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THE CHINESE VIEW OF THE CRISIS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA:
PAST RELATIONS, CURRENT POLICY, PROSPECT

7 March 1980

FA 17 80-101541 C

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OVERVIEW

Beijing has interpreted the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a significant expansionist thrust that poses global dangers, particularly to Western interests and indirectly to China itself. In the past Beijing has viewed Southwest Asia as having relatively remote implications for China's own security, but it has now seized on the Afghan invasion to sound the alarm about Soviet intentions and to press its case against detente as a smokescreen for Soviet aggression. [redacted]

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The Chinese view the Soviet move into Afghanistan as a particularly disturbing extension of the Brezhnev Doctrine outside of the Soviet bloc. For the first time Moscow used its own troops against a Third World country. With Cubans active in Africa--and in the Horn in particular--and the Vietnamese expanding in Southeast Asia, Beijing believes that the Soviets are moving to establish a stranglehold on the oil routes from the Persian Gulf. This hold will threaten the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the West and will ultimately jeopardize China's own security. [redacted]

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The Chinese have long held that Soviet expansionism is focused on Europe, and thus China is not immediately threatened. Now, however, introducing a new wrinkle into its strategic line, Beijing asserts that the invasion of Afghanistan has "linked" Soviet strategies in the East and the West. While still acknowledging that the primary threat is to the West, the new argument maintains that a growing threat to Chinese interests has increased Beijing's "international responsibilities." [redacted]

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China realizes it has a limited ability to project its own power into the region. To date, it has reacted to the threat almost solely through diplomacy; it has yet to offer any commitment of significant economic or military assistance. The Chinese response thus far has proceeded along five tracks: [redacted]

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Reassurance to Pakistan. China moved promptly to reassure Pakistan of its support, but this so far consists more of diplomatic

This memorandum was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for China by [redacted] the Office of Political Analysis, National Foreign Assessment Center.

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form than substantive assistance. The major elements of Beijing's policy have been attempts to help broker a rapprochement between Pakistan and India and to encourage maximum assistance from the United States. Chinese officials have frequently talked about increasing assistance to Islamabad above the levels already in the pipeline, but there is no evidence that Beijing has yet offered a new commitment. China has also hesitated to provide a firm response to Pakistan's request for a security guarantee. [redacted]

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Renewal of Efforts at Normalizing Chinese Relations With India and Iran. In the wake of both the Soviet invasion and the election of Indira Gandhi, China has renewed its effort to normalize relations with India; the effort was stalled a year ago when the Chinese invaded Vietnam while the Indian Foreign Minister was visiting China. Before the trip soured, the two sides agreed to discuss the border question and made progress on other issues. [redacted]

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After the trip, despite the strain caused by the Vietnam invasion, bilateral relations did not revert to the old level of hostility. Beijing is continuing to seek improved relations with a notable degree of determination and finesse. Gandhi, however, is cautious about responding to Chinese overtures. Given her long-standing deep suspicions of China, her country's close relations with the Soviet Union, and her policy of opposing further arms assistance to Pakistan and the Afghan rebels, it is not likely that there will be an early breakthrough in bilateral relations. On the other hand, given the persistence of the Chinese effort, the inclination of some elements in the Indian bureaucracy to improve relations, and India's basic interest in coexistence with its largest neighbor, it is likely that there will be a gradual improvement in China's relations with India. The first significant sign of this may come during a trip to India by Foreign Minister Huang Hua proposed for the second half of 1980. [redacted]

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Beijing is also seeking to improve relations with the government in Tehran, but its efforts have been hampered by the chaotic situation in Iran and the fact that China was a strong supporter of the Shah through the end of his reign. Beijing is seeking to foster a more propitious atmosphere through its media commentary, which places some distance between China and the United States, and through a variety of private and official contacts. Since the pace of normalization depends on Tehran, the prospects for the future are clouded. [redacted]

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US Engagement in the Region's Defense. Long before the December invasion of Afghanistan, Beijing sought to engage the United States and other Western nations in fuller support of Pakistan. China was [redacted]

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[redacted]

highly critical of the US aid cutoff to Pakistan in 1979 and expressed pleasure over indications that Washington would reverse this policy in response to the Soviet invasion. Beijing's main concern is that the aid be of sufficient magnitude to encourage Pakistan to stand firm in its resistance to the Soviets; too little, China has argued, will be worse than useless. Beijing, however, has not indicated the amount it considers sufficient; it has been reported that Chinese leaders are irritated that President Zia has not already accepted the aid Washington has offered. [redacted]

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It appears China's ultimate goal is for the United States to become, in effect, Pakistan's protector. At the same time, China has deflected US efforts to discover what it plans to do in aiding Pakistan. Beijing has, for example, been particularly reticent in discussing Foreign Minister Huang Hua's recent trip to Islamabad. [redacted]

