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Moscow's Bermuda Triangles

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The Soviet Union may try to use improving Sino-Soviet relations to fuel its "peace offensive" in Europe and Japan.

Moscow's Bermuda Triangles

Foreign policy compass needles wobble precariously back and forth, refusing to settle on any one direction. Painstakingly prepared plans vanish without a trace. Experienced practitioners appear and disappear from the scene, not always of their own volition. We are entering the Bermuda triangles of international politics.

CHANGING CURRENTS

Ever less subtle indications of possible changes in Sino-Soviet relations have become evident over the past year. Given the acrimonious nature of the Sino-Soviet polemics in the 1960s and chilly Sino-Soviet relations following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, any public communication between the two countries

was bound to be some kind of first. Reminiscent of the "ping-pong" diplomacy of the early seventies, a Chinese gymnastics team participated in the Moscow News Cup in March 1982. The visit to China in May 1982 of Mikhail Kapitsa, the head of the Far East Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, received due notice. Exchanges of other sports teams, senior academicians, trade officials, and diplomatic personnel also took place between Beijing and Moscow during 1982.

In early October 1982, Deputy Foreign Minister Leonid Ilyichev, a top Kremlin China expert, led a high level Soviet diplomatic mission to China for more than two weeks of "informal exploratory talks" regarding the possibility of upgrading bilateral relations. The meeting with Chinese Vice

Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, who handles Soviet and East European affairs, resulted in an announcement that the two countries would hold a series of discussions, to be hosted on an alternating basis with final details to be determined through diplomatic channels.

During the commemorations of the 65th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, the Chinese ambassador to Moscow attended the November 7 Revolution Day celebration in Red Square for the first time in years. In Beijing, as reported by the Chinese news agency Xinhua, Minister of Culture Zhu Muzhi and Vice Foreign Minister Qian Qichen appeared at a reception given by the Soviet ambassador to China, I.S. Shcherbakov, and his wife to mark the occasion. The symbolism was obvious in the responsibilities of the two Chinese diplomats—one charged with Sino-Soviet negotiations, the other with the areas in which upgraded relations were most immediately likely. Also marking the anniversary of the October Revolution, the Standing Committee of the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) National People's Congress and the P.R.C. State Council sent the warmest greetings in years to the Supreme Soviet Presidium and the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers, indicating among other things that, "the Chinese side is sincerely striving to eliminate all obstacles hindering the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations and to direct the relations between the two countries onto a path of sound development."¹

In early November 1982 at the funeral of Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri V. Andropov, newly named party general secretary, met with P.R.C. Foreign Minister Huang Hua longer than protocol required. Huang was the first Chinese foreign minister and highest ranking Chinese dignitary to visit Moscow in 18 years. The day after the funeral, the Chinese and Soviet Foreign Ministers Huang Hua and Andrei Gromyko met for 90 minutes, the highest level meeting since their predecessors Zhou Enlai and Alexei Kosygin met hurriedly at the Peking airport in 1969 in a last minute effort to defuse tensions over

border questions. After their meeting, Huang reported that the "leaders of the two countries attach importance to these consultations," and that he and Gromyko had discussed "ways of removing obstacles and promoting consultations so as to achieve progress on substantive matters."²

The "retirement" of Huang Hua the day after his return from Moscow brought intense speculation about the possibility of new P.R.C. signals to Moscow. The theory that Huang was being reprimanded for overextending his diplomatic instructions did not square with the professionalism and survival skills Huang had shown throughout his career; further, the reprimand theory seemed to founder on the fact that Defense Minister Geng Biao was replaced at the same time. Rumors had been circulating for some time that both men were on their way out; this suggests that the timing of their departure was as significant as the fact that they were replaced by two perceived Deng Xiaoping supporters, Vice Foreign Minister and Central Committee Member Wu Xueqian and former Chairman of the Science and Technology Commission for National Defense Zhang Aiping. At the time of this writing, it is premature to do much more than speculate that the move symbolized the byzantine playing out of Chinese power shifts and Beijing's interest in leaving itself some distance and room for maneuver in the current Sino-Soviet discussions.

Still, within a week of Brezhnev's passing, as if to underscore Soviet good faith, Viktor G. Afanasyev, *Pravda* editor and Soviet Communist Party Central Committee member, told a group of Japanese journalists that if the Sino-Soviet discussions went well, "It is possible that the two sides might promise each other a reduction of military forces in border areas." Afanasyev's comments were later pointedly confirmed. Although the reiteration of this Soviet negotiating position takes on added significance in the context of possibly improving Sino-Soviet relations, the Soviet position is in itself not new.³ Further, the Soviet hints that their leadership change had brought a

review of their position on Afghanistan and Vietnam suggested that China's conditions for more normalized relations (as well as intense U.S. concerns on those two issues) were being addressed directly by the Soviets.

Carefully orchestrated, current events can influence—perhaps disproportionately—current perceptions about the world, and thereby the broad outlines of current policy around the world.

NATIONAL PERCEPTIONS

It is said Americans are obsessed with the possibility of Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Will Sino-Soviet rapprochement dramatically shift the world balance of power? Are Sino-American relations foundering on mismanagement, misperception, or diplomatic mishap? Will the United States be caught flat-footed, again, by changing Sino-Soviet configurations?

As a label for inquiry into national perceptions and decision making, the term "strategic culture" is coming into its own. Beyond analysis of societal attitudes toward the deployment of nuclear weapons, a consideration of strategic culture, particularly regarding American policy toward China and the Soviet Union, touches American strategic, emotional, and political nerves.

First, from the time Richard Nixon first visited China, the United States has sought strategic refuge in the hope of cooperation with China as a counterweight to the Soviet challenge. Our window to China and our perceived window of vulnerability vis-à-vis the Soviet Union seem to open and close in counterpoint time. Our concern for strategic safety in a world menaced by a Soviet superpower, which has attained strategic parity and global power projection capabilities, is heightened by the fear that a reversal of Sino-Soviet hostility would confront the United States by reconciled if not allied communist giants. Both the Soviets and the Chinese are well aware of the apprehension with which Washington would view such a process.

