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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

03 February 1988

Speculating on a Possible Sino-Soviet Summit [Redacted]

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SUMMARY

We speculate that improving US-Soviet relations and a desire both to support Gorbachev and reward recent Soviet flexibility could lead Beijing to agree to a high-level meeting. By agreeing, Beijing would seek to restore lost leverage in Sino-US relations and unnerve Hanoi and New Delhi. Because a Deng-Gorbachev meeting would cause the greatest concern in the West, we judge it would be less likely in the near term than a meeting of Foreign Ministers, Premiers, or Presidents. Chinese practice suggest to us that, should a meeting occur, the period between the next US-Soviet summit and a visit to Beijing by a senior US official is a particularly likely time. [Redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by China Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 3 February 1988 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, China Division, OEA, [Redacted]

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Responding to Soviet Overtures

Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev in the last few months has twice called for a Sino-Soviet summit meeting, most recently in an 11 January interview published in a Chinese foreign affairs journal.¹ As in the past, the Chinese have responded by reiterating Deng Xiaoping's condition that resolution of the Cambodia problem must precede a summit with Gorbachev. [REDACTED]

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A series of recent developments, however, leads us to speculate that the **chance** of a senior level meeting has increased. Our speculation is not based on hard evidence but rather on our appreciation of China's foreign policy goals, Chinese style, and the logic of the situation in which Beijing finds itself. [REDACTED]

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Reasoning That Could Lead to a Summit

At its most basic, Chinese foreign policy seeks a stable, non-confrontational relationship with the Soviet Union -- especially along the border -- so that Beijing can concentrate on its reforms and devote maximum resources to economic modernization. Beijing simultaneously seeks to deepen its relations with Washington partly because of the Soviet long-term threat and partly to gain access to US markets and technology essential to the success of the modernization effort. This suggests that China would be more receptive to a summit if (1) it concluded that it was losing leverage in the Sino-Soviet-US strategic triangle or (2) it wanted to encourage Soviet behavior that it believed significantly improved the environment for China's reforms. [REDACTED]

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A case can be made that -- **from Beijing's perspective** -- recent developments are pushing China toward just such a conclusion [REDACTED]

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The Strategic Triangle. The most significant development is the improvement in US-Soviet relations, which has left Beijing pondering the implications for China. Publicly, China has welcomed the upturn in US-Soviet relations for reducing international tensions and improving the environment for China's reforms. [REDACTED]

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¹ The Liaowang interview consisted of answers to three questions posed by the Chinese weekly in writing and dealing with Sino-US relations and Soviet reforms. It is the first interview with a Soviet leader to be published in a Chinese journal in more than two decades. In the interview, Gorbachev said there was an "objective necessity" for a Sino-Soviet summit at the "highest level" and pointed to similarities in Soviet and Chinese perspectives on arms control and domestic reform. Gorbachev called for a summit with Deng last November, during a meeting with Zambian leader Kaunda. [REDACTED]

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Regional Concerns. In the last year, Moscow has altered its approach on China's top regional concerns: Indochina, the Sino-Soviet border, and Afghanistan, the so-called three obstacles. After telling Beijing for years that it had no role in a Cambodia solution and that China should discuss its differences with Vietnam directly, Moscow agreed to discuss the Indochina problem at the 9th round of their political normalization talks. More significant is the light pressure Moscow has begun to put on Hanoi and Phnom Penh to negotiate a compromise solution with Sihanouk. We believe the Chinese remain deeply suspicious of Hanoi and worry that Sihanouk still might negotiate an agreement they cannot live with, but Beijing is also aware that Moscow has taken a step that may help China get what it wants. 