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Creation of Informal Alliance of Southwest Asian States. One theme that has emerged in public and private Chinese comment since the Soviet invasion is the promotion of an informal anti-Soviet alliance of Southwest Asian nations. Candidates mentioned for this alliance have varied [redacted]

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[redacted] but Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and even India have been mentioned as possible members. A prerequisite to any such alliance is a rapprochement between Pakistan and India, a move China has been promoting assiduously since early January. It is not clear how far this idea has matured in Beijing. At a minimum, Beijing is attempting to steer all states in the region as far away from close ties with the Soviet Union as possible and to thwart creation--however unlikely--of a Moscow-New Delhi-Hanoi axis. [redacted]

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Aid to the Afghan Rebels. Although China publicly denies it is aiding the rebels, it is attempting to make Afghanistan a quagmire for Moscow by [redacted] encouraging unity among opponents of the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Beijing has sought the cooperation of Pakistan and other governments in this effort. It is not known for certain, however, if China has succeeded in rendering material assistance. [redacted]

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Following is a discussion of China's relations with the various countries in Southwest and South Asia. [redacted]

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PAKISTAN

Before the Soviet Invasion

China has long been a faithful ally to Pakistan, but its support has always been limited by Beijing's inability to furnish high levels

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of sophisticated equipment. Beijing has, however, consistently advised and supported Islamabad diplomatically. After the April 1978 coup in Kabul, the Chinese counseled Pakistan to use restraint in the quiet support it gave the Afghan rebels lest it give the Afghans or Soviets pretext for a diplomatic crisis or military action. To this end, Beijing approved of Islamabad's effort to improve relations with Moscow and Kabul. China also encouraged the Pakistanis, with greater emphasis, to improve their ties with the United States.

[Redacted]

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During 1973-79, China renewed its military and economic aid program to Pakistan. In 1978, China reportedly gave Islamabad \$25 million for the purpose of building a highway and airfield, Beijing's first new aid agreement since 1973. In 1979, Beijing apparently gave Pakistan additional economic aid amounting to slightly less than \$25 million. Some of the assistance in both these years may have been in the form of long-term, low-interest loans.

[Redacted]

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A Pakistani military delegation visited Beijing in February 1979 and reportedly requested a variety of military supplies from China

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[Redacted]

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Throughout much of 1979, the Chinese leveled heavy criticism at the American aid cutoff to Pakistan and said that the United States was making too much of an issue of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. In Beijing's view, at a time when the USSR menaced South Asia by its actions in Afghanistan, Washington should have offered Pakistan greater support. Beijing expressed concern [Redacted] that the US

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refusal to supply arms and economic assistance to Pakistan might compel Islamabad to adjust its foreign policy and be more accommodating toward Moscow. [Redacted]

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After the Invasion

[Large Redacted Block]

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[Redacted] the major Chinese reaction to events in South Asia was to urge the United States to give Pakistan strong support and to attempt to accelerate the pace of normalization of relations with India. The purpose of the latter move was, in part, to relieve pressure on Pakistan. China was reported during this time to be considering promoting the creation of an informal regional alignment including Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey to oppose the Soviet move into Afghanistan and may have had hopes that India would join. Beijing hoped such a grouping would offset if not thwart the creation of a Moscow-New Delhi-Hanoi axis.

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[Redacted]

China has also strongly supported Pakistani efforts to gain support through the Islamic conference. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[REDACTED]

Huang Hua's Trip to Islamabad

Huang Hua's 18-23 January Islamabad trip demonstrated China's cautious approach toward substantive support to Pakistan.

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Judged by its public manifestations, the Huang visit was notable for its subdued tone. Huang, unlike Chinese leaders on earlier trips to Islamabad, made no provocative references to Kashmir--reflecting China's new effort to improve relations with India. Chinese media also gave the trip low-key treatment that appeared to play down Beijing's commitment to Pakistan, again possibly out of regard for Indian sensitivities.

