

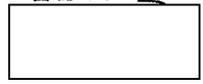
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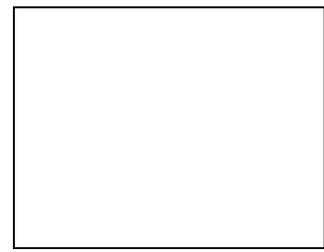
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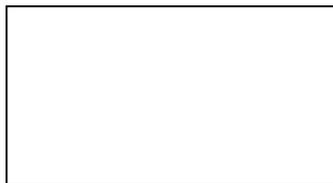
DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE



SR/IM - 14/70

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Recent Soviet Military Activity on the Sino-Soviet Border*



~~Top Secret~~

SR IM 70-14

April 1970

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
17 April 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Recent Soviet Military Activity on  
the Sino-Soviet Border

Introduction

The year 1969 saw the first publicized--and probably the bloodiest--border clashes between the Soviet Union and Communist China. Tensions reached a peak last summer, prompting reports from a variety of sources that the Soviets were increasing the pace of their buildup of forces along the border and were considering a military attack on China.

In an effort to temper the dispute, the two countries agreed to open talks in Peking in October 1969. The talks are apparently deadlocked and their eventual outcome is uncertain. Whatever the outcome, last year's border clashes and the beginning of the border talks will stand as landmarks in the course of the Sino-Soviet confrontation.

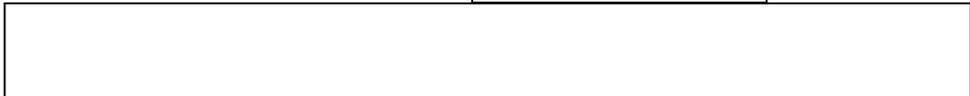
This memorandum reviews the progress of the Soviet military buildup along the border, particularly since the clashes of 1969. A summary begins on page 15.

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*Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Strategic Research and coordinated with the Offices of Current Intelligence, Economic Research, and National Estimates.*

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The Soviet Buildup Through Mid-1969

Soviet relations with China began deteriorating in the late Fifties, but it was not until the middle Sixties that the Soviets began to view China as a hostile power. By 1965 the ideological and territorial disputes between the two countries had grown increasingly bitter. It was apparently about then that the Soviets decided to undertake a significant buildup of their forces along the Chinese border.

In 1965, the Soviets had 14 divisions along the Sino-Soviet frontier. Only 2 of these were combat ready. By mid-1969, 27 divisions--9 tank, 16 motorized rifle, and 2 airborne--had been identified in positions near the border. About half of them were at combat strength.\*

