

CONTENTIONS IN SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS 1959-1973

James C. Chukwu

Department of History and International Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: jimco4real@gmail.com

Abstract

China and Russia are both important players in the multipolar global order. Both countries dominate the soil across Europe and Asia. Russia is the world's largest manufacturer of oil and gas and China is the world's largest importer of energy and the fastest growing economy, a fact that contributes to the prospects that Russia and China could be in the same level. The position of the USA, as the only world's superpower, depends directly on the success or failure of Sino-Soviet relations. Given the nature of their relationship, this work examines the factors at play in among them in the face of growing Cold War in the world. Several factors account for the contentions in the Sino-Soviet relations 1959-1973. These inter-alia include discontents of de-Stalinization, conflicting national interests and border crisis. The paper also highlights the historical evolution of Sino-Soviet relations. The paper concluded by investigating the background relationships of the two states and revealed that antipathy existed, but not to a degree strong enough to cause such an open confrontation between the two countries. The method adopted in the study combines both descriptive and historical narrative. Qualitative research methodology was used in the re-interpretation and analysis of verifiable information collected from different sources. The approach was interdisciplinary and presentation of findings was both chronological and thematic. An analysis of the national interests of the Soviet Union and China showed a divergence of very fundamental goals, goals deeply rooted in the national interests of the two states. This divergence had arisen after the formation of the alliance and was not compatible a decade later with the demands of cooperation which the alliance prescribed. Hence, a clash of interests erupted into a dispute having immense ramification.

Keywords: Contentions, Sino-Soviet, relations, 1959-1973

Introduction

In October 1917, Bolshevik revolutionaries seized power in Russia and began transforming it into a socialist nation. The Soviet Union, as Russia was later remained became a global superpower a model and mentor for socialist movements everywhere. The Soviet Union also influenced the development of 20th century China, supporting both the Gnomindang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Mao Zedong had conflicted views about the Soviet Union. As the world's largest and oldest socialist state and a powerful neighbour to China, Mao understood the importance of the Soviet Union and the value of maintaining ties with Moscow. But Mao felt undervalued and disregarded by Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union dictatorial leader, while developments in the 1960's placed further strain on Sino-Soviet relations. What followed was the Sino-Soviet split, a breakdown in cooperation and diplomatic relations that almost produced a war between China and the Soviet Union¹.

The prestige acquired by the United States and Union of Soviet Socialist Republic during World War II is certainly not in doubt; however the unexpected expansion of the Cold War in Asia after 1949 surprised both sides. World War II weakened the nationalist government in China but, the Chinese people had decided to give their trusts to the communists that would have been the reason for the victory of Mao Zedong in 1949 It is not surprising that during World War II the US was inclined to the Chinese nationalists².

The Chiang Kai-Shek (31st October, 1887 – 5th April, 1975), was a Chinese Nationalist politician, revolutionary and military leader who served as the leader of the Republic of China between 1928 and 1975, first in Mainland China until 1949 and then in Taiwan until his death) as recognised internationally as the legitimate representative of China and even the Soviet Union had recognised its legitimacy. Relations became cold, after the US began to think that Moscow could expand its influence over China when Mao and his followers won the Chinese

Civil War. It should be noted that Washington encouraged the strengthening of the relations between the USSR and China, however the evolution of the relations between the two countries at that time heavily depended on the attitudes and views of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. On the other hand, this is explained by the hope of Stalin that if agreement was reached with Chiang Kai-Shek it would be possible to avoid disputed issues with the US in Southeast Asia. However it is unusual but actually largely, Soviet's and USA's post-war policy toward China was similar. USSR and USA perhaps assumed that the nationalists will regain control of China. However, they didn't anticipate that the communists would be much better than the nationalists in gaining the support of the Chinese people. Therefore, president Harry Truman after he had started openly supporting the troop of Chiang Kai-Shek, he ordered the American delegation led by George Marshall to travel to China in order to achieve an agreement between the Nationalists and the communists³.

It makes sense that these measures were aimed to reduce Soviet influence because Washington feared that it was possible the Chinese communists could act on Soviet orders. The attempts by the US Marshall Plan weren't successful and the option that the USSR would have problems in controlling communism beyond its borders was expected. On the other hand, the US feared that perhaps Stalin would use Chinese communism for his advantage. However, it is a fact that the Mao's movement was firmly grounded in the nationalist tradition which despised a foreign influence regardless of which side comes. It is indisputable that both the American and the Soviet side started to treat the Chinese issue seriously. It is curious that Mao was unwilling to accept subordination offered to China by both sides. However, China had no other choice but to lean on one side – the Soviet side. This work discusses the contention in Sino-Soviet relations 1949-1973. It also identifies the evolution of their relationship and the factors aiding the fallout in Sino-Soviet relations.

