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SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS : QUEST FOR RAPPROCHEMENT

Sino-Soviet relations during last more than two decades are characterized by continued rivalry and acrimony between the two communist giants in ideological, political, economic and military-strategic fields. As a result, the popular view among the academic circles was that the Sino-Soviet relations would turn into those of major conflicts in near future. Rapprochement between the two communist poles was considered to be a distant possibility. Of late however, Sino-Soviet relations have shown certain positive developments. It has been evidenced by the fact that attacks on China have disappeared from the Soviet press and Chinese criticism of the Soviet Union is confined now only to its foreign policy matters.

Apart from the relaxation of tension between the two countries, some concrete measures designed to remove their differences and improve mutual relations have been taken in the recent past. Resumption of the bilateral talks at the Soviet initiative is the most important example. The talks are being held alternately in Beijing and Moscow, although both the sides expressed only cautious optimism on the results of the talks. Whether a rapprochement between the two countries is in sight is yet to be confirmed but quest for it is certainly in sight.

The relations between the two largest communist powers—the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China—have always been of great importance in international politics and of interest to observers and analysts. In particular, the nature of developments in Sino-Soviet relations¹, specific aspects, like the border disputes,

1. K. Subrahmanyam, "Necessity Dictates Change" *World Focus*, (Vol. 3, No. 6, New Delhi, 1983,) pp. 3-5, I. Alexandrov, "On Soviet-Chinese Relations" *International Affairs*, (No. 7, Moscow, 1982), pp. 16-19 and others.

strategic balance and outlooks for the future implication of Sino-US rift on Soviet Union² etc. have drawn the attention of quite a number of researchers. But the nature of contradictions between the two countries, factors behind the move towards rapprochement, and possibility of accommodation on the key issues, are the aspects that must be adequately focussed to grasp any future relationship between the two countries. With this end in view the present paper highlights the factors leading to the quest for rapprochement from both countries perspective and then assesses the possibility of accommodation in relation to key issues like ideological differences, border disputes, Kampuchea and Afghanistan.

I

At the Soviet end the primary consideration for extending hand of peace is to reduce her increasing military efforts directed against China. Soviet defence efforts directed against China was 5% of the total in the mid-1960s.³ It increased to about 12% in the 1970s.⁴ While in 1965 there were 18 Soviet divisions deployed against China,⁵ in 1982 this figure reached to 46.⁶ Such increase in Soviet defence efforts in respect of material and human resources directed against China poses a serious obstacle to Soviet Union and her East European allies in meeting the long-standing requirements of their economies. Foremost among these is the food programme. Continuous dependency of the Soviet Union and her East European allies on the USA for foodgrains became a

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2. Gerald Segal, *The "Soviet Threat" at China's Gates*. Conflict Studies, No. 143, The Institute for the Study of Conflict, London, 1983, Gordon F. Boreham, "Two China's One World" *International Perspective*, (July-August, Ottawa, 1982), pp. 21-26, and others.
 3. *Strategic Survey 1981-82*, (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1982,) p. 105.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. *Ibid.* Table 1. p. 105.
 6. Gerald Segal, *The Soviet Threats at China's Gates*. Conflict Studies No. 143, The Institute for the Study of Conflict, London, 1983, p.4.

serious problem of economic as well as political nature for the Soviet Union. In the first place, food deficiency is contributing to the East-West trade imbalance in favour of the latter. Secondly, food have already become a weapon in the hands of the USA to create political pressure on the Soviet Union. Thirdly, Soviet allies and most of the countries in the Third World friendly to her are food deficient. Fourthly, the image of the Soviet Union as a Super Power is seriously hampered by her chronic food shortage. To overcome these problems, in 1982 the USSR undertook a Food Programme for the period ending in 1990. It has been planned that by that time annual grain production will increase to 250-255 million tonnes (compared with 189.2 million tonnes in 1980) and meat production to 20-25 million tonnes (compared with 15.1 tonnes in 1980).⁷ But such massive programmes require enormous resources which could partly be generated if the Sino-Soviet relations are eased and some resources are released thereby.

Another problem facing the Soviet Union is her technological backwardness in comparison with the western world, particularly, the USA. To overcome this backwardness, Soviet Union in cooperation with her allies within the framework of CMEA has undertaken some projects for the 1980s. In this respect, most ambitious is "general agreement on cooperation in the development and wide use in the economy of micro-processors as well as elaboration and organisation of specialized and joint production of industrial robots", signed by the CMEA countries at the 36th Session of the organisation held in June 1982.⁸

All these programmes are vast enough. Their fulfilment will need huge amount of material and human resources both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The Soviet policy makers perceive that while it seems to be almost impossible to reduce military spending directed against NATO, an improvement of relations with China

7. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVIII, 1982,) p. 31588.

