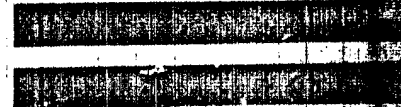


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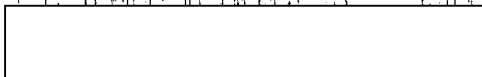
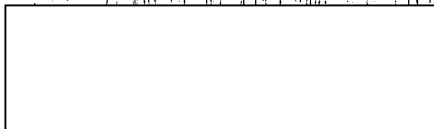


Strategic  
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# Monthly Report

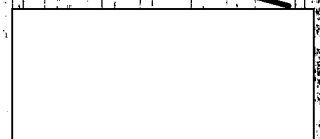
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**STRATEGIC WARNING STAFF  
MONTHLY REPORT\*  
TO THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

The monthly report draws upon both the finished and unfinished product of the intelligence community and the field commands. It reflects the judgment of analysts assigned to the Strategic Warning Staff arrived at in consultations with analysts in the various NFIB agencies. Major substantive differences are welcomed and can be addressed to the Director, SWS, Room 1C925, Pentagon, commercial phone 695-1181 (Autovon 225-1181), gray phone 90-3125 or KY-3 #2552, or to the individual analysts whose names appear at the end of each item.

[redacted]

\* This report covers the months February-March 1979.

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29 Mar 1979

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Overview examines China's punitive attack on Vietnam and the Soviet response in the context of their perceptions of each other's motives, objectives and calculations of risk. Both Beijing and Moscow operated on the basis of realistic and accurate assessments of each other's intentions and the constraints on their respective actions and reactions. The Chinese in particular revealed a canny skill in controlling risks by influencing Soviet, Vietnamese, and other foreign perceptions of China's limited objectives. They deliberately signalled their intentions in advance and during the conflict, particularly the essentially political purposes of their military operations. Moscow and Hanoi seem to have judged that Beijing's intentions were quite limited and therefore avoided actions which might trigger an unwanted escalation or lead them into military and political traps set by the Chinese. In the aftermath of Beijing's defiance of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty, however, the Soviets are likely to exercise greater prudence in identifying their interests so closely with Hanoi's and may elect to buttress their power position vis-a-vis China. [REDACTED]

We examine some warning aspects of the recent large Soviet exercise in the Transbaykal Military District and Mongolia. [REDACTED]

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29 Mar 1979

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## MONTHLY OVERVIEW

China's venture in Realpolitik in undertaking a punitive attack on Vietnam and the Soviet response to this audacious action provide instructive insights into their perceptions of each other's motives, objectives, and calculations of risk. An examination of this episode suggests that both Beijing and Moscow operated on the basis of realistic and accurate assessments of each other's intentions and the constraints on their respective actions and reactions. Chinese behavior, in particular, revealed a canny skill in controlling risks by influencing Soviet, Vietnamese, and other foreign perceptions of China's limited objectives. [REDACTED]

There are few precedents in twentieth century history for the deliberate care with which the Chinese signalled their intentions in advance and during the conflict, particularly the precision with which they underscored the essentially political purposes of strictly limited and controlled military operations. The reactions of both Moscow and Hanoi seemed to reflect considerable confidence in a shared evaluation that China's intentions were, in fact, quite limited and that the Soviet Union and Vietnam should therefore avoid actions which might either trigger an unwanted escalation or lead them into military and political traps set by the Chinese. [REDACTED]

### China's Calculations

China's political and military strategy appears to have been based on the fundamental assumption that the scope and duration of its military operations could be tightly controlled in a way that would minimize both the risks of becoming locked into a protracted and inconclusive conflict with Vietnam and of generating potentially dangerous Soviet military reactions and politically damaging American, Japanese, and West European responses. The crucial element in Beijing's calculations clearly was its estimate of Moscow's probable reaction -- an estimate which proved to be quite accurate. [REDACTED]

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29 Mar 1979

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The Chinese appear to have judged that the Soviets would be deterred from mounting a major retaliatory attack across the Sino-Soviet border by two principal factors: (a) recognition that a strong military reaction would play into China's hands by transforming a minor Sino-Vietnamese confrontation into a major Sino-Soviet crisis which would deflect world attention from China's attack on Vietnam and jeopardize Moscow's priority objectives in Soviet-US relations; and (b) Soviet concern about the unpredictability of Chinese reactions and apprehensions that even a limited retaliatory strike might trigger strong Chinese counterattacks which the Soviets would be unwilling to risk. Although the Chinese apparently estimated that Moscow's reaction would be limited primarily to propaganda and diplomatic efforts to discredit China, they did not completely rule out the possibility of minor Soviet incursions into Chinese territory. Beijing's decision to evacuate the civilian population from cities near the border, particularly in Xiangiang province, probably was intended not only as a precautionary defensive measure but as a move to reduce the risk of Soviet military reaction by signalling that Chinese forces in the border area were fully prepared to mount counterattacks in strength. [redacted]

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29 Mar 1979

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In late February, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping publicly declared that he did not anticipate Soviet military intervention but that he could not "preclude totally such risks." After two weeks of Soviet inaction, the Chinese grew increasingly confident that Moscow would not move. Vice Premier Li Xiannian, in a tone of thinly veiled contempt, told journalists on 1 March that Soviet reaction would be confined to "abusive language and bluffing" even if China, after withdrawing from Vietnam, again "courterattacked" to punish further Vietnamese provocations. [redacted]

### China's Objectives

This public depreciation of the likelihood of Soviet military reaction reflected one of China's principal political objectives in invading Vietnam, namely, to demonstrate to the US and its allies that the Soviets would back down when challenged and that Moscow's opponents could safely take bold actions against the "hegemonistic" ambitions of the USSR and its surrogates, such as Cuba and Vietnam, without fear or risk of dangerous Soviet reactions. It seems likely, in fact, that this desire to strike a blow at Soviet pretensions and ambitions and to influence Western perceptions and policies was as strong a motivating factor as China's determination to punish Hanoi, redress the damage to China's credibility and prestige caused by Vietnam's conquest of Kampuchea, and undermine Hanoi's ability to consolidate this conquest. [redacted]

### China's Tactics to Minimize Risks

Beijing's wish to hold risks to a minimum and to secure a free hand in moving against the Vietnamese led it to take extraordinary measures to influence Soviet, Vietnamese and Western perceptions of Chinese intentions. As far back as last November, Chinese officials began to speak of an eventual need to "teach Hanoi a proper lesson in the northern part of Vietnam" and to nurture an understanding abroad that Chinese objectives were essentially political and that any use

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of military force would be limited in scope and duration. This deliberate signalling of intentions intensified sharply in December with unambiguous public warnings against Vietnamese provocations on the Chinese border and "aggression" in Kampuchea -- warnings which were clearly intended to establish the justification for a punitive attack. The most striking example of this signalling appeared in an authoritative People's Daily editorial on 25 December which bluntly informed Hanoi: "Don't complain later that we've not given you a clear warning in advance." [redacted]

The final phase of this careful conditioning of foreign perceptions was carried out by Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping during his visits to the US and Japan in late January and early February. His public remarks confirmed the movement of Chinese forces to the Vietnamese border and called attention to the possibility that China may have to teach Vietnam "some necessary lessons." Deng balanced his warnings that "we mean what we say" with assurances that China "does not act rashly." [redacted]

After the incursion into Vietnam was launched on 17 February, the Chinese actively sought to forestall dangerous Soviet, Vietnamese, and Western reactions by constantly emphasizing that the offensive was aimed solely at halting Vietnamese border provocations, not at broader objectives such as compelling Hanoi to withdraw its forces from Kampuchea. Beijing's statement on 17 February referred to Chinese forces as "frontier troops" and defined their mission as a "counterattack." It declared that "we do not want a single inch of Vietnamese territory," that China's only aim was to establish a "peaceful and stable border," and that after the "counterattack" had achieved its objectives, "Chinese frontier troops will strictly keep to defending the border of their own country." The statement also renewed China's proposal for early negotiations with Hanoi to restore peace and settle border and territorial disputes.

