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Authority E.O. 12958  
 By WDP NARA Date 5/24/01

*Chambers  
 July*

August 16, 1969


Dear Henry,

This is the product of an overnight effort; I hope it does not show it! Feel free to have the typist set it up in whatever form the President prefers; I have used wide margins and double-space for convenience in final editing.

Needless to say, the classification is understated. I trust you will handle it accordingly. I have done all my own typing (obviously!) and no one else knows of the paper's contents, including Fred.

It was good seeing you. I am scheduled to return from the Cuernavaca conference next Saturday morning at 10:30. Should you wish me to call or come down, I have a few days free before driving back to Ann Arbor where I am due by Labor Day. Messages can come through RAND or my home (213-472-2651). If nothing eventuates, I'll be much the happier even if I'm proven wrong!

John Holdridge and Paul Kreisberg are good men; you can lean heavily on both of them.

Sincerely,  
  
 Allen S. Whiting

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Sino-Soviet Hostilities and Implications

For U. S. Policy

by

Allen S. Whiting

August 16, 1969

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Summary

Soviet military deployments and political behavior indicate an increasing probability of a Soviet attack on China, presumably aimed at destroying China's nuclear capability. A Sino-Soviet war raises the risk of nuclear weapons being used by one or both sides. A Soviet attack on China will increase the bitter hatred and siege mentality with which Chinese are likely to view the world for the rest of this century.

U.S. efforts should seek to deter the use of nuclear weapons and to reassure the Chinese that we are not in collusion with the Russians. Toward these ends we suggest:

- (1) an identical Presidential letter to the Soviet and Chinese leaders;
- (2) a stand-down for all U.S. and GRC military and intelligence operations except for those absolutely essential to determining major changes in Chinese force dispositions;
- (3) if a Soviet attack does occur, U.S. initiatives aimed at bringing China's case before the U.N.
- (4) a lifting of our trade embargo against China to make it identical with that against Russia.

Note

This paper was written largely on the basis of classified information available in mid-July 1969. It has not benefitted from more recent intelligence nor from the latest National Intelligence Estimate on this subject.

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Soviet Military Deployments

Between 1966 and 1969, Soviet military deployments doubled the number of ground force divisions near the Chinese border while bringing the units originally there from half to full strength. Soviet artillery, nuclear and conventional, is concentrated along China's northeast frontier with a firepower density estimated as comparable with that opposite NATO. Soviet 500-nautical mile nuclear missiles (SS-12) are deployed so as to threaten vital rail and industrial centers in Manchuria.

During this period, existing Soviet airfields have been improved and additional bases constructed targetting China. Particularly salient for striking China's nuclear production facilities are ten new Russian airfields in Outer Mongolia. Soviet tactical aircraft have doubled in the Far East Military District. Soviet long range aircraft now conduct regular reconnaissance and weather-data collecting missions along the Sino-Mongolian border, within four hundred miles of China's main nuclear targets.

Soviet military activity has continued apace this year. In late May and early June, a massive land-sea-air exercise focused on China. Sizeable Soviet air forces moved from European to Far Eastern Russia and back, including 180 transport, 200 tactical, and 50 long range aircraft. The Trans-Siberian Railroad was closed to foreign passengers from early spring through mid-summer. Fragmentary intelligence indicates continuation of the Soviet buildup.

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Soviet Motivations: Defensive?

In the absence of any significant change in Chinese ground and air force dispositions throughout this period, we are compelled to examine Soviet motivations behind the buildup. The timing of early deployments suggests the initial Soviet decision was made after the fall of Khrushchev, in late 1964 or early 1965. The Chinese nuclear detonation that October and the Kosygin-Mao conversations the following February provide a likely context. Additional considerations, however, undoubtedly arose with the unanticipated effects of the Cultural Revolution. This simultaneously increased the danger of irrational aggressive Chinese action (as occurred on the Hong Kong and Soviet borders in mid-1967) and opened up the possibility of civil strife splitting China and permitting Soviet intervention.

These changing circumstances permit three basic alternative explanations for Soviet military deployments: defensive, interventionist, and offensive. Offensive motivations, in turn, may be political, changing Chinese behavior according to Soviet wishes, or military, occupying Chinese territory or impairing China's fighting capacity. Up to a point, these are not mutually exclusive categories. Different options can be served by similar deployments. However they do possess sufficiently different political postures so as to produce a preponderance of logic in favor of defensive as opposed to offensive motivations.

Interventionist motivations can be most easily dispensed with. Inconceivably in 1964-6, they may well have come to the fore with the Cultural Revolution turmoil of 1967-8. However they lost whatever prospect they might have had between the military clampdown of August 1968 and the Ninth CCP Congress in April 1969. Whatever doubts attend

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Mao's relations with his colleagues, there are no grounds for expecting a split to emerge sufficiently serious to invite or justify Soviet intervention on the side of "true socialists" as opposed to "Maoist heretics."

