

*The President's Daily Brief*

15 April 1969

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16 April 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF  
15 APRIL 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

SOVIET AFFAIRS

Dubcek's trip to Moscow apparently has been cancelled. Press sources in Prague suggest that the cancellation was due to continuing disagreement between Czechoslovak liberals and conservatives. (Reuters [redacted] 16 Apr)

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MIDDLE EAST

Lebanese troops clashed yesterday with a group of about 100 terrorists who had crossed into Lebanon from Syria. The Lebanese are now trying to persuade the group to go back to Syria, but they doubt that they will be able to do so. Four firefights in the last week between terrorists and Israeli forces on the frontier have made the Lebanese even more nervous than usual about Israeli retaliation. [redacted]

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[redacted]  
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There is nothing significant to report on Vietnam or Europe.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

KOREA

Two US destroyers are now in the area in which the US plane was lost. It is still not clear if there are any survivors. [redacted]

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Under the headline "American Plane Shot Down over North Korea," Moscow newspapers this morning carried a brief account of the North Korean news agency's version of the incident. Tass, however, also reported the US Defense Department statement

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that the plane was lost over the Sea of Japan. [REDACTED]

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The South Korean press is demanding that the US retaliate against the North Koreans. Government spokesmen have been more cautious. There has been no official government statement so far. [REDACTED]

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The embassy in Seoul reports that there have been no reports of infiltration activity from North Korea since the plane was lost. Nor have there been any firefights along the Demilitarized Zone. [REDACTED]

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

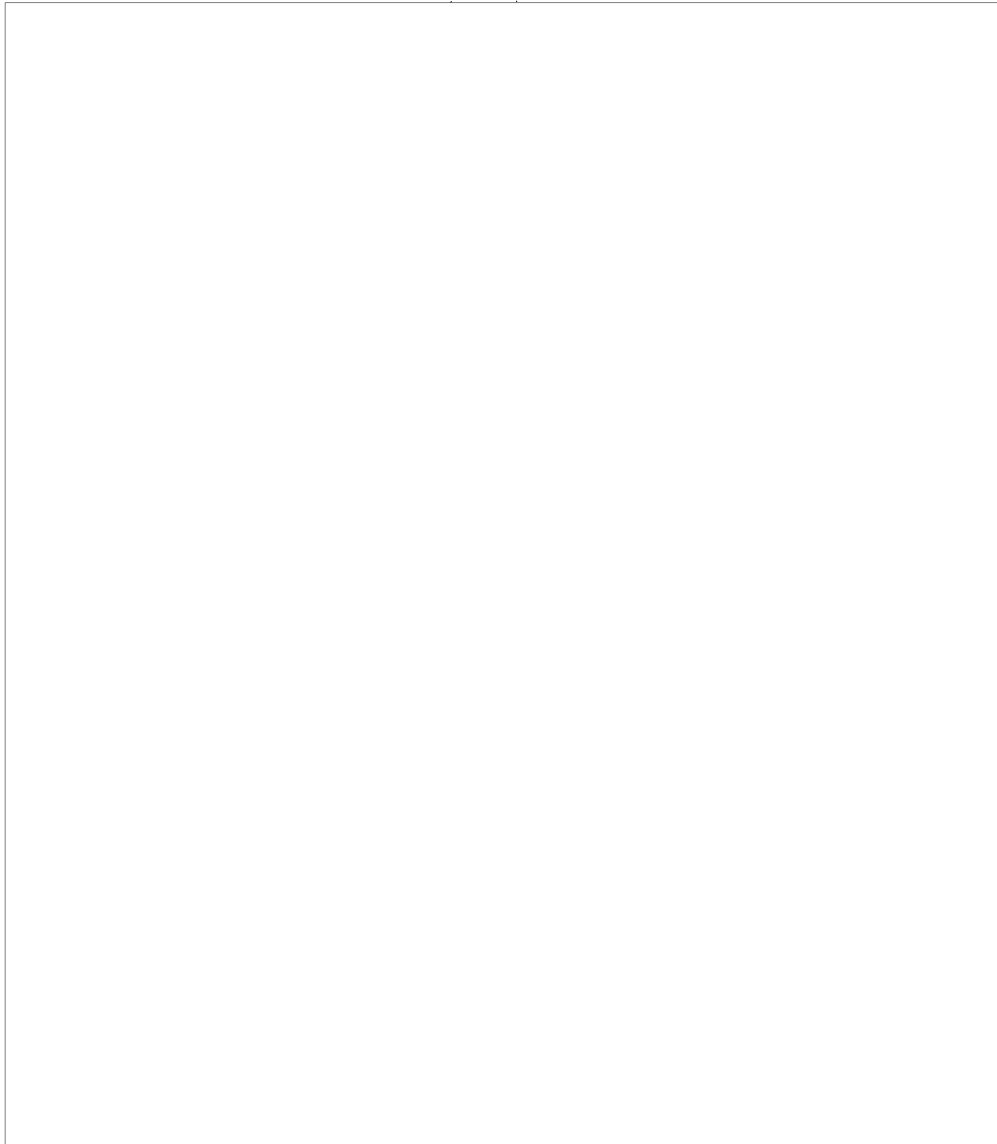
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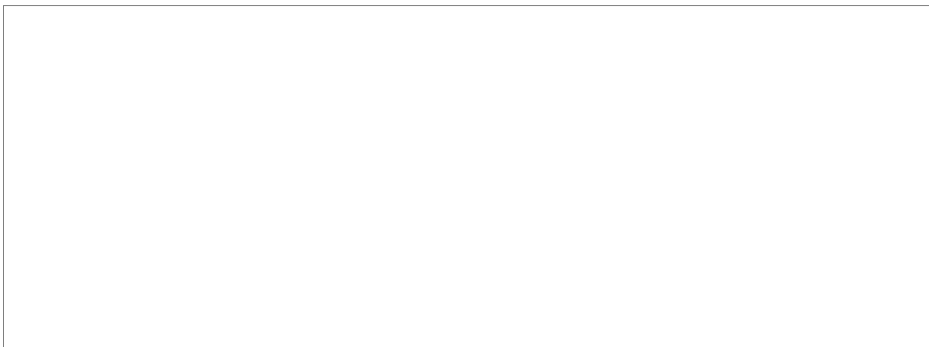