Second, our desire for amiable, long-term

relations with the P.R.C. derives from an American fascination with, and sense of mission toward, China. The debate continues as to whether Americans are more sentimental imperialists or imperial sentimentalists.⁴ In either case, the historical U.S. love/spurned-love relationship with China makes any serious sign of Sino-Soviet rapprochement a harbinger of guilt-laden soul-searching and recrimination over "Who lost China?"

But China has never been, at any time, a helpless pawn for any other country to win or lose, nor a card to be played by external powers. This admission comes hard for some in the United States. Warning fingers are already being pointed that should China be "lost" to the strategic advantage of the Soviets, the Reagan administration will be held responsible. The burdens of proof and culpability should not fall on only one side. Reality argues that a strategically steady and culturally sensitive American policy toward China is a necessary but insufficient determinant of Sino-American relations. Along with its size, cultural heritage, and national pride, China enjoys the responsibility of determining its own foreign policy.

Third, born of the particular U.S. sensitivity that shifts in Sino-Soviet relations not go unnoticed, any indication of such changes is always news in the United States. It is as though, having been slow to recognize the existence of Sino-Soviet tensions in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the United States is determined not to be caught unaware again. Somehow the prize is greater the second time around; the only thing worse than not recognizing the spat between the Soviets and the Chinese the first time is to have them find each other again.

BROAD OUTLINES

Current dynamics in the P.R.C. and the Soviet Union suggest four themes concerning recent Sino-Soviet developments.

First, the anti-Deng hardliners within the Chinese military and the moderates struggling for power in the Soviet succession may

seem to have little in common, but the effect of the current Sino-Soviet discussions is, on balance, to appease (and thereby somewhat to weaken) the domestic position of Chinese hardliners while strengthening the domestic position of the Soviet moderates. Reopened avenues of accommodation and discussion can serve to placate the fears of the military establishments in both countries, and hence represent a political method to address their concerns. At the same time, the momentum of such political maneuvering cannot help but ultimately to strengthen the control of the party apparatchik in both countries over domestic and international matters. In Mao's dictum, the "party controls the gun," and the leaders of the communist parties in both countries are understandably eager to use the mutual relations of their countries to more firmly consolidate their domestic political positions, in the immediate periods of succession and beyond.

Second, the death of Leonid Brezhnev on November 10 and his replacement the following day by former KGB head Yuri Andropov as general secretary have focused attention on leadership successions, and thereby have acted as catalysts in making more fluid Sino-Soviet relations that were previously rather rigid. New names and new faces are always a good excuse for exploring the possibilities of new relations. By upping the political stakes to be won in the changing Sino-Soviet relationship, the American interest in improving Soviet-American relations in light of the Soviet leadership change also adds to the atmosphere that new possibilities may pertain.

These shifts will make China wary of trying to influence the Soviet succession process, lest a tolerant China policy inadvertently become identified with an effete Soviet faction. Likewise, the emphasis on the Soviet succession has overshadowed an equally important, but less dramatic leadership succession: the ongoing Chinese succession. Informal opinion polls among young people in the P.R.C. are said to indicate a majority belief that a radical leadership, perhaps not dis-

similar to that of the "Gang of Four," is a distinct possibility in their lifetimes. A Soviet-trained 1950s generation coming to power in China is a possibility no doubt being hoped for by the Soviet Union.

Third, more normal state-to-state relations between the P.R.C. and the U.S.S.R. can increase the opportunities for negotiation between themselves, and the bargaining power of both vis-à-vis the United States. Many U.S. analysts emphasize that a Chinese move away from the United States is not necessarily a move toward the Soviet Union; in this view, China is seeking to strengthen its position in the Third World. While influence in the Third World may be China's strategy for the long term, a more equidistant position between the superpowers offers China advantages in the short term as well.

The primary advantages to the Soviets of more normal Sino-Soviet relations are twofold. Better Sino-Soviet relations hold an intrinsic appeal to the Soviet Union, particularly in view of the constellation of differences, some still bitter, which together constitute the Sino-Soviet schism. Further, improved Sino-Soviet relations may also have a salutary effect on Soviet foreign relations in general by enhancing the image of the Soviet Union as a power eager to find peace through negotiation. For example, coming through Japanese sources, reiterations of Soviet willingness to consider pulling troops back from the Sino-Soviet border are intended to influence Japanese opinion favorably. Such rumors are also aimed as much toward the March 1983 West German elections as toward showing good faith toward China.

Fourth, some accommodation between the Soviet Union and China is not only in their interests (thereby increasing its probability), but also in the interest of the United States and the rest of the world. To the extent limited Sino-Soviet detente defuses tensions and thereby helps to stabilize the international situation, it could increase the prospects for long-term peace. The challenge for the

United States is thus twofold: to guarantee that our vital interests are not compromised, while not playing into the hands of either the Soviets or Chinese by overreacting if and when some of the tensions and strains in Sino-Soviet relations begin to ease.

For the array of reasons discussed at greater length below, Sino-Soviet relations can be expected to improve gradually, although only toward what are generally considered normal relations. The diplomatic, trade, cultural exchanges, and other avenues for communication that characterize normal relations between states can be expected to develop across a spectrum of Sino-Soviet interests. For example, a trade agreement covering increased cooperation for mutual benefit was signed in November 1982 between Chinese commerce representatives from Heilongjiang and representatives from

both Southwest and Southeast Asia, even in the highly unlikely event that some kind of Sino-Soviet tactical accommodation emerges.

SINO-SOVIET-AMERICAN TRIANGLE

Despite frequent reference to the strategic triangle, analyses of American foreign policy are sometimes determined as though no such Sino-Soviet-American triangle exists. There are several explanations for this tendency. As symbolized by Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision to win the war in Europe before turning to the Pacific one, where America's war had actually begun, America's primary orientation has long been Atlantic. Bureaucratically, American foreign policy in recent years has been driven by those whose experiences and concerns make proper relations with the Soviet Union a first priority. The

"Warning fingers are already being pointed that should China be 'lost' to the strategic advantage of the Soviets, the Reagan administration will be held responsible."

the Association for Soviet Foreign Trade. Fully normalized Sino-Soviet party ties (as distinct from renewed limited party-to-party communications) would constitute a *démarche* for both the P.R.C. and U.S.S.R.—and possible cause for serious U.S. concern.

