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MEMORANDUM

MICROFILMED

Recent Soviet Ground Force
Activity on the Sino-Soviet Border

1. This memorandum, to be updated on a periodic basis, summarizes significant Soviet ground force activity in the Sino-Soviet border region since January 1977. It is a status report only. A number of Soviet force changes and improvements are underway in the area, and, although some tentative conclusions can be drawn, further evidence is required before the full impact of these developments on the overall size and capabilities of Soviet ground forces there can be assessed.

2. The major build-up of Soviet forces in the border region occurred between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s. In 1965, Soviet ground forces there numbered some 130,000 men in 15 combat divisions and support units. By 1970, this force had grown to about 30 divisions with some 290,000 men. The current force level of 40 active divisions* has remained relatively constant over the past four years, although total ground manpower has continued to rise slowly from

* This number excludes two divisions on Sakhalin Island and one on the Kamchatka Peninsula which are too far from the Chinese border to be used there in the near term.

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385,000 in 1973 to the current level of 415,000. During this period, the Soviets appear to have been concentrating on upgrading the ground force support structure and modernizing the inventory of major weapon systems.

3. During the past ten months, the USSR has continued to upgrade the capabilities of its ground forces located opposite China. There has been only a modest increase in the number of units deployed in the area. Changes in the structure and status of ground force units have been limited to the possible upgrading of the readiness status of two divisions, the appearance of several new regimental-size units--which could portend additional divisions, and continued expansion of static defensive positions close to the border.

4. The more significant force improvements have been qualitative in nature: the deployment of additional self-propelled artillery at division level, the appearance of new heavy self-propelled artillery pieces with two heavy artillery brigades, and an increase in tactical surface-to-air missile (SAM) launchers.

5. These activities reflect a continuing effort by the USSR to improve ground force capabilities in areas of potential conflict. They do not appear to have upgraded Soviet capabilities there to the extent that the existing balance of forces in the border region has been appreciably altered.

Structural Force Changes

6. Activation of New Units. Elements of a new motorized rifle regiment at Rybachye in the Central Asian MD in April. Equipment included 80 BMPs, 18 towed 122-mm howitzers, eight medium tanks, and antitank guns and 120-mm mortars. The new unit at Rybachye cannot be accommodated within the structure of the active division already located in this area. It is too early to determine precisely either the origin or subordination of this new unit.



There already is one mobilization division base* in Central Asia which has elements at Semipulatsinsk, Georgiyevka, and Ust Kamenogorsk. The new unit could be the initial element of either a second mobilization division base in the MD or a new active division.

7. Redeployments. A mobilization division base, formerly located at Varfolomeyevka in the Ussuriysk Army area of the Far East MD, apparently has been relocated to the Spassk-Dalniy/Krasnyy-Kut area closer to the China border. There are some indications that this equipment may form the basis for a new active division (possibly a cadre level unit) in the Spassk-Dalniy/Krasnyy-Kut area. In August 1977, construction was underway on a barracks and housing area and a vehicle storage and maintenance area at Krasnyy-Kut. Mobilization division bases normally do not have barracks associated with them.

8. Another redeployment, or possibly the activation of a new unit, also has occurred recently in the Ussuriysk Army area in the southern Primorsky Krai.

FROG launchers and what appeared to be initial elements of two motorized rifle regiments, a tank regiment, a reconnaissance battalion, and a signal battalion were identified at a new army barracks at Lyalichi where barracks construction was underway. This new installation is located in the vicinity of units subordinate to a motorized rifle division headquartered at Monastyrishche to the north, where additional construction is also underway. As yet, however, it cannot be determined whether these new units have been shifted to Lyalichi from elsewhere in the Far East MD or whether they represent a new addition to the forces. The units-- whose major equipment items include tanks but no APCs--may

* A mobilization division base consists of the necessary combat equipment to equip a division. The equipment is maintained in storage by a small caretaker force and probably is intended for rapid mobilization of additional divisions in wartime. Most of these bases are collocated with active divisions.

represent the early stage of the building up of a new division in this area.