Theoretical Framework

The theory on which this work stands is Deterrence Theory of War and Nuclear Weapons. The proponent of the theory was Huth. Deterrence theory is based upon the concept which can be defined as the use of threats by one party to convince another party to refrain from initiating some course of action⁴. The doctrine gained increased prominence as a military strategy during the Cold War with regard to the use of nuclear weapons and is related to but distinct from the concept of mutual assured destruction, which models the preventative nature of full-scale nuclear attack that would devastate both parties in a nuclear war. Deterrence is a strategy intended to dissuade an adversary from taking an action that has not yet started by means of threat of reprisal, or to prevent it from doing something that another state desires. A threat serves as a deterrent to the extent that it convinces its target not to carry out the intended action because of the costs and losses that target would incur. In international security, a policy of deterrence generally refers to threats of military retaliation directed by the leaders of one state to the leaders of another in an attempt to prevent the other state from resorting to the use of military force in pursuit of its foreign policy goals.

A policy of deterrence can fit into two broad categories: preventing an armed attack against a state's own territory (known as direct deterrence) or preventing an armed attack against another state (known as extended deterrence). Situations of direct deterrence often occur if there is a territorial dispute between neighboring states in which major powers like the United States do not directly intervene. On the other hand, situations of extended deterrence often occur when a great power becomes involved. Building on the two broad categories, Huth goes on to outline that deterrence policy may be implemented in response to a pressing short-term threat (known as immediate deterrence) or as strategy to prevent a military conflict or short-term threat from arising (known as general deterrence).

A successful deterrence policy must be considered in military terms and also political terms: International relations, foreign policy and diplomacy. In military terms, deterrence success refers to preventing state leaders from issuing military threats and actions that escalate peacetime diplomatic and military co-operation into a crisis or militarised confrontation that threatens armed conflict and possibly war. The prevention of crises of wars, however, is not the only aim of deterrence. In addition, defending states must be able to resist the political and the military demands of a potential attacking nation. If armed conflict is avoided at the price of diplomatic concessions to the maximum demands of the potential attacking nation under the threat of war, it cannot be claimed that deterrence has succeeded.

Deterrence theory holds that nuclear weapons are intended to deter other states from attacking with their nuclear weapons, through the promise of retaliation and possibly mutually assured destruction. Nuclear deterrence can also be applied to an attack by conventional forces. For example, the doctrine of massive retaliation threatened to launch US nuclear weapons in response to Soviet attacks. A successful nuclear deterrent requires a country to preserve its ability to retaliate by responding before its own weapons are destroyed or ensuring a second-strike capability. A nuclear deterrent is sometimes composed of a nuclear triad, as in the case of the nuclear weapons owned by the United States, Russia, the China and India. Other countries, such as the United Kingdom and France, have only sea-based and air-based nuclear weapons.

The Sino-Soviet border conflict provides important empirical evidence for re-examining theories of nuclear deterrence and crisis behaviour developed during the Cold War, and offers new insight and lessons for current and future nuclear challenges. Sino-Soviet border dispute sheds new light on the behaviour of new nuclear power, the behaviour of major nuclear powers towards new nuclear states, the dynamics of crises in vastly asymmetric nuclear relationships; and the role of strategic culture in deterrence behaviour.

The Evolution of Sino-Soviet Relations

The proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 changes the attitudes and strengthens Mao's power. Chinese leadership is directed towards ensuring national security, consolidation of government and economic development. The direction of foreign policy of China was meant to implement these goals and to create closer relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries against the USA and Japan. On the other hand, the defeat suffered by Chiang Kai-Shek forced him to leave China and look for shelter on Formosa (Taiwan), where he was protected by the US soon after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Mao in February 1950, travelled to Moscow to negotiate this led to the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and mutual assistance in the period of thirty years⁵. Under this agreement, China gave the Soviet Union some rights, such as the use of naval bases in exchange for military support, weapons and large amount of economic and technological support, including logistical support⁶. China accepted at least initially, the Soviet leadership in the communist world and accepted the Soviet Union as a model for development. The Soviets were also interested to enhance the friendship with China, because they had a common enemy – the US⁷. The New Chinese government was recognized by the Soviet Union as an international entity⁸. It seems that China's participation in the Korean War (1950-1953) relatively strengthened the Sino-Soviet relations to a great extent. The Sino-Soviet alliance in the Korean War somehow united Moscow and Beijing and China had become more connected and dependent in foreign power than ever previously⁹.