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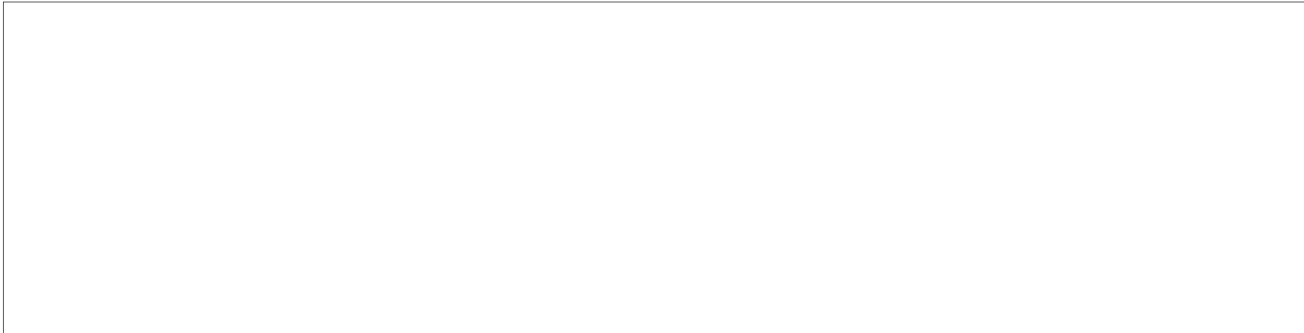
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The Soviets have also shown surprising flexibility on the Sino-Soviet border issue, and real progress has been made in these negotiations over the last year. The Soviets have made most of the significant concessions, and although much has to be worked out, we believe a resolution of this issue is a real possibility in the next few years. As with the Cambodia problem, the Chinese attribute the movement to Gorbachev. 

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Progress is less evident on Afghanistan, but the Chinese have taken note of recent Soviet rhetoric. They believed that Gorbachev might say something significant on this issue during the Washington summit and were disappointed when he did not. But Afghanistan has always been the least important of the three obstacles for China, and Chinese officials have stated privately for years that the Soviet presence there does not threaten China. 

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Truly Obstacles?

Although China is concerned about Soviet actions along its borders and still worries about Soviet encirclement, in our opinion the three obstacles are essentially a foreign policy tool and as such are not an insurmountable obstacle to either a summit or better Sino-Soviet ties. Beijing uses the obstacles in three ways: to modulate its relations with Moscow, the obstacles waxing and waning in importance depending on Beijing's goals; to press the Soviets for further concessions on the border and Indochina; and to reassure the West. [REDACTED]

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The obstacles function in much the same way as the Taiwan issue does in the Sino-US relationship. Beijing seeks concessions on this issue and raises and lowers the temperature to fit its mood, but Beijing does not let US ties to Taipei, including arms sales, stand in the way of other Chinese goals. [REDACTED]

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In our judgment, progress on the three obstacles sufficient to permit a summit is a matter of definition. Beijing can declare at any time that Moscow has substantially met its concerns on the obstacles. When negotiating, the Chinese insist that their "principled position" be accepted by the other side, but once it has -- and China defines when it has -- the Chinese show great flexibility in applying the principle. [REDACTED]

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The Taiwan issue provides a useful analogy. In the early 1970s, Beijing took a very hard line on Taiwan, insisting that there could be no official relationship with the United States unless Washington broke all ties with Taipei. Ultimately they settled for far less -- Liaison Offices in 1972 and continuing US arms sales to Taiwan after recognition in 1979 -- because they believed they had more to gain by moving ahead with the United States despite the differences over Taiwan. Beijing declared that Washington had essentially accepted its principled position on Taiwan and that future generations would work out the details. [REDACTED]

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Chinese Goals

China could conclude that a summit or senior-level meeting would serve its interests in a number of ways. First and foremost would be to redress what it may see as an imbalance in the strategic triangle. Beijing may believe that a Sino-Soviet summit would remind Washington that it cannot take China for granted and that, unless satisfied, China can take steps that significantly change the US security environment. [REDACTED]

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The Chinese may also see a senior-level meeting as helping Gorbachev. After a period of doubt, Beijing has concluded that the General Secretary sincerely wants better relations with China and that his focus on domestic development contributes to a stable international environment that China's reform program needs to succeed. [REDACTED]

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To Beijing's way of thinking, a summit also could be useful in dealing with Hanoi, especially if it comes before agreement is reached on a Cambodia solution. A senior meeting would play on Vietnamese fears of being sold out, especially because China has stressed that the Soviets must meet its demands on Cambodia before a summit can occur.³ Beijing may hope that this would make Hanoi more flexible, but, in any case, increasing the discomfort in Hanoi is an end in itself. [REDACTED]

China may hope to have the same effect on India. The border dispute escalated last year, and isolated clashes and even hostilities are possible. Moscow has avoided taking New Delhi's side in the border dispute. During his visit to India in November 1986, Gorbachev offered only platitudes on the need to resolve regional issues, avoiding endorsement of India's position. China may conclude that a summit can only add to Indian doubts about Soviet reliability, and perhaps thereby weaken New Delhi's resolve and increase Beijing's leverage in the border negotiations. [REDACTED]

Thinking About Level ...