8. D. Lebin, "The Course for Integration" *International Affairs*, (No. 10, Moscow, 1982) p. 14.

would let them reduce military efforts directed against her and thus to emancipate a considerable amount of material and human resources, that could be used in implementing the programmes of economic development.

A second reason for the change of Soviet attitude is her willingness to develop economic cooperation with China. In recent years Soviet economic relations with the West are facing a severe test. Reagan administration has taken a tough policy aimed at the prevention of the expansion of East-West economic relations. It has been demonstrated by rigid US sanctions against the USSR and Poland, US-West European controversy over the gas pipe line issue and rhetoric US campaign against the East-West economic relations. Although, Europe and Japan were far from being enthusiastic in implementing sanctions against the USSR and Poland, still then, they failed to avoid them. All these developments put the Soviet Union on alert, as she needs to expand her economic relations with the outside world. While, the possibility of the expansion of her economic relations with the West is uncertain, she became obviously interested to expand such relations with China. In this respect, it is widely maintained that while China could provide Soviet Union with food and consumer items which are in short supply in the USSR, a market for the products of Soviet heavy industry is important to the latter.

A third motive for rapprochement may be to neutralise the possible impact of Sino-US-Japanese triangular relationship. The Soviets were always suspicious that the normalization agreement between China and the United States, the Japan-China Friendship Treaty, and the US-Japan Security Treaty *en bloc* could form a covert alliance between the three powers directed at the Soviet Union. Such suspicion was increased by the deterioration in her relations particularly, with the US and Japan. The possibility of the rearmament of Japan also put the Soviet Union on alert. In a recent article, the Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, Marshal N. Ogarkov wrote that "the broadening of military political

links of the USA with China and with Japan which is going in a direction of militarization creates a long term military threat to our eastern frontiers.”⁹ Such perception of the relations between the three countries by the Soviet policy makers led them frame policy that could prevent a possible Sino-US-Japan *entente*. In this regard, they took into account the fact that these three states have very few common interests in the region except their common goal of the containment of the USSR. In addition to this China has some uncompromising contradictions with both of these two prospective allies, particularly, with the United States. Recent strained relations between the two countries over US arms sale to Taiwan brought the matter into sharp relief. On the other side, Sino-Japan controversy over the text-book issue focused the extent of Chinese fear of the revival of Japanese militarism. All these contributed towards Soviet hope that China could be detached from forging a tripartite alliance. Soviet perception is that by giving some concessions to China on the issues of mutual discord, supporting her over the Taiwan issue and citing reference to parallelism in Sino-Soviet policy regarding the rearmament of Japan Soviet Union could make China put confidence on her. In Soviet views China will then be expected to be more tough with the Reagan administration over Taiwan issue, oppose the revival of Japanese militarism, and pursue a more or less independent policy towards regional and international issues.

Political gains of the Sino-Soviet *detente* in respect of her bargaining capability with the West are also no less important to the latter. For a long time, the USSR has been the odd man out in the three-way relationship. Her strained relations with the West, lack of constructive dialogue with China and the development of cooperation between the West and China made the Soviet Union isolated in the big power politics. An improvement of her relations with China may provide the Soviet Union with a way out of the current *imbroglio*. It will deprive the U.S. of her “China card”

9. Quoted in *Strategic Survey* 1981-82, (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London,) 1982, p. 107-8.

against the Soviet Union, let her take the advantages of Sino-US contradictions and thus, increase the Soviet manoeuvrability in the Super Power triangle.

Another driving force behind Soviet desire for resuming good relationship with China is her urge to reach a reconciliation in the Third World and the cessation of mutual polemics. Chinese offensive against the Soviet Union caused irreparable harm to the image of the latter in the Third World. Particularly, her propaganda campaign characterizing the Soviet Union as "revisionist" and later on as "hegemonist" and "social imperialist" discredited the latter in the eyes of a considerable part of the centrist and leftist nationalist elements in the Third World countries, who play a remarkable role in the political life of the mentioned countries. It also provided the anti-Soviet forces of all sects with additional weapons of ideological struggle. In fact, never in the past, any propaganda campaign against the Soviet Union in the Third World was as much successful as the anti-Soviet campaign of China. The dilemma, facing the Soviet Union in this regard, is that from strictly economic and military point of view, not China but the United States is her main adversary in the Third World. As a result continuation or aggravation of Sino-Soviet polemics could only benefit the US.