At the same time, enduring areas of Sino-Soviet competition and difference appear to make any kind of renewed Sino-Soviet entente or alliance as remote a possibility as any formal Sino-American one. If military cooperation develops between China and the United States, it will be on the model of France, not of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Still, Sino-Soviet competition for influence in Asia and China's concern that it not be encircled by a Soviet south-forward strategy argue for sustained Chinese pressure on the Soviets in

constant calls not to play a China card are a little ironic in this light, since U.S. strategy has tended to be singleminded, and that singleness of purpose has made policy toward China more a perceived means to a greater strategic end than an end in itself. In any case, Sino-American relations, Soviet-American relations, or Sino-Soviet relations are too often considered in isolation, as though these bilateral relationships could somehow be fundamentally understood or successfully conducted outside their larger global context.

At the same time, Sino-Soviet-American relations are wrongly singled out from other triangular relationships which influence and are influenced by them, and from which they should not be detached. These other triangular relationships include the Sino-American-

Taiwan triangle and the unlikely but frequently discussed Sino-Soviet-Taiwan triangle; the Sino-Soviet-Vietnamese triangle; the Sino-Soviet-Third World triangle; and the Sino-Soviet triangles with Europe and Japan. The impact of current Sino-Soviet dynamics on these various triangles is also worth exploring in turn.

National Goals and Domestic Options

To place current Sino-Soviet relations in dynamic context requires consideration of the interplay between the national policy goals of both countries, their domestic policy options for achieving those goals, and their foreign policy options.

In the coming years, China must strengthen its relatively backward and weak position in the face of two major challenges. First, there is the threat to China's national security posed by its somewhat paranoid neighbor to the north, the Soviet Union, and the Soviet ally to the south, Vietnam. To a lesser extent, China also views India with suspicion. However, at present, only the Soviet Union and Vietnam directly threaten China's national security, a threat made more credible coming from neighboring land powers with which China clashed in 1969 and 1979, respectively. In contrast, although some U.S. contingency plans are said to include targeting for 100 Chinese sites, the United States poses an essentially negligible military threat to China, particularly in terms of invading ground troops.

Second, there is the more fundamental challenge: China must strengthen its society and its national capabilities without compromising either its economic construction or socialist revolution. This is China's most pressing current imperative. From 1978 at the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress, economic construction, as championed by Deng Xiaoping over the earlier "revolutionary" policies of the Gang of Four and Hua Guofeng, has been taken as the "key link."⁵ Increasingly, however, the prestige of the Deng regime, and presumably the brightness of its future, depends on how successfully economic construction is actually carried

out. China is assuming that agricultural and industrial strength will contribute to military strength; in this sense the objective exigencies of the first of China's challenges will gradually diminish with the solution to the second. Also, because pursuit of a direct solution to the first challenge could only result in Sisyphean frustration, China has focused its attention on socialist construction.

In some important ways, guaranteeing China's security while continuing its revolution and economic construction appear mutually exclusive; neither modern weapons nor increased agricultural output come free, and both appear to come at the expense of the other. During the coming years, China will attempt to resolve this apparent dilemma by pursuing three conditions:

- To establish, both domestically and internationally, a period of peace and stability sufficiently long for successful continuity of domestic construction.
- To develop the political and military means necessary to make the capacity to fight a People's War in modern conditions a viable deterrent to external aggression and a useful domestic doctrine for organizing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as a "regular, modern, and powerful revolutionary armed force."
- To facilitate (and regulate) the transfers of the technology, capital, and skills from the West that are needed for modernization.

These three objectives are directly related. The West's perception of "parallel strategic concerns" with China (and the resultant willingness to offer China appropriate military assistance) could help China underwrite its own national security, thus preserving a period of peace and potential stability while the technology, capital, and skills necessary for construction are secured from the West. In turn the West will provide these resources more readily and on better terms as China is able to maintain its allure as an active and indispensable part of an anti-Soviet coalition. China knows the capital and technology it needs—at least in the quantities required—

are to be found in the West, not the Soviet Union.

Thus, economic modernization is not Deng's (nor China's) sole task. While the P.R.C.'s plans to modernize agriculture, industry, science and technology, and the military are now widely known in the West as the "Four Modernizations," China's goals entail more than simply the struggles of a developing country to catch up. China's plans are much more comprehensive in scope. In the words of the Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, China must become a "modern and powerful socialist country, which is prosperous, highly democratic and culturally advanced." This is one of the clearest formulations to date of China's primary policy objectives.

Efforts to balance ongoing socialist revolution and economic construction show the concern of China's policymakers with the potential effects of industrialization and modernization on their country. Accordingly, they are trying to walk the tightrope of making China powerful and modern without compromising its socialist, democratic, or cultural ideals. "China's revolution and national construction are not and cannot be carried on in isolation from the rest of the world," authoritative party directives state. Indeed, "it is always necessary for us to try to win foreign aid, and in particular, to learn all that is advanced and beneficial from other countries."⁵

At the same time, these directives also insist that China must maintain "our own national dignity and confidence and there must be no slavishness or submissiveness in any form in dealing with big, powerful or rich countries."⁷ China places its hope for providing both rapid growth and long-term societal stability in the four fundamental principles, namely, upholding the socialist road, the people's democratic dictatorship (i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat), the leadership of the Communist party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought (the product of the integration of the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution).

The controversy still inherent in these issues lies at the heart of the ongoing Chinese succession in the post-Mao era. The Chinese succession has involved at least a two-stepped process. The removal of the Gang of Four in October 1976 constituted a first step. The gradual removal of Hua Guofeng and those associated with Maoist ideology from the December 1978 Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress through the September 1982 12th Party Congress has been a longer and more complicated second step. For example, at the 12th Party Congress, Hua Guofeng was removed from the Chinese Politburo and demoted to a junior position among the vice ministers. The ousting of Hua and the November 1982 replacements of Foreign Ministers Huang Hua and Defense Minister Geng Biao symbolize the political struggle to determine and implement the correct policy line for a Chinese regime intent on producing economic growth without endangering China's national security.

