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Prospects for Sino-Soviet Rapprochement (U)

National Intelligence Council
Memorandum

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Memorandum

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Prospects for Sino-Soviet Rapprochement (U)

Key Judgments

A significant Sino-Soviet rapprochement is unlikely in the near future because:

- The historical and geopolitical rivalry is too long, too deep, and by now too institutionalized.
- China is determined to become a superpower, and the Soviet Union, on whose Asian borders China lies, will continue to try to prevent it from becoming one.
- China's growing nuclear potential will make a Sino-Soviet war *and* a significant Sino-Soviet rapprochement even less likely, because the Soviet Union will become more vulnerable to Chinese nuclear weapons and China will therefore have less need for better relations with the Soviet Union.

This unlikelihood will remain even though the near future is likely to bring some additional impulses—arising especially from the coming Soviet and Chinese succession crises—toward a rapprochement, because:

- Moscow and Beijing are carrying on a double encirclement of each other.
- Sino-Soviet rivalry has now extended to important areas for both (Indochina and Afghanistan); remains in North Korea; and is potentially rising in India (toward which China's attitude is softening).
- Other powers, notably Vietnam, India, and the United States, can and want to prevent a Sino-Soviet rapprochement.
- Beijing, as well as Moscow, will in principle not want to be so susceptible to manipulations by the United States to their disadvantage.

The United States has policy options that would contribute, albeit probably not decisively, toward making any Sino-Soviet rapprochement less or more likely:

- Vis-a-vis China, its policies toward the Soviet Union, Taiwan, and Vietnam.
- Vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, the extent to which the United States avoids, or moves toward, both total break and major rapprochement.

Prospects for Sino-Soviet Rapprochement (U)

The Historical and Geopolitical Factors

Ever since the mid-19th century when the Russian and Chinese empires came into active contact, Russo-Chinese rivalry has been endemic. Stalin doubted that Mao's victory in all of China would be to Soviet advantage, and before and after it he treated the Chinese Communists as Soviet satellites, to their lasting resentment. After a century of weakness, the Korean War, and Stalin's death, China again became strong, united, and expansionist. In contrast, Stalin's successors fought each other, had problems in Eastern Europe, pursued detente with Washington—to Mao's fury—and expected China to continue unquestioningly to follow their lead. Mao therefore broke with Moscow, and global Sino-Soviet rivalry has continued ever since.

Two major powers with common borders—like Russia and China—are, as history shows, usually condemned to mutual conflict. Because both have nuclear weapons, and because China's nuclear potential is increasing, an all-out war between them becomes less likely. The political conflict, however, is more likely to continue because China has less need to be concerned about its own weakness.

The Sino-Soviet conflict led to competition for influence in other areas, beginning in the late 1950s. Until the early 1970s the competition on the Sino-Soviet border was primarily for North Korea and North Vietnam, both of whom were strong enough to try to remain neutral and profit therefrom. North Korea is still neutral. But Vietnam, once it became engaged in a major war with the United States, depended so much on Soviet arms and was historically so fearful of renewed Chinese domination that by the late 1960s Hanoi was increasingly tilting toward Moscow. Vietnam broke with China in the mid-1970s and joined the Soviet encirclement of China, primarily by allowing the Soviet Union to use bases on its territory.

Double Encirclement

The Sino-Soviet conflict has now reached a new stage, that of double encirclement. The Soviet Union, because it is far stronger, has been the prime mover in this process. Russia historically has been addicted to deployment of overwhelming military force (and to lack of diplomatic finesse). In the 1960s Khrushchev began, and Brezhnev has intensified, an enormous Soviet troop deployment on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian frontiers. This, plus the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, drove Mao toward the United States, the more so as Washington was beginning to disengage from Vietnam. Moscow, which had both feared and unwittingly encouraged this, stepped up its cultivation of Vietnam.

By the mid-1970s the Soviet Union had built the airlift and sealift capabilities—and had used Cuban troops—to exploit successfully opportunities of local origin in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. This drove China and the United States more rapidly toward each other. Japan drifted toward them, and away from the Soviet Union, because of Chinese initiative, the Soviet refusal to hand back to Japan the four southern Kurile Islands, and US encouragement of Japan's drift.

Thus China has successfully begun the encirclement of the Soviet Union. Moscow's "preemptive breakout" from this encirclement, by encircling China (and the United States in Asia) itself, has succeeded in Indochina, can probably succeed in Afghanistan (and thereby menace the US position in the Middle East), and can possibly profit from the turmoil in Iran.