However things changed over time, especially in the second half of the 1950s, when gradually, limitations in the matters of ideology, security and economic development appeared¹⁰. In China, there was anxiety caused by the policy by Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev and his aspirations for de-Stalinization and peaceful co-existence with the West¹¹. The armament race or the successful launching of the Sputnik Satellite from the Earth on October 4, 1957 confirmed Mao's conviction that the world balance was in favour of the communist world or in his words that the east wind was prevailing over the western.¹²

In the field of science, during the 1980s there were very frequent exchanges between China and Russia. Many Russian experts and consultants came to China to help do the Chinese construction work. At the same time the Chinese government sent young and middle aged scientists to Russia for further studies,

which can clearly be seen in the Agreement from 1957 between China and Russia on 122 items for engineering technology. According to the agreement Russia would help China with 156 construction projects which created the need for translators. Students graduated from Harbin and Dalian. Russia school were welcome in China, but they still couldn't meet the need of her technology¹³.

An interesting fact is certainly the strong intention China had to escape the Soviet model of economic development, so that in the period 1958-1961 China launched a radical politics, "the withdrawal of Soviet advisers from China. Policy campaigns advocated such wholesale economic changes: such as, communal organization of rural labour, regional self-sufficiencies and dual track (small and large scale) industrial investment and production"¹⁴. If analyse farther all the events it could be concluded that the main ideological, military and economic reasons for the Sino-Soviet division in fact were almost similar. Chinese leadership can be said to possess a strong desire to achieve the confidence and independence in their actions, which surpassed the benefits that Beijing received as a junior associate of Moscow.

Early in the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute deepened, expanded and widened, including territorial issues, as well¹⁵. The tension in Sino-Soviet relations was worsened with the increase of competition between Beijing and Moscow for the influence in the third world and the international communist movement. China accused the Soviet Union of cooperation with imperialist, for example, because of the signing of the Treaty banning nuclear weapons with the USA in 1963¹⁶. This is a period when the communist party of China would end the relationship with the communist party of the Soviet Union and it wouldn't be restored up to the end of the Cold War. Severe consequences for the Sino-Soviet relations will also occur during the Create proletarian cultural resolution¹⁷.

The culmination of the Sino-Soviet dispute would be achieved in 1969, when serious armed clashes broke out on the Island Zhenbao (or Damanskiy) on the North-Eastern border, near the Chinese coast of Ussuri¹⁸. Both sides would be drawn from the brink of war; however the tension would calm down later in 1969 when Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai would meet with the Soviet Prime Minister Alexei kosygin¹⁹.

In the 70s, Beijing took on a more moderate direction and began to renew the friendship with Washington as a counterweight to the perceived threat from Moscow and as early in 1969, the link China-Russia was almost completely broken at the key year of "Cultural Revolution"²⁰. The Sino-Soviet border talks moved alternately. By the time of Moa's death on September 9, 1976, political Sino-Soviet relations had fallen out completely and weren't restored until the mid-1980s, when Moscow would start sending conciliatory messages²¹. All of this would result in no substantial progress at that time. Officially, the Chinese statements were calling for struggle against the domination of the two superpowers, but especially against the Soviet Union, which Beijing considered as a perhaps more dangerous source of war than the US.

Until 1978, the Chinese economy was a typical for a communist developing country. In that time, the Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping launched some profound reforms, in order to modernize Chinese economy and society. These reforms were implemented in the following fields of activity: agriculture, industry, science and technology, defence, and foreign policy. The most important reform implemented in the time of this visionary leader was that concerning the direct foreign investments in China. Actually, now a day's Chinese "economic miracle" is based on this reform²². The Chinese "economic miracle" quite successfully described Martin Jacques who stated that "If the 20th Century ended in 1989, the 21st began in 1978"²³.

In the late 1970s, the increased Soviet military presence in East Asia and Soviet agreements with Vietnam and Afghanistan increased Chinese awareness of the threat of the Soviet surrounding. The thirty-year old Chinese – Soviet treaty of friendship, alliance and mutual assistance which had been on hold at the end of 1970s, was supplemented with a proposal for bilateral agreements. However, bilateral talks would be suspended as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979²⁴.