* * * *

The appointment of Andropov is only the tip of an iceberg of changes in Soviet succession. Andropov's record-time appointment to the Soviet Presidium evidences his skill in consolidating his political power base. This may spell trouble in the form of possible purges of those who took power over the past 18 years solely because of Brezhnev's patronage. Although the publicly unanimous appointment of Andropov is thought to mask the power struggles within the Kremlin, particularly the challenge by Konstantin Chernenko and his supporters, Andropov's power to determine policy could increase very dramatically if he can fill the now-vacant Politburo positions with those sympathetic to his approach.

Andropov's vigorous ascendance stands in contrast to the lack of decisive direction that marked Brezhnev's twilight years. Such indecision and inertia cannot be tolerated by the Soviet leadership in the face of the converging economic, demographic, and other domestic challenges in the months and years to come. With Andropov already 68 and not in perfect health and with the average age of

the present Soviet Politburo around 70, it is also only a matter of time before a younger Soviet successor generation rises to power.

But certain Soviet goals are unlikely to change despite the changes in leadership. The Soviet Union faces severe economic imperatives at home, with converging difficulties including declining levels of growth to between 1 and 3 percent; tough choices between allocations to the military, consumer, and investment sectors; and demographic shifts that will make it increasingly difficult to maintain growth in both the civilian and military sectors and that suggest increasing numbers of non-Slavs and a concomitant rise of racial tensions in the Soviet army and in Soviet society in general. Andropov has indicated these domestic concerns are his first priority.

However, while focusing on such domestic imperatives as worker productivity, Andropov has also indicated that he will continue Brezhnev's basic foreign policy direction, a no-lose situation in some ways with regard to China. As Harvard historian Adam Ulam notes, an increasingly powerful, hostile, and communist China on its border poses a fundamental, perhaps ultimately intractable, problem for the Soviet Union. Ulam makes the point that the Soviet Union would likely prefer bitter and hostile relations with a weak and backward China to warm and friendly relations with an industrially advanced and militarily powerful China.

Deep-seated psychological distrust and long-term racial and ethnic antagonisms exacerbate already significant tensions over national security competition. Columbia University political scientist Seweryn Bialer puts it bluntly: "When it comes to the Chinese his [the Soviet citizen's] deepest feelings are of unconcealed fear, distrust, aversion, and even hatred."⁸ Nor, Bialer argues, is there much difference between the views of the Soviet leadership and political elites and the average Soviet citizen on the highly emotional issue of China. The Soviets appear to believe that tension with China can be channeled, but never completely dissipated. Soviet pleas to the West to help con-

tain China, whether on grounds of shared race, shared religion, or shared culture and civilization have been an undercurrent in diplomatic meetings from the time Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev is alleged to have warned that with a million more Chinese each year, the West needed to band together to stem the yellow tide. As Bismarck did in his time, the Soviets fear their country could be surrounded by a nightmare coalition: a unified Western Europe, a determined United States, and perhaps most threatening, a modern and powerful China strengthened by an anti-Soviet Japan.

Foreign Policy Options

More normalized relations promise benefits to both the Soviets and the Chinese: more flexibility in allocating scarce resources to consumer and investment sectors and an enlarged room for maneuver vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the United States.

For the Soviets, the prospects of diminished tensions with China are agreeable for several reasons. With one hand the Soviets can hold out the olive branch, offering recent Sino-Soviet discussions as evidence of their honest efforts to find peace through negotiation. On the other hand, a velvet glove covers a mailed fist: some of the approximately 53 Soviet divisions could be withdrawn from their present stations on the Sino-Soviet border and be redeployed in Europe. Further, to the extent that lessening Sino-Soviet tensions can be taken into account in the targeting and deployment of SS-20 missiles, the Soviets could limit or freeze SS-20 emplacement, while singing their own virtues to both West and East. To the Chinese, the Soviets can portray their peaceful intentions as evidence of good faith for improved Sino-Soviet relations, while to the Europeans, the Soviets can argue that fewer missiles are more conducive to peace. ("Would it not also be good for those who talk of Pershing and cruise missiles to follow such a peace-loving example?") Efforts to normalize Sino-Soviet relations could thus influence the overall atmosphere toward détente in Europe.

The Soviets have an incentive rooted in Chinese domestic politics for exploring rapprochement at the present time: the main opposition to Deng Xiaoping appears to come from Chinese Politburo members Li Xian-nian and Ye Jianying—in short from key factions within People's Liberation Army. The replacement of Geng Biao as defense minister and Deng's retaining the chairmanship of the party's military commission show the perceived need for ongoing attention in that area.

Indeed, it is to those disaffected by changes in the PLA and in its role that clandestine broadcasts of "Ba Yi" radio are aimed. Literally "Eight One" Radio signifying August 1 (the day the PLA was organized), "Ba Yi" broadcasts clearly enjoy Soviet sponsorship. They express dissatisfaction with the Deng regime's cutbacks in

aid and genuine Chinese domestic concern for how much and how rapidly Western technological, legal, financial, and administrative influences and their material manifestations can be imbibed. The webs of influence and the accompanying ties of trade, which were thought to be desirable by-products of detente toward the Soviet Union, are precisely what China—remembering an earlier age of "unequal treaties" and now determined to chart a course largely independent of external influences—wants at this time to eschew.

In terms of the strategic balance, the Chinese, like the Soviets, are watching to see if the Reagan defense and spending program represents a change in fact for U.S. policy, and at what level of commitment. The apparent ceiling of 6-8% of U.S. gross national product spent on defense in peacetime is seen

"A Soviet-trained 1950s generation coming to power in China is a possibility no doubt being hoped for by the Soviet Union."

military prestige and budget, with its policies toward Taiwan, and with China's perceived orientation to the West and to the United States in particular.

China has three major motivations for shifting toward a more middle course between the United States and the Soviet Union—domestic economic retrenchment and concern over Taiwan, desire to buttress national security, and a desire to foster its identification with and prestige within the Third World.