Let us now turn to Chinese side. Chinese leaders by committing themselves to a 20 years programme of modernizing Chinese economy and of raising the standard of living of the country, require a long period of peace both at home and on her borders. Chinese leadership seems to be determined to modernize and quadruple the economy of the country by the end of the century.¹⁰ That ambitious drive will require huge investment in China's industrial base, much of which is in Manchuria—the first place that would be overrun if the Soviet troops ever invaded. Such situation needs efforts directed to the strengthening of the security of her Far

10. See, Reng Tao and Pang Yongjie, "Can the Goal for 2000 Be Reached?" *Beijing Review* (Vol. 26, No. 9, 1983), pp. 12-20.

Eastern borders. But the dilemma facing China is that she is awefully short of investment capital. So every dollar to strengthen the military is one dollar less for productive investment. Mainly this has prompted Chinese leaders to be interested in "taking confidence building measures in the Sino-Soviet borders" offered by the Soviet leaders.

China in recent years has become too much dependent on the West in terms of foreign trade and technical assistance while her economic relations with the Soviet Union has declined. For example, the volume of trade between the Soviet Union and China stood at about \$200 million in 1981, while the volume of trade between China and Japan reached over \$10 billion and that between China and US \$ 5.5 billion.¹¹ The Chinese leaders could very well realize the fact, that overdependency on the West in terms of economic assistance might gradually diminish her bargaining capability and deprive her of taking the advantages of the economic cooperation with the East. An important factor in this direction is her disappointment with the low flow of modern technology to China from US, Japan and West Europe. The Chinese Leaders repeatedly expressed their sentiments to United States regarding the transfer of modern technology to China such as sophisticated computers, semi-conductors, integrated circuitry and satellite technology. Under US export law, China is placed in the unique category of "friendly but non-allied" countries by a Presidential order issued in June 1981.¹² Current policy requires that the transfer of sensitive technology to China must be approved by an inter-agency review of the entire US bureaucracy and then by NATO coordinating group. Regarding the transfer of nuclear technology to China, United States demands that China has to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or place all its nuclear facilities under international inspection,¹³ which is quite unacceptable to her. On the other hand, with

11. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol-XXVIII 1982.) p. 31562.

12. See, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 17, 1983, pp-9-10.

13. *Ibid.* p. 10.

100 million people under-employed by its own reckoning,¹⁴ China needs labour intensive technology, not the latest Western technology such as industrial robots. One obvious source of lowpriced medium technology is China's former industrial mentor, Soviet Union. The fact that the Chinese way of modernization and her 5-year plans have a striking similarity with those of the Soviet Union is no less important in her willingness to develop economic cooperation with the latter. The Chinese are interested to see how the Soviet economy has fared in the 20 years since the Sino-Soviet split. They are also interested in how the Soviets manage their vastly centralized economy.

Does the Taiwan factor have any impact on the Chinese rethinking of her relationship with the USSR? It would be difficult to put any hard evidence. But possibly the recent negative developments on Taiwan issue on the one hand and some favourable Soviet utterances in this regard, as mentioned earlier, might prompt the Chinese leadership in taking softer attitude toward the former. Another factor that might make similar contribution is the recent incident over the text-book issue giving an impression of new Japanese militarism in Chinese mind. The question was even raised in the 12th Congress of Chinese Party. In his report to the Congress, Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party Hu Yaobang emphasized that, "some forces in Japan are whitewashing the past Japanese aggression against China and East Asian Countries and are carrying out activities for the revival of Japanese militarism. These dangerous developments can not but put the people of China, Japan and other countries sharply on alert".¹⁵ It is indicative of the fact that the opposition to revival of militarism in Japan could be a permanent course of Chinese foreign policy. Here she could find a common foreign policy objective with the Soviet Union, which also vehemently opposes the current wave of Japanese militarism.

14. *The Economist*, June 5, 1982, p.57

15. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 10, 1982. p. 13.

Chinese leadership seems to realize the outcome of the Sino-Soviet split in respect of her position in the International Communist Movement and in the Third World. During the long more than two decades of Sino-Soviet acrimony, China not only failed to achieve none of her goals regarding the Communist bloc and the International Communist Movement but her strategy and tactics designed to achieve the leadership of the Communist bloc and the International Communist Movement ended with a debacle. At the moment, China maintains normal or friendly state-to-state relations with only three socialist countries viz., North Korea, Romania and Yugoslavia which are listed by her as "friendly socialist countries"¹⁶. Rest of the socialist countries are more or less hostile towards her. On the other side, since the Sino-Soviet split, Soviet Union expanded the number of her allies in the Communist bloc, sometimes even at the cost of China.