9. The Ussuriysk Army already has five active divisions and a mobilization division base. An army with more than five divisions in peacetime would be unusual by Soviet standards, and the formation or activation of additional divisions could presage the creation of a new reserve corps. To date, however, there has been no indication that the command and control structure for such an entity has been established.

10. Upgrading of Readiness Status. The 150 MRD, located at Borzya in the Transbaikal MD, apparently is being upgraded from its cadre status. Construction of three new regimental-size housing areas--two at Borzya and one at Shirlovaya Gora, 16 km away--was completed this year, and expansion of training areas at both sites has been underway since 1976. In late May 1977, the tank regiment and engineer battalion belonging to the division apparently were shifted to Shirlovaya Gora. This activity could be in preparation for the assignment of additional personnel to the division, bringing it to a higher readiness level.

11. Static Defense Positions. The Soviets are continuing to expand a line of fixed defensive positions that extends some 200 km along the China border in the Transbaikal MD. These positions include both tank turrets mounted on concrete bunkers and hardened automatic weapons firing positions. Construction of defensive positions continued in 1977. About 600 tank turret positions have been completed since the program began in 1973. These defensive lines are probably intended to provide an initial defense capability in the area closest to the Chinese border.

Qualitative Improvements

12. Air Defense. Within the past two years the Soviets have increased the number of SAM launchers along

the Sino-Soviet border by more than 50 percent, adding three new SA-4 brigades and elements of six SA-6 regiments and three SA-8 regiments. Of these, one SA-4 brigade, two SA-6 regiments, and one SA-8 regiment have been added during 1977. We expect introduction of additional SA-6 and SA-8 SAMs to continue at a modest rate, replacing anti-aircraft guns in divisional anti-aircraft artillery regiments, in conjunction with the continuing addition of SA-9 SAMs and ZSU-23-4 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns to the tank and motorized rifle regiments.

13. Divisional Artillery. The Soviets also are steadily increasing the amount of self-propelled (SP) artillery in the border area. In June 1977, the first known assignment of 152-mm SP guns to a Soviet tank division in the border region was at the 5 Guards Tank Division (TD) at Kyakhta in the Transbaikalian MD.* Three of the 152-mm SP guns were in the division's artillery regiment. In July, an SP gun battalion of 152-mm SP guns was also with the artillery regiment of the tank division in Mongolia, and in early October a 152-mm SP gun was in the tank division at Choybalsan. Previously, 152-mm guns were only with motorized rifle divisions.