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In the next two weeks, Chinese officials provided almost daily private and public assurances that China would be circumspect and that military operations would not be expanded beyond the limited

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29 Mar 1979

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objective of halting Vietnamese provocations. Chinese spokesmen denied any intention to expand operations into the Red River delta or to attack Hanoi, and they declared that the fighting would be over in a "few days." After capturing Cao Bang on 23 February, Beijing reiterated its call for negotiations and the assurance that China did not want "one inch" of Vietnam's territory. On 1 March, the Chinese again proposed negotiations as soon as possible. Three days after Chinese forces achieved their major goal by capturing Lang Son on 2 March, against fierce Vietnamese resistance [redacted]

[redacted] Beijing announced that its goals had been attained and that Chinese forces had begun to withdraw into Chinese territory.  
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Soviet Perceptions and Reactions

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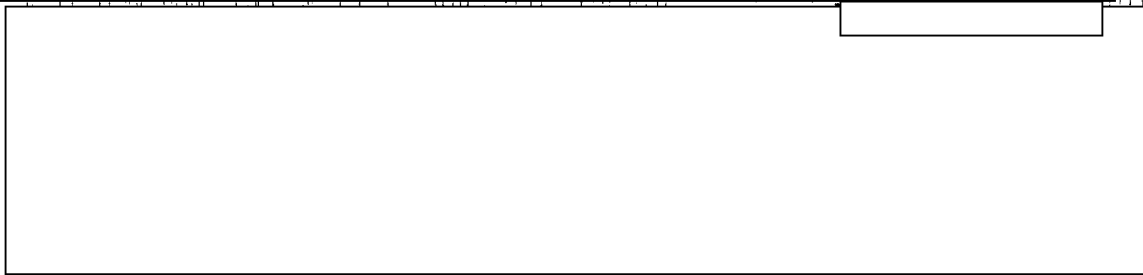
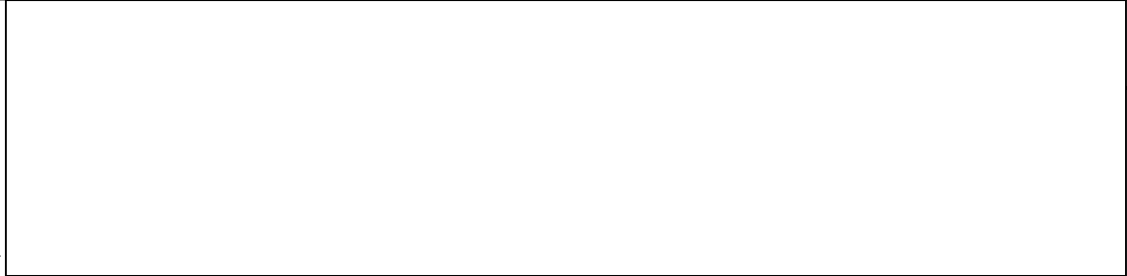
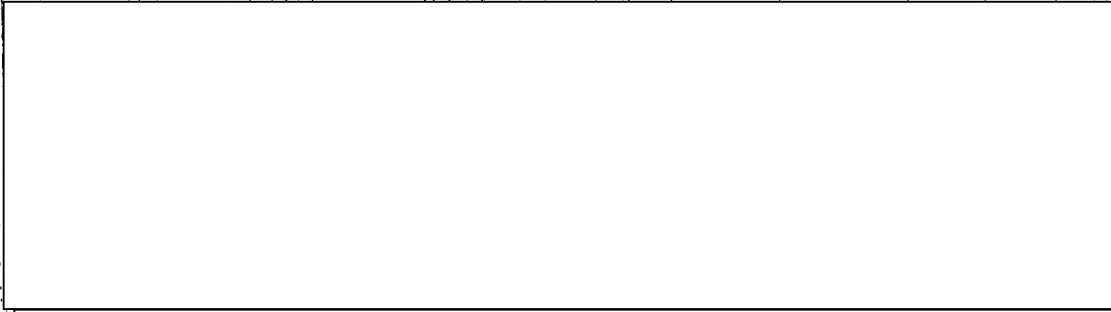
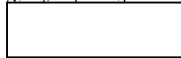
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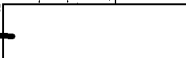


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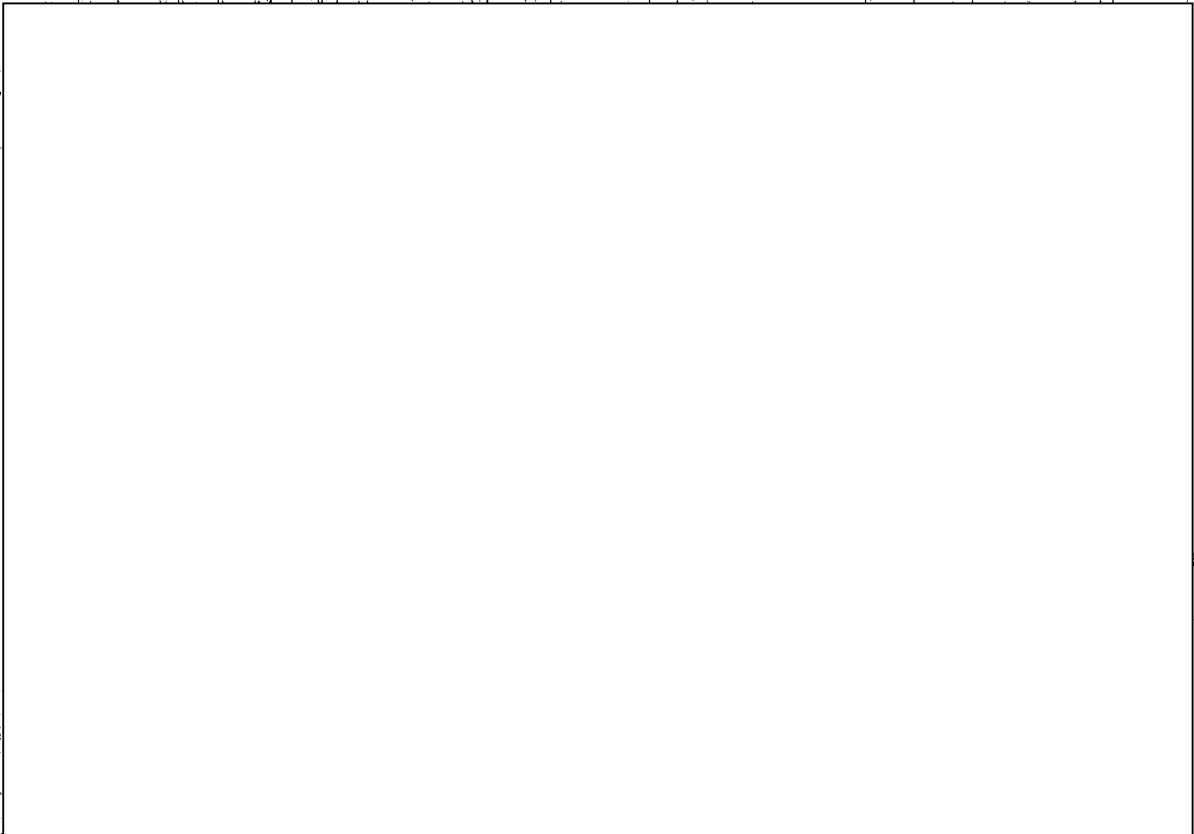
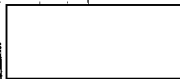
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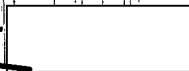


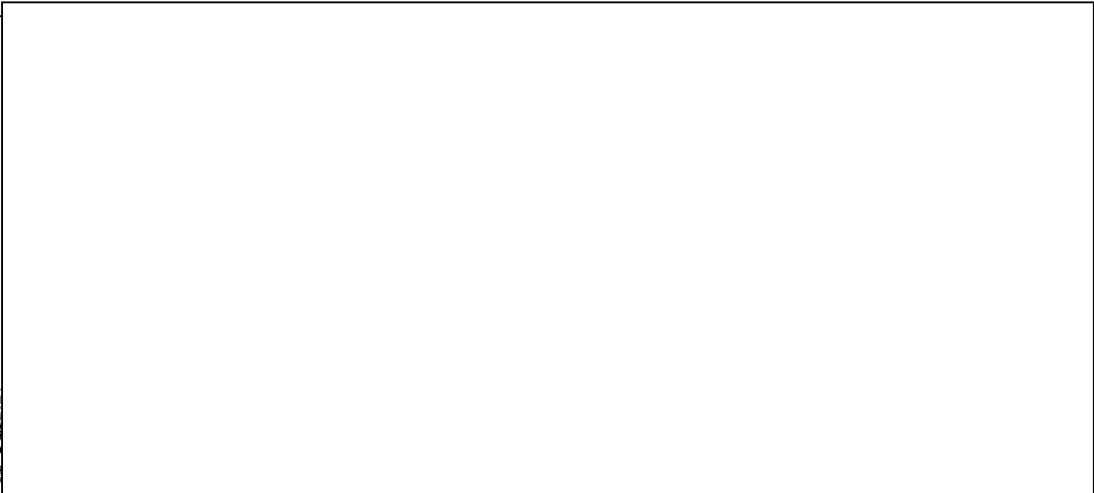
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The Next Phase

It is too early to draw a balance sheet on the outcome of the Sino-Vietnamese confrontation and Moscow's ambiguous response. But Soviet policy in the immediate future probably will be influenced by the

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Soviet leaders' lingering concern to offset the impression -- now being assiduously promoted by the Chinese -- that the USSR failed to make good on its commitments to Hanoi and that it backed down when challenged by China. This concern is likely to be translated into active Soviet support for Vietnamese efforts to consolidate their grip on Kampuchea and to strengthen their political and military defenses against an eventual renewal of Chinese pressure on the border. [REDACTED]