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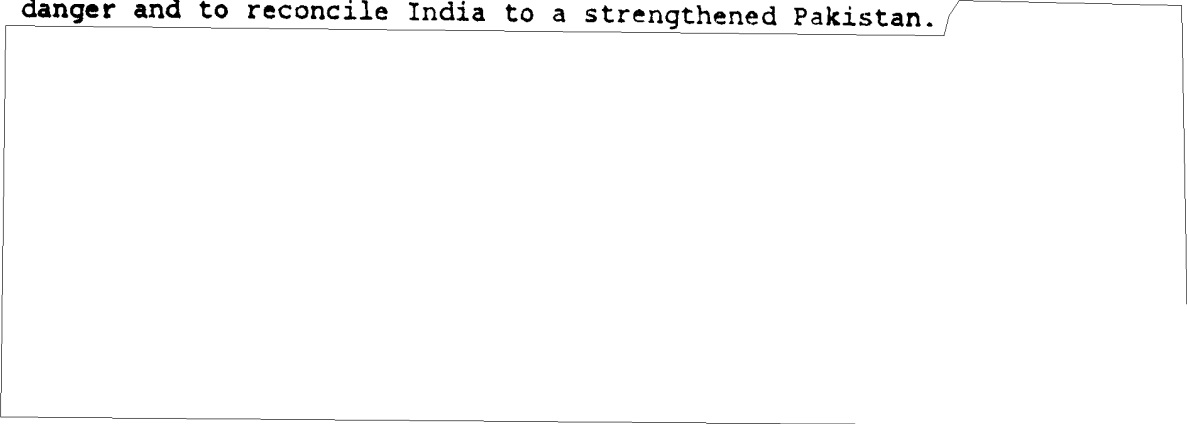
China, nonetheless, sees little alternative at this time to continuing its support for Pakistan. Since Huang's trip it has continued to lobby a number of countries about the need to step up assistance to

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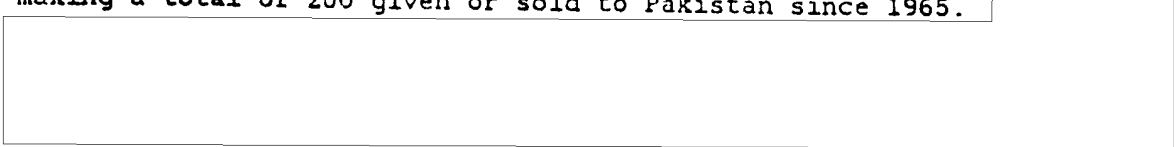
Pakistan. It has also continued efforts to alert India to the Soviet danger and to reconcile India to a strengthened Pakistan.



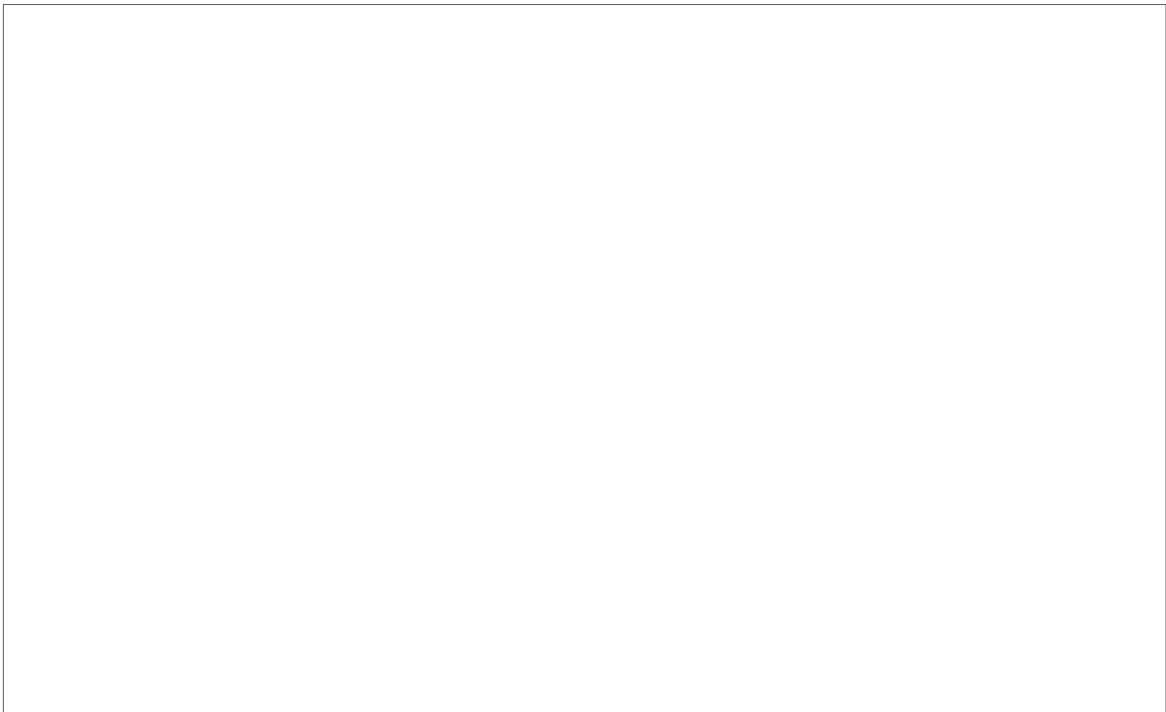
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Chinese Military Assistance

While China has reacted cautiously to Pakistan's request for additional military equipment, the close military relationship between the two countries continued in 1980. As part of an earlier aid agreement, Pakistan accepted final delivery of 15 F-6s in early February, making a total of 200 given or sold to Pakistan since 1965.