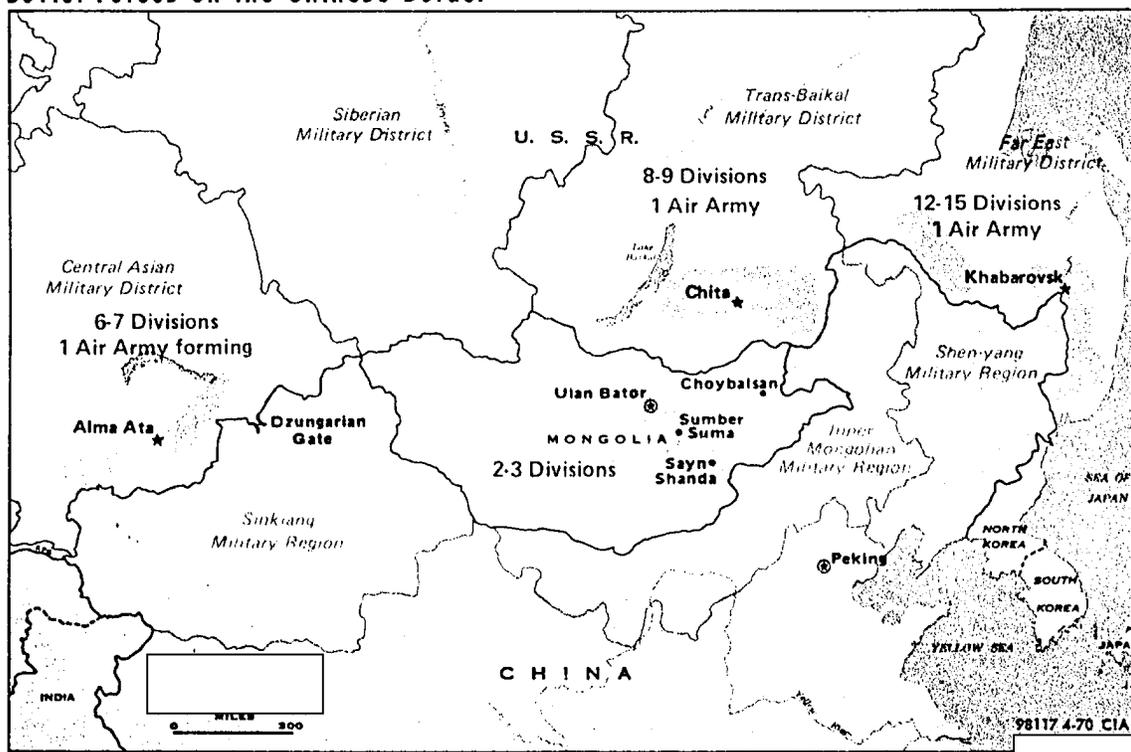
Tactical air forces along the border underwent a similar buildup. Prior to 1965, one tactical air army with about 190 combat aircraft and 50 helicopters was located near China in Primorskiy Kray, the southern part of the Far East Military District. By mid-1969, a regiment had been added to this air army and a new air army had been formed in the Trans-Baikal - Mongolia area. This brought tactical air strength along the border to 550 combat aircraft and about 170 helicopters. Nearly all the new units were based at airfields built or renovated since 1967.

\* [redacted]

*Only those divisions close enough to China to make them readily available for use against that country are considered. There are also about a dozen low strength divisions in the Turkestan Military District and in more remote parts of Siberia and the Soviet Far East that would be available as reinforcements over the longer term. They have undergone little change during the border buildup, however, and apparently do not figure prominently in Soviet planning against China.*

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### Soviet Forces on the Chinese Border



In 1965 the Soviets had 14 divisions--only 2 of them combat ready--and one tactical air army deployed along the Chinese border. As shown on the map, 28 divisions--about half of them combat ready--have now been identified there. Elements which could form the base for 6 more have been detected.

The tactical air army in the Far East Military District was reinforced during the buildup and a new tactical air army has been formed in the Trans-Baikal - Mongolia area. A third tactical air army is now forming in the Central Asian Military District, a new district created about mid-1969 to improve control of ground and air forces being deployed opposite Sinkiang.

The initial stages of the border buildup were concentrated in the two military districts opposite Manchuria. Beginning about mid-1968 the Soviets paid increasing attention to the western portion of the border, and have added more new units opposite Sinkiang and in Mongolia.

● Troop concentration

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Several of the new airfields had not been occupied, but those appeared to be dispersal or deployment airfields not intended to have permanent complements.

The greatest buildup in strength occurred opposite Manchuria, the area in which the Chinese are strongest. The Trans-Baikal and Far East military districts, which border Manchuria, are the farthest from the Soviets' industrial and population base and would be the most difficult to reinforce in the event of hostilities. Priority apparently was given to the buildup of forces in these two districts.

The Soviets probably did not judge the Chinese threat in the Sinkiang-Kazakhstan border area to be as serious as that opposite Manchuria, nor that the stakes would be as high in the event of a Chinese incursion. Few Chinese troops are stationed in Sinkiang, and that area would be one of the most difficult for the Chinese to resupply. The Sinkiang border is closer to the Soviets' European power base than the Far East and would be easier to reinforce. When the border buildup was planned in the mid-Sixties, the western border apparently received less attention than the area facing Manchuria.