Kampuchea, in the short term, probably will again become the central focus of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Hanoi almost certainly will undertake strenuous political and military efforts to break the back of the Pol Pot forces' stubborn resistance. The Vietnamese began airlifting elements of several divisions to Kampuchea on 20 March in what may be preliminary preparations for a multi-division offensive in western and southwestern Kampuchea before the rainy season begins in May. In view of the severe drain on Vietnam's limited resources created by Pol Pot's guerrillas and the failure to establish a viable client regime in Phnom Penh, Hanoi probably will attach high priority to bringing its Kampuchean problems under control before confronting China in an attempt to recover disputed territory occupied by the Chinese. [REDACTED]

If the Vietnamese appear to be making significant progress in weakening Pol Pot's forces, the Chinese will again face the same kind of challenge that led to their incursion on 17 February. One of China's major objectives was to compel Hanoi to reduce its forces in Kampuchea and to encourage indigenous resistance to the Vietnamese conquest. Vietnamese successes therefore could trigger another cycle of Chinese pressures and threats. Beijing radio warned on 24 March that the Vietnamese are attempting to step up military operations in Kampuchea in an attempt to "annex" that country and achieve their objective of an Indochina federation. [REDACTED]

The Soviets and Vietnamese probably anticipate that China intends to use its occupation of territory claimed by Hanoi to press and bargain for the removal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea. There would seem

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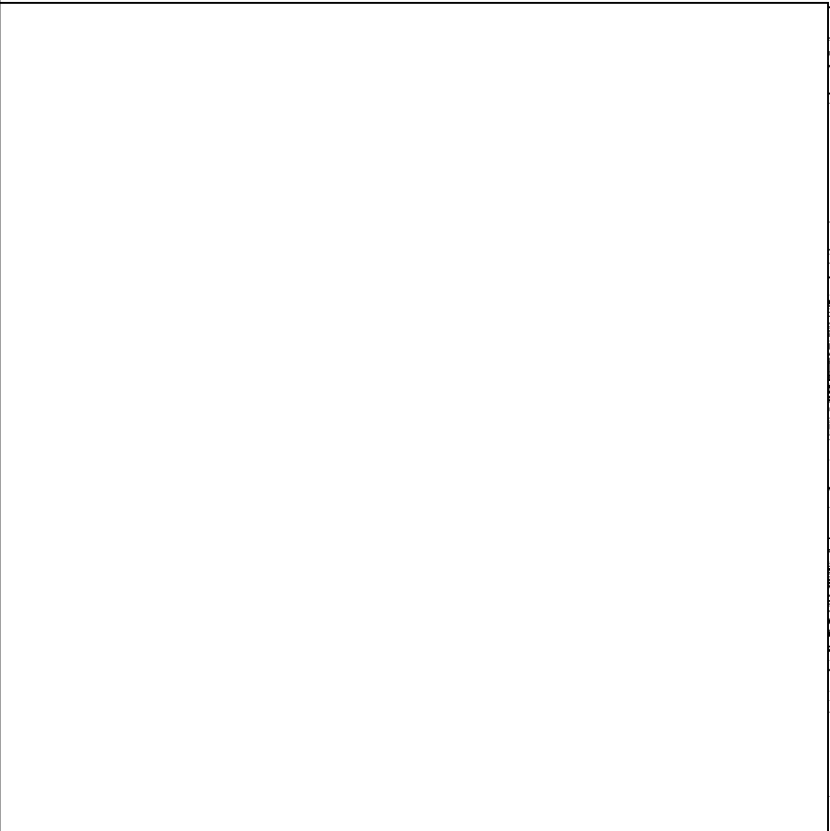
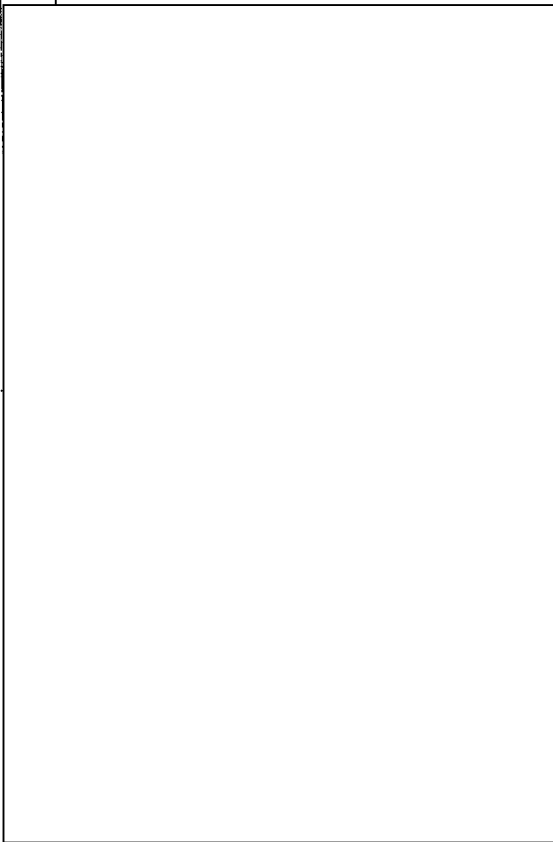
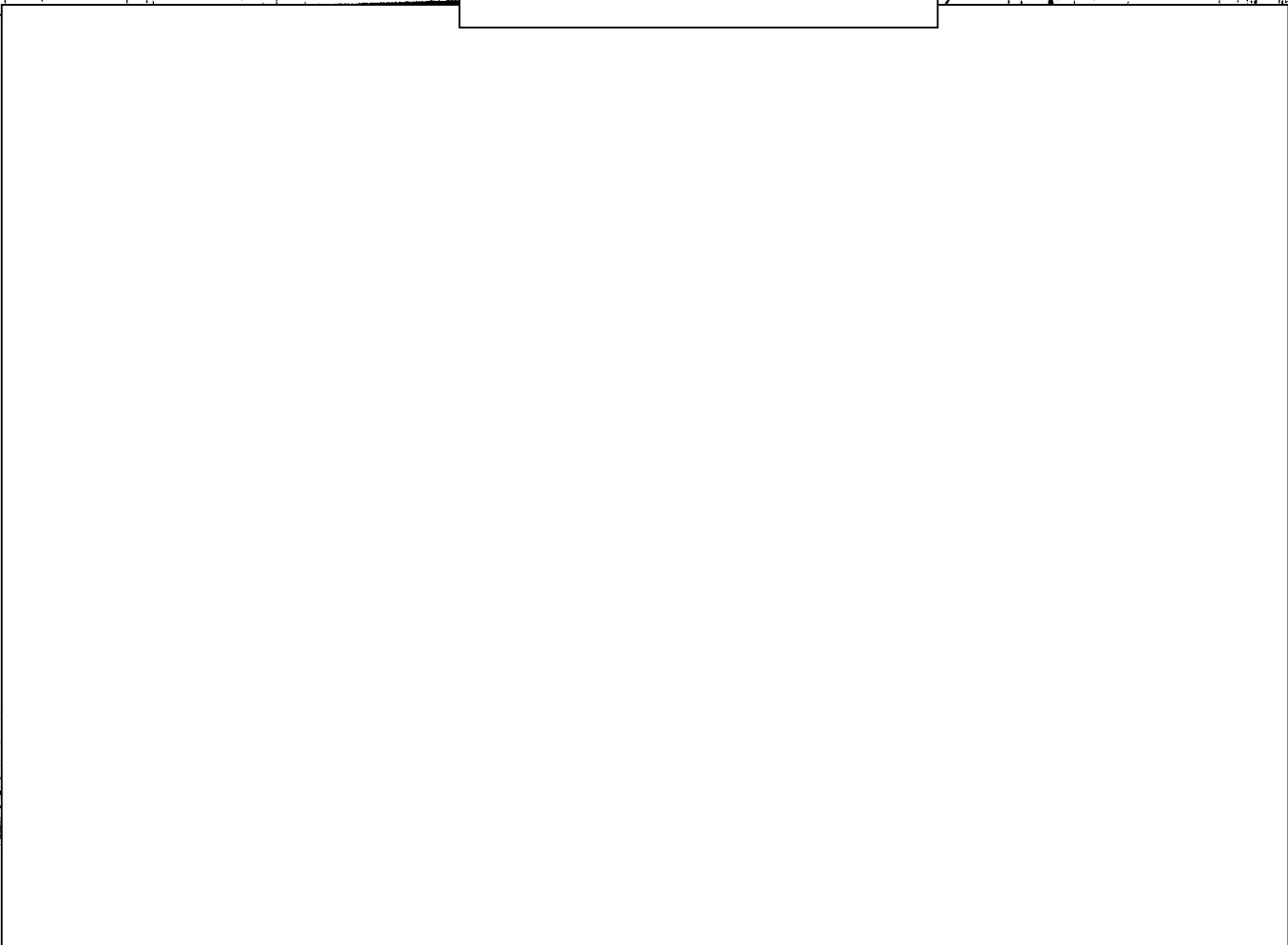
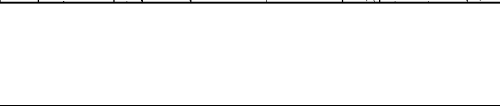
to be no prospect of an early break in the negotiations impasse, however, as long as Hanoi continues to demand a prior Chinese withdrawal to the "historical boundary." Although Hanoi has proclaimed its right to act in "self-defense," it seems unlikely that the Vietnamese will undertake a major military effort to expel the Chinese from some 60 square kilometers of territory in the next few months while they are preoccupied with Kampuchea. [REDACTED]

