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By EE NARA Date 11/17/77

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# OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

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Origin

ACTION: USNATO ~~XXXXXXXX~~ IMMEDIATE

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" ROME  
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*143579*

Deliver to Helman at 8:30 a.m.

Subject: Guidance for POLAD Discussion <sup>on August 26</sup> of Sino-Soviet Border Incidents ~~xxxx August xx~~

August 13 incident in Sinkiang provides occasion for taking stock of current state of Sino-Soviet tensions and their implications.

1. Soviet and Communist Chinese accounts of August 13 incident are of course diametrically opposed on question of who intruded into whose territory and who started fight. Chinese

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Clearances:			
INR/REA: C. Kamman <b>RB</b>	EUR/RPM: Mr. Floyd	EUR - Mr. Swank	
OSD/ISA: Col. Boyd / Col. Fitzgerald	EUR/SOV: JGMacCracken		
S/PC: <del>xxxx</del> R. T. Davie	EA/ACA: P. Krebsberg		
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Charge Soviets with two kilometer intrusion and Soviets allege Chinese were seven tenths of kilometer into Soviet territory. On our maps Soviet statement of where incident occurred ~~now~~ seems to put it into Chinese territory, but gross scale precludes definitive assessment. Moreover, it is possible that there is some question about actual border alignment on the ground, ~~known~~ though there are no disputed territorial claims recorded in this sector.

2. Rival accounts agree that larger, better-armed Soviet force repulsed Chinese. Chinese assert Soviets used several hundreds of men; Soviet versions give Chinese about 100 men in action. Chinese describe Soviets as using helicopters, tanks and APCs; Soviets confirm that APCs played major role in encounter, including encirclement of Chinese force and interdiction of reinforcement. Soviet versions convey sense of satisfaction with outcome, (including mention of capture of two Chinese) while early Chinese reports (not later resolved) asserted battle not over and charged that Soviets remained on Chinese soil. Soviets have acknowledged two dead on USSR side but hinted that Chinese casualties number dozens.

3. Sino-Soviet tensions had reached a high point in March over Ussuri River incidents. Since then propaganda had continued vitriolic, but volume had fluctuated at generally lower levels (we have used radio monitoring as basis for judging volume). And on August 8 Khabarovsk talks on river navigation had produced signed protocol. While that

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agreement was obviously only very small part of total picture, it did suggest some interest on part of both Peking and Moscow in toning down border tensions. If so, Soviet charges that Chinese had conducted suspicious troop movements in area near incident on August 12 and Chinese charge that Soviets had fired on Chinese troops in that Area on August 8 suggest that origins of incident may have been action and reaction, on local scene. Be that as it may, incident has served to heighten tensions once more. Propaganda volume, for example, has risen again, though not to peak set at time of Ussuri incidents (both sides seem to be exercising a measure of restraint even though both are engaging <sup>in</sup> acerbic propaganda).

4. Since mid-sixties, Soviets have been building up their forces in Sino-Soviet border area, and now have some 30 ground force divisions there. This doubling of Soviet force in this period arrayed against China doubtless reflects growing Soviet concern with China as potential military threat. Buildup has been carried out so far without ~~substantial~~ lessening Soviet European-theater forces. Soviet buildup is apparently continuing, and indeed pace may have accelerated this summer during period of closure of Transiberian railroad to foreign travel.

5. We have considered hypothesis that Soviets might attempt surprise air strike to knock out nuclear-missile facilities in China and possibility Soviets might be tempted to do this before Chinese deploy MRBMs. ~~While we cannot rule out possibility of some back-to-back~~

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However, ~~because of the~~ Soviets would presumably not be assured of destroying entire Chinese inventory of nuclear weapons and they would have to consider prospect of China's rebuilding. Finally Soviets would see such action as carrying substantial risk of triggering protracted, possibly all-out war. Moreover, Soviets do not now appear to be ready for ~~such~~ <sup>full-scale war</sup> ~~such~~ with some 30 divisions available on scene. We thus see continued border skirmishing as most likely future prospect, and with it ever present possibility of escalation.

6. Concern over China has begun increasingly to color Soviet diplomacy. This year USSR has resorted to formal diplomatic demarches to free-world governments in an effort to discourage recognition of Peking. Brezhnev's June 7 remark that Asian security now on the agenda in Asia even though Soviet officials have denied that Brezhnev's words were directed against China. Gromyko's July 10 speech left an impression of Soviet desires to avoid problems and irritations elsewhere in the world while Moscow grappled with its intractable China problems. This mood or tone in Soviet policy is evidently to be reflected at the UN General Assembly this fall; Moscow evidently wishes, for example, to be able to show tangible progress on seabeds in the disarmament field. So far, it would be fair to say ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> it has been more the tone of Soviet diplomacy which has been affected by troubles with China than the substance of Soviet positions on major East-West issues.

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7. The US for its part does not intend to be drawn into any alliance with Moscow or Peking against the other. Rather it is the policy of the US Government to seek opportunities to improve relations with both (in the case of Communist China this entails only small adjustments to which Peking has so far remained unresponsive; the question of recognition is far from being on the agenda). Beyond that, the US is now conducting its own review of the situation, and would welcome suggestions of its allies. In any case, we recognize that continuing friction and skirmishing between the USSR and Mainland China create a situation which will call for close watching, and we anticipate a continuing change of views with our allies on the subject.

8. FYI for Tokyo: You may draw upon foregoing in consultations appropriate with Japanese officials.

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