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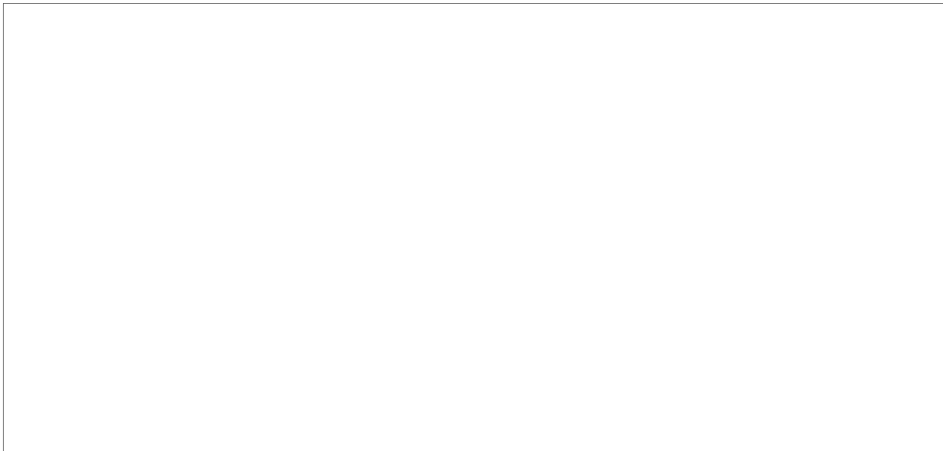


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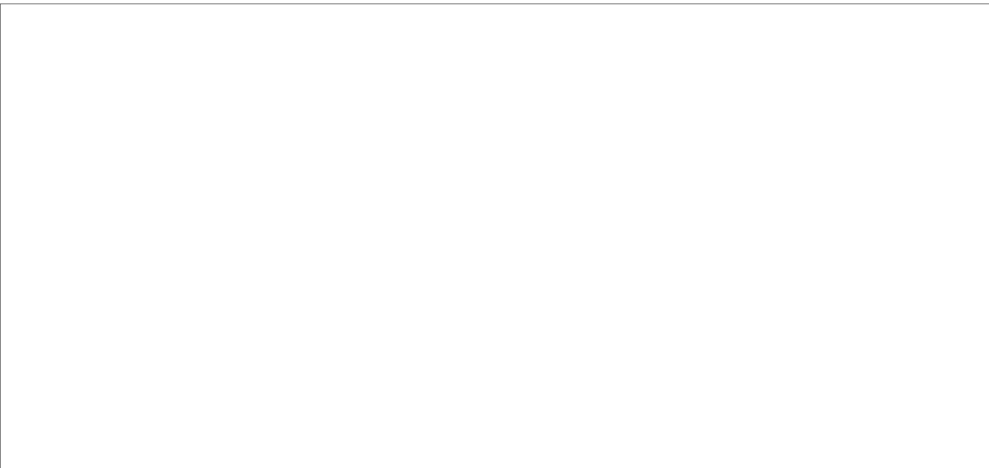