The formidable array of military, political, and economic problems facing the Vietnamese leaders will undoubtedly cause them to press the Soviets for greater support and assistance. These pressures may well result in growing Soviet-Vietnamese tensions and resentments because Moscow's behavior during the Chinese invasion underscored their divergent interests, particularly Moscow's desire to avoid excessive involvement on behalf of Vietnam which might jeopardize higher priority Soviet objectives. There is also some chance that the Soviets will overplay their hand in attempting to turn Hanoi's increased dependence to their advantage by pressing for military access to Vietnamese ports or air bases. [REDACTED]

Although the Soviets have little choice but to continue demonstrative support and assistance to Hanoi as the latter prepares for the next round with China, it seems likely that the Soviet leaders, having digested the lesson of Beijing's defiance of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty, will exercise greater prudence in identifying their interests so closely with Hanoi's. In preparing for the next phase of the Sino-Vietnamese confrontation, the Soviets may therefore elect to give higher priority to buttressing their general power position vis-a-vis China, perhaps by strengthening their combat forces in Mongolia and in the military districts on the Sino-Soviet border. [REDACTED]

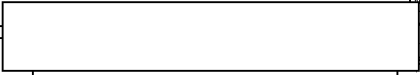
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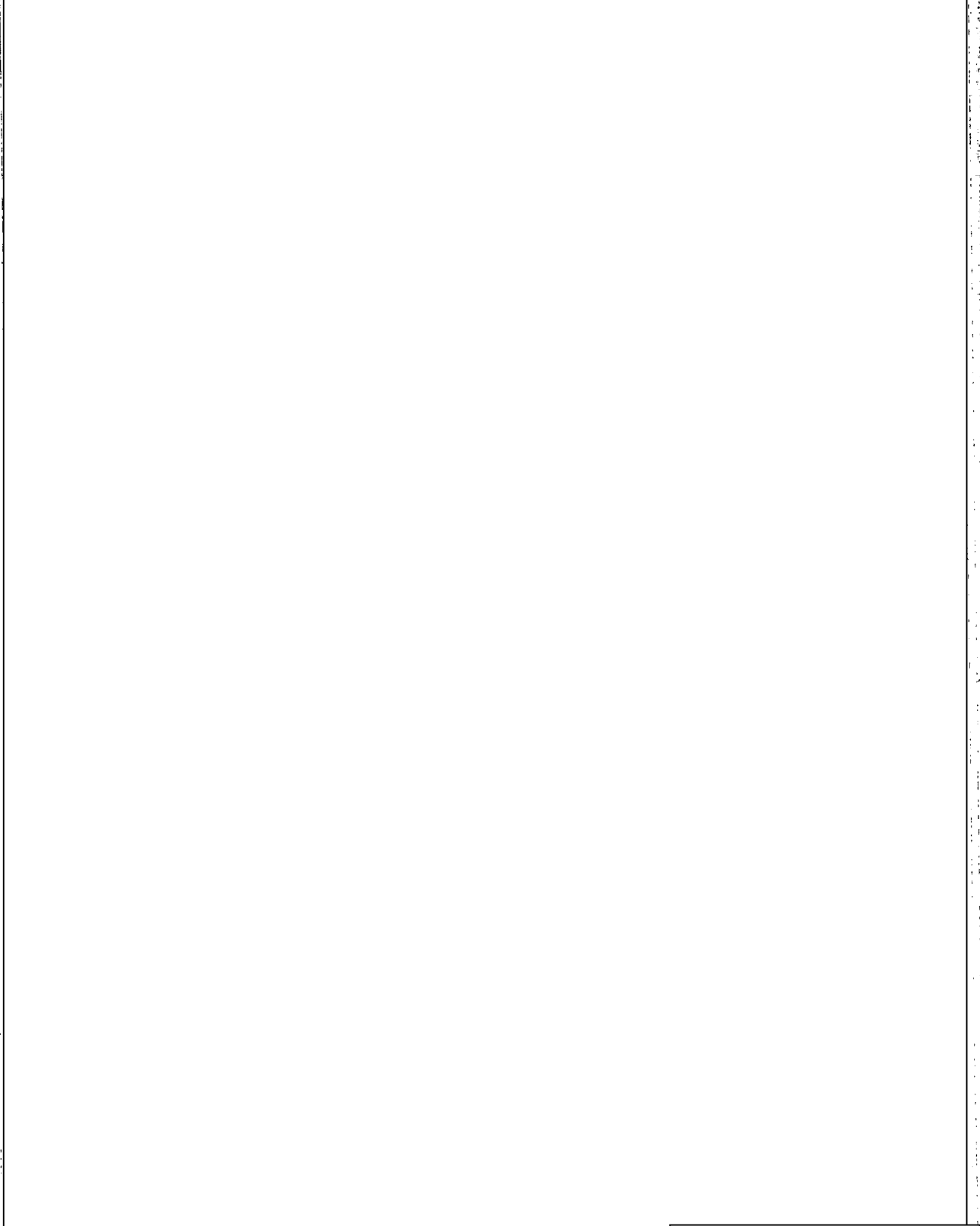
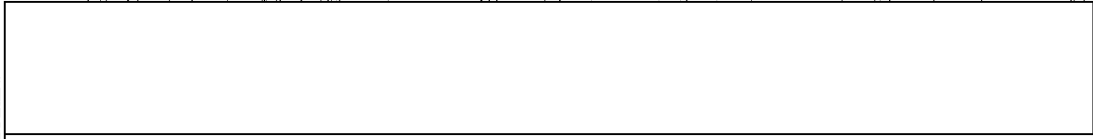
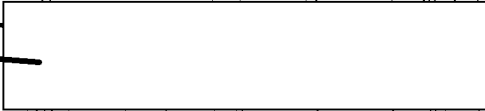


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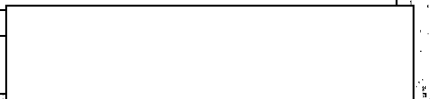
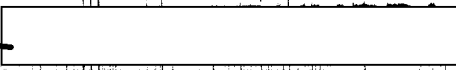


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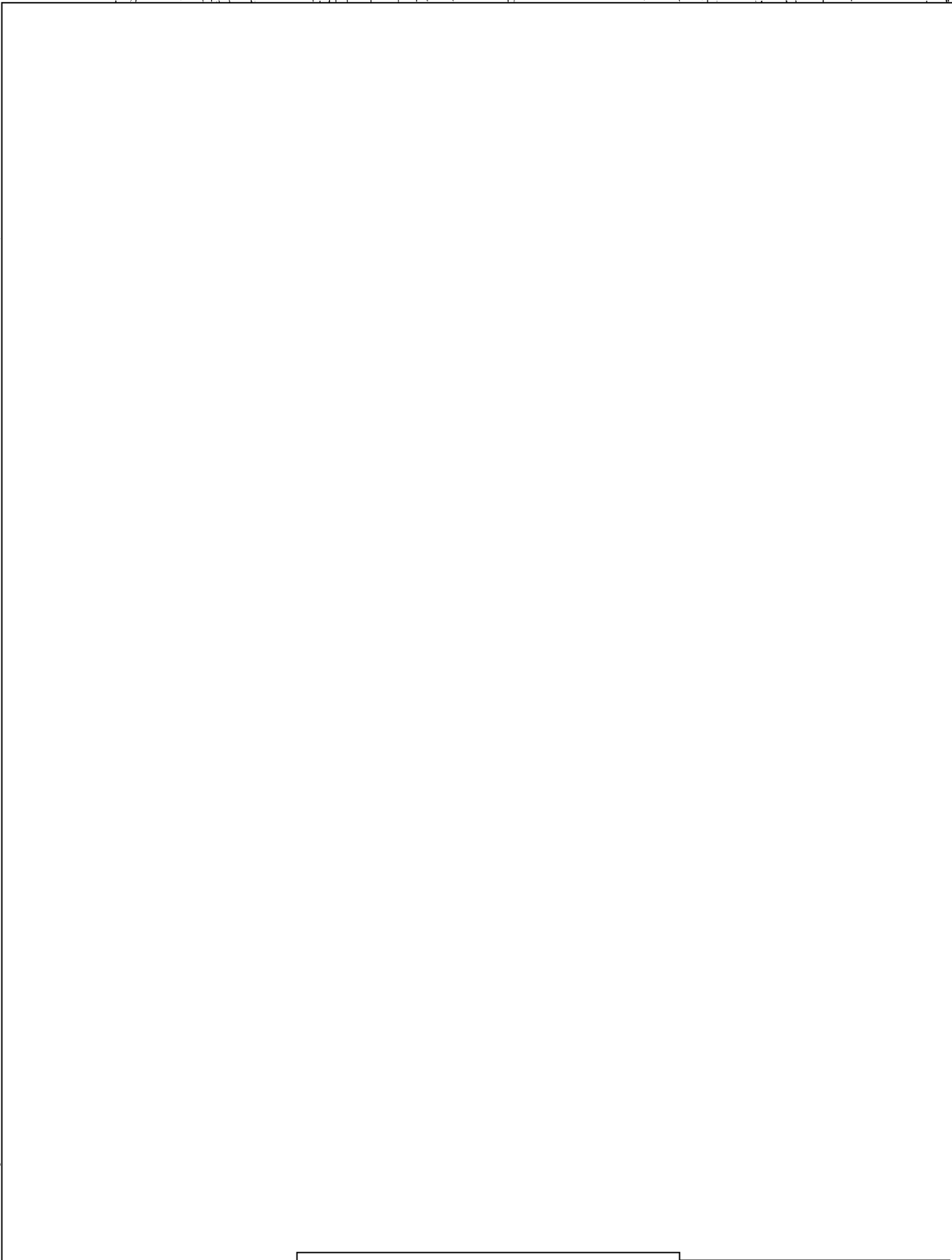
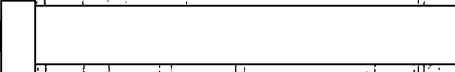


