades which failed to satisfy either Washington or Beijing.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



Map 1. Location of March 1969 Sino-Soviet border clashes broke out. Source: U.S. State Department, Bureau of Intelligence and Research: Intelligence Note, "USSR/China: Soviet and Chinese Forces Clash on the Ussuri River," 4 March 1969.

APPENDIX B

The Sino-Russian Treaty of Nipchu/Nerchinsk, September 7, 1689

(Partial Text*)

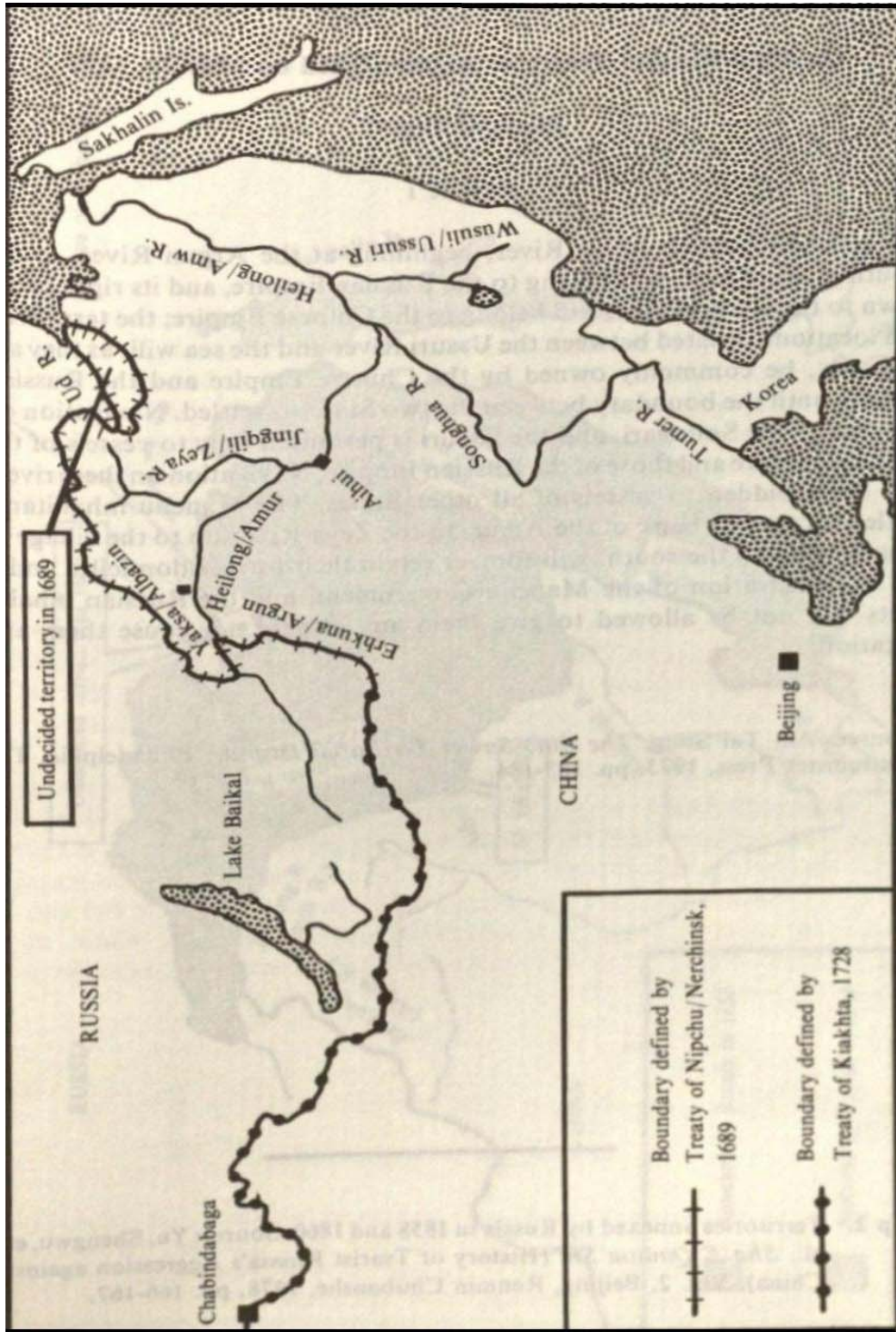
The river named Kerbechi, which is next to the river Shorna, called, in Tartarian Urwon, and falls into the Saghalian, shall serve for bounds to both Empires;