Some in China argue that their country has been compromised by accommodation and cooperation with the West. These concerns are manifest, first, with regard to Taiwan, where U.S. "interference" is still of concern, and, second, on the economic front, where there is both public Chinese disappointment in the levels and types of Western

by some Chinese analysts as insufficient to reverse the long-term Soviet eclipse of U.S. power, particularly in East Asia. Moreover, in deliberations marked by a distinctly Chinese approach and historical flavor, Chinese analysts are debating which between the United States and the Soviet Union is the ascending power, and which is the declining power. For the analysts who believe the United States to be the declining power, it only makes sense to limit China's exposure to possible military threats from the only country that poses them. Political accommodation with the Soviets (or efforts to find a political *modus vivendi*) is in this viewpoint the least expensive and perhaps most effective kind of national defense.

"The emergence of the Third World on the international arena after World War II," General Secretary Hu Yaobang reported at

the 12th National Congress of the Chinese Communist party, "is a primary event of our time." In his view, China "is still a developing country," which shares "a common destiny" with the Third World countries, which China recognizes "have vast territories, large populations, immense resources, and extensive markets."⁹ Hence, China's interest in the Third World is both short- and long-term.

However, the provision in the most recent Chinese constitution that independence be a permanent part of China's foreign policy can be seen to have three dimensions of meaning: it indicates China's alignment with the nonaligned Third World countries; it assures both two superpowers that China will not side entirely with one against the other; and it reiterates a patriotic principle befitting the national and cultural entity whose name still connotes the "Middle Kingdom."

SINO-AMERICAN-TAIWAN TRIANGLE

Taiwan plays an important role both in the P.R.C.'s search for the right road to combining economic construction and societal revolution with national security. From the perspective of the P.R.C., unification with Taiwan is necessary both to complete the Chinese revolution and to safeguard China's national security. The P.R.C. recognizes Taiwan's strategic value and would find it impossible to differentiate a perceived compromise of territorial integrity from one of national security. Also, Taiwan's industrial and economic infrastructures and its technical and managerial skills, like Hong Kong, may provide both a useful buffer with the rest of the world and needed impetus for economic construction.

There are two opposite but-not necessarily mutually exclusive views regarding the effect the Sino-American tête-à-tête over Taiwan has had on the Sino-Soviet configuration. One view argues that recalcitrance on the part of the United States over Taiwan remains a major stumbling block in Sino-American relations and a reason for China to consider better relations with the other

superpower. With "reunification of Taiwan with the Chinese motherland," one of its three priorities for the 1980s, the P.R.C. has steadfastly maintained that the question of Taiwan is strictly an internal matter, interference with which constitutes a violation of China's sovereignty and a serious affront to China's dignity. Further, it is possible that some of Beijing's hardliners, seeking to embarrass Deng politically, have been successful in making progress on the Taiwan question a domestic pressure point for Deng. No doubt Deng's group also argues internal pressure to gain leverage in discussions with Washington, always using any U.S. concessions on Taiwan to hold their opposition at bay.

The other view suggests that the P.R.C. is shifting away from the United States in part because Beijing has already achieved everything it can hope for regarding Taiwan in the near term. The heart of this line of argument is that since the 1972 Shanghai communiqué, whether deliberately or not and for a variety of reasons, U.S. policy toward Taiwan has been subtly shifting toward the position desired by the P.R.C.

In the 1972 Shanghai communiqué, the U.S. declared: "The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China."¹⁰ In the 1979 Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations, the United States government said it "recognizes the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China. Within this context," the 1979 communiqué continued, "the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan."

Efforts to affirm the principles agreed on by the two sides in the Shanghai communiqué led to the controversial interpretation in the 1979 document that "the government of the United States of America acknowledges the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China." What had before been the U.S. acknowledgement of all Chi-

nese on either side of the Taiwan Strait was collapsed into a single Chinese position. Nor did the January 1979 Department of State *Bulletin* note help clarify matters: "the Chinese text translated the word 'acknowledges' into *Cheng-jen* which, if retranslated into English, would mean 'recognizes.'"¹¹

The tendency toward "diplomacy by footnote" was carried a step further in the August 1982 U.S.-China Joint Communiqué. The link implied in the 1982 Joint Communiqué between the willingness of the United States to reduce arms sales to Taiwan and the pursuit by the P.R.C. of "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan remains tenuous. In trying to be all things to all countries, the 1982 Joint Communiqué leaves open the door for serious misunderstanding, particularly in the public mind.

The P.R.C. has stated its unwillingness to

ton by the P.R.C. to furnish data on past arms sales to Taiwan are logical if one grants the need to measure qualitative and quantitative levels of arms sales and their general reduction. However, the reported willingness of the U.S. State Department to comply with such requests, if actually carried out, could over time lead to a *de facto* asking of Beijing's permission before selling military goods to Taiwan (wishful disclaimers to such by U.S. government officials notwithstanding). Whatever the rhetoric, the precedence of state practice could make it increasingly difficult for the United States to maintain that certain kinds of involvement with Taiwan did not constitute interference in internal Chinese affairs. In this regard, other more positive U.S. actions toward Taiwan currently taking place must also be taken into account.

"...the Soviet Union and China are willing to work in conjunction to prevent Japan from ever becoming... a military power again."

renounce the use of force as an option in resolving the Taiwan question on grounds of principle: "The Chinese government reiterates that the question of Taiwan is China's internal affair." And, by successfully insisting that the "fundamental policy of striving for peaceful reunification of the Motherland" be framed within the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan of January 1, 1979 and the nine-point proposal of September 30, 1981, the P.R.C. has been able to resist any direct tie between its approach to Taiwan and the stated intent of the United States government "to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution."

While some in the United States argue the term "over a period of time to a final resolution" was deliberately left sufficiently vague as to be nonbinding, there are grounds for presuming otherwise. Requests to Washing-

Emphasis on "peaceful unification" is a red herring in two ways. First, it is too frequently asserted that "tensions at the Taiwan strait are at an all-time low." Tensions can be increased at a moment's notice. Troops can be redeployed; airfields can be built or filled with planes; indeed, as has in the past, offshore shelling can be stepped up, with various lessons for various parties.

