

**China
and the
Soviet Union
1949-84**

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CHINA AND THE SOVIET UNION, 1949-84

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demonstrations on the Soviet frontier in support of China's territorial claims, especially on the border between Manchuria and the Soviet Far East, and that Chinese troops had opened fire several times on Soviet ships plying on the River Amur. In view of the strained situation, military training schools were reported on Dec. 7 to have been established for the civilian population in the Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kirghizia.

The situation became particularly tense during the siege of the Soviet embassy in February 1967. Beijing radio alleged on Feb. 2 that a plot by the "Soviet revisionists and US and Japanese imperialists" to attack China through Heilongjiang province (Manchuria) had been smashed, and on Feb. 11 all Chinese frontier troops were placed on the alert. On the following day wall newspapers in Beijing alleged that a company of the Chinese army had recently repulsed an attack by a Soviet battalion near Vladivostok, taking a number of prisoners; this report was not confirmed by any other source.

Western sources estimated the number of troops on the Sino-Soviet border at this time at nearly 40 Soviet divisions, many of which had recently been transferred from Eastern Europe, and between 50 and 60 Chinese divisions, or more than 600,000 men. It was reported from Moscow on Feb. 21, 1967, however, that except for frontier guards all Chinese troops had been withdrawn about 100 miles from the Soviet and Mongolian borders, creating a "no man's land" from which all civilians had been evacuated.

The Soviet press reported in January 1967 that several hundred thousand Uighurs and Kazakhs had crossed the border from Xinjiang in recent months and taken refuge in the Soviet Union; this exodus was attributed to fear of the Cultural Revolution and the hunt for Soviet sympathizers which accompanied it, the mass settlement of Chinese in Xinjiang, and the alleged persecution of national minorities. The evacuation of civilians from the frontier areas was reported on Feb. 21 to have been particularly thorough in Xinjiang, with the result that the flight of refugees into the Soviet Union had been almost brought to an end.

According to diplomatic sources in Moscow, many minor incidents took place in 1968, but neither side gave them any publicity; a Chinese protest Note of Sept. 16, 1968, however, alleged that Soviet military aircraft had flown over Heilongjiang province 29 times between Aug. 9 and 29.

The Damansky Island Fighting (March 1969)

Armed clashes between Soviet and Chinese frontier guards, causing considerable loss of life, occurred on March 2 and March 15, 1969, on the River Ussuri. The scene of the fighting was a small uninhabited island $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles long by half a mile wide, known to the Russians as Damansky Island and to the Chinese as Chenpao Island, which lies about 110 miles south of Khabarovsk and 250 miles north of Vladivostok. The status of the island under the treaties of Aigun and Beijing is disputed.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry statement of March 10, 1969, contended that under international law the central line of the main channel of the Ussuri formed the boundary line, that the island was situated on the Chinese side of this line, and that it had always been under Chinese

jurisdiction and had been admini at the boundary negotiations i below], on the other hand, n Governments in 1861 showed boundary line in this area. The after the breaking up of the ic banks and frequently shifted its

The Chinese statement of Marc had intruded into "the Chenpao I 1967, and March 2, 1969, woundin whilst Maj.-Gen. Vasily Lobanov (claimed on March 16 that Chinese island during the past 18 months.

Diametrically opposite accou given by the two sides. Accordi soldiers, camouflaged in white night of March 1-2 to Damansl morning about 30 more Chines frontier guards came up to the At the same time both the troo bank of the river opened fire w Soviet frontier guards. With the post, it was stated, the Soviet hour battle, in which they had wounded. Chinese official stat large Soviet force, accompanie fire on Chinese frontier guard and wounding many of them.

Both Governments sent stro March 2, 1969. The Soviet N the punishment of those respon to preclude any further violat "reckless and provocative acti "met on our side by a rebu! punishment of the culprits, res and declared that if the Soviet conflicts" it would receive "resol

Mass protest demonstrations beg in Beijing which for four days w servicemen and civilians shoutin Brezhnev". Similar demonstrati Agency 260,000,000 people took p China. On the Russian side, alth and Vladivostok on March 3-4, 1 March 7, when over 50,000 people organized protest seen in the city lumps of ice, ink bottles and paint broken.

At a press conference on March 7, 1969, Leonid Zamyatin (head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry press department), after giving the first detailed account of the incident, alleged that the Chinese had shot and bayoneted wounded men, and that the faces of some of those killed had been "so mutilated as to be unrecognizable". An even larger demonstration than that of the previous day occurred outside the Chinese embassy in Moscow on March 8, over 100,000 people taking part, although on this occasion there were no disorders; protest meetings were also held on March 8-9 in many other Russian cities. In Beijing protest demonstrations against the stoning of the Chinese embassy in Moscow began outside the Soviet embassy on March 11, and continued for three days. *Red Flag* (the Chinese Communist Party's theoretical organ) declared on March 14 that if the Soviet leadership wanted to fight, "let us thoroughly annihilate them". The article added: "The Soviet revisionists have created such theories as 'limited sovereignty' to help Soviet troops march into other countries [i.e. Czechoslovakia]. This makes us understand that their recent armed provocation is no mere coincidence."

A Chinese Note of March 13, 1969, which the Soviet embassy refused to accept, alleged that between March 4 and March 12 Soviet armoured vehicles had "intruded into China's territory, Chenpao Island", on six occasions, and that Soviet helicopters had twice flown over it during this period. Soviet official statements claimed that a group of Chinese soldiers had attempted to "invade" the island on March 14 but had been driven off.