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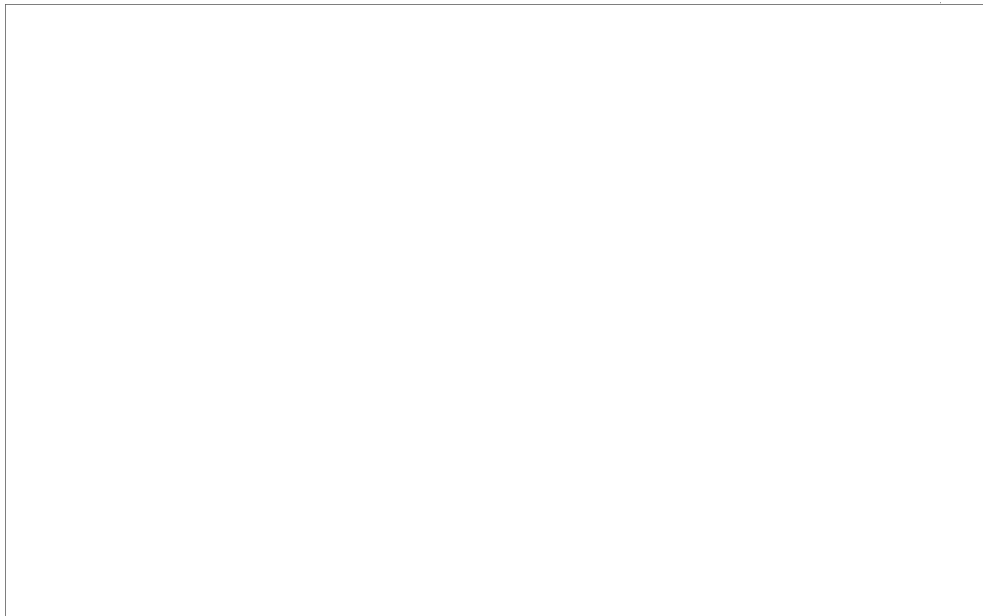
Exchanges of fire across the Suez Canal have increased in frequency and intensity in recent weeks. Shooting of some kind--most of it initiated by the Egyptians--is now a daily occurrence. Artillery duels have become commonplace, and there was another air battle on Monday. Neither side seems interested in scaling down the exchanges; Cairo wants to focus world attention on the problem and refute charges of Egyptian inactivity, and the Israelis are more willing to shoot back now that their hardened shelters are finished.

SOVIET AFFAIRS



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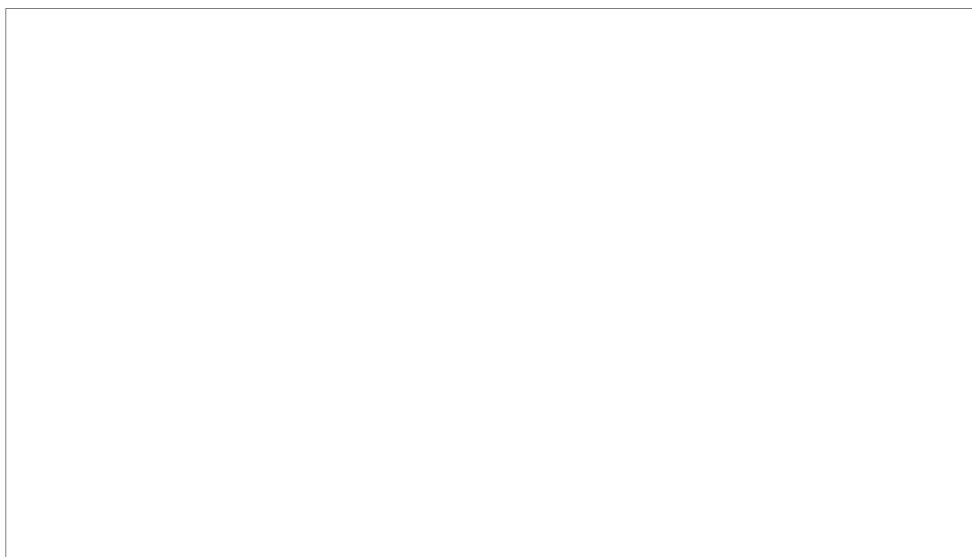
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At annex today we discuss Soviet propaganda charges of  
"Sino-US collusion."