Beijing recognizes that a summit runs the risk of increasing concern in the West about the direction of Sino-Soviet relations that could decrease China's access to Western technology and markets. [REDACTED]

As a result, if China decides a senior-level meeting with the Soviets is in its interests, it may not opt for a Deng-Gorbachev meeting. Both sides agreed in principle to a Foreign Minister's meeting outside the United Nations (where they meet each fall), but a specific date has never been set. That invitation could be picked up and a meeting set for Moscow or Beijing, perhaps in conjunction with the border talks or the normalization discussions. [REDACTED]

A second option is a meeting between the two Presidents -- largely ceremonial positions on both sides -- or an exchange of visits by the two Premiers. Perhaps less likely is a meeting between Gorbachev and his Chinese counterpart, Zhao Ziyang, because it would be a party-to-party meeting, something the Soviets want and China would try to extract a high price for, in part because of the likely reaction in the West. [REDACTED]

³ Hanoi is deeply suspicious of both Beijing and Moscow. It believes that both capitals negotiated away a Vietnamese victory at the 1954 Geneva Conference, and that Moscow did not apply any military pressure on Beijing when China invaded Vietnam in 1979. [REDACTED]

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... and Timing

Assuming the will, timing becomes the most critical question, and Chinese practice offers clues on a possible time frame. First, the decision on a Sino-Soviet senior-level meeting is not going to be made lightly, and China will want to be sure that its position in the strategic triangle has slipped, or is in real danger of slipping, before going ahead. This suggests to us that Beijing would want to wait for the outcome of the fourth Reagan-Gorbachev summit. In any case, China is unlikely to agree to a senior-level meeting with the Soviets before a Reagan-Gorbachev meeting for fear of increasing Moscow's leverage over Washington.

If past practice holds, Beijing would try to balance a Soviet meeting with a visit by a senior US official. For instance, in May 1984 First Deputy Premier Arkhipov, the most senior Soviet visitor to date, was scheduled to begin a China visit immediately after President Reagan.⁴ And, in October 1986 Secretary of Defense Weinberger and Soviet Vice Foreign Minister Rogachev were briefly in country at the same time.

In the last few weeks, Chinese Foreign Ministry officials have inquired about Secretary Shultz's schedule for later this year, and Chinese Defense officials are pressing for a visit by a senior US military figure. If Beijing believes it is at a serious disadvantage in the triangle, and/or if it believes that its security interests would be served by boosting Gorbachev's stock, and, if a senior US visit can be arranged, then, to Chinese thinking the ideal timing for a senior Sino-Soviet meeting would be after the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting and before the China-US meeting in the expectation that the Sino-Soviet meeting could increase Beijing's leverage in discussions with Washington.

⁴ The Soviets cancelled the visit -- although they subsequently rescheduled it for December 1984 -- in the face of China's warm reception for President Reagan and a dramatic upsurge in Chinese artillery barrages against Vietnam.

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Chronology of Sino-Soviet Relations Since Gorbachev's Vladivostok Speech

28 July 1986

Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev makes a dramatic speech in Vladivostok aimed at convincing China that the Soviet Union seriously wants improved relations.

2 September 1986

During a television interview with "60 minutes", Deng Xiaoping says that if the "main obstacle" to Sino-Soviet relations -- namely, the Vietnamese-Cambodian issue -- can be removed, he is willing to meet Gorbachev in Moscow.

8-15 September 1986

Candidate politburo member Nikolay Talyzin heads a Soviet delegation to Beijing marking the first visit of a Soviet politburo member since Kosygin in 1969. Talyzin and Vice Premier Yao Yilin discuss ways to broaden Sino-Soviet economic and technical cooperation; Talyzin later holds talks with Zhao Ziyang. During the visit Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev and Vice Foreign Minister Qian sign a revised consular treaty.

24 September 1986

Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian meets with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze for the third time in three years in New York at the opening of the UN General Assembly. The two agree to hold border talks in 1987.

28-30 September 1986

Polish General Secretary Jaruzelski makes a working visit to China and establishes the first party-to-party ties between China and a bloc country, other than Romania, in over 25 years.

6-14 October 1986

The ninth round of Sino-Soviet Political Talks on the normalization of relations takes place in Beijing between Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Qian. Moscow agrees for the first time to discuss the removal of the "three major obstacles" to normalization.