Only in a very few countries, there are pro-Chinese Communist parties with significant strength. Moreover, the existing pro-Chinese Communist parties all over the world are suffering from serious crisis and internal cleavages resulting from the Sino-US *detente*. These have been deepened due to the struggle against the "gang of four" and "demaosiation" in China. Pro-Soviet lobbies are emerging in some parties. In this regard, Communist Party of Thailand is a case in point.¹⁷ But at least in the 68 countries of the non-communist world, there are pro-Soviet communist parties.¹⁸ In addition to this, Soviet Union is maintaining own lobbies in the independent communist parties such as those of Italy, Spain etc.

China's isolation in the communist bloc and in the International Communist Movement is caused by a number of factors. Among

16. *Keesing's Contemporary Achieves*, (Vol. XXVIII, 1982.) p. 31818.

17. Richard F. Staar, "Checklist of Communist parties and Fronts, 1981" *Problems of Communism*, (Vol. XXXI, Washington, 1982,) p. 75.

18. *Ibid.* Calculated from the Tables, pp. 72-74.

them first to be mentioned is the fact that she neither economically nor militarily was prepared to compete with the Soviet Union for the leadership of the communist bloc and of the International Communist Movement. Next is the ultra-revolutionary policy, which victimized such strong pro-Chinese Communist parties as the Communist Party of Indonesia and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). It also detached liberal independent communist parties from the Communist Party of China.

While, the struggle for the leadership of the communist bloc and of the International Communist Movement ended in a fiasco, China is seeking reconciliation with the Soviet Union in the hope that, it would let her overcome the present isolation. Such intention has been reflected in recent Chinese efforts to improve state-to-state relations with the East European countries and to restore party-to-party relations with the foreign communist parties, including, pro-Soviet parties, like French Communist Party.

At the same time, the consequences of Sino-Soviet confrontation in the Third World was not always positive for the former. Chinese efforts in this respect often met successful challenges from the Soviet Union and her allies who were better equipped in terms of economic and military strength as well as propaganda network. Her failure to defend Pol Pot regime from Vietnamese assault is a case in point. On the other side, the only beneficiary of Sino-Soviet confrontation became the West, particularly, the United States. It created an impression that the Chinese are in an American-run alliance against the Soviet Union.

The Chinese attempt is designed firstly, to reduce her confrontation with the Soviet Union in the Third World and find out reconciliation, where it is possible; secondly, to increase manoeuvrability, so that she could take the advantages of US-Soviet contradictions. Thirdly, to explain the development of her relations with the Super powers as a tactical foreign policy manoeuvre and thus to keep her face in the Third World.

II

Moves are underway on both sides to remove the ideological differences. In the sixties CPC vehemently opposed the condemnation of the personality cult of Stalin whom the Chinese considered as "a great Marxist-Leninist" and "the recognised leader of the International Communist Movement".¹⁹ But now, Deng Ziaoping himself is fighting the personality cult of Mao Zedong, who for a long time was considered in China as the highest authority in Marxism-Leninism. Ironically enough, Mao has been accused by the new Chinese leadership of the offences, almost similar to those of Stalin, such as : "unjust dealing with the party cadres", "mistakes concerning class struggle in a socialist society", "personal arbitrariness" violation of "democratic centralism in party life" and finally "personality cult". Mao was held "Chiefly responsible" for almost all the errors committed by the party since the early 60-s.²⁰ Another issue of ideological discontent was that of peaceful coexistence. Peking's conviction was that Moscow was betraying the revolutionary principles by opting for peaceful coexistence with the developed capitalist countries. But in recent years, China herself is urging for peaceful co-existence with the capitalist world by establishing close relations with the United States, the West Europe and Japan. Whilst Chinese leaders in the past had laid emphasis on the inevitability of wars, the present leadership is stressing that a long period of peace was essential for China's economic modernization.

Both the countries also changed their perception of each others internal policy. Curious enough, that at a conference on contemporary Soviet literature held in Harbin on september 1979 most of the delegates held that although the Soviet Union's foreign policy was "aggressive and expansionist." its domestic policy was "basically socialist".²¹ On the other side, in his speech in Tashkent

19. See Alan Lawrance, "China's Foreign Relations Since 1949", (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1975,) pp. 71-72,

20. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVIII, 1982,) pp. 31317-8.

21. *Ibid.* p. 31561.

on March 24 late Soviet leader L.I. Brezhnev said that "we have not denied and do not deny now the existence of a socialist system in China"²² All these indicated a reduction of ideological difference among the two countries to a significant extent.