EUROPE

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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

CAMBODIA

Cambodian border forces have fought several engagements with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops in recent months. Such incidents are not without precedent and are still fewer in number than those involving Cambodian and allied troops, but they are a clear sign of the growing tension between the Communists and the Cambodians in the border area.

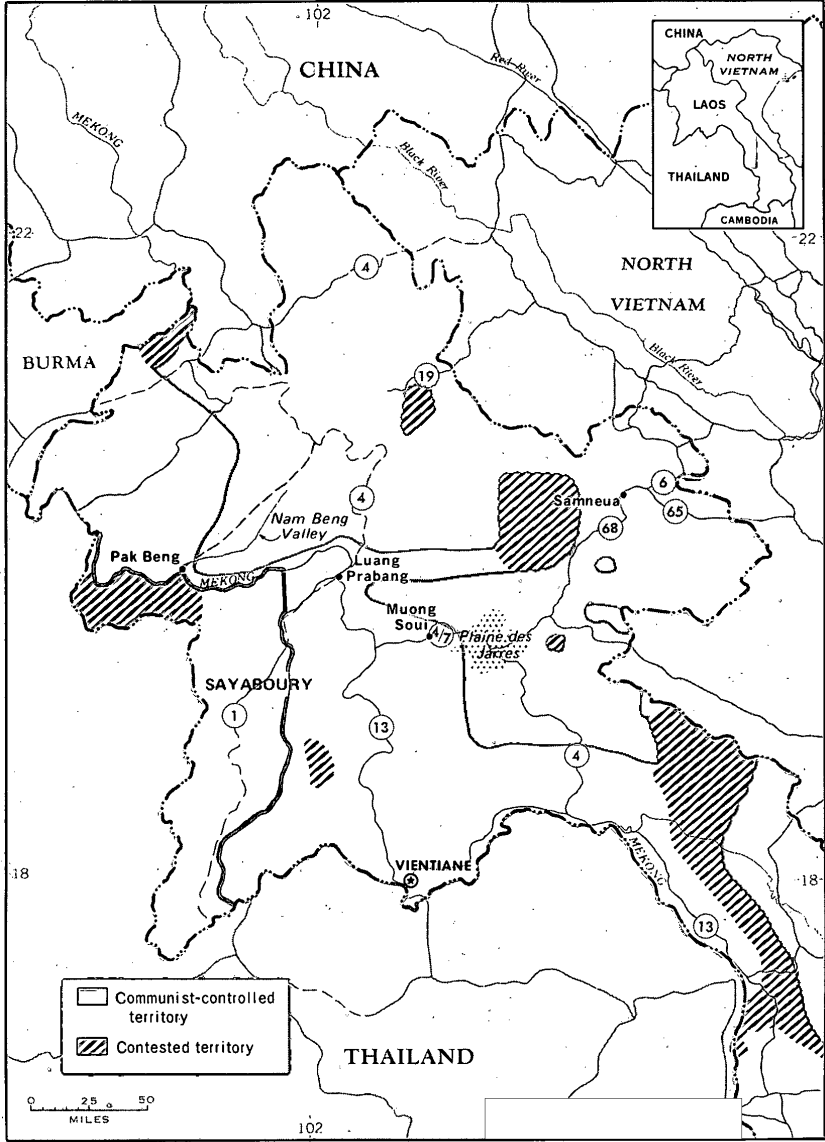
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The change in the Cambodian attitude has resulted largely from the heavier fighting along the border over the past several years and the greater use the Communists have made of their bases in the southern half of Cambodia. The heavy influx of North Vietnamese troops may also have disrupted long-standing local arrangements worked out by the Viet Cong with Cambodian border officials.