This double encirclement has introduced a new, corrosive factor in the Sino-Soviet conflict: manipulation of both countries by allies and enemies. The principal global manipulator was the United States. Moscow had vainly hoped to maintain its preferred version of detente with Washington: US priority for arms control agreements over countering Soviet advances in the Third World.

As Soviet-American relations rapidly worsened in the late 1970s and early 1980s because Washington refused to accept Moscow's priorities for detente, the Soviets tried to reach the same goal indirectly, via Western Europe, and in the process to encourage Chinese distrust of the United States. The West European—especially the West German—attachment to detente, even after the Afghan and Polish developments, has led to a rift in US-West European relations. Moscow is trying to exploit this by encouraging West European pressure for Soviet-US arms control negotiations and agreements. This would constrain US global responses to Soviet moves, Moscow believes, and raise Chinese distrust of US reliability as a firm ally against the Soviet Union.

The United States has remained a power in the Pacific and is becoming one in the Indian Ocean. It is committed to support ASEAN. China gives priority in Southeast Asia to support of the Khmer Rouge against the Vietnamese in Kampuchea. Singapore and Thailand seem to support this but Malaysia and Indonesia think China a greater long-range danger than the Soviet Union. To the extent that its hostility to Vietnam might decrease, ASEAN might try to get the United States to persuade China to be less hostile to Hanoi, for example, by tacitly accepting the status quo in Kampuchea. China would probably regard such an ASEAN and US attitude as "objectively" pro-Soviet and would distrust the United States as a result.

Finally, there is Taiwan. Beijing balances its need of the United States to help contain the Soviet Union with its determination to recover Taiwan, to which the United States is the principal obstacle. Although Moscow has so far had no success in its attempts to cultivate Taiwan, China remains concerned about the

possibility. To the extent that China may feel that the United States is not paying enough attention to its interests vis-a-vis Taiwan, it may be inclined to improve its relations with the Soviet Union, or at least appear to be starting to do so, in order to put pressure on the United States. Such a Chinese move could well become a reality if the United States were significantly, in China's view, to increase its support of Taiwan.

The Communist Ideological and Organizational Factors

The fact that the Soviet Union and China are also Communist powers and therefore rivals for ideological and organizational hegemony in what is left of the "international Communist and workers movement" further complicates the picture. Both these factors, which delayed the Sino-Soviet split from becoming public, make compromise regarding the split more difficult, because Sino-Soviet rivalry over ideological and organizational factors normally becomes absolute in public polemics. Since Marxism-Leninism explicitly rejects ideological compromise and denies that state interests rightly can overshadow "proletarian internationalism," Communist ideology has hindered pragmatic compromise.

Even so, the "de-ideologization" of post-Mao Chinese Communism, Beijing's abandonment of its previous charge that Moscow had "restored capitalism," and the cessation of Chinese attempts to split Communist parties throughout the world and form a "Maoist international" have downgraded the ideological aspect of the Sino-Soviet split. However, Chinese party relations with the Romanian, Yugoslav, Italian, and Spanish Communist parties, all by now independent from Moscow, have contributed to an international, anti-Soviet "independentist" rather than an "anti-revisionist" entente. Moscow will continue to consider this, and Chinese participation in it, hostile to the continuing Soviet claim to ideological and organizational hegemony in the international Communist movement.

Thus, although the ideological factor is likely to remain downgraded in the Sino-Soviet conflict, the Communist organizational factor has become a more important barrier to rapprochement, because it is based upon a pragmatic, partial partnership among independent Communist parties that are united by opposition to hegemony, and made easier by their mutual tolerance of ideological differences.

The New Factors For and Against a Sino-Soviet Rapprochement

Ever since the fall of Khrushchev in 1964, Brezhnev has been trying to bring about a partial Sino-Soviet rapprochement at the state level. He has consistently failed because the Chinese—Mao, Zhou, Hua, and Deng—have always rejected his repeated overtures.