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INDIA

Cycles of Rapprochement and Hostility

Normal relations between China and India have been blocked since 1962 by a border dispute and by the tendency of the two countries to allow the vicissitudes of relations with third parties, especially Pakistan and the USSR, to affect the status of their bilateral relations. Since the early 1970s, relations between China and India have been marked by cautious, brief efforts at improvement, followed by long periods of renewed bickering. [redacted]

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Some progress has been made, however. In 1976 the two countries restored normal diplomatic ties at the ambassadorial level; relations remained strained, however. After Indira Gandhi left office in 1977--to the undisguised glee of Beijing--China looked forward to better relations under the less pro-Soviet government of Moraji Desai and in early 1978 invited Indian Foreign Minister A. B. Vajpayee to Beijing to discuss outstanding issues. [redacted]

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Vajpayee's trip, which occurred in February 1979, went well until China invaded Vietnam--which has close relations with India--while Vajpayee was still in China. Following this affront, which was politically embarrassing to the Desai government, relations between the two countries remained chilled, but did not revert to earlier levels of animosity. [redacted]

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After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Beijing again attempted to revive the effort at rapprochement, and the Indira Gandhi government has expressed interest in moving ahead. [redacted]

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The Vajpayee Talks

If significant progress is to be made in improving Sino-Indian relations, both sides must try to pick up some of the pieces dropped a year ago. The main question the then Foreign Minister went to China to explore was the border dispute, a complex issue for both parties, as it touches on key security concerns in China and sensitive domestic issues in India. The dispute involves three areas: [redacted]


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- Western Sector (Aksai Chin). As a result of long-term moves into the area and military conquest in 1962, China controls 26,000 square kilometers of high barren plains and mountains through which it has built a road linking the western Tibet


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(the Autonomous Xizang Region) to Xinjiang. Although not vital to Indian interests, New Delhi claims the Aksai Chin as part of the state of Ladakh but also knows that China considers the road crucial to its control of Tibet. 

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-- Middle Sector. Between the Aksai Chin and Nepal, China and India dispute control of several tracks that are associated with pilgrim routes between India and Tibet. 

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-- Eastern Sector (Arunachal Pradesh). This region, which is controlled by India along the "McMahon Line," is claimed by China as a traditional part of Tibet. China, however, may have asserted this claim mainly as a bargaining chip to be sacrificed in the greater interest of securing the Aksai Chin area. 