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Phnom Penh is also showing its increasing preoccupation with Communist bases in other ways. Cambodian news media have described in greater detail than heretofore Viet Cong violations of the border, and Liberation Front representatives

### LAOS: Pak Beng Falls to Enemy



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have been maneuvered into public admission that such depredations occur. By applying such pressures on the Communists, while at the same time moving toward a resumption of relations with the US, Sihanouk is again trying to achieve by political means what he cannot by military.

For their part, the Communists are trying to maintain as cordial relations as possible with the Cambodians. The recent Cambodian actions do not seriously threaten Communist bases in Cambodia, and the Communists are probably not overly concerned about what the Cambodians can do in this regard.

LAOS

The Communists have captured Pak Beng, a government outpost on the Mekong River in the northwest. On 14 April a series of enemy ground assaults led to the fall of the garrison and several outlying defense positions.

This action caps a seven-month enemy effort to clear government forces from the Nam Beng Valley. The Communists probably wanted to draw off government guerrillas that had been operating against Lao and Thai Communist elements along the Thai-Lao border.

Communist forces have long controlled the area surrounding Pak Beng, but their new access to the valley will make it easier for them to move troops and supplies into western Sayaboury Province. The erosion of the government's presence in this area may also have considerable impact in the Thai border area, where a Communist tribal insurgency has made significant inroads.

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Around the Plaine des Jarres the government's counter-offensive continues to make limited headway. The Communists, probably thrown off balance by heavy air strikes, have so far limited their response to a series of probing attacks against the neutralist headquarters at Muong Soui.

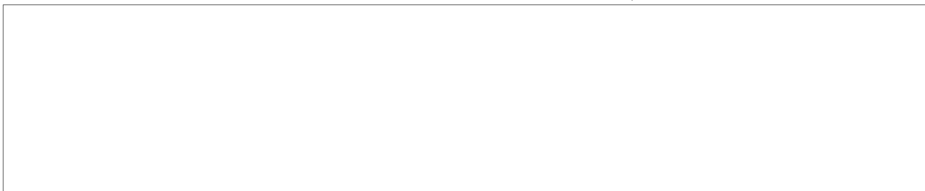
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SOVIET CHARGES OF SINO-US COLLUSION: HOW MUCH DOES MOSCOW BELIEVE?

For the better part of the past three years the Soviets have been publicly charging Sino-US collusion on a wide range of international issues, grossly exaggerating the extent of dialogue between Washington and Peking. Moscow knows how sterile the Warsaw talks have been over the years. Moscow's allegations of collusion, therefore, are primarily propaganda aimed at discrediting Peking. Moscow is in effect attempting to turn back on the Chinese the charges of collusion with the US which Peking has regularly leveled at the Russians. The Russians also are seeking by innuendo and half-truth to implant the idea that collusion accounts for the discrepancy between Peking's bold words and cautious deeds.