And that long chain of Mountains which is below the source of the said river Kerbechi, and extends as far as the eastern sea, shall serve also as bounds of both Empires;

Insomuch that all the rivers and brooks, great or small, which rise on the southern side of those mountains and fall into the Saghalian, which all the lands and countries from the top of the said mountains southward shall belong to the Empire of China; and all the lands, countries, rivers and brooks which are on the other mountains extending northward, shall remain to the Empire of Russia;

With this restriction nevertheless, that all the countries lying between the said mountains and the river Ud shall continue undecided, till the Ambassadors of both powers on their return home shall have gotten proper informations and instructions to treat of this Article; after which the affair shall be decided either by ambassadors or letters.

Moreover, the river Ergone which falls also into the Saghalian ula, shall serve for bounds to the two Empires; so that all the lands and countries lying to the south thereof shall appertain to the Emperor of China, and whatever lies to the north of it shall remain to the Empire of Russia. (Saghalian refers to heilong/Amur and Ergone to Erhkuna.)



Map 1. First Sino-Russian boundaries established by Treaty of Nipchu/Nerchinsk 1689, and Treaty of Kiakhta, 1728. (Source: Tsui, Tsien-hua. *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 118-119).

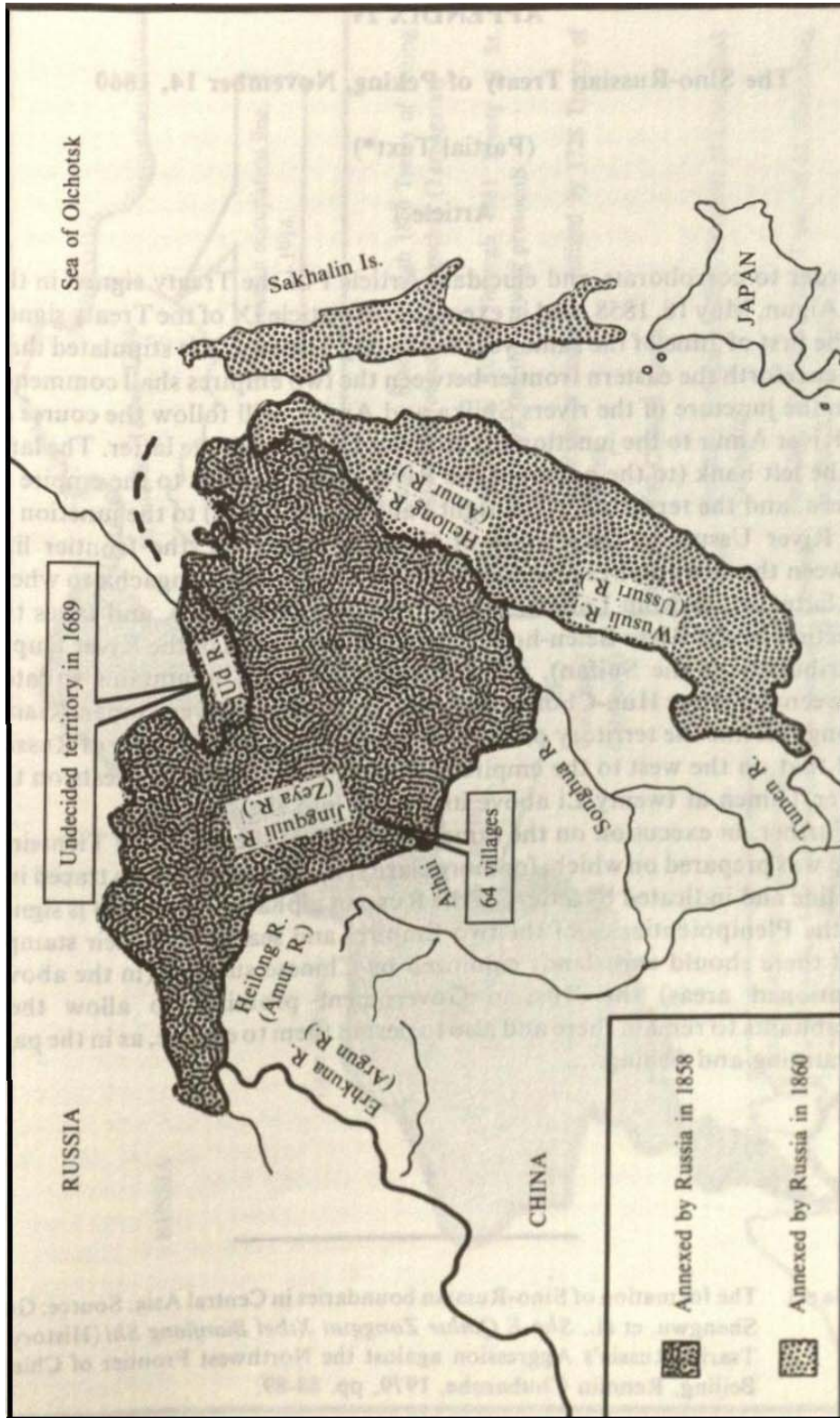
APPENDIX C

The Sino-Russian Treaty of Aigun Signed on May 28, 1858

(Partial Text*)

Article I

The left bank of the Amur River, beginning at the Argun River, to the mouth of the Amur, will belong to the Russian Empire, and its right bank, down to the Ussuri river, will belong to the Chinese Empire; the territories and locations situated between the Ussuri River and the sea will, as they are presently, be commonly owned by the Chinese empire and the Russian Empire until the boundary between the two States is settled. Navigation on the Amur, the Soungari, and the Ussuri is permitted only to vessels of the Chinese Empire and those of the Russian Empire; Navigation on these rivers will be forbidden to vessels of all other States. The Manchu inhabitants settled on the left bank of the Amur, to the Zeya River up to the village of Hormoldzin to the south, will forever retain their former domiciles under the administration of the Manchu Government, and the Russian inhabitants will not be allowed to give them any offense nor cause them any vexation.



Map 2. Territories annexed by Russia in 1858 and 1860. (Source: Tsui, Tsien-hua. *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 120-121.)

APPENDIX D

The Sino-Russian Treaty of Peking, November 14, 1860

(Partial Text*)