In the 1980s China's approach to the Soviet Union began to change, albeit gradually in accordance with the adoption of the Chinese independent foreign policy and the opening of economic policy. Another factor behind the change was the perception that, although the Soviet Union posed a threat to China, the threat was more long-term than immediate. However, Sino-Soviet consultations for normalizing the relations were renewed in 1982 and were held twice a year, despite the fact that the reason for their delay was the Soviet presence in Afghanistan²⁵.

Beijing set three main prerequisites for normalizing the relations, which were called "three obstacles" that Moscow had to remove: the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Soviet support for Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and the presence of Soviet troops along the Sino-Soviet border in Mongolia²⁶. The stance of Moscow regarding this issue was that these problems were the third country's obstacle and that they were unfit for bilateral discussion. The changes in the Soviet leadership between 1982 and 1985 opened space for renewed diplomacy²⁷. At this time, the Sino-Soviet relations began to gradually improve in several areas: expanded trade, economic and technical exchange started (including renewing of projects originally built with Soviet assistance in the 50s), border crossing were opened and delegations were regularly exchanging. The Soviet position on Sino – Soviet relations showed the greatest flexibility in 1986 with the speech of the Secretary General Mikhail S. Gorbachev in July in Vladivostok²⁸. Gorbachev was the first to seek *Détente*.²⁹

Among the Gorbachev's proposals for the Asia - Pacific region, several were directed at China, including the release of partial withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Mongolia, the renewal of the concession for the border dispute and proposals for agreements on border railway, cooperation in the space program and joint development of hydropower plants³⁰.

Ten years later, along the former Soviet border, China has four neighbours and Russia is only one of them. The others, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and the new Moslem states were engaged in a careful balancing act between Russia, China and the West. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were a most useful framework for the dismantlement of the Soviet Union which has turned to be virtually useless as a tool for Post-Soviet integration of Mongolia which had shaken off Moscow's tutelage and had for the first time in its recent history, adopted an independent foreign policy posture³¹.

Although these attempts didn't lead to a quick breakthrough in the Sino-Soviet relations at a high level, the bilateral consultations were accelerated and the talks regarding the border were renewed in 1987. In the later 80s, it seemed unlikely that China and the Soviet Union would renew formal alliance but, the Sino-Soviet relations were significantly improved compared to the previous two decades. By the mid-1987 it was uncertain whether the incomplete normalization would include renewal of the relations between China and the Sino-Soviet relations with the communist parties of Eastern Europe. On the other hand Gorbachev's foreign policy must be seen against the background of the policies of his predecessors. He inherited not only staggering domestic economic and social ills, but also a foreign policy that had become increasingly rigid and defensive³².

Before the dissolution of the USSR, Gorbachev had improved relations with the People's Republic of China, upon the end of the Cold War, reversal occurred in the Chinese – Russian relations. With the advents of the new president Boris Yeltsin, the relations with the United States and Europe started to arrange and balance, while regarding China the relations were promoted and reached the achievement of "strategic partnership"³³.

Yeltsin nicely captured China's position as a reference point with the West when he said in 1995: "China is a very important state for us. It is a neighbour with which we share the longest borders in the world and with which we are destined to live and work side by side forever. Russia's future depends on the success of cooperation with China. Relations with China are extremely important to us from the global politics perspective as well. We can rest on the Chinese shoulder in our relations with the West. In that case, the West will treat Russia more respectfully"³⁴.

The Chinese president, Jiang Zemin, visited Moscow in September 1994 that marked the first visit of a Chinese president to the Russia capital since 1957³⁵. Since then, all the Russian presidents would be

directly involved in the border dispute with China. Russian president Gorbachev signed the first (border) contract on this issue in May 1991 the second agreement with President Yeltsin in 1996, followed by the last of Vladimir Putin in 2004³⁶. Since 1960s and 1970s the border's length of around 4259km of territory along the Ussuri Rivers and Ashur was a sore point for both countries³⁷. For many Russian analyses, Chinese hostility has always been a strategic nightmare in which the Soviet Union has spent huge amounts in order to strengthen the border with China.

