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## SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS: A NATIONAL INTEREST PERSPECTIVE

The death of Chernenko and the rapid rise of Gorbachev has heightened interest in appraising what affect those developments may have on Sino-Soviet relations. Such concern is prudent. A major change in the relationship could have serious implications for the US. Therefore, OEA has prepared a typescript, Possible Chinese Motives for the Overtures to Gorbachev and SOVA has contributed to materials sent to the NSC by NIO/USSR. These efforts have been timely and quite good. China watchers and Kremlinologists alike anticipate some improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, but stopping well short of the "lips to teeth" relationship of the 1950's. I concur with this assessment, but think we must also put it in a proper perspective, that is, in terms of China's perception of its national interest.

China's action since 1949 demonstrates that it has a clear idea of its long-term goals and objectives and uses them as a guide to strategic and tactical foreign policy judgments. Some of the more important of these include:

- an almost passionate desire to remain independent of either of the two superpowers (it does not want an instant replay with the US of its bad experiences with the USSR in the early 1950's);
- confident of eventually becoming the dominant regional power in East Asia at the expense of Japan, the US and the Soviet Union;
- returning China someday to its rightful place as a major player in world politics; and
- sustaining economic and military modernization primarily by borrowing from the West in order to achieve its other objectives.

Chinese leaders appear to appreciate the "middle Kingdom's" present weaknesses, its principal security threat, i.e., the Soviet Union and the importance of the the western nations as a source of technology. At the height of Sino-Soviet tensions in 1969-1970 they determined to move

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closer to the US to provide protection and began a search for ways to incorporate essential western technology into their modernization plans. As tensions subsided somewhat with the Soviet Union and relations with the US improved the Chinese began readjusting their policies to be more in line with their long-term goals. They resisted American overtures for a closer strategic relationship recognizing this threatened their prized independence and would be viewed as highly provocative in Moscow. Instead they pressed for greater access to western military technology and began a series of moves to improve relations with the Soviets. We should also expect China to readjust its foreign policy stance tactically again in the future as it takes into account new circumstances or unanticipated threats to its long-term objectives.

Such an analysis suggests that US policy initiatives may have some influence on Chinese tactical thinking, but probably will not succeed in persuading Beijing to alter significantly its long-term goals. This need not, however, prejudice US interests as long as our decisions are based on a keen appreciation of China's ultimate intentions, and we avoid designing policies based primarily on Beijing tactical pronouncements and maneuvering.

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