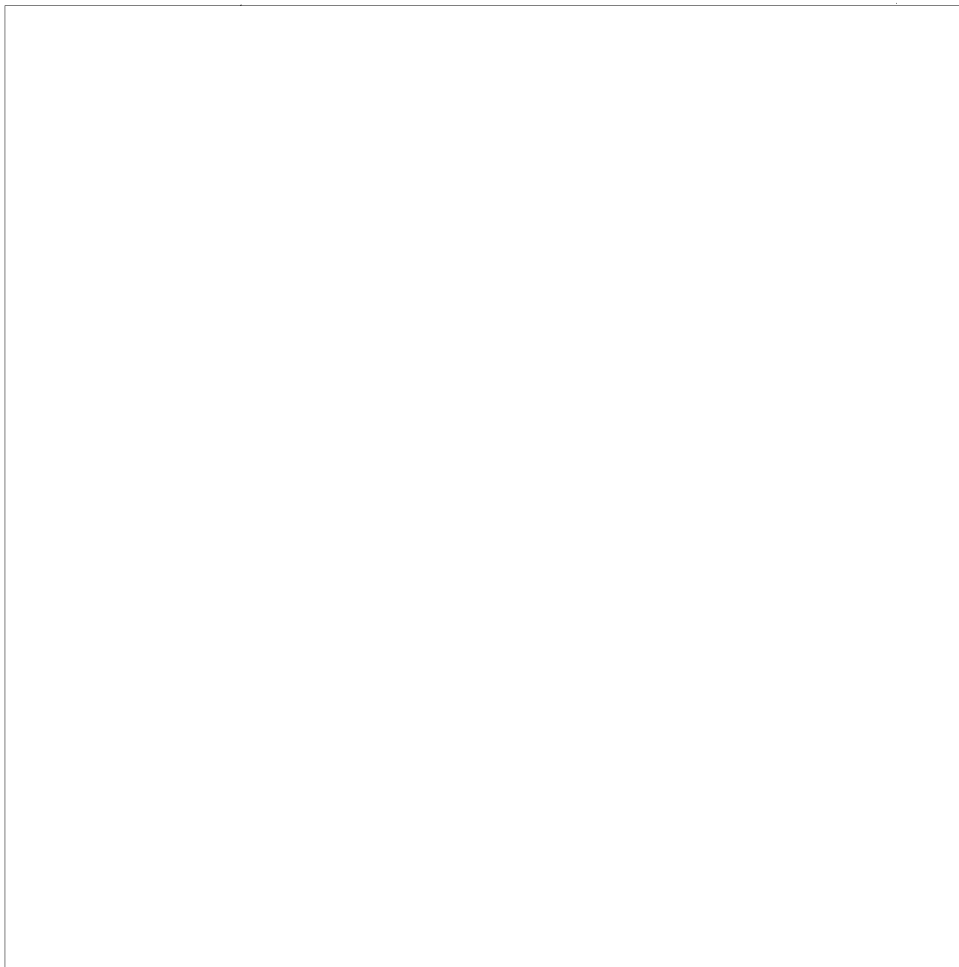
As with other major Soviet propaganda campaigns, however, there is an element of real concern beneath the public charges. In this case, the concern is over an eventual US-Chinese accommodation at Soviet expense. Such an accommodation is probably not considered likely in the short term, but there is almost certainly far less confidence about even the medium term. As a result, Soviet officials frequently seek information on the extent of contacts between the US and the Chinese, and on possible US policy changes toward Peking.

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The Soviet concern that Peking may some day decide to seek an arrangement with the US is perhaps not yet clearly articulated in Moscow, but probably stems from Moscow's fear that the post-Mao era in Peking will produce a more flexible Chinese foreign policy. The Soviets probably realize that Peking could indeed ease its isolation and gain diplomatic maneuvering room by muting its simultaneous and absolute hostility to both Moscow and Washington. The Soviets also probably judge that Peking would be more likely to edge toward

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Washington than toward Moscow, given the depth of Chinese hostility to the Soviets. An attack on the Chinese leaders in the current issue of the Party theoretical journal Kommunist makes the statement that Maoist "foreign political steps have at their base... tendencies of relying on any forces in the political struggle against the USSR and other fraternal countries." This is probably an accurate assessment of the Kremlin's real feelings. On the other side of the coin, our embassy in Moscow has reported considerable consternation among various Russian officials over statements by several prominent Americans at the recent US National Committee Meeting on Sino-US Relations which advocated a significant US effort to reach an accommodation with China.

Meanwhile, no incident is too small to be used by Moscow in its effort to embarrass Peking. Thus, following the Sino-Soviet border clashes last month, Moscow renewed charges that the Chinese were obstructing Soviet aid destined for Vietnam. The Chinese apparently did harass or refuse to cooperate with Soviet officials at border transshipment points for several days following the clash on 2 March, but the Soviets inflated this to a claim that China had "closed its border" to Soviet aid for embattled Vietnam.

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In another instance late last year, a Soviet journal did an exposé on a commercial telephone link--the only one existing--between San Francisco and Shanghai, citing it as an example of US-Chinese cooperation. Probably embarrassed by this publicity, Peking shortly thereafter broke the connection.

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The "Sino-US collusion" charge will continue to be a polemical issue as long as Moscow feels that it can be used to blacken Peking, and to help reduce the impact of similar charges against itself--charges to which it is indeed more vulnerable than is Peking. In all probability, Moscow does not believe the vast majority of its charges. Given its traditional suspicions and its heightened nervousness since the Ussuri River incident, however, Moscow probably does believe there is a greater prospect of improved US-Chinese relations than is apparent in Washington.

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