The Contentions in the Sino-Soviet Relations

Discontents of de-Stalinization

First, there was a serious divergence between Chinese and Russian leaders concerning the assessment of Stalin's historical contributions. In early 1956, Sino-Soviet relations began deteriorating consequent to Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation of the USSR, which he initiated with the speech *On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences* that criticised Stalin and Stalinism, especially the Great Purge of Soviet society, of the rank-and-file of the armed forces, and of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In light of de-Stalinization, the CPSU's changed ideological orientation – from Stalin's confrontation of the West to Khrushchev's coexistence with it– posed problems of ideological credibility and political authority for Mao, who had emulated Stalin's style of leadership and practical application of Marxism–Leninism in the development of Socialism with Chinese characteristics and the PRC as a country³⁸.

Conflicting national interests

In July 1958, in Beijing, Khrushchev and Mao were negotiating joint Sino-Soviet naval bases in China, from which nuclear-armed Soviet submarines would deter US intervention in East Asia. The agreement failed when Mao accused Khrushchev of trying to establish Soviet control of the PRC's coast³⁹. At the end of August, Mao sought the PRC's sovereignty upon Taiwan by attacking the Matsu Islands and Kinmen Island that resulted in the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. In launching that regional war, Mao did not inform Khrushchev. Formal, ideological response to that geopolitical contingency compelled Khrushchev to revise the USSR's policy of peaceful coexistence to include regional wars, such as the recent Taiwan crisis. Mao's withholding of information from Khrushchev worsened their personal-political relations, especially because the US threatened nuclear war upon China and the USSR, if the PRC invaded Taiwan; thus did Mao's continual shoot-outs with Chiang Kai-shek impel Khrushchev into Sino-American quarrels about the long-lost civil war in China⁴⁰. In the context of the tri-polar Cold War, Khrushchev doubted Mao's mental sanity, because his unrealistic policies of geopolitical confrontation might provoke nuclear war between the capitalist and the communist blocs. To thwart Mao's warmongering, Khrushchev cancelled foreign-aid agreements and the delivery of Soviet atomic bombs to the PRC⁴¹.

Border Crisis

The borderline issue between the two countries remained unresolved throughout the Soviet era. As political relations worsened tension along the vast Sino-Soviet border intensified⁴². The delineation of the border had always been a point of contention for Beijing, but when bilateral relations were good the Chinese did not raise the issue. But as political relation soured, dispute over the border became a useful tool for both sides to express their contempt. From this perspective, the conflicts that erupted on the border in March 1969 were not about territory per se, but rather served as a physical manifestation of broader political and ideological hostilities⁴³. Conflicts on the border provided a useful mechanism for Sino-Soviet animosities to play out. Zhenbao Island, after all, is a small, uninhabited, strategically meaningless island that is often submerged at high-water. At best, the island is useful for logging and for fisherman to dry their nets⁴⁴. As one commentator observed shortly after the conflict on 2nd March, Zhenbao has “no value whatsoever to either country except one of prestige”, thus “it is not this tiny piece of land but a question of principle which is involved, a potential danger of which this little islands is a symbol”⁴⁵.

The specific dispute over the border centred on differing interpretations of the 1860 Treaty of Peking, which identified the Amur and Ussari rivers as forming a part of the eastern boundary between China

and Russia. There were two main points of contention. First, China repeatedly claimed that the Treaty of Peking was an “unequal” treaty forced upon a weak China by Czarist Russia. China, according to this view, was forced to make concessions to a more powerful neighbour that “forcibly incorporated” 400,000 square kilometres of Chinese territory into Russia⁴⁶.

Second, Moscow and Beijing disagreed on the exact location of the boundary line. While both agreed that the treaty listed the Amur and Ussuri Rivers as the border, there was a sharp divergence in interpretation as to what this meant regarding ownership of the hundreds of river islands. China contended that the actual border was drawn at the “Thalweg”, defined as the central line of the main river Channel⁴⁷. “According to established patterns of international law”, China claimed, “in the case of navigable boundary rivers, the central line of the main channel should form the boundary line which determines the ownership of islands”. Since Zhenbao is clearly on the Chinese side of the main channel, Beijing argued that it is an “indisputable, iron-clad fact that (Zhenbao) is Chinese territory. The Soviet Union, however, argued that there was no international legal norm that “automatically” established the boundary at the Thalweg. According to Moscow, the boundary lays “directly along the Chinese bank”, thereby giving the Soviets ownership of all the river islands⁴⁸. Moscow rested its claim on a map of the border exchange between Russian and Chinese officials in 1861. The map, Moscow argued, proved that the boundary lay along the Chinese bank. Beijing countered that the scale of the map was smaller than 1:1,000,000 and therefore it does not, and cannot possibly, show the precise location of the boundary line in the rivers, still less is it intended to determine the ownership of islands.