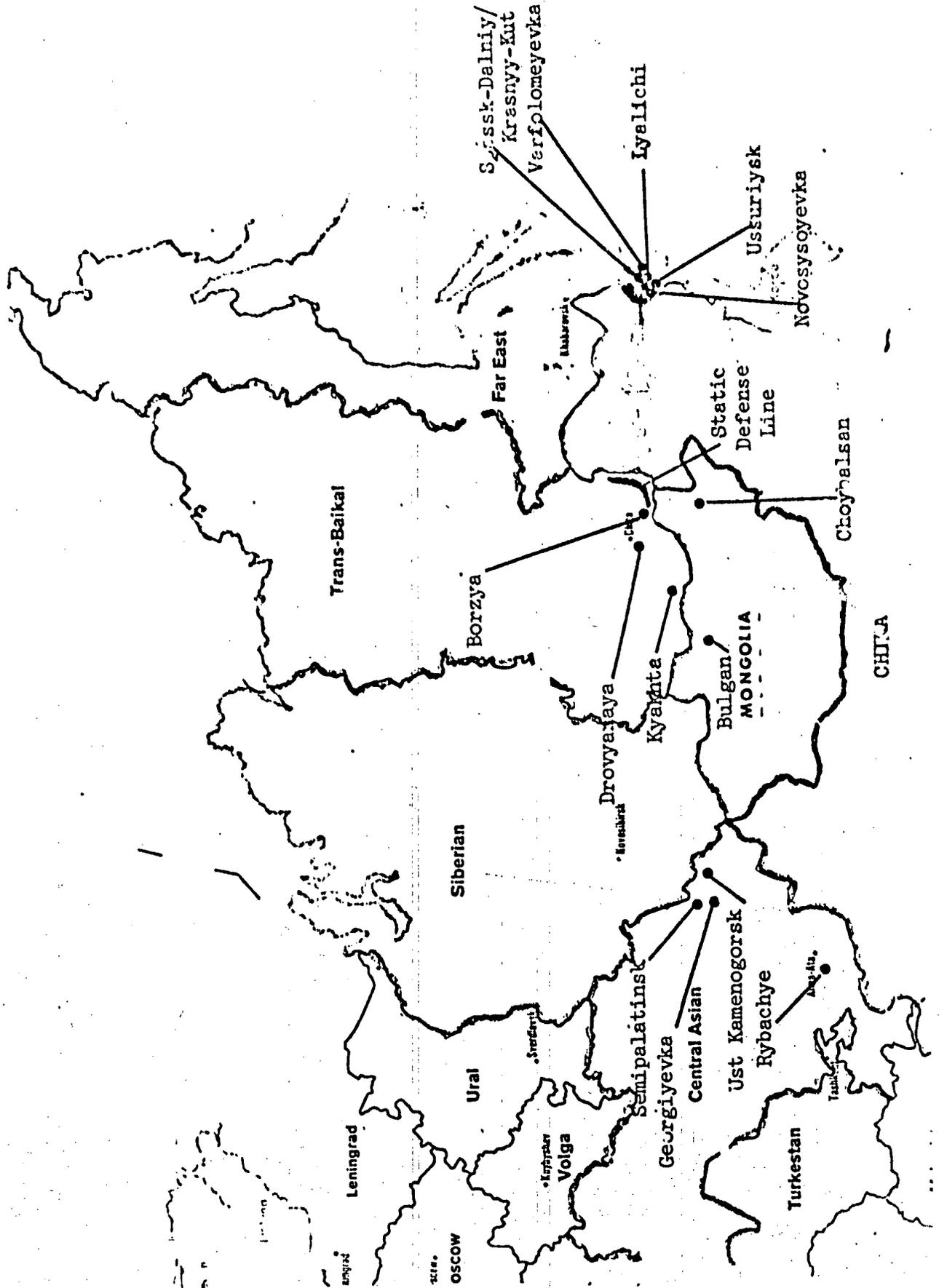
14. Nuclear Artillery. Nuclear-capable heavy artillery units opposite China are also being upgraded. The Soviets have deployed at least nine heavy artillery brigades throughout the USSR, two of which are in the Far East and Transbaikalian MDs. These units have been equipped with obsolete 203-mm howitzers and 240-mm heavy mortars, which have a nuclear delivery capability. It now appears, however, that at least some of the brigades, including the two opposite China, are being reequipped with new 203- and 240-mm SP weapons.

* Tank divisions normally are equipped with 122-mm towed or SP howitzers. Since August 1976, 152-mm SP gun battalions have been with Soviet tank divisions in Poland and in East Germany.

15. In May 1977, six of the new heavy SP mortars [] [] with the mortar regiment of the heavy artillery brigade collocated with the Drovyanaya Scaleboard Brigade in the Transbaikal MD. By August, the number of SP mortars had increased to 23, only one short of the full complement of heavy mortars normally associated with these units. Also this summer, the heavy artillery brigade in the Far East MD at Novosysoyevka began to receive heavy SP mortars and what appeared to be heavy SP guns.

16. New Heavy Multiple Rocket Launcher. The Soviets have also begun to field a heavy multiple rocket launcher (MRL) with the first sighting again being in the border area. The Soviets had been developing a new heavy multiple rocket launcher since at least mid-1974, and its existence was confirmed [] [] the Letzlinger-Heide training area in East Germany, where several were deployed with a Soviet unit. The new MRL had been [] [] at Ussuriysk in the Far East MD in October 1976. It was [] confirmed as the new MRL based [] in East Germany--at Ussuriysk in May and August 1977, when as many as 33 launchers and 66 resupply vehicles [] []

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