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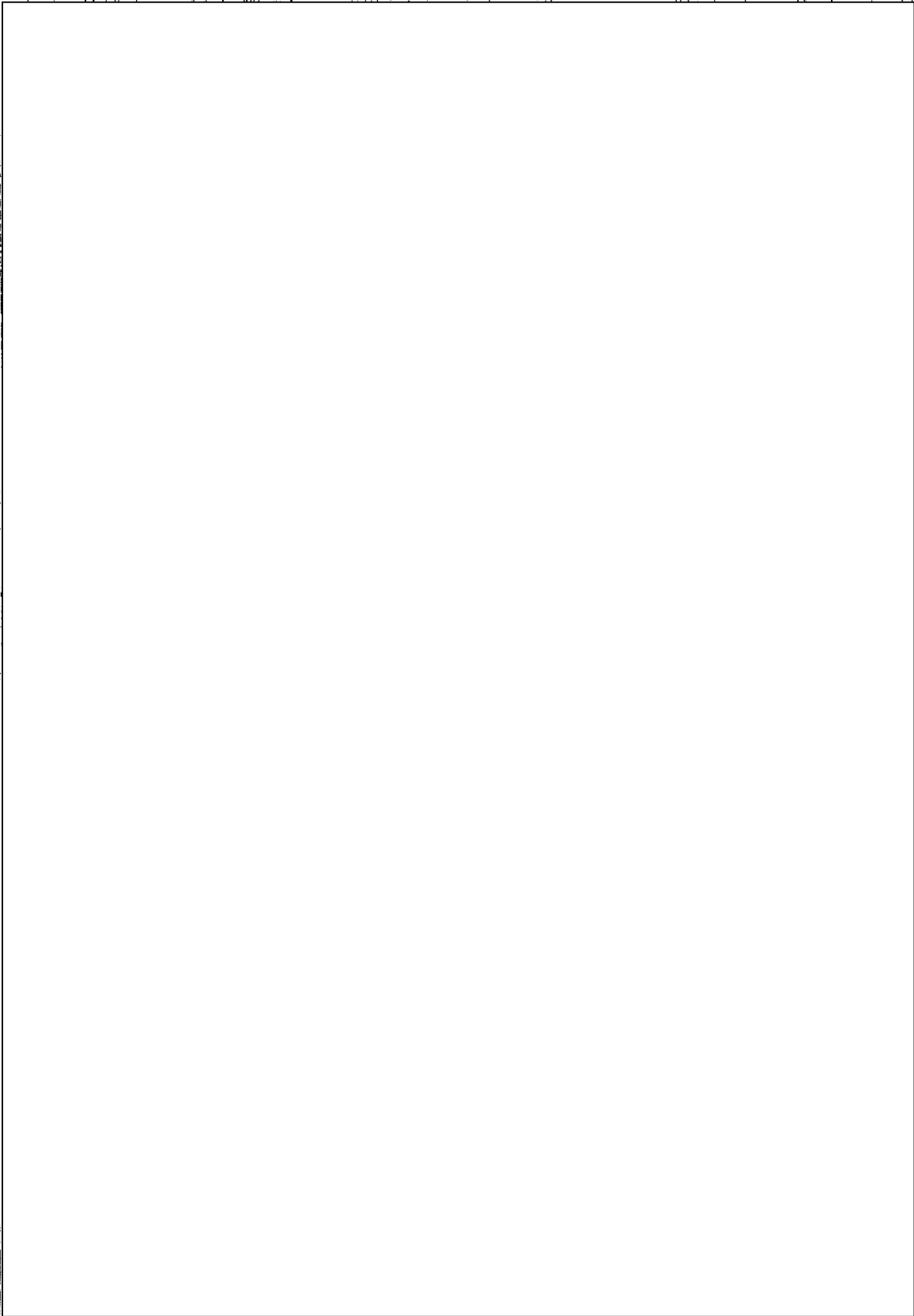