By mid-1969, the evidence available suggested that the increase in the number of Soviet divisions on the border was nearing completion. Of the 13 new divisions identified by that time, formation of 11 had begun before the end of 1967 and the other 2 were started by early 1968. The increase in new facilities and equipment holdings continued at a steady pace thereafter, but apparently involved the filling out of existing units rather than the creation of new divisions. The rate of construction of new hard-surface airfields declined.

#### Activity Since Mid-1969

Since mid-1969 the picture has changed (see map, facing). A buildup has been identified opposite Sinkiang and additional divisions have been detected in Mongolia. Although some of the units identified as divisions by mid-1969 have not developed as

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expected, other, more likely candidates for buildup to division strength have appeared along the border. And the filling out of understrength divisions has continued.

The Area Opposite Sinkiang

Only one division had been stationed in the area opposite Sinkiang prior to 1965. Although two more divisions were added in 1966, the initial stages of the border buildup were concentrated opposite Manchuria, and not until mid-1968 or so did the Soviets really seem to turn their attention to the western portions of the border.

Since mid-1969, two additional divisions have been identified opposite Sinkiang. Elements of both these divisions may have been present as long ago as mid-1968. Another new division may now be forming. In addition, an existing division near the Afghanistan border probably has been resubordinated from the Turkestan Military District to the new Central Asian Military District opposite Sinkiang. This brings the total number of divisions in the new district to 6 or 7, and additional military installations are under construction.

The new district, first identified in November 1969 but probably established in midyear, probably includes the three republics in Soviet Central Asia closest to China. These republics used to be part of the Turkestan Military District but apparently were separated from it in an effort to provide more effective control of the increasing number of divisions opposite Sinkiang. General of the Army N. G. Lyashchenko, the former commander of the Turkestan Military District, heads the new district.

A buildup of tactical air forces also appears to be under way in the new district. The Soviets

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are transferring control of part of the 6th Tactical Air Army from the Turkestan Military District to the new Central Asian district, and the present division of tactical air authority between the two districts indicates that a separate air army is being established in each. Two of the six combat units formerly assigned to the 6th Air Army [redacted]

[redacted] will provide the nucleus for air support of the ground forces there. These two units, with about 60 combat aircraft, probably will be augmented by additional units, either newly created or transferred from other air armies.

The runways of several natural-surface airfields in the new district have been paved during the past year and new natural-surface dispersal or utility airfields have been built. Continuing construction at some of the natural-surface fields suggests that they will be hard surfaced, a step which often precedes permanent deployment of aircraft.

The border area for which the new military district is responsible was the scene of several clashes with the Chinese last summer. One of these incidents-- in the Dzungarian Gate area on 13 August 1969--was the last reported clash before the Sino-Soviet talks got under way in Peking in October.

[redacted] the seriousness with which the Soviets viewed the situation along the western border. A Soviet motorized rifle regiment at Druzhba, astride the Dzungarian Gate, was withdrawn from its salient position to a more easily defended and supplied base some 75 miles from the border.

[redacted]

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The Trans-Baikal - Mongolia Region

Considerable Soviet military activity has also taken place in Mongolia during the past year. Construction continued at ground force installations at Sayn Shanda and Choybalsan, and a new installation was identified at Sumber Suma. A Soviet division has been stationed at Ulan Bator since 1966, and there are elements of one or two more divisions at the other installations in Mongolia.

The new construction [redacted] suggest that the Soviets intend to form a corps or army headquarters in that country, with three or four divisions subordinate to it. [redacted]

No new divisions were positively identified in the Trans-Baikal Military District during the past year, and the status of one of the previously identified divisions is now uncertain. The recent build-up in the Trans-Baikal Military District--as in the Far East--probably has been concentrated on filling out existing units and on improving support elements.

In tactical aviation, one new air unit was added in the Trans-Baikal last year. The increase in tactical air strength east of Lake Baikal was much lower than in 1968, when seven new air units reached operational status. The total number of combat aircraft in the Trans-Baikal - Mongolian air army now stands at about 350, some 75 of them in Mongolia.