Defensive motivations are more credible, arising from Soviet concern over Chinese territorial claims which purport to invalidate large nineteenth-century Russian acquisitions in Central Asia and the Far East. This concern would magnify the threat of a growing Chinese nuclear capability combined with a population increasing from 700 to 800 million in the near future, eventually reaching one billion Chinese. Added anxieties could follow the seeming reckless behavior of Mao Tse-tung in the Cultural Revolution and anticipation of a post-Mao succession crisis in an atmosphere of acute xenophobia and militant nationalism. In this overall context, prudence could dictate much of the Soviet deployment.

A concomitant political posture, however, would show care in communicating the defensive nature of Soviet moves so as to safeguard, to the extent possible, against exacerbating precisely those irrational, xenophobic impulses which seem to make Chinese behavior so dangerous. Soviet ground forces would remain in deep reserve unless Chinese forces moved to threatening positions along the border. But precisely the opposite situation has obtained, with Russian force increases near the frontier unmatched by any forward movement from Chinese reserve concentrations in the deep interior.

Similarly, a Russian reaction to local incidents, if wholly defensive in motivation, would avoid provoking Chinese nationalistic sensitivities while seeking to punish and to deter further incidents. While it is possible to explain the

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Ussuri River clashes of March 2 and March 15 within a framework of Chinese initiative and Russian punishment-deterrence reaction, the Soviet propagandistic and political exploitation of the incidents, at home and abroad, went far beyond defensive dictates. Equally questionable from a defensive point of view was the nature and scope of the Soviet military exercise directed against China in May and June, knowledge of which was certain to become available to Chinese intelligence collectors.

Defensive motivations fall into further discredit with the most recent incident of August 13. Its occurrence on the Sinkiang border suggests a deliberate Soviet initiative. By every comparison of population density, logistical infrastructure, and economic development, the Chinese side is markedly inferior to the Russian. The clash occurred three hundred miles from China's nearest railhead, the distance being traversed by a road which skirts a desolate desert basin along steep mountain foothills. By contrast, the main Soviet rail line passes within less than a mile of the clash. Moreover the western portion of Sinkiang is populated by Turki-speaking Kazakhs and Uighurs. Akin to peoples in adjacent Russian territory, they have revolted against Chinese rule repeatedly in the past hundred years. From 1944 to 1949, a Soviet-instigated uprising, manned and armed from across the border, denied this area to Chinese control. In 1962, 80,000 Uighurs and Kazakhs fled across the Sinkiang border, remaining in Russia ever since. These factors, together with a recent increase in Soviet propaganda aimed at stirring up minority discontent in Sinkiang, make a Chinese provocation on this frontier inconceivable.

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Soviet Motivations: Offensive?

Alternatively, offensive motivations, political or military, may underlie Soviet deployments, at least in the past year. Russian pride and impatience could argue for making the Chinese more fearful of Soviet power so as to mute their claims against Soviet territory and their attacks against Soviet domestic as well as foreign policy. In addition, Moscow might hope to force Peking's agreement to border commerce and control on Russian terms. Seen in these terms, a large military buildup both guarantees against irrational Chinese aggression and offers leverage for moving Chinese policy toward Russian interests.

However the credibility of this limited political motivation is undermined by the August 13 incident if, as it appears, it came by Soviet initiative. On August 7, both sides concluded a river navigation agreement after six weeks of negotiations. The history of this problem is such as to make agreement almost wholly dependent on Chinese concessions. This, in fact, was Peking's posture in applauding the settlement as proof of China's desire to improve relations. But no mollifying comment emerged from Moscow. In the absence of any other negotiations known to be under way, it is difficult to explain the August 13 clash as aimed at inducing Chinese compliance with either a general or a specific Soviet wish.

#Thus some larger military purpose would appear to underlie Russian deployments and political behavior. No territorial acquisition appears sufficiently attractive from a strategic or political viewpoint to justify the costs of attempting to hold part of China against Chinese manpower.

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However the original defensive concerns outlined above could well argue for a preventive war aimed at denying China's burgeoning population a nuclear capability. Before taking this step, however, Russia's vulnerable Far Eastern holdings must be safeguarded against a retaliatory Chinese thrust. The massive buildup along the northeast frontier meets this requirement. Meanwhile the proliferation of Soviet airfields, including those in Outer Mongolia, permits the use of "iron bombs" against Chinese nuclear installations through the large number of sorties they afford for flying low over the Mongolian desert, beneath the Chinese radar screen.