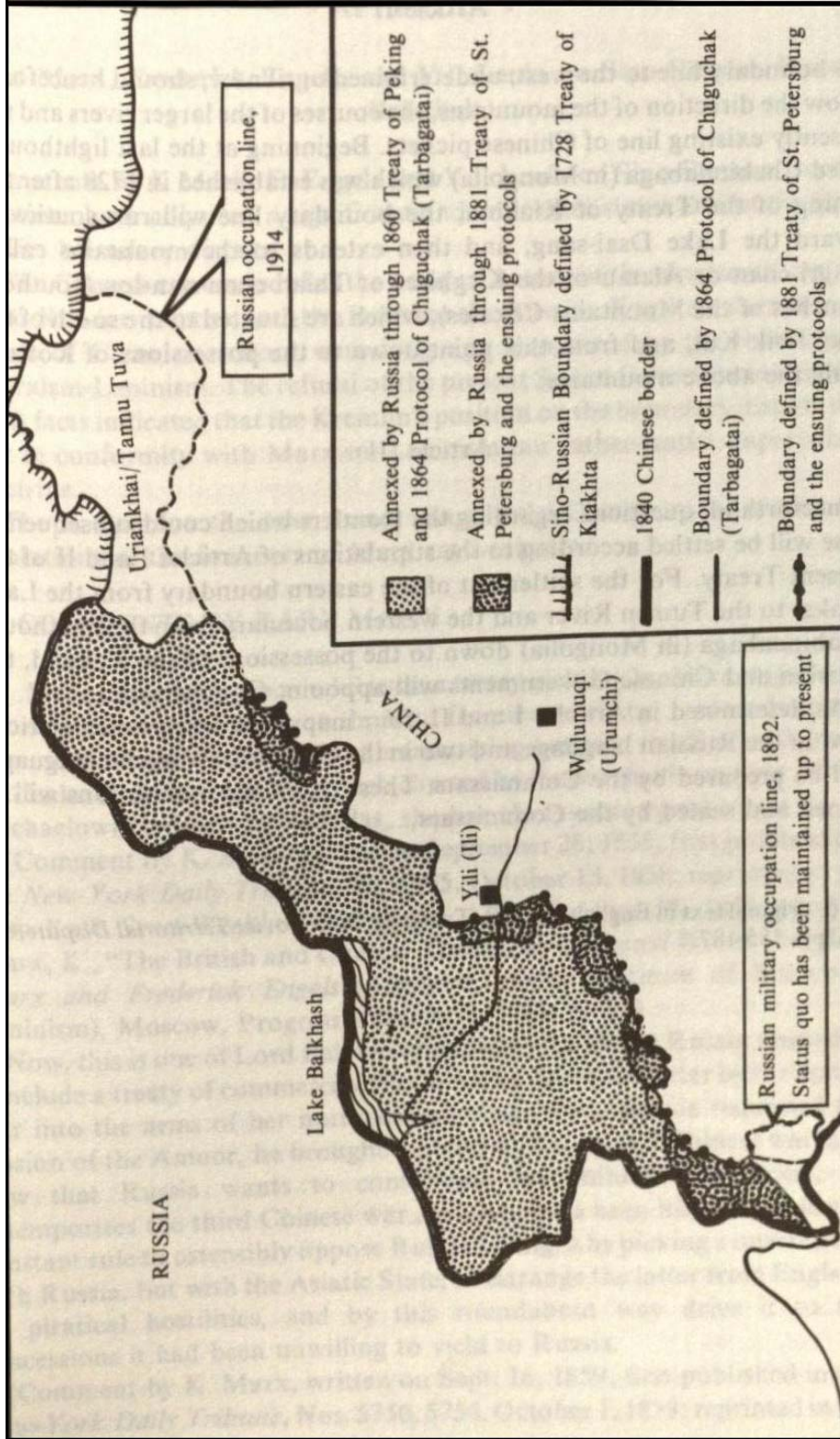
Article I

In order to corroborate and elucidate Article I of the Treaty signed in the city Aigun, May 16, 1858, and in execution of Article IX of the Treaty signed on the first of June of the same year in the city Tientsin, it is stipulated that:

Henceforth the eastern frontier between the two empires shall commence from the juncture of the rivers Shilka and Argun, will follow the course of the River Amur to the junction of the River Ussuri with the latter. The land on the left bank (to the north) of the River Amur belongs to the empire of Russia, and the territory on the right bank (to the south) to the junction of the River Ussuri to the empire of China. Further on, the frontier line between the two empires ascends the rivers Ussuri and Sungacha to where the latter issues from Lake Kinka; it then crosses the lake, and takes the direction of the River Belen-ho or Tur; from the mouth of the River Huptu (a tributary of the Suifan), and from that point the mountains situated between the River Hun-Chun and the sea, as far as the River Tumen-Kiang. Along this line the territory on the east side belongs to the empire of Russia, and that on the west to the empire of China. The frontier line rests on the River Tumen at twenty Li above its mouth into the sea.

Further, in execution on the same Article IX of the Treaty of Tientsin a map was prepared on which, for more clarity, the boundary line is traced in a red line and indicated by letters of the Russian alphabet. This map is signed by the Plenipotentiaries of the two Empires and sealed with their stamps.

If there should exist lands colonized by Chinese subjects (in the above-mentioned areas) the Russian Government promises to allow these inhabitants to remain there and also to permit them to engage, as in the past, in hunting and fishing. ...



Map 3. The formation of Sino-Russian boundaries in Central Asia. (Source: Tsui, Tsien-hua. *The Sino-Soviet border dispute in the 1970's* (Oakville, Ont., Canada: Mosaic Press, 1983), 120-121)

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