9-23 February 1987

Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Qian resume long-suspended border talks in Moscow. Qian meets with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. The Chinese continue to call for a comprehensive settlement of the border question.

14-20 April 1987

Tenth round of Sino-Soviet Political Talks is held in Moscow. There are no indications of progress on Cambodia or Afghanistan.

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20 April 1987

Deng Xiaoping says in remarks during the visit of the General Secretary of the Indian Communist Party to Beijing, "We hope for the normalization of political relations with the Soviet Union, but this requires concrete actions on the Soviet side."

29 April 1987

The Soviets begin a limited withdrawal of troops from Mongolia.

6-13 May 1987

Chinese Vice Premier Yao Yilin heads Chinese delegation visiting Moscow for the annual meeting of the Sino-Soviet Commission for Economic, Trade, Scientific, and Technical cooperation. The Soviet host is Planning Chief Nikolay Talyzin. A protocol is signed to expand trade in the border areas and to continue cooperation in trade transport and air services.

4-21 June 1987

Acting Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang visits Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, completing full restoration of relations with all five nations.

7 June 1987

China and Mongolia sign a border treaty in Ulan Bataar.

1 August 1987

Soviet Defense Minister Yazov cables greetings to Zhang Aiping, Chinese Defense Minister, on the anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army. This is the first time such a gesture has been made in 20 years.

7-21 August 1987

Second round of the Sino-Soviet border talks are held in Beijing. There are signs of progress toward settling the river boundary in the east, but the Chinese and Soviets still must work out the details; also must address the more complex question of the mountain boundary in the west.

20 September 1987

Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian meet at the Soviet mission in New York during the opening of the UNGA and discuss a variety of issues; includes a frank exchange on Cambodia.

8-14 October 1987

Eleventh round of Sino-Soviet Political Talks is held in Beijing. Chinese Foreign Minister Wu tells Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev that the key to a settlement of the Cambodian question lies in an early and complete withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops. Talks break off after only one week as both sides remain unyielding on this issue.

31 October 1987

China acknowledges receiving a message of congratulations from the Soviet Communist Party to mark the Chinese Communist Party's 13th Congress; first time in 30 years that Beijing has mentioned such a message.

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October 1987

Soviets send a three-member press delegation to cover China's Party Congress. Previous Soviet press coverage in China was limited to non-political events.

1 November 1987

Xinhua reports on the publishing of Gorbachev's book, "Perestroika", quoting Gorbachev as saying that the USSR shares responsibility for the mistakes within the socialist world and that the USSR should learn from its breaches with China.

3 November 1987

General Secretary Gorbachev cables Zhao Ziyang to congratulate him on his election as General Secretary of China's Communist Party. Zhao does not acknowledge Gorbachev's congratulations.

6 November 1987

CPSU Central Committee Secretary Anatoliy Dobrynin receives Zhang Wenjin, Chinese People's Society for Friendship with Foreign Countries Chairman, who heads a delegation to the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Moscow. Visit marks the first time since early 1960s that Chinese have attended the celebrations.

27 November 1987

During talks with Zambian President Kaunda, General Secretary Gorbachev proposes a Sino-Soviet summit to discuss Cambodia and other issues. A Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official reiterates China's demand that the Cambodian issue must be resolved prior to a summit.

21 December 1987

Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev briefs Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Qian Qichen on the US-Soviet summit in Washington and the INF Treaty with the U.S.

3 January 1988

Chinese "Liaowang" weekly publishes an exclusive interview with Gorbachev, in which he calls for a Sino-Soviet Summit meeting. Chinese respond by saying that Deng has made the conditions for a high level meeting quite clear and that "at present it is the strong hope of the international community that Vietnam will withdraw all its troops from Kampuchea promptly." Xinhua and Renmin Ribao summaries of the interview omit Gorbachev's call for a summit.

15 January 1987

Tass reports the publishing of a Russian language version of Deng Xiaoping's book "Principal Issues Concerning Present Day China".

23 January 1988

Pravda article calls for Sino-Soviet summit, noting that "the Soviet-Chinese summit meeting could become the logical development of the beginning of political dialogue between the USSR and the People's Republic of China." This marks the third Soviet call for a summit in less than two months.

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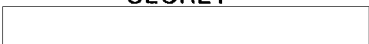
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