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The Soviet Far East

No new divisions were identified in [redacted] [redacted] the Far East Military District last year. The Soviets apparently are concentrating on filling out the divisions already there rather than on establishing new ones. Tactical air strength stands at about 250 combat aircraft.

New Techniques and Equipment

In addition to deploying new divisions along the border, the Soviets have taken other steps during the past year to strengthen the forces there. In September 1969, two new ground force units equipped with helicopters were identified opposite the Manchurian border. These battalion-size units have air-transportable combat equipment and vehicles and a total of about 90 helicopters. No jump training equipment typical of standard airborne units or the heavy combat equipment of conventional ground force units has been seen with these units.

The Soviets almost certainly established these highly mobile units to be able to react quickly to incidents in that rugged section of the border without having to station large forces along its entire length. A similar helicopter-lifted unit apparently is being established in southern Primorskiy Kray.

Over the past few years, Soviet forces along the border have received Shaddock and Scaleboard missiles, wheeled Scud missile launchers, and T-62 tanks prior to or simultaneously with Soviet forces facing NATO (see photos on next page). This priority in new equipment apparently continued into 1969.

[redacted] the first large-scale deployment of a new infantry combat vehicle, first shown in the November 1967 parade in

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NEW MILITARY EQUIPMENT ON THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER



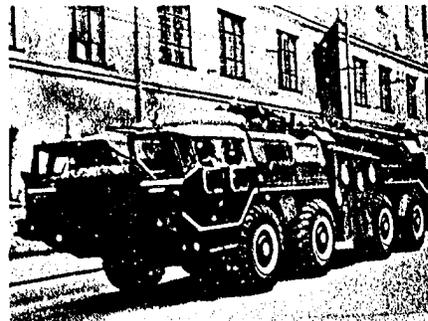
Infantry combat vehicle



T-62 medium tank



Scaleboard mobile missile system



Wheeled Scud tactical missile launcher



Shaddock cruise missile system

The Soviets have supplied a variety of new types of military equipment to their forces being deployed along the Chinese border. Some of this equipment has also been provided to Soviet forces elsewhere--such as the T-62 tank--but some types, including the Scaleboard and the new infantry combat vehicle, were first detected on the border.

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Moscow. These vehicles, which mount a 76mm gun and an antitank guided missile, [REDACTED] a motorized rifle regiment in the far East. The 90 vehicles seen had replaced almost all of the other troop transports--trucks and armored personnel carriers--in the unit.

In some cases, however, new units on the border have received older equipment and weapons. Obsolete tanks and assault guns have been observed with some of the new ground force units along the border, and some tactical air units have been equipped with aging MIG-17s at the same time that units in the western USSR were receiving new MIG-21s. The older equipment would be good enough for use against the Chinese, however, and in several instances the obsolete tanks and assault guns have now been put into storage, suggesting that they are being replaced by newer equipment.

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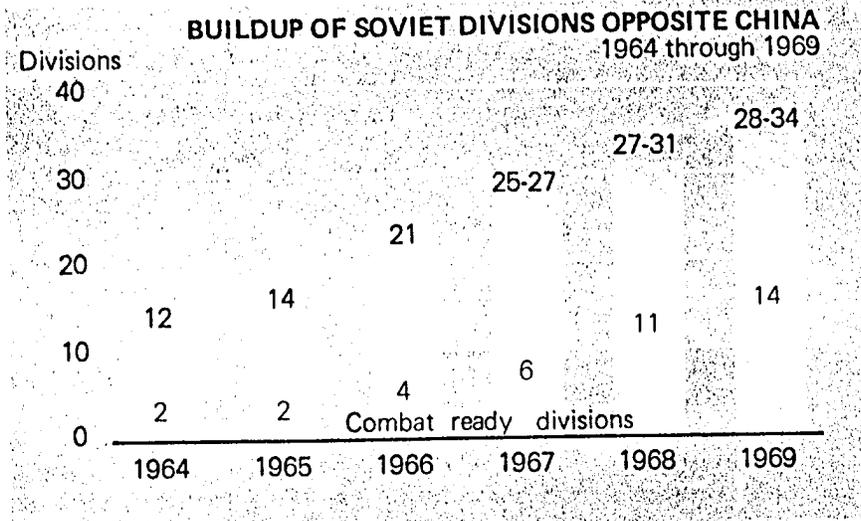