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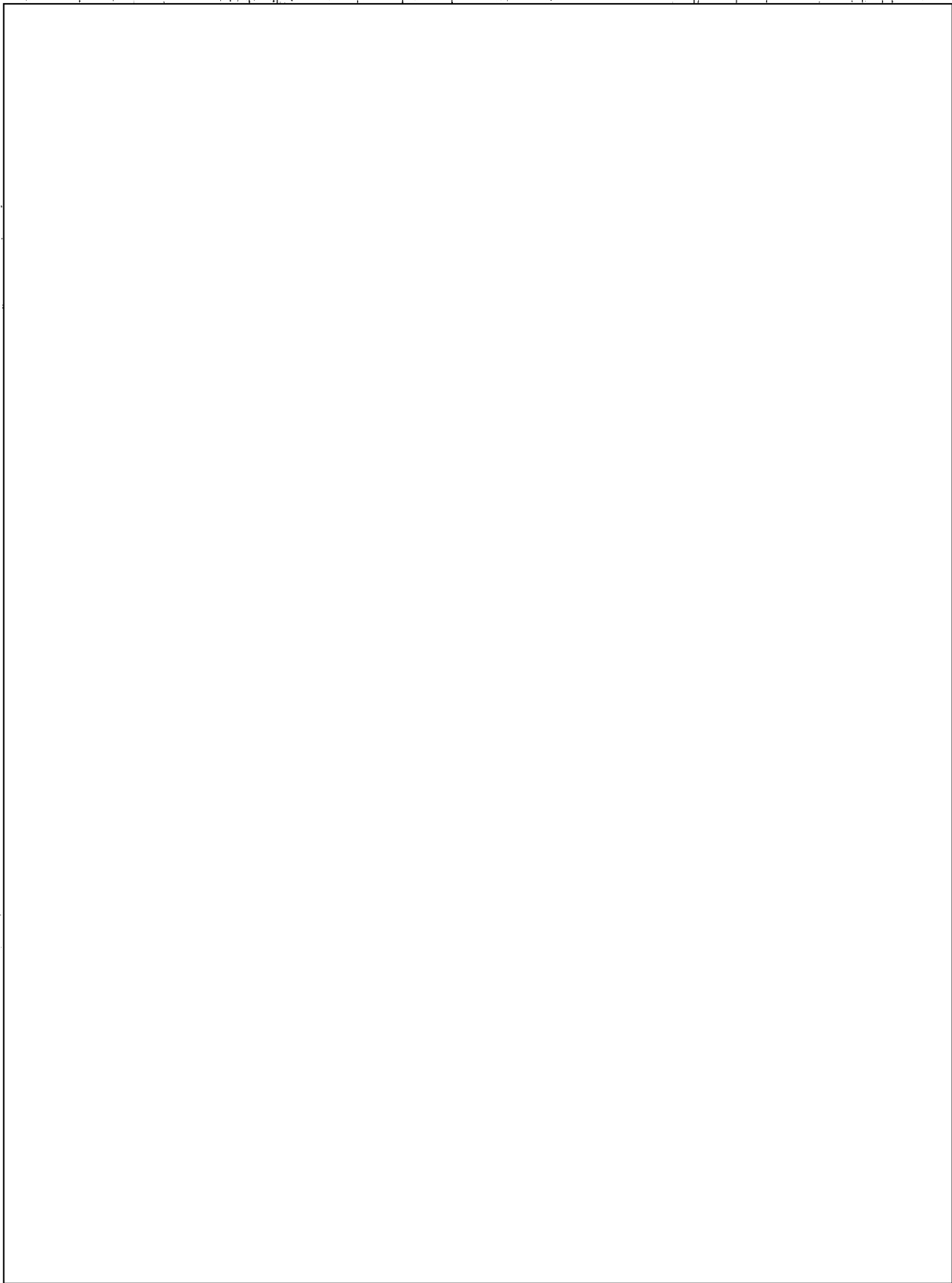
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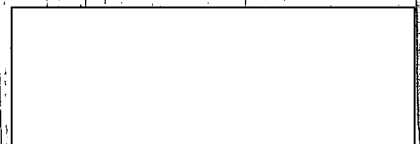
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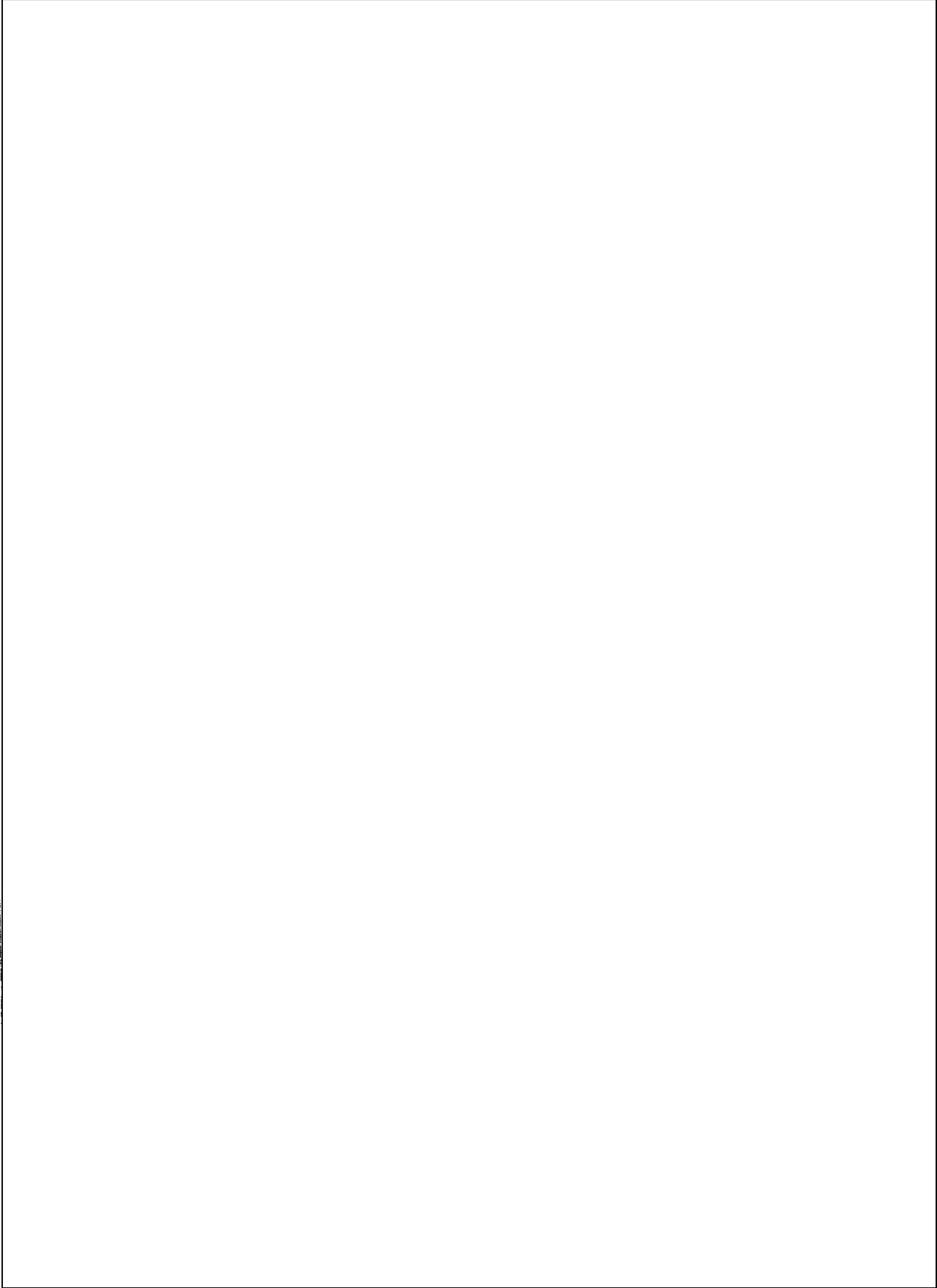
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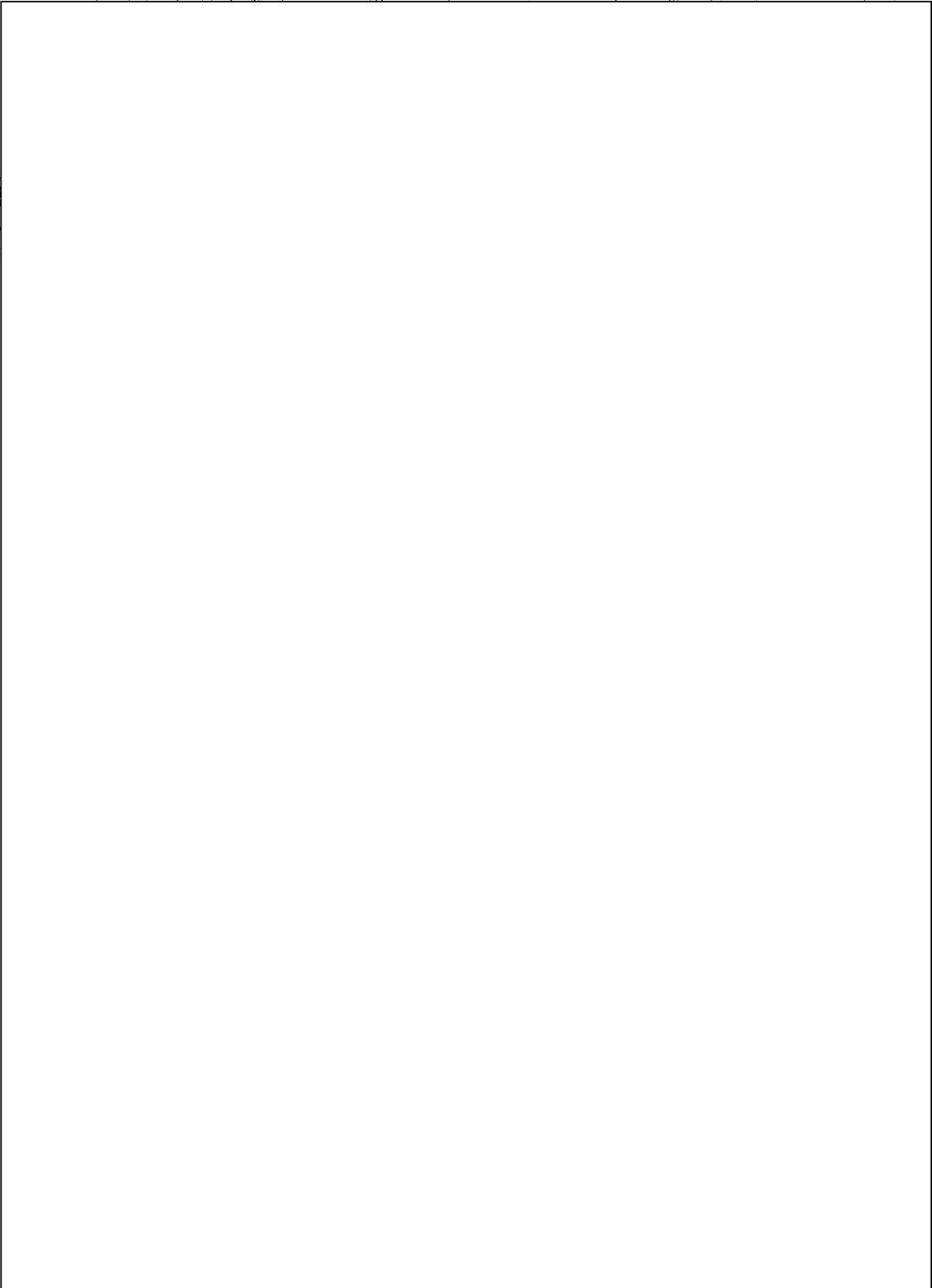
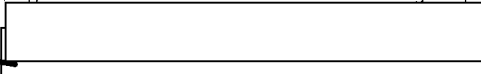
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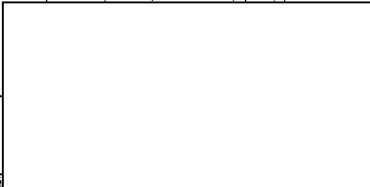
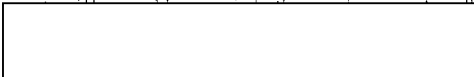
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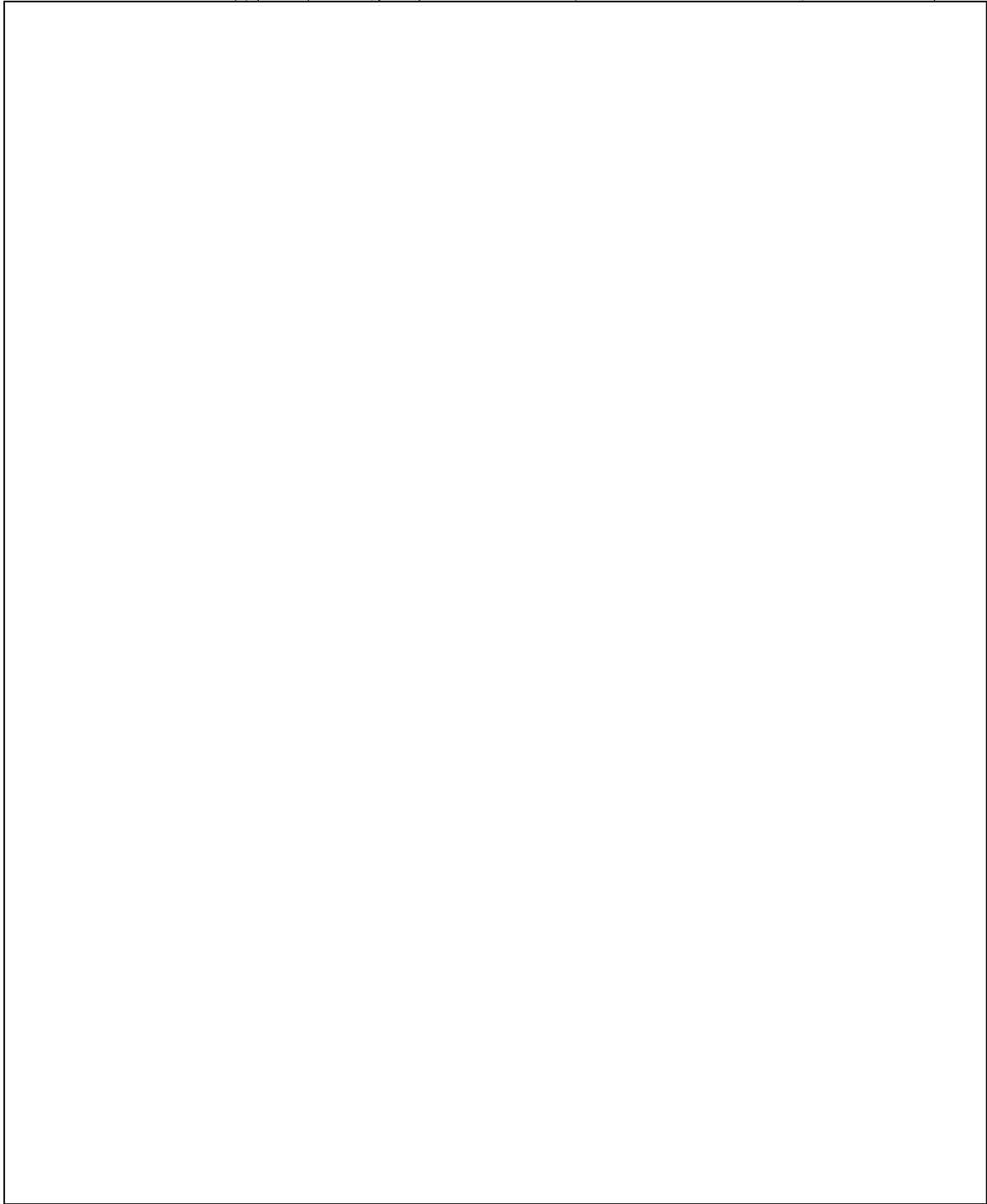
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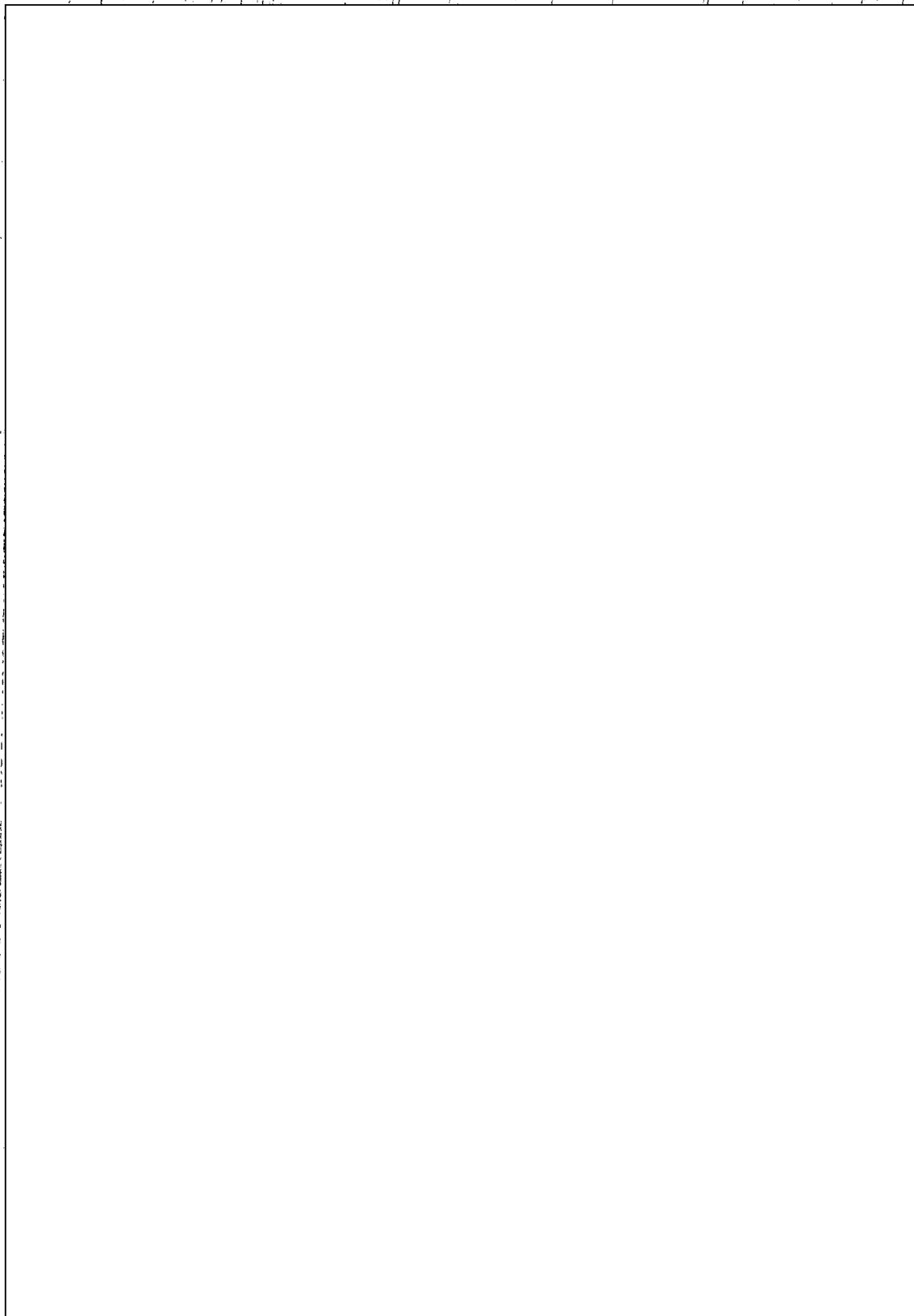


