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# Intelligence Note

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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**  
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

To : The Acting Secretary  
Through: S/S  
From : INR - George C. Denney, Jr. *G.C.D.*  
Subject: War between Russia and China: A Communist Nightmare

The recent letter from the Australian Communist Party to several fraternal parties asking them to help avert the possible "colossal disaster" of actual warfare between the Soviet Union and Communist China reflects the alarm with which some members of the world communist movement view the present course of the Sino-Soviet dispute. Whether the Australians were prompted to sound the tocsin only after getting a letter from the CPSU which suggested rising Soviet impatience with the Chinese, or simply found their worst fears confirmed upon receiving such a communication is a moot question. In either case, Australian concern over Soviet arrogance, manifested by the USSR's continued insensitivity to the fortunes of other communist parties, stems from the Czech crisis of last year and was probably reinforced by the reportedly abrasive encounters of key Australian communists with senior CPSU leaders during the preparations for the world communist meeting in Moscow.

Misperceptions or Insurmountable Cleavages? Although the Australian CP, along with the Italian and Spanish parties, are the only pro-Soviet parties that have thus far been both critical and horrified by the behavior of the Soviets and the Chinese, any further worsening of the crisis, particularly the onset of actual hostilities, would undoubtedly find a sizable number of other parties joining them in their condemnation. For

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such parties the very notion of a military attack by one communist giant on the other gnaws at the roots of their political faith. Actual war would end the long-cherished Marxist tenet that conflicts are inseparably linked to capitalism since outside parties are likely to continue to view both China and the USSR as communist states (unlike the position taken by each combatant toward the other, viz, that the rival has abandoned communism).

Neither the Soviets nor the Chinese seem to be aware that their increasingly bitter wrangling over territorial questions has evoked dismay in the rest of the communist movement. Both are consumed by their own particular interests, and they have failed to draw the proper conclusions from the fact that neither Soviet invocations of the threat of nuclear war nor Chinese charges of blatant aggression have served to rally other increasingly mortified communist parties to either side. Wittingly or not, the actions of both communist nations have only conjured up the specter of actual conflict between them in the manner characteristic of traditional great powers.

Finding itself increasingly under attack for fanning narrow national instincts against Communist China under the guise of defending "proletarian internationalism" the Soviet Union has sought vainly to buttress its position with the ideological arguments of a by-gone period, only to have those same arguments thrown back at it by Peking in equally self-serving fashion. However, neither contestant can any longer speak for its own camp, let alone for the entire communist movement. The Australian CP statement to the other parties put this very clearly, when it rejected the claims of either side to be the sole interpreter and custodian of Marxism, and thereby to assume a position of hegemony over others. In a sense, the current war scare has accelerated the transformation

of the Sino-Soviet dispute from a battle between two ideological camps into a considerably more diffuse conflict where the two principal contestants may become the chief ideological target for a growing number of communist parties.

Opposition: A Deterrent or Irrelevant? The fact that a number of communist parties take seriously--and are mightily disturbed by--the possibility of war between the Soviet Union and China is not in itself evidence that war is about to break out. Nor does it imply that such outside criticism would effectively deter either side from mounting an attack, if other motivations were strongly present. At the same time, the role and position of other communist parties in the event of such a cataclysmic confrontation cannot be entirely discounted.

Even if speculation is confined to Moscow (the rival often portrayed as more likely to initiate an attack), it seems evident that the Kremlin is still the prisoner of ideological perceptions and preconceptions, as is demonstrated by the persistence over several years of the Soviet leaders in pushing to fruition, in June 1969, an international communist party conference. This alone would incline the leaders to react with major discomfiture to mounting dissent from other communist parties over Soviet handling of the China problem. What cannot be predicted, however, is how Moscow would take on its critics--whether it would move to squash them (the prospects for which, based on recent precedents, would seem poor outside of the Warsaw Pact countries); whether it would delay and temporize in an effort partially to accommodate them; or whether it would ostensibly ignore them, on the assumption that success, if it came, in a military adventure against China would cause waverers to rally to a Soviet bandwagon.