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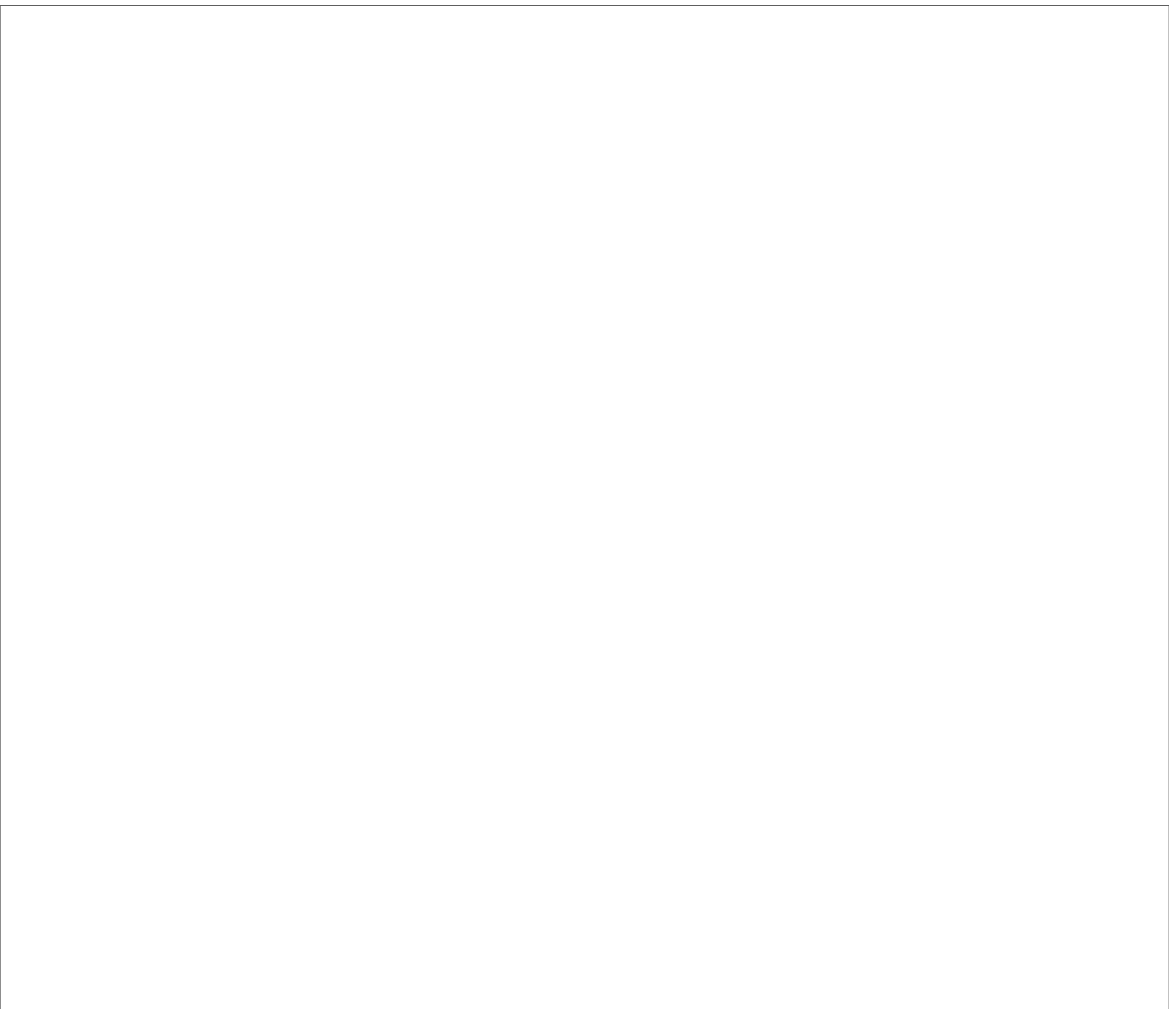
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The atmosphere of "trust and confidence" that had been built up was dissipated by the Chinese attack on Vietnam on 17 February. Vajpayee, who was touring the provinces, cut short his visit by a day. 

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After the Vietnam Invasion: Chilled Interim

While Sino-Indian relations cooled again after the Vietnam invasion, they did not deteriorate significantly. India sharply criticized the Chinese for committing aggression and Vajpayee expressed indignation at its occurrence while he was in China. New Delhi, however, did not yield to Soviet pressure to recognize the Heng Samrin government in Kampuchea. Beijing, for its part, did not revert to anti-Indian propaganda; its comments on Sino-Indian relations continued to be upbeat. Chinese leaders recognized that a combination of bad feeling about China in New Delhi compounded by Indian political instability temporarily prevented progress in normalization. Indian



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[Redacted]

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leaders were apparently impressed that China ignored the sharp criticism and remained temperate in its public comments about India.

[Redacted]

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Minor irritants, however, did occur. On at [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Over Chinese objections, India allowed the Dalai Lama to visit the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia. Beijing did not make a serious issue of the trip, however, and New Delhi, in a reversal of policy, reportedly was willing to allow him to return to Tibet if China recognized his position as spiritual leader and would allow Tibetans to live as they choose--conditions that are unacceptable to Beijing. The Indians were also reportedly irritated that a Chinese delegation to an Indian international trade fair in November failed to arrange new contracts and made no effort to increase trade with India.

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Chinese and Indian reaction to developments in Bhutan and Nepal in the months following the Vajpayee trip indicated that neither Beijing nor New Delhi was willing to let minor irritants resulting from third-party relations further sour their bilateral relations. One potential issue that both sides took steps to defuse was the intrusion of Tibetan sheep across the unmarked Bhutan border, an annual occurrence but an issue that raised the specter in New Delhi of Chinese encroachment in a sensitive neighboring country. Although the question was played up in the Indian press, both China and India played down its importance

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While signs that Bhutan was considering moving closer to Beijing caused concern in New Delhi, the concern did not appear to damage Sino-Indian relations. Both China and India handled Sino-Nepali relations in a manner that did not complicate Sino-Indian relations.

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By the end of the year, Sino-Indian relations had not progressed much past the point reached on 15 February 1979. Both sides were awaiting the outcome of the Indian general election for a new opportunity to make further progress.

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After the Afghanistan Invasion

The Chinese leadership's initial reaction to the election of Indira Gandhi was to view India as a country that was not a "stable factor for peace in South Asia."