Second, the P.R.C. can hardly be expected, whether because of the principles of sovereignty or because of the realities of power politics, to surrender the potentially potent psychological weapon that refusal to preclude nonpeaceful means to reunification might hold. At the same time, it is misleading to think that the P.R.C. would choose a violent military solution to the Taiwan question as a first preference. The Chinese, who had Hsun Tzu long before the West had Clausewitz, know well that military force is useful

only if it helps achieve political ends. A continuation of the civil war by military means would be anathema to Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait.

Military victory would be something of a Pyrrhic victory for the P.R.C. More desirable would be a political accommodation that leaves the industrial and economic infrastructure of Taiwan intact, facilitates the integration of Taiwan with the rest of China, and enhances the perception of a unified and peaceful China. In this light, Chinese negotiations regarding the return of Hong Kong from Great Britain provide a limited precedent for how the vehicle of the special economic and administrative zones may also apply in the case of Taiwan.

In politics, agreements to disagree are often necessary. But there is a subtle but important difference between an agreement to disagree and an ambiguously worded disagreement over what was agreed. While the experts may full well recognize carefully distinguished shades of meaning, the general public may not—and on questions of Taiwan, public opinion (or lack thereof) matters a great deal. In this sense, what the Taiwan Relations Act will mean in practice may well come to depend, perhaps to a large degree, on the interpretation of American popular opinion and Chinese elite sentiment.

Deliberately or not, various P.R.C. positions toward the Soviet Union have also served to isolate Taiwan and to undercut its political and military position in three ways. First, the frequent attention paid to the population of the P.R.C.—over one billion people, constantly referred to as a quarter of the earth's population—suggests a general political importance and, intentionally or not, makes the population of Taiwan—more than 18 million—pale in comparison. The comparison between one billion and less than 20 million makes a choice, if it comes to one or the other, appear deceptively simple. Who wouldn't choose the 98 percent? American susceptibility to the logic of majority consensus makes one wonder how so many people could be that wrong.

Second, underlying the Sino-American rapprochement from 1969-1971 and highlighted in the 1972 Shanghai communiqué is the perceived need of the United States for a P.R.C. counterweight to the Soviet Union—hence the U.S. emphasis on “parallel strategic concerns” between the P.R.C. and the United States. However, whereas the P.R.C. is no longer calling for a “united front against hegemonism,” the conventional wisdom in the United States still places high priority on strategic cooperation with China. Particularly when focused vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, Washington's heightened sense of the P.R.C.'s strategic value has also been accompanied by a diminished perception of Taiwan's strategic value. Economies of scale also make a choice between Taiwan as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” and the P.R.C. as a “strategic counterweight” to the Soviet Union appear more straightforward than they may actually be.

Third, while the P.R.C.'s declaratory policy of no-first use of nuclear weapons has usually been interpreted as a P.R.C. effort to take the moral high ground in the face of Soviet military superiority, such a policy may have helped preclude the effective development of a Taiwan nuclear deterrent. In the event of military conflict between the P.R.C. and Taiwan, the nuclear option appears to be Taiwan's most cost effective way of forestalling what most analysts feel would be a debilitating war of attrition.

However, statements by Taiwan Premier Sun Yun-hsuan and President Chiang Ching-kuo have indicated that while Taiwan could develop a nuclear capability at will, it will not do so. Nevertheless, given that the missiles Taiwan has developed to defend itself have the capability to strike cities or military installations in the P.R.C., the P.R.C. may do well to defuse any “Masada option” in Taiwan. Such an option suggests Taiwan's willingness to threaten massive retaliation to deter perceived aggression. The P.R.C.'s nuclear no-first use doctrine will not preclude Taiwan's taking up nuclear arms, but it could make any use of them

against the P.R.C., even in perceived cases of self-defense, a seemingly unconscionable crime against the Chinese people.

SINO-SOVIET-TAIWAN TRIANGLE

A Sino-Soviet-Taiwan triangle also periodically receives attention. In this scenario, Taiwan, driven to desperation for survival, becomes susceptible to increasing Soviet overtures. *A la* the Soviet-Vietnamese model, Soviet-Taiwan negotiations would be presumed to revolve around Taiwan's exchanging access to its excellent harbors at Keelung, Taichung, or Kaohsiung for Soviet military support against potential aggression. Soviet-Taiwan ties could also materialize in other ways: militarily, in the form of arms sales, joint military coordination, or training and advisory functions; nonmilitarily, in the form of visits, both official and unofficial, personnel exchanges, trade or aid programs, or cultural exchanges.¹² (The formula for Soviet-Taiwan relations would not be in terms of Soviet military support against aggression from "third countries" unless Taiwan were making a volte-face and declaring independence.)

Despite the appearance of the Taiwan flag in several Soviet publications from 1965-1967, the Soviet news agency Tass reference to Taiwan as a country in 1970, the fanfare given to the 1978 visit to Taiwan of KGB operative Victor Louis and the seemingly logical advantages suggested by a Soviet-Taiwan connection, the Taiwan Soviet card is hardly credible for several reasons.

It is highly uncertain that a leader in Taiwan could argue for forming a Churchillian pact with the devil, even in the name of self-preservation. Taiwan would lose the ideological *raison d'être* with which it has justified its regime if it permitted itself to be drawn into the embrace of the Soviet bear. The P.R.C. has also made clear that a Soviet-Taiwan alignment would provoke a strong response; nothing would galvanize mutual U.S.-P.R.C. resolve faster than hints at Soviet-Taiwan accommodation. As dis-

comforting as a P.R.C. envelopment of an unwilling Taiwan would be to Japan, Korea, and the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a Soviet presence in Taiwan would be even less welcome.

And perhaps in the interest of more harmonious relations with the P.R.C., the Soviet Union has emphasized a hands-off position toward Taiwan. In his March 1982 speech at Tashkent, Brezhnev stated, "We have never supported and we do not now support in any form the so-called concept of two Chinas and have fully recognized and continue to support the P.R.C.'s sovereignty over Taiwan island." Brezhnev's comments on Taiwan were broadcast in Mandarin by Moscow Radio Peace and Progress to the P.R.C. on the same day. The Soviet position serves to minimize friction with the P.R.C. over Taiwan, while maximizing the attention paid to alleged deficiencies in U.S. policy toward Taiwan.