While such an action could perpetuate Chinese enmity, Russian planners might accept this as a preferable risk to allowing China a growing nuclear capability after so deep a split has already emerged in Sino-Soviet relations. They might hope to limit the damage to Chinese cities and civilians and to avoid a prolonged land war, thereby lessening the likelihood somewhat of a permanently hostile China on Russia's borders. The vital issues at stake probably place other considerations well down on the scale of priorities. But to the degree a pretext is available through a well-publicized record of Chinese "provocations," the Soviet leadership can argue its case to audiences presumably prejudiced against the Chinese and alarmed by China's growing nuclear threat.

While there may not yet be a definite "D-day" for larger Soviet action, if Moscow indeed aims at destroying China's nuclear capability before that capability can threaten Soviet cities, an obvious time constraint exists. At some point, sooner or later, the Soviet leadership will have to go for a "surgical strike" or forego forever a preventive war.

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Implications for U.S. Policy

The most immediate threat to U.S. interests posed by a Sino-Soviet war is the possibility that nuclear weapons will be used. Should the Chinese respond to a conventional attack with massive manpower against the Soviet Far Eastern provinces, the temptation may prove overwhelming to use tactical nuclear weapons against "human wave" assaults. The political-military implications of such a development require no elaboration. Only slightly less serious is the precedent which would be established were Moscow to attack potential nuclear enemies at will. Finally, the Chinese propensity to view the world, and particularly stronger powers, as inimically hostile to China's well-being would be reinforced by a Soviet attack to the point of poisoning China's relations with all major countries for decades to come.

The U.S. objectives therefore should be (1) to deter a Soviet attack on China, (2) to inhibit the use of nuclear weapons in a Sino-Soviet war, and (3) to maximize the possibility of China identifying Russia as its sole antagonist, in contrast with the rest of the world and particularly with the United States. The means available for pursuit of these objectives are limited by our unique relations with both adversaries. On the Chinese side we remain allied with Mao's civil war opponent and committed to denying Peking China's place in the United Nations. On the Soviet side we have compelling reasons for wishing to improve our relations with our most powerful opponent.

In view of these and other constraints, as well as the inevitable uncertainties attending Sino-Soviet relations in

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areas remote from U.S. surveillance, it may be that we have no real option other than declaring, as we have done, our impartiality in any Sino-Soviet conflict. However the following modest proposals are offered as low cost, low risk initiatives which aim both at deterring the Russians and communicating our position to the Chinese.

(1) A Presidential Letter. The possible urgency of the situation calls for swift and credible communication. A Presidential letter to the Soviet and Chinese leaders, identical in wording and so described therein, might contain some of the following elements:

(a) expresses concern over the levels of tension manifest in Sino-Soviet relations and the prospects this raises for a calamitous war between two of the world's largest countries;

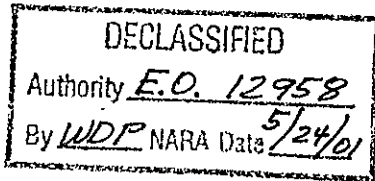
(b) deplores the use of force to resolve disputes and reaffirms the U.S. opposition to the use of force as enunciated by President Kennedy in his Taiwan Strait statement of June 27, 1962;

(c) restates our regret over China's refusal to sign the NPT but notes our confidence that the best safeguard against a nuclear holocaust visiting this earth is the universal moratorium against the use of nuclear weapons;

(d) expresses our hope that both sides can draw back from further confrontation, perhaps observing a ten-kilometer demilitarized zone along the frontier;

(e) reaffirms our public position of choosing no sides in the dispute but of viewing with the gravest concern actions by either side which lead to a larger war.

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(2) Communicating to the Chinese. We should exert every effort to impress on the Chinese Communists the complete unambiguity of our opposition to a Soviet attack. Toward this end we could:

(a) stand down all U.S. and GRC military intelligence collection activities directed against and detectable by the Chinese Communists, except for those which are proven to be absolutely essential to the detection of major changes in Chinese Communist force dispositions;

(b) reconfirm our absolute control over all GRC operations, including psychological, against the mainland;

(c) avoid any U.S. military transit of the Taiwan Strait other than strictly between two points outside the area or necessary to and from Hong Kong and maintaining a distance of at least 25 nautical miles from Chinese territory where possible;

(d) seek to reactivate contacts in Warsaw and through third parties elsewhere;

(e) lift our embargo on trade with China, to be identical with that controlling trade with Russia, i.e. affecting only strategic goods.

(3) If war comes. The consequences and ramifications of a Sino-Soviet war go far beyond the limits of this paper. However in keeping with the foregoing objectives, the following steps might be considered:

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- (a)making the Presidential letter public;
- (b)expressing our position forcefully in the UN while encouraging other parties, perhaps the Japanese, to move for inviting Chinese Communist participation in a General Assembly examination of the crisis;
- (c)seeking a joint announcement with the GRC disavowing any use of force in the Taiwan Strait.

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