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Other Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials expressed similar concerns. Beijing's already strong suspicions of Gandhi were reinforced by the pro-Soviet statement the Indian representative to the UN made on 11 January in defense of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

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While Beijing privately viewed Gandhi's return to power with concern, it did not abandon its policy of moderate media comment on Indian affairs during the transition and sought immediately to establish good relations with the new government. Hua Guofeng sent Gandhi warm congratulations on her return to power, and when New Delhi appeared to back away slightly from its 11 January position by making mildly critical statements about the Soviet invasion, Chinese media played up the Indian call for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. New Delhi, in turn, began generating a mixture of statements about China that Beijing chose to interpret in a positive light. Beijing, for example, ignored Gandhi's statement in a press interview that India had been a victim of Chinese aggression and she did "not think that China has changed"; instead, Beijing highlighted statements by Gandhi and other Indian officials expressing a desire for better relations.



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By mid-January Beijing had altered its initial pessimistic assessment of India under Gandhi.

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In line with this new assessment, Beijing began offering New Delhi new assurances of good intentions. During his 18-23 January trip to Islamabad, Foreign Minister Huang Hua was careful to avoid offending Indian sensitivities; he did not, for instance, refer to the Kashmir question, something Chinese officials had frequently done in the past.

[Redacted]

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Three days after returning to Beijing, Huang led the Chinese delegation to the Indian 30th anniversary celebrations in Beijing, where he gave an especially warm statement calling for consolidation of friendship between China and India.

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[Redacted]

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The Chinese, however, continue to harbor doubts about India's intentions and the prospects of better relations any time soon. These doubts were recently fed by a shrill statement Gandhi was reported in the press to have made to a political rally on 21 February condemning Chinese occupation of sections of Indian, Bhutanese, Nepalese, and Burmese territory and charging that China posed a danger to the Indian border. Beijing dealt with this charge by expressing "surprise and regret" over Gandhi's remarks which flew "in the face of facts" and "vilified China." Beijing's public commentary, however, ended on an upbeat note by recalling the Gandhi government's expressed desire to seek normal relations with all neighbors, including China.



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Despite this upbeat comment, Chinese officials continue to express private concern about Gandhi's ultimate intentions.

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The Chinese Ambassador in Washington has recently indicated that Beijing's relatively sanguine view of Soviet-Indian relations may be eroding. The pace of normalization, he told a senior American official in late February, has been slowed as a result of the new Gandhi government and there still existed a schism between the two countries. In regard to Chinese-Indian relations, he said, the problem was not the border issue since China had not violated the border. India's hostile attitude, he suggested, had not been caused by past problems, "but by good Indian-Soviet relations."

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[Redacted]

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NEPAL

Sino-Nepali relations continued to be close in 1979 and are likely to remain so in 1980. The most significant bilateral event last year was the signing of a border demarcation protocol that China handled in a manner that did not raise the ire of New Delhi. Because of its size and geographical location, Nepal has always tried to stay on good terms with its two giant neighbors, and India and China have traditionally been sensitive to each other's influence and activities in Nepal.

[Redacted]

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When widespread political discontent erupted in civil disorders last spring, Beijing supported King Birendra's government and was careful to avoid the appearance of interfering in Nepal's internal affairs. China was particularly concerned that the disorders would lead to Indian military intervention.

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[Redacted]

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The King's call for a political referendum in May restored public calm, but Beijing reportedly remained concerned that the vote would lead to increased power for the supposedly pro-Indian Nepal Congress Party.

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Chinese suspicions of India, however, were not reflected in media comments.* [Redacted]

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In August King Birendra visited Beijing, reciprocating Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping's visit to Katmandu in 1978. The Chinese assured him that Sino-Nepali relations were a "model" of good neighborliness. In November, Foreign Minister Huang Hua visited Katmandu to sign a border demarcation protocol that concluded a year's work by a joint border commission.

[Redacted]

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Beijing was careful not to allow the Huang visit or the border accord to offend India. The Indian Government has reportedly been concerned over Nepal's unilateral action of signing the border protocol without first consulting India. The agreement Nepal and China signed, however, left untouched the sensitive trijunction area where the borders of Nepal, China, and India meet. Huang avoided making anti-Indian statements in public

[Redacted]

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Since Indira Gandhi's return to power, however, New Delhi's suspicions about Nepal have been renewed despite the apparent absence of real Chinese provocation. In a conversation with a senior American official in late January, Gandhi complained about Chinese "mischief making" in Nepal. When an American diplomat in Katmandu asked the

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Indian Ambassador the reason for this concern and specifically about reports that Gandhi was concerned about Sino-US collusion, the Ambassador said he was unaware of the exact cause but speculated that the concern might arise from periodic anti-Indian campaigns undertaken by pro-Chinese factions of the local Nepali Communist party. These groups, the Ambassador said, had created an issue about Indian mistreatment of Nepalese in Assam when one really did not exist; if the Chinese Embassy in Katmandu was not actively involved in this anti-Indian agitation, he suggested that it did not appear to be doing anything to curtail it either. [redacted]