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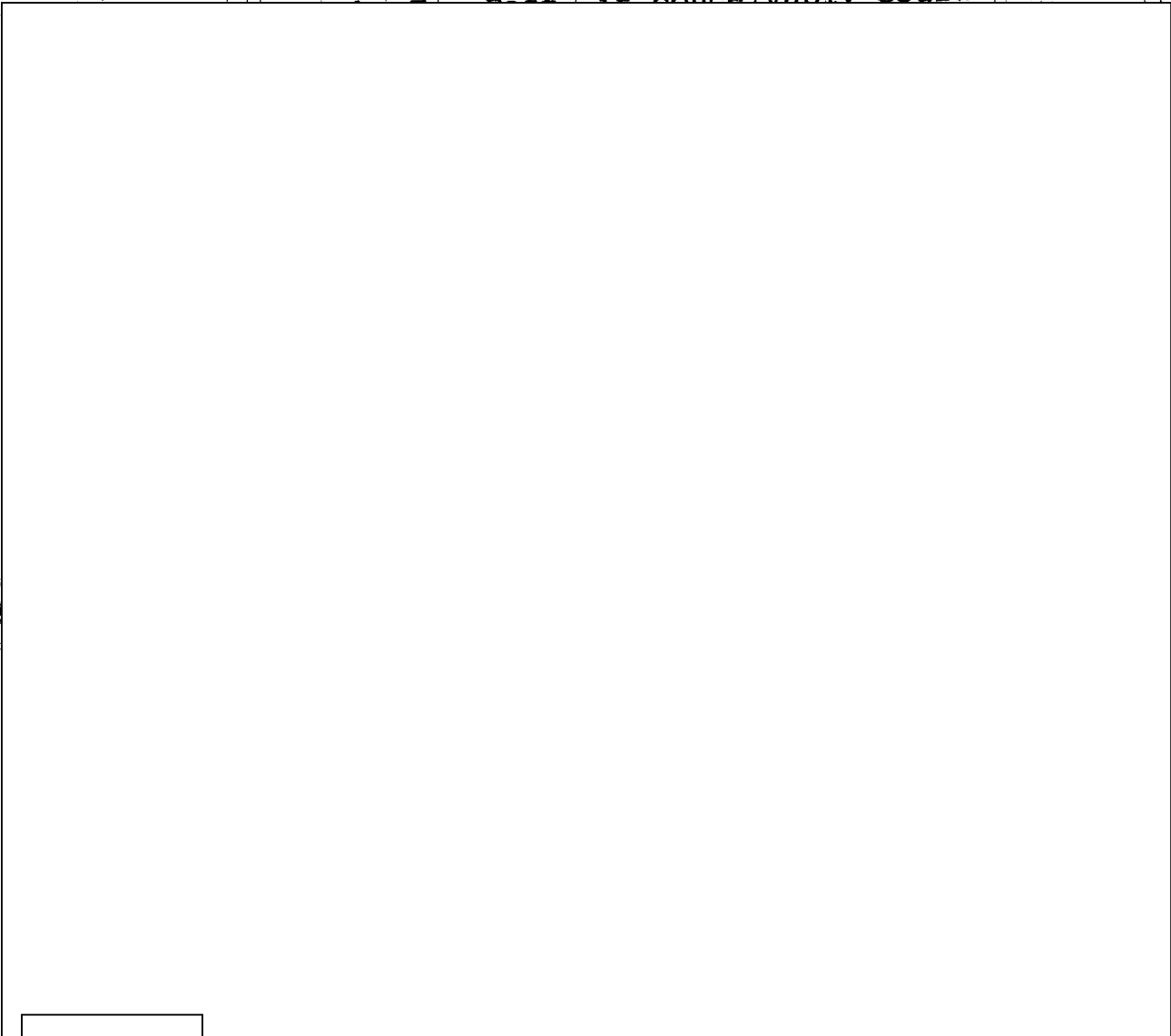