Tensions on the border began as early as 1959 and progressed steadily in frequency and intensity⁴⁹. Although it is unclear which side initiated many of the early skirmishes along the border, Beijing was certainly the primacy antagonist in the broader Sino-Soviet split⁵⁰, led the charge in rhetorical lashings. In 1963, China publicly raised the issue of the many past “unequal treaties” that it was “compelled” to sign after Khrushchev brought up China’s restraint in resolving the status of Hong Kong and Macao. In responding to Khrushchev’s comment about Hong Kong and Macao, which in itself was a reaction to Beijing’s earlier claim of soviet “capitulationism” in the Cuban Missile Crisis, China asked rhetorically. “You are not unaware that such questions as those of Hong Kong and Macao relate to the category of unequal treaties left over by history, treaties which the imperialists imposed on China. It may be asked: In raising questions of this kind, do you intend to raise all the questions of unequal treaties and have a general settlement? Has it ever entered your heads what the consequences will be? Can you seriously believe that this will do you any good?”⁵¹ After bringing the border dispute into the open, Beijing sent a diplomatic note to Moscow proposing negotiation on outstanding border issue. Moscow responded favourably to this inquiry, agreeing to discuss a specific set of issues dealing with the border. Since China had recently concluded agreements with other states in the region, including North Korea and Pakistan, there was at least some reason for the Soviets to believe that these talks might generate a peaceful settlement. At this point Moscow had no interest in a protracted confrontation – rhetorical or otherwise – with China, and Khrushchev was eager to find a political solution. In August, an article in the official national newspaper of the Soviet Government, warned of the possibility that conflicts over border could “push the world into the abyss of the unclear war” – one of the earliest Soviet references to the possibility of a unclear conflict with China – and argued that the “peaceful resolution of border disputes has the most important significance for assuring peace and peaceful coexistence in December, Khrushchev carried this sentiment even further in a letter sent to all heads of state which proclaimed that the Soviet Union was against the military method of setting territorial issues and proposed an international agreement or treaty on the reification by states of the use of force for the solution of territorial dispute or questions of frontiers⁵².

In late February 1964, a Soviet delegation flew to Beijing for the start of border negotiations. At the outset, both sides appeared willing to reach a settlement. In a letter to Moscow, Beijing said that it believed a peaceful solution could be reached; that until such time the *status quo* on the border should be maintained, and that even though the Treaty of Peking was “unequal”, it should be used as the basis for a “reasonable settlement” of the border⁵³. For its part, Moscow initially indicated willingness to sign a new treaty that would abrogate the existing agreements that China considered unequal⁵⁴. Friction and disagreements, however, quickly arose. A key sticking point was China’s insistence that Moscow admit

that the existing treaty was unequal before a new treaty was negotiated and signed. The Soviets refused largely out of concern that China might not fulfil its end of the bargain. If Moscow declared the inequality of the existing treaty before a new one was signed, they would risk undercutting their legal claim if a new agreement broke down⁵⁵. For Moscow, acknowledging the inequality of the Treaty of Peking at the outset of negotiation was “completely untenable”⁵⁶. Despite this initial statement, Soviet and Chinese negotiation did make progress. Most important, the Soviet agreed that the Thalweg would form the boundary in the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, thereby leading 400 river islands, including Zhenbao, to China⁵⁷. The negotiators drew up a draft treaty for the eastern boundary, but Moscow refused to sign it until other outstanding issues were resolved, particularly the dispute over the Islands near the Soviet city of Khabarovsk⁵⁸.

Despite the apparent progress in reaching a peaceful resolution to the border dispute, negotiation came to an abrupt halt in July 1964. In a July meeting with a visiting delegation from the Japanese socialist party, Mao remarked, “About a hundred years ago, the area to the east of Lake Baikal become Russian territory, and since then Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Kamchatka, and other areas have been Soviet territory. We have not yet presented our account for this list⁵⁹. In response to these statements, the Soviet Union withdrew its delegation from the border negotiations. A 2 September article in “Pravda” the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, interpreted Mao’s accusations as a sign of China’s continued “expansionist aspirations and its on-going polemical “Cold War” against the Soviet Union. Moscow was now facing “an openly expansionist program with far-reaching pretensions⁶⁰.