The Internal Influences

Moscow. The 18-year-old Soviet policy of partial rapprochement at the state level is not likely to change in the near future, but it may be interrupted. The principal impending Soviet development that might, but probably will not, influence Soviet policy in this connection is the Brezhnev succession struggle. That it will lead, even temporarily, to a return to Khrushchev's total political hostility to China seems unlikely, for such a policy would only push China even closer to the United States, something Moscow has been trying for the last decade to prevent. It might well, however, interrupt the present policy, for succession struggles have historically initially limited the freedom of foreign and domestic policy maneuvers of the main contestants. (Sometimes, however, contestants have proposed major foreign policy initiatives, as Beria reportedly did in 1953 on the German question. That this probably contributed to his fall is not likely to encourage further such initiatives.) The winner in the Soviet succession struggle might well launch new, more inviting initiatives toward a Sino-Soviet rapprochement, but even then his possibilities would be limited. This would probably be especially true with respect to any military initiatives. We know that the Chinese conditions for a rapprochement set forth in and after the 1979 Sino-Soviet negotiations included Soviet military withdrawal from Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Mongolia, plus scaling down the deployment

of Soviet troops on the borders of China to their level under Khrushchev. Given the influence of the Soviet military, and the possibility that their support will be important in the succession struggle, they might well be able to persuade any new Soviet leaders that such concessions should not be made.

Beijing. During the past few years some Chinese intellectuals have on occasion advocated improvement of relations with Moscow. However, they have been consistently slapped down by Beijing. Nor has Beijing used or exaggerated this opposition to try to put pressure on the United States. On the contrary, its anti-Soviet line has remained consistent for at least 23 years. Nevertheless, after Deng leaves the scene there may be such an attempt among those struggling for succession. It seems, however, unlikely to succeed. First, the succession is already fairly well determined. Second, just as with the Soviet Union, the issues involved in any Sino-Soviet compromise have become so much more serious and so less susceptible to exclusive control by Moscow and Beijing, that the possibility of a rapprochement is less than it was a decade ago.

The External Influences

Moscow. There seems to be no serious prospect that Soviet concessions will come close to the minimal Chinese demands. On the contrary, the influence on the Soviet Union of Vietnam, which can threaten to bar the Soviets from bases in that country if Moscow makes concessions of any kind to Beijing, will probably be significant in the opposite direction. Moreover, US conditions for a Soviet-US rapprochement would probably also involve Soviet military evacuation of Vietnam and Afghanistan. Moscow would be even less likely to make similar concessions to Beijing, because such concessions could hardly be counterbalanced by anything less than a full Sino-Soviet rapprochement. But this would mean de facto Chinese hegemony in East and Southeast Asia. Nor would the United States in the near future be likely to make major concessions to the USSR in return for Soviet evacuation of Vietnam and Afghanistan. Thus Moscow's rivalry in these areas with Washington as well

as Beijing makes compromise with either more difficult, because each of the latter two would find the danger of arousing mistrust in the other an additional barrier to successful negotiation with Moscow, which in turn would, by trying to play each against the other, probably arouse the mistrust of both.

Will the Soviet Union move toward China in order to make up for the recent worsening of Soviet relations with the United States? *Realpolitik* would require that this occur, the more so because of the current US global military buildup. The next five years or so will probably see this factor become more important in Soviet policy considerations. But the Soviet Union has worked for a Sino-Soviet rapprochement since 1964, and all the more as Sino-US relations have improved.

The primary reason why Moscow has not succeeded has been that the Chinese have refused to play. But there have been, and will probably continue to be, other reasons as well: first, the continuing geopolitical causes of hostility set forth above; second, the time-tested maxim, which Moscow probably shares, that concessions all too often only increase the appetite of one's opponent for more; third, the high probability that a partial rapprochement at the state level would not end the Sino-Soviet struggle. On the contrary, a partial rapprochement would allow China to become a player as well and therefore gain an advantage vis-a-vis the United States, which now enjoys the advantageous position of being the only member of the strategic triangle that can profit from maneuvering with and against the two others. But China would then also enjoy the same possibility, which by definition would limit the Soviet freedom of maneuver. Given the Soviet tradition of caution in foreign affairs, many in Moscow will probably find this another reason for opposing even minimal concessions to China. Fourth, and most important, the recent, increased Chinese demand for concessions, set forth above—including, most importantly, Vietnam and Afghanistan—will discourage even smaller Soviet concessions in the near future. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which any Soviet leader, Brezhnev now or whatever successor later, would meet even a major part of these Chinese demands.