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... it conceivably could



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Conclusions: We have seen nothing in the recent developments to modify our view that the Soviets see the Chinese as a long-term threat to their vital interests, perhaps their greatest threat. This concern almost certainly has been intensified by the recent developments in Southeast Asia. The Soviet leadership no doubt is relieved that the Chinese invasion of Vietnam was brought to a halt before they were compelled "to do something" to aid their Vietnamese allies. But they may also believe that

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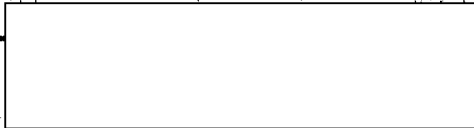
the respite is temporary and that the Sino-Vietnamese confrontation could result in a more dangerous situation some time in the future. Although from our standpoint the Soviets may appear to have a great military superiority over the Chinese, this has not deterred China from attacking Vietnam. The Soviets may therefore hope that their recent exercise, and perhaps others to come, will have some deterrent effect on future Chinese actions and, if deterrence fails, that they will be better prepared to take whatever military action they deem necessary. [redacted]

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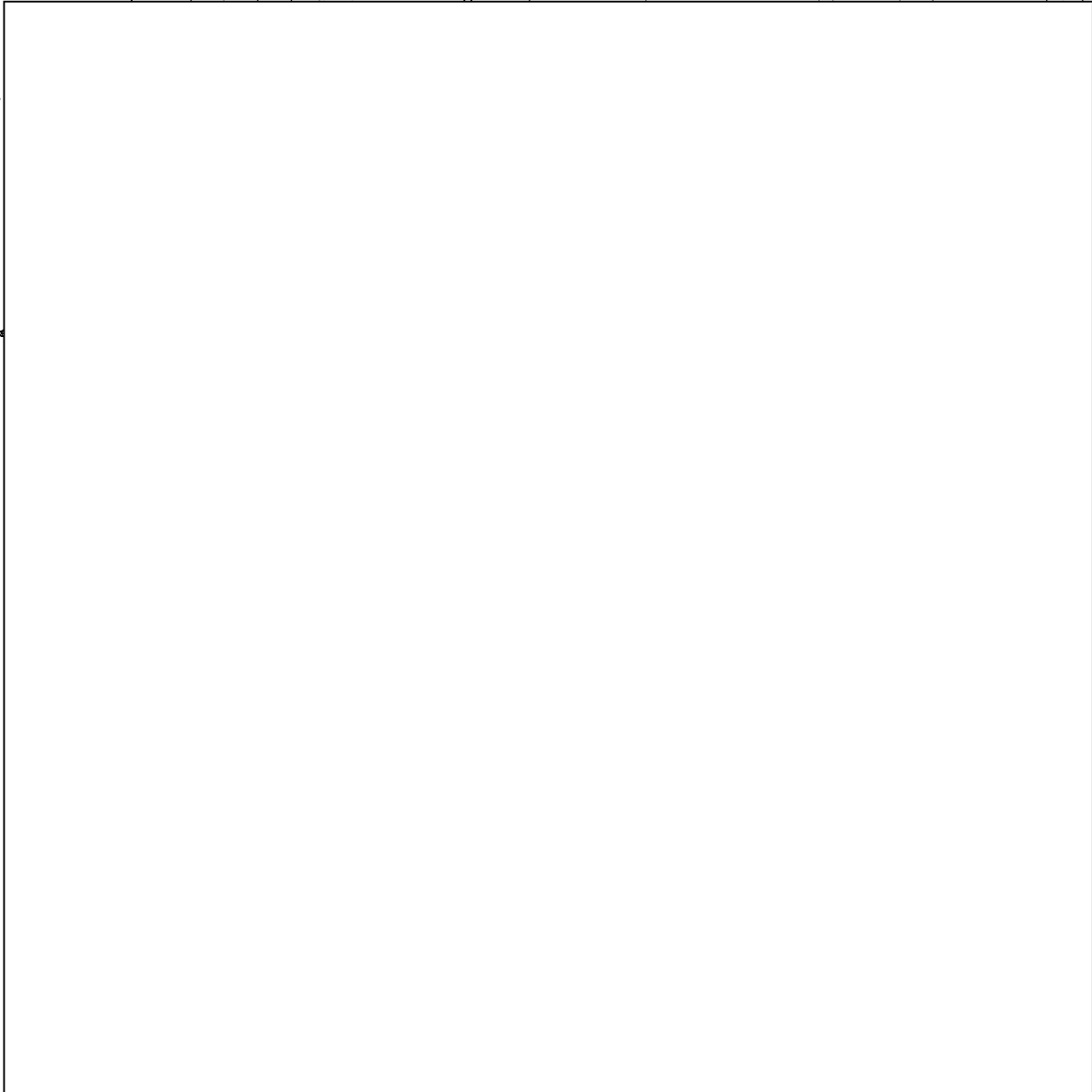
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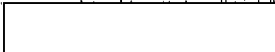


PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST TO THE

STRATEGIC WARNING COMMUNITY

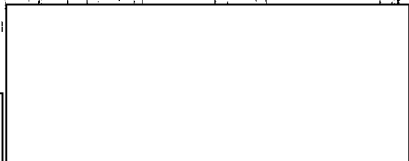
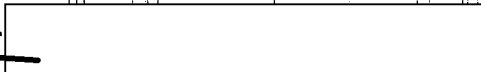
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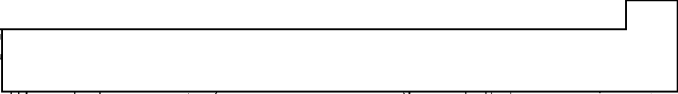
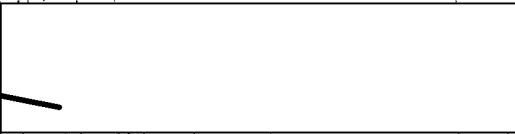


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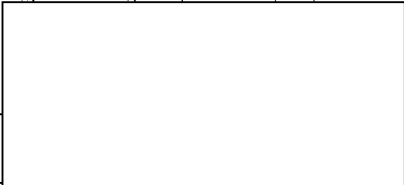


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