Further fighting occurred on March 15, 1969, and was apparently on a much larger scale than that on March 2. Gen. Lobanov told the press on March 16 that Chinese infantry in regimental strength—or up to 2,000 men—had launched repeated attacks on the island under cover of artillery and mortar fire from the Chinese bank, and had been driven back, with the aid of frontier guards from neighbouring posts and the reserve, only after seven hours' fighting. According to the version given by Beijing radio, large numbers of Soviet troops supported by tanks repeatedly attacked the Chinese frontier guards on duty on the island, and were driven back after an 11-hour battle during which Soviet heavy artillery and tanks shelled the island and the Chinese bank of the river. Although neither side gave details of the casualties, these were evidently heavy; Soviet press reports mentioned by name 12 officers and NCOs who had been killed, including a colonel, suggesting—according to the Moscow correspondent of *The Times*—that a full regiment of frontier guards and reserves, or nearly 3,000 men, had been engaged on the Soviet side.

Only minor incidents were subsequently reported from the area. The Soviet press reported on several occasions between March 18 and April 8, 1969, that the Chinese had directed mortar and machine-gun fire against the island and were digging fortifications on their side of the river, whilst Beijing radio alleged on April 13 that the Russians had committed "new acts of aggression" on the Ussuri frontier, without giving any further details.

A Chinese Note of March 15, 1969, accused the Soviet Government of "incessantly" sending troops to intrude into Chinese territory, and demanded that it should immediately stop its "armed provocations". A Soviet Note of the same date maintained that "Damansky Island is an inalienable part of Soviet territory", and declared that "if further attempts are made to violate the inviolability of Soviet territory, the USSR and all

its peoples will resolutely defend such violations".

For some days after the fighting and the Soviet press published the country's leaders. The Beijing Kosygin, Brezhnev and company asserting that the Soviet people armed forces newspaper *Red Star* "a traitor to the sacred cause of blood" and compared him to a traitor were not resumed in either of the latest fighting, suggested that push matters to extremes.

Soviet Proposals for

Kosygin asked on March 20, 1969, the Chinese leaders by telephone. The Chinese day with a memorandum stating between China and the Soviet Union telephone. If the Soviet Government it forward officially to the Chinese channels."

In a long and moderately worded Government reaffirmed in detail Chenpao Island, and proposed that the fighting should be resumed as soon as possible.

After giving the Soviet version of the Note contended that the Chinese should existing frontiers by concluding a treaty on the Ussuri in 1951, and by asking the Chinese to use certain islands in those rivers which they did not question the Soviet claim.

The Note went on to recall the Chinese side of the 1950s, and commented: "If it were not for the side, trade, economic and scientific cooperation would undoubtedly have developed today. . . . Whenever a danger arises for China, the Soviet Union, loyal to the Sino-Soviet Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. [These statements were interpreted as the event of a change in Chinese policy to resume its economic aid and diplomatic relations.]

After deploring the breaking off of relations then Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, said of the Soviet-Chinese frontier were "to be solved peacefully", the Soviet Note demanded any actions on the frontier that would widen differences that may arise in a crisis. It proposed that the consultations should be resumed as soon as possible, and concluded: "The Soviet Union in the final count the vital interests of the Chinese people."

its peoples will resolutely defend it and will deliver a crushing rebuff to such violations".

For some days after the fighting on March 15, 1969, both the Chinese and the Soviet press published virulent and bellicose attacks on the other country's leaders. The Beijing *People's Daily* described "Khrushchev, Kosygin, Brezhnev and company" on March 20 as "a herd of swine", asserting that the Soviet people hated "the new tsars", whilst the Soviet armed forces newspaper *Red Star* denounced Mao Zedong on March 23 as "a traitor to the sacred cause of communism . . . painted with human blood" and compared him to Hitler. The fact that protest demonstrations were not resumed in either country, however, despite the seriousness of the latest fighting, suggested that both Governments were anxious not to push matters to extremes.

Soviet Proposals for Boundary Negotiations (March-April 1969)

Kosygin asked on March 21, 1969, to communicate with the Chinese leaders by telephone. The Chinese Government replied on the following day with a memorandum stating that "in view of the present relations between China and the Soviet Union, it is unsuitable to communicate by telephone. If the Soviet Government has anything to say, it is asked to put it forward officially to the Chinese Government through diplomatic channels."

In a long and moderately worded Note of March 29, 1969, the Soviet Government reaffirmed in detail its claim to sovereignty over Damansky Island, and proposed that the boundary negotiations broken off in 1964 should be resumed as soon as possible.

After giving the Soviet version of the incidents on March 2 and 15, 1969, the Note contended that the Chinese Government had signified its acceptance of the existing frontiers by concluding an agreement on shipping on the Amur and the Ussuri in 1951, and by asking the competent Soviet authorities for permission to use certain islands in those rivers for cutting hay and timber—an indication that they did not question the Soviet claim to those islands, including Damansky Island.

The Note went on to recall the friendly relations between the two countries in the 1950s, and commented: "If it were not for the position adopted by the Chinese side, trade, economic and scientific technical co-operation between our countries would undoubtedly have developed successfully further. This also holds true for today. . . . Whenever a danger arose to the security of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, loyal to its commitments under the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, always came out in support of People's China." [These statements were interpreted by Western observers as a suggestion that in the event of a change in Chinese policy the Soviet Union would be prepared to resume its economic aid and diplomatic support to China.]

After deploring the breaking off of boundary negotiations, and recalling that the then Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, had said in 1960 that the unestablished sections of the Soviet-Chinese frontier were "insignificant discrepancies in the maps, easy to solve peacefully", the Soviet Note urged the Chinese Government to "refrain from any actions on the frontier that may cause complications and to solve any differences that may arise in a calm atmosphere and through negotiations". It proposed that the consultations started in Beijing in 1964 should be resumed as soon as possible, and concluded: "The Soviet Government is firmly convinced that in the final count the vital interests of the Soviet and Chinese peoples will make it