Khrushchev personally shot back telling a visiting Japanese delegation on 15 September that Mao promulgated “hatred and conflict”, and that Mao’s arguments were similar to Hitler’s “lebensraum” theories. Khrushchev also made yet another early reference to the possibility of nuclear conflict. He told the Japanese that if war was forced on the Soviet Union, “we will fight with all our strength using all our means. We have sufficiently powerful means for waging war, even unlimited I would say”. If an aggressor starts a war, “they will die in it” Khrushchev concluded. “We well know the destructive force of this horrible weaponing and would not want to ever use it⁶¹.

Mao later told officials from North Korea and Albania that his comments on 10 July were designed to “make (the Soviet Union) nervous” in order to “achieve a relatively rational border treaty”. He was deliberately “saying a few empty words, firing a few blank shots” to “take the offensive” in the negotiations. According to Mao, Khrushchev “does not feel good if you don’t fire a few blank shots at him”. In actually Mao claimed, he did not intend to demand the return of all the lands he mentioned in his comments to the Japanese on 10 July, which totaled 1.5 million square kilometers. In responding to Khrushchev’s reference to nuclear weapons, he told the Albanian Defence Minister, “Since we fired a blank round, he responded with a round of his own⁶².

Mao’s export explanation for his comments on 10 July is suspect, since the chairman had a history of attempting to later re-frame unwise decision as deliberate and strategic⁶³. If Mao’s comments to the Japanese delegation were intended to help conclude a favourable border treaty, he badly miscalculated. Rather than strengthening China’s bargaining position, his comments ended the talks, and Khrushchev fell from power before negotiations could resume. More likely, however, Mao spoke without any strategic intent, and the subsequent collapse of the border talks helped to ensure the continued provocations on the border that would ultimately lead to wider conflicts in 1969. Mao’s characterisation of Khrushchev’s reference to Soviet nuclear capabilities as a “blank round” must also be treated carefully. Already by July 1964 Mao was firmly convinced of the growing Soviet threat to China⁶⁴. At a meeting of the political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Committee, Mao said, “We cannot only concern ourselves with imperialism, while disregarding revisionism, we need to prepare for war on two fronts”⁶⁵. Moreover, in discussing Khrushchev’s comments to the Japanese, Mao asked the visiting North Korean and Albanian officials if they thought the Soviets might actually start a war with China⁶⁶. At this point, however, the Soviet Union had limited conventional forces on the border and had not yet deployed tactical nuclear weapons to the Far East. Consequently, while Khrushchev’s statements were certainly cause for concern, the lack of a concerted Chinese response (war preparations

etc.) to Khrushchev's comments about nuclear conflict especially compared to the reactions to similar hints in the summer of 1969 – suggests that at this time Mao did not take them as particularly serious or credible⁶⁷

Conclusion

This work has tried to demonstrate that relationship is not a one-way traffic. Human society, though driven by distinct interests, either as individuals, nation or country is inter-dependent. No country can exist in total isolation and independent of the other. The study among other things, tried to consider the existence of mutually enriching and intensive interaction between China and Russia over time. However, the work has attempted to examine the contour and dynamics of their interactions and extent to which then Cold War impacted on their relationship. From the findings made by this work, the nature of the interactions between Sino-Soviet, stresses mutuality, autonomy and contentious relations.

The research has also made modest attempts to present insights into the nature of relationship that existed between them. From the foregoing, some reasonable conclusions have been made on the inherent factors responsible for the dynamic nature of their relations. First, the communist system of government practiced. Secondly, ideology has also been employed in the development of the Sino-Soviet dispute as a means of discreet argument. Thirdly, the delineation of the border had also been a point of contention for these two communist blocs.

An investigation of the background relationships of the two states revealed that antipathy existed, but not to a degree strong enough to cause such an open confrontation between the two countries. An analysis of the national interests of the Soviet Union and China showed a divergence of very fundamental goals, goals deeply rooted in the national interests of the two states. This divergence had arisen after the formation of the alliance and was not compatible a decade later with the demands of cooperation which the alliance prescribed. Hence, a clash of interests erupted into a dispute having immense ramification. Looking deeper into the basis for the change in Soviet and Chinese policies, I think a reason can be found for the changes in the revolutionary experience and the resultant difference in total perspective. This then was the elemental source of the dispute.

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