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IRAN

Past Support for the Shah

Iran and China established diplomatic relations in 1971 and began to exchange high-level economic and political delegations. China considered the Shah a major stabilizing force in the region. After the 1978 Afghanistan coup, Beijing moved to strengthen its ties with both Pakistan and Iran. It viewed both countries, along with Saudi Arabia, as vulnerable to a Soviet "pincer movement" aimed at control of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. [redacted]

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To underscore China's interest, Foreign Minister Huang Hua visited Tehran in June 1978, and in late August Premier Hua Guofeng, on his return from an East European trip, stopped off in Tehran [redacted]

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[redacted] Hua's visit, however, was marred by an upsurge in anti-Shah demonstrations and a harsh government reaction; the Chinese, concerned about the stability of the regime but believing it would survive, used the Hua visit to demonstrate Beijing's support. They considered the Shah's troubles to be Soviet inspired [redacted]

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After the Shah

During the last days of the monarchy and through the period just after Khomeini's return, the Chinese looked to the United States to do something to save the situation. A middle-ranking Chinese diplomat in Europe suggested that the United States resort to assassination of unspecified persons to influence events. Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping complained openly that US measures in Iran were "no good." Referring to both Cuba and Iran, Deng warned that the Soviets would "never be impressed by halfway positions." [redacted]

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When China realized an Iranian Islamic Republic was inevitable, it moved quickly to recognize the new regime and attempted to limit the damage caused by the memory of Hua's 1978 visit to Tehran. Beijing's media coverage, which had been largely reportorial in the last days of the Pahlavi monarchy, began to describe the old regime as "autocratic" and noted that the new Bazargan government stood for opposition to the monarchy, release of political prisoners, and establishment of a democratic republic. The propaganda also noted that the Persian Gulf was menaced by both the United States and the Soviet Union, with the Soviets posing the greater threat.

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[redacted]

In private, Beijing conveyed to Iran, through Pakistani Foreign Affairs Adviser Agah Shahi, an explanation--bordering on an apology--for Hua's 1978 visit. The explanation, given to Khomeini in July, stated that the Shah had invited Hua to stop off in Iran on his return from Eastern Europe. Although Sino-Iranian relations were under a strain, Hua decided that it would have been improper not to accept the invitation. Shahi explained that China had to deal with the government in power; that the return trip from Europe was long; and that Hua's plane needed to stop somewhere for refueling. Khomeini reportedly replied that although Hua's trip was a tragedy, he would forget the past and maintain good relations with China.

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Shortly after the Shahi-Khomeini meeting, Iranian state television reported that Shahi had conveyed a Chinese "apology" to the Ayatollah. Both Shahi and the Chinese immediately denied the interpretation, but Iranian officials soon affirmed its validity. After several weeks, the apology question faded and China began to rebuild its relations with Tehran.

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[redacted]

The seizure of the US Embassy derailed the Sino-Iranian rapprochement.

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Policy Since the Hostage Seizure

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China's initial response to the hostage crisis was to [redacted] restrict media coverage to impartial reportage. In response to repeated requests from US officials for public expressions of disapproval of the Embassy takeover and concern about the fate of the hostages, Beijing issued a cautious statement on 26 November, three weeks after the takeover, that balanced an affirmation of the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries with a call to respect the principle of diplomatic immunity.

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At the United Nations, China joined in the unanimous resolution calling on Iran to release the hostages and gave a qualified vote on 31 December supporting the resolution calling for possible sanctions if the crisis were not resolved; Beijing's decision to cast this vote was an apparent reversal of an earlier decision and came only after receiving the President's 31 December letter to Hua Guofeng. On 13 January, China did not vote on the resolution imposing sanctions, taking the position that sanctions would not be effective in releasing the hostages, that they would serve to increase Soviet influence in Tehran, and that a Chinese vote for them would reduce Beijing's already marginal influence in Tehran. [REDACTED]

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Beijing's general policy toward Iran since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has been to step up efforts to normalize its own relations with Tehran. China continues to be concerned about a possible ultimate takeover in Tehran by a pro-Soviet political group. While Beijing sees the current regime as reactionary and unpredictable, it contends that there are elements that could coalesce into a stable government and could play a role in thwarting Soviet designs in the Persian Gulf. Beijing therefore enthusiastically welcomed the election of Bani-Sadr, sending him a warm message expressing hope for "friendship and amicable cooperation" between China and the "fraternal" Iranian people. [REDACTED]

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On 11 February, Vice Premier Ji Pengfei led an unusually high-level delegation to the Iranian Embassy's reception marking the first anniversary of the Iranian revolution. In publicly reported comments, Ji praised Iran for its success in opposition to foreign aggression. In private remarks to an Iranian official, he soundly condemned the Shah and urged Iran to support the Afghan rebels and improve relations with Pakistan. [REDACTED]