Perhaps most significantly, Taiwan itself recognizes that any relationship with a very large and militarily powerful Soviet Union could lead only to uncomfortably inequitable and unbalanced relations. The lessons Chiang Kai-Shek learned in Russia should be evidence enough that the Soviets would not treat a Taiwan ally any better than a Vietnam one.

SINO-SOVIET-VIETNAM TRIANGLE

The possibilities of improved Sino-Soviet relations cannot bode well for Vietnam.

An option the Soviet Union retains is the opportunity to play Vietnam and China against each other. Vietnam's hegemonial aspirations for an Indochina Federation (to include Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea) most directly threaten the ASEAN countries. Indeed, the dangers, direct and through insurgent groups, that Vietnam poses for the region are recognized in the recent U.S. agreement to augment military assistance to Thailand.

The strategic dimension of Vietnam's am-

bitions also worry both the P.R.C. and the United States, the former because of the possibility of a strong and hostile Soviet ally on their border, the latter because the continuing Soviet use of facilities at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang could give 2,000 miles of forward deployment to an already increasingly large and powerful Soviet Pacific fleet. Soviet power projection into the Indian Ocean and to the Persian Gulf would be greatly improved by such an arrangement.

The Vietnamese-Soviet relationship appears solely to be a tryst of inconvenience. Beyond the rhetorical facade of fraternal communist relations, what the Soviet Union and Vietnam have in common is their distance from each other (as apparently recognized in some of their after-dinner toasts) and a mutual antagonism toward a shared neighbor. Isolated from the world community, Vietnam needs Soviet economic support for its war-torn society; hence, Vietnam exchanges Soviet visiting privileges for Soviet aid in a very calculated fashion. Hoping to threaten China with a possible second front should conflict arise, and interested in facilities for its growing Pacific fleet, the Soviet Union signed the 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Vietnam to enlarge its potential scope of action. However, as has been suggested by the hints of Soviet willingness to reduce economic aid to Vietnam as a sign of good faith in the Sino-Soviet discussions, the Soviet Union can play both Vietnam and China for concessions that benefit itself.

Because relations with China are the primary Soviet concern, three considerations come into the play for the Soviets regarding Vietnam: the high cost of aid to Vietnam by a Soviet government already strapped for funds; the limited payoffs by a Vietnamese government unwilling to surrender much control to the Soviets, particularly one that did not fight a "war of liberation" for the privilege of granting the Soviet Union military access to the Vietnamese homeland; and the caution of the Soviet Union that the liability incurred by alliance with Vietnam be minimized. (The Vietnamese tail must not

wag the Soviet dog, as the Sino-Vietnamese clashes in February 1979 threatened to do.)

The Soviet Union may be willing to make concessions at the expense of a recalcitrant Vietnamese ally to which no great feeling is attached. China would welcome both a further isolation of Vietnam and a reduction of its own antagonism with the Soviet Union, which has been one of Vietnam's entrées to Moscow. In any case, Sino-Vietnamese hostility can be expected to continue, though the manifestations thereof will depend in large measure on the East Asian power balance at the time.

SINO-SOVIET-THIRD WORLD TRIANGLE

Though the tendency in the short term is to focus on the impact of changing Sino-Soviet relations on the United States, the greatest arena of potential impact in the longer term is in the Third World. When it was suggested to Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping that so long as China and the United States were friends no third country would dare threaten the peace of the world, he quickly replied that not only the friendship of the United States was needed, but also the friendship of Europe, Japan, and the whole Third World. This answer properly avoided any appearance of great-power collusion, but more importantly left open China's options with the "second world" (Europe and Japan) as well as the Third World.

It is persuasively argued that the Third World is only a loose and shifting political coalition composed of heterogeneous countries with diverse and often competing interests. Nevertheless it is worth recalling three factors that give the Third World countries common identity and common cause: their common colonial experiences, their common struggles for freedom, and their common, resented low standards of living.¹³ In claiming these experiences, struggles, and resentments, China asserts its enduring identity with the Third World. Indeed, China's ongoing efforts to solve problems of food, population, and rapid economic development

through centralized planning and government, together with its size and cultural prestige, will continue to give China influence in the Third World.

In contrast, in many ways, the Soviets are their own worst enemies in these regions. Unconscious (perhaps) Russian feelings of racial superiority and arrogance (many Third World nationals have by now had their own bad experiences in Moscow), diminishing Soviet ability to subsidize foreign governments, and the Soviet proclivity to impose unworkable political structures or economic development models on Third World countries—all are eroding the myth of the Soviet Union as a Third World leader.

Enter China (though with competition in the past from India). By distancing itself somewhat from the United States, China can enhance its prestige, both as a country courted by the superpowers and as a bona fide Third World country. Should China so choose, it could likely ideologically and pragmatically outcompete the Soviet Union, not in terms of financial assistance but rather in terms of relevant historical development experience. In the long term, China is seeking a preponderance of influence in, and perhaps leadership of, the Third World; it is only a matter of time before their human and natural resources will make these countries central international political actors.

Those who point to the realities of power argue that any Third World strength is still decades away. But China, while remaining sensitive to the exigencies of short-term political necessity, is building bridges for the future. It is worth remembering that within a single lifetime, an observer in Japan could, as a child, see Commodore Perry's "black ships" steaming mysteriously against the wind in Edo harbor; then could, as an adult, see Japan's first economic miracle bring military power strong enough to conquer Asia but fragile enough to be susceptible to slow strangulation by economic embargo; and then could, in his twilight years, see MacArthur sign the armistice aboard the U.S.S. *Missouri* in the same Edo harbor, now called Tokyo Bay. Japan is admittedly a

special case of growth, but its example serves notice that the configurations of power today will not necessarily hold sway tomorrow.