Beijing. Some of the possible Chinese motives for a partial rapprochement with the Soviet Union are the converse of Soviet motives: to profit from equidistant manipulation of Moscow and Washington; the decline in the ideological aspects of the dispute; and the desire for greater autonomy from the United States. Other motives are different: the end of the violent ideological hostility toward the USSR of Mao and the "Gang of Four" in favor of far more pragmatic Chinese policies; the desire to get Soviet as well as Western help for modernization and thus be less dependent on the West; increasing disappointment with US policy concerning Taiwan; lingering concern that the United States may return to a partial policy of collusion with the USSR on arms control negotiations, which might, for example, limit Soviet SS-20s targeted on Europe and redirect them to Chinese targets. The most important motive is that the Soviet involvement in Vietnam and Afghanistan, and more generally its attempt to encircle China, seem to have influenced China, in its new demands in 1979, to insist that Moscow concede to Beijing strategic hegemony in East and Southeast Asia—something Moscow is most unlikely to agree to. And the more powerful China becomes, the more it will insist upon it.

A Sino-Soviet War: Most Unlikely

A Sino-Soviet general war is most unlikely. First, the most serious Sino-Soviet border incidents, in 1969, led to a brief, partial relaxation of tension. Second, rising Chinese nuclear capability makes it less likely still. But to take the "worst-case" analysis, even if such a war did occur, it would be more likely that the Soviet Union would be bogged down in a long guerrilla war in China than that it would score a cheap, quick victory. Moreover, a Soviet attack on China would

cost the Soviet Union tremendous influence in the rest of the world, drive Western Europe back into the US camp, and consolidate US-Japanese relations. Thus, a Sino-Soviet war is (1) most unlikely and (2) by no means necessarily contrary to US interests.

A Sino-Soviet nuclear war is also most unlikely, because China is already capable of inflicting what Moscow would in all probability consider unacceptable damage on the Soviet Union, and will be more capable as time goes on. Moreover, it would hardly end, but rather encourage, prolonged Chinese guerrilla resistance and would antagonize the rest of the world even more than a conventional war.

There is a somewhat greater possibility of a Sino-Soviet limited war, such as almost occurred in 1969. A second Chinese attack on Vietnam could force a limited Soviet response of the kind the Chinese prepared for in February 1979, when they evacuated civilians from the Sino-Soviet border region on the eve of the attack on Vietnam.

The Impact on the United States of a Partial Sino-Soviet Rapprochement

A partial Sino-Soviet rapprochement would ease Soviet fear of China and therefore free Moscow's hand more vis-a-vis the United States, especially in areas such as Western Europe, the Middle East, and Central America, where China is not so directly involved. It would ease Chinese pressure on Vietnam, which could—and would—then cause US interests more trouble in Southeast Asia. It would make China less interested in supporting arms aid to the Afghan rebels. Finally, it would make the Soviet Union less likely to compromise with the United States, for example, in arms control negotiations. On the contrary, because it would lower the Soviet estimate of the Chinese threat, it would enable, indeed encourage, Moscow to deploy more of its forces, nuclear and conventional, to oppose the United States, notably in Europe and in the southern Soviet Union on the frontiers of the Middle East.

Consequences of US Policy Options

Options With China

Options open to the United States that would discourage Chinese rapprochement with the Soviets are:

- To keep the Taiwan issue on the back burner, thus making it credible to Beijing that the United States does not intend to increase Taiwan's military strength but that it also does not intend to abandon arms aid to Taiwan and thereby ensure its absorption by China. (The latter would be disastrous vis-a-vis ASEAN and other US allies, while the former would unnecessarily play into Soviet hands by pushing Beijing back toward Moscow.)
- To maintain and gradually increase US technological aid to China but not accept any Chinese requests for direct military assistance.
- To keep Beijing fearful of a possible Soviet-US rapprochement but convinced that it can and must prevent it.

The options that would encourage a Sino-Soviet rapprochement on the Chinese side are generally the reverse of the above, notably the return to priority for arms control agreements with the USSR and little resistance to Soviet expansion, or a US military buildup of Taiwan, or both.

Options With the Soviet Union

To discourage the Soviets from rapprochement with the Chinese, the United States could continue LRTNF and resume SALT negotiations, and thus reassure Moscow that the United States does not intend to return to a total Soviet-US cold war, *but* consult with the Chinese as well as with NATO on them, with the triple purpose of:

- Continuing to make the negotiations credible to the Soviet Union and to Western Europe.

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- Assuring China that it will not suffer by any agreement.
- Publicly abjuring any desire for condominium with the Soviets and declaring that, since the USSR has consistently violated the Yalta Agreements, the United States formally denounces them and no longer considers Eastern Europe an exclusively Soviet sphere of influence any more than it considers Latin America an exclusively US one.

The opposite of the above, or, alternatively, a total US alliance with China against the USSR, or both, would encourage the Soviet Union toward a Sino-Soviet rapprochement.

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