Rate of Buildup

Presently available evidence indicates that the Soviet buildup in men and equipment continued in 1969 at about the same rate that has prevailed since 1965. The number of new divisions identified in 1968 and 1969 was considerably below that of 1966 and 1967 (see chart, facing), but the filling out of

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The Soviet buildup of forces opposite China has proceeded at a steady and deliberate rate, and new divisions have been identified each year. In addition, units which could form the base for other divisions have been identified, as shown by the shaded areas at the top. Not all of these have yet developed far enough to be firmly identified as new divisions.

The number of new divisions identified in 1968 and 1969 was less than in the two preceding years, but filling out divisions already deployed probably kept the flow of men and equipment as high as in previous years.

The number of divisions estimated to be combat ready--that is, with their complement of subordinate units, men, and equipment--is also shown.



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divisions already deployed to the border probably kept the flow of men and equipment as high as it had been in previous years.

The decisions leading to the deployment of the new units identified on the border last year probably were made before the series of border clashes which began in March 1969. Probably not enough time has passed for any of the new units identified so far to have been deployed as part of a Soviet plan to increase force goals as a result of the border fighting. Nor is there any evidence [redacted]

[redacted] that the Soviets sent substantial numbers of men to the border because of the fighting there. And the rate of deployment of aircraft does not seem to have changed significantly.

The Trans-Siberian Railroad, the main Soviet artery to the Far East, has been closed to Western diplomats since the beginning of 1969, [redacted]

[redacted] large amounts of eastbound traffic, including military shipments. The amount of traffic [redacted]

[redacted] is consistent with what would be required by normal economic activity, by the continuing buildup on the border, and by the logistical support of the units already deployed there. The capacity of the railroad is such that it probably would not be taxed by even larger military requirements.

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Summary

There is as yet no evidence that the steady pace of the Soviet military buildup along the China border has changed as a result of the series of bloody clashes which began there last March or because of the opening of the talks in Peking last October. It does appear, however, that the ground forces buildup will exceed the 30 divisions which seemed to be the Soviet goal as of mid-1969.

At least 28 divisions--about 14 of which are combat ready--are already deployed along the border, and elements which could form the base for 6 more have been identified. Soviet ground forces in the area and their combat support units probably now number between 240,000 and 265,000 men. Tactical air units bring this total to 270,000 to 295,000 men. A force of 28 divisions, their front and army support elements, and the tactical air units identified along the border would total some 400,000 men at combat ready levels. This does not include some 75,000 KGB border guards stationed in small detachments along the border itself.

The Soviets apparently are forming three front-level groupings opposite China, each with several ground armies and its own tactical air army.\* The grouping in the Far East Military District already is virtually a front-in-being. Soviet forces in Mongolia and the Trans-Baikal Military District probably would form another front in the event of large-scale hostilities with China. The formation of a new military district and the buildup of ground and tactical air forces opposite Sinkiang indicate that another front-level force probably is being established there.

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\* *The front is the Soviets' highest wartime field organization for the joint operational control of general purpose forces. No fronts exist as such in peacetime.*

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[redacted]

Although the size of Soviet forces along the border apparently will exceed previous expectations, there is no conclusive evidence that the Soviets have changed what appears to have been their original objective: the establishment of a force capable of repelling any Chinese military initiatives or of conducting limited military operations across the Chinese border.

Without the use of strategic strikes, Soviet forces presently deployed along the border would not be strong enough, even when brought up to full strength, to occupy industrialized and populated regions of China. Before undertaking any large-scale ground operations against China, the Soviets almost certainly would want substantially more combat and service support forces than those which are now being deployed along the border.

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