SINO-SOVIET TRIANGLES WITH JAPAN AND EUROPE

Any change in the Sino-Soviet relationship has potential ramifications for two other major international triangles, those with Japan and with Europe.

The firm victory of Yasuhiro Nakasone as Japan's prime minister and his concern for close ties with the United States as a "base of Japanese foreign policy" suggest that changes in Soviet-Japanese relations are unlikely to come from the top. The causes for the dogged inflexibility of Soviet Japanese policy remain a mystery (if a welcome one for most Western observers). The northern territories issue is normally cited as the major stumbling block toward more normal Soviet-Japanese relations, but other factors, some military and some not logically explainable, hold sway as well.

Even without a Soviet *démarche* on Japan, it is possible that limited Sino-Soviet accommodation will provide Japan (which China persuaded to sign the 1979 Sino-Japanese peace and friendship treaty with its "anti-hegemony" clause) more room for maneuver vis-à-vis the Soviets. In this way, the influence of those in Japan who favor a more equidistant policy, whether for diplomatic or business reasons, may increase.

In an East Asian context, the Soviets may attempt to use changing Sino-Soviet relations in three ways. First, to the extent a diminution of Sino-Soviet tensions permits the Soviets to freeze or reduce (even if only symbolically) their military forces in East Asia, the Soviets may try to incorporate those efforts into the "peace offensive" aimed at those who favor neutralism in Japan. Second, although the proposed downplaying in Japanese textbooks of Japanese atrocities in the Second World War did not spark Soviet outrage as it did throughout Asia, the Soviet Union and China are willing to work

in conjunction to prevent Japan from ever becoming, for whatever reason, a military power again. Third, the Soviet Union may try to use its improving relations with China as an East Asian precedent for improving relations with Japan.

While the Europeans were interested in the possibility of selling military hardware to China, they have also become aware that political factors, lack of hard currency, and limited Chinese ability to absorb Western technology all constrain what China will buy. A general European sense is that China has had good opportunities to buy and has not bought. Some suggest that the West's willingness to sell arms was the primary political point China wanted to make—both with the West and with the Soviet Union.

A curious point bears examination. It is apparently more an American than a European conventional wisdom that at least a modicum of Sino-Soviet rivalry is to be applauded for tying down the 50 to 53 Soviet divisions on the Sino-Soviet border. The converse, of course, is that an improvement of Sino-Soviet relations could release Soviet troops for redeployment in the European theater. There are several explanations for the apparent lack of concern among some Europeans, one being the perception that the military balance has already tipped in favor of the Soviet Union in Europe. Bringing additional Soviet divisions from the Sino-Soviet border would not greatly change either the political or military situation in Europe, except in the highly unlikely event that the Soviets were contemplating actual military engagement.

This is not to say the Europeans, particularly certain prominent members of European military establishments, do not value the potential utility of China as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. Rather, many Europeans also understand the Chinese desire to have a European counterweight to the Soviet threat. In this view, the Chinese diplomatic forays into Romania during the time of Hua Guofeng and their window shopping for arms in Western Europe served to bring

China to the attention of the Europeans and the Europeans to the attention of the Soviets.

Some permanent Soviet divisions on the Sino-Soviet border are also fundamental to Soviet strategy in Asia, particularly given the Soviet fear of Japanese rearmament. If stretched thinly over 4,100 miles of border, even 53 Soviet divisions with their five hundred thousand to one million men look less imposing. Significant in the longer term is the Soviet interest in strengthening its European and Asian links. Now under construction are two symbols for a country that perceives itself as both a European and Asian power: the Baikal-Amur railroad (BAM) and the trans-Siberian pipeline. The Siberian gas pipeline holds out the possibility of gaining needed hard currency for the Soviets (whether or not one accepts the figure of U.S. \$10 billion in 1990 dollars). It may also energize the domestic system across the Soviet Union, and possibly build a European dependence on Soviet energy sources. Reminiscent of the nineteenth century rail lines, the pipeline also symbolizes a Soviet desire to weld its east and west together with bands of steel.

Further, whatever tactical shifts in troop position undertaken for immediate political expediencies, the Soviet troops along the border would be difficult to move, and even more difficult to disband. Indeed, the argument that it costs the Soviet Union three times as much to place a division on the Sino-Soviet border as in Europe reflects largely initial emplacement expenses, which once its barracks and support facilities are installed, would then be costly to move or to abandon.

THE ULTIMATE TRIANGLE

As in the United States, foreign policy concerns occupy very little of the everyday attention of the average Soviet or Chinese citizen, and on balance with domestic political challenges, a limited amount of the attention of their respective elites as well. Barring the outbreak of war, even shifts in

what appears to be the major strategic triangle of international politics must be viewed in the perspective of the daily lives of millions and hundreds of millions of people whose concerns are driven by issues much more immediate. Herein lies the real Bermuda triangle of international politics.

TWO

NOTES

1. The events in this period are covered by a variety of printed media. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), PRC International Affairs (Soviet Union), November 8, 1982 p. C1.
2. *Washington Post*, November 17, 1982.
3. *New York Times*, November 18, 1982.
4. See James C. Thompson, Jr., Peter W. Stanley, and John C. Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists: The American Experience in East Asia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).
5. "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," text in *Beijing Review*, no. 27, July 6, 1981, p. 26.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Seweryn Bialer, "The Soviet Perspective," *Sino-Soviet Conflict: The Seventies and Beyond*, Herbert G. Ellison, ed., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 39.
9. Hu Yaobang, "Create a New Situation in all Fields of Socialist Modernization," *Report to the Twelfth National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, September 1, 1982, (PRC: Foreign Languages Press, 1982), pp. 61-62.
10. See Text of Joint Communiqué Issued at Shanghai, February 27, 1972; Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, January 1, 1979; and U.S.-China Joint Communiqué, August 17, 1982.
11. Department of State Bulletin 79, no. 2022 (January 1979), p. 25.
12. See John W. Garver, "Taiwan's Russian Option: Image and Reality," *Asian Survey*, July 1978, and "Taiwan's Options," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, May/June, 1979.
13. B.V.A. Roling, *International Law in an Expanded World* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1960), p. 74.

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