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China has kept up its contacts with Iran in other ways throughout the hostage crisis. It maintains an Embassy in Tehran but apparently has not yet been allowed to send an ambassador. It concluded a trade agreement with an Iranian delegation to Beijing during the second week of the crisis. In early February, a delegation of Chinese Muslims visited Iran to attend celebrations honoring the revolution. Chinese officials claim they used members of this delegation, as well as other contacts with Iranian officials, to urge an early, peaceful resolution of the hostage situation. [REDACTED]

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Beijing is taking care, however, not to become too closely identified with the United States. While its media coverage tends to avoid negative comments about the United States, Beijing has reported Iranian statements that Tehran will follow a course independent of both Washington and Moscow. [REDACTED]

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AFGHANISTAN

Before the Invasion

Beijing initially expressed little public concern about the April 1978 coup that installed the pro-Soviet Taraki regime in Kabul, and it recognized the new government within two weeks. China assumed that Afghan nationalism would assert itself eventually, as it had in the previous Daoud regime. As Soviet involvement in Afghanistan increased, however, Beijing sharpened its criticism of the USSR. China was circumspect in its public comments about the Kabul government



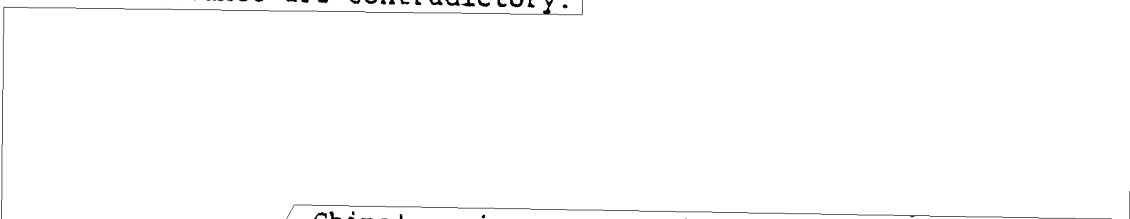
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China maintained correct relations with both Taraki and Amin and retained a diplomatic mission in Kabul. In March 1979, China gave Afghanistan a 250-bed hospital in Kandahar. In the same month it signed a protocol for the construction of a textile mill in Bagrami. In October the two countries signed an annual protocol (several months after an earlier protocol had expired) that called for some \$6-7 million in mutual trade; Afghanistan had earlier agreed to deliver 5,000 tons of cotton to China. Beijing's main imports to Afghanistan were tea and textile machinery.



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We have no conclusive evidence of direct Chinese assistance to the Afghan rebels before the invasion, despite charges by Moscow and Kabul. Reports of Beijing's willingness to furnish such assistance are contradictory.



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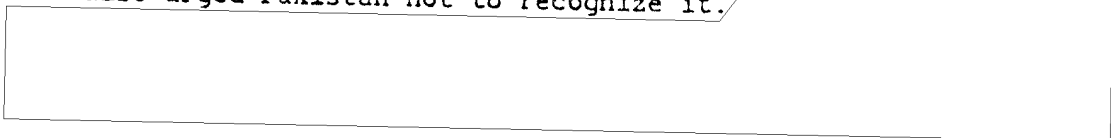
China's major concern about the situation in Afghanistan appeared to be that it would lead to greater instability in the region.



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After the Invasion

China has kept open its mission in Kabul since the Soviet invasion, but it has not recognized the Babrak Karmal regime and has also urged Pakistan not to recognize it.



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[Redacted]

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By 18 January, however, Beijing had apparently changed its view and began to make disparaging public comments about "Soviet puppets in Kabul." By mid-February China reportedly decided to suspend all trade relations with Afghanistan.

[Redacted]

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We have no conclusive evidence that China is currently aiding the Afghan rebels. Beijing is known to be willing to supply arms through Pakistan; Chinese diplomats have stated this willingness to numerous foreign officials. Pakistan, however, was reported in January and February to be hesitant to cooperate with China in aiding the rebels until it has a foreign military aid commitment large enough to allow Islamabad to offer strong resistance to a possible Soviet invasion.

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While China denies assistance to Afghan rebels, it has strongly endorsed their cause. In media comments, Beijing has repeatedly stressed the need for the continued struggle of the Afghan people and also their need to unite. In late January, for example, the commentator in an article in Renmin Ribao entitled "Unite and Persist in

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Fighting," noted the establishment of the "Liberation Alliance of Afghan Muslims" as a possible beginning of unity among the resistance. Chinese media also stress the brutality of the Soviet occupation.



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