But such moves and overtures have to be weighed against certain differences between the two countries regarding their world outlook which appear to be irreconcilable. In the eyes of the Soviet Union "World revolutionary process" consists of three components viz., "world socialist system" (the 16 countries ruled by Communist parties), "revolutionary movement of the working class in capitalist countries" and national liberation movement.²³ While the Soviets held that "world socialist system" is the decisive factor of world development, the Chinese even did not recognise the existence of world socialist system. According to China contemporary world consists of three "Worlds". The USSR and the USA belong to the First World, other developed capitalist and socialist countries to the Second World and the rest of the world including China belong to the Third World. The 'First World' i.e. the USSR and the USA according to Chinese point of view are the main exploiters of the contemporary world and their "hegemonist" rivalry "made the danger of a world war even more greater".²⁴ While the Soviet theoreticians held that "the national liberation movement" is the least important among the three components of "world revolutionary process", the Chinese theoreticians argued that the Third world is the most powerful revolutionary force in the contemporary world. Such differences of opinion may persist in the foreseeable future, but they may not pose a serious obstacle in the way of the normalization of state-to-state relations between the two countries. The dogmatic differences are much less now in China than in Mao's lifetime. Moreover,

22. *Survival*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1982,) p. 186.

23. Wallece Spaulding, "Checklist of National Liberation Movement," *Problems of Communism*, (Vol. XXXI Washington 1982,) p. 77.

24. *Keesing's Centemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVIII, 1982,) p. 31818.

the new pragmatic leadership of China has come to realize the fact that "overemphasis on ideological differences, mixing them up with state relations, would do more harm than good".²⁵

The Chinese leaders identified three principal obstacles, which prevent the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations. According to Deng Xiaoping these are : (1) The presence of "1 million troops along the border between China and the Soviet Union, which includes Mongolia", (2) "Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea", (3) "Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan"²⁶

These three actions according to Chinese point of view constitute a direct threat to the security of China. China is continuously demanding that if the Soviets really wanted to move towards *detente*, they would first have to prove their sincerity by taking practical steps to remove these obstacles. The future of Sino-Soviet relations would mainly depend on the settlement of these issues.

Although, Chinese demand regarding the Sino-Soviet border is confined to the reduction of Soviet forces deployed against the former the long-standing border disputes between the two countries cannot be avoided altogether. These disputes owe their origin in a series of 19th century "unequal" treaties between the two countries. The total area ceded to Russia as a result of these "unequal" treaties, according to Chinese claim is nearly 1.5 million sq. km.²⁷

China has not said that it demands the return of all the territories ceded under the treaties. Because, she could very well realize that the Soviets, under any circumstances short of a total military defeat, would not return these territories to China. What the Chinese have presumably expected all along is according to Deng Xiaoping "the return of a few kilometres here and there."²⁸ At the same time, they have all along insisted that the Soviet

25. *Asiaweek*, January 28, 1983. p. 24.

26. *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 8, 1982.

27. S.K. Ghosh, "Border Dispute : Limitations to Resolution", *World Focus*, (Vol. 3, No. 6, New Delhi, 1982,) p. 9.

28. *Ibid.* p. 10.

Union should formally and publicly admit that the Czarist treaties were really unequal, before starting any meaningful negotiations on border adjustment. But, for understandable reasons, it is quite unacceptable to the USSR. The Soviets, although did not seem to be ready to talk about the ethics of Czarist treaties, were reported to consider border adjustment in those sectors of Sino-Soviet border where differences exist, and wanted that the adjustment should be on the basis of mutual concessions. But, as a result of these continuing difference of approach to the problem, the dispute shows no signs of being resolved in the foreseeable future.

Whether or when the Sino-Soviet border dispute would be resolved is a moot point but one thing is clear that the existence of border dispute would not effect the normalization process to a significant extent as the Chinese demand regarding the Sino-Soviet border is the reduction of Soviet forces deployed against her.

In this regard, it should be clearly stated that not only the Soviet Union but both the sides concentrated a high degree of military efforts both in quantity and in quality along their common border.

There are at least 46 Soviet divisions along the Sino-Soviet border. In the Central Asia the Soviets have one tank and six motor rifle divisions. In the Far Eastern high command there are five tank and 34 motor rifle divisions providing upto 530,000 troops and 11000 tanks.²⁹ Soviet pacific fleet has now become the largest among the Moscow's four fleets. Soviet Union also deployed about 120 SS-20s and SS-11s against China.³⁰ On the other side, China deployed in the Central Asia 1 armoured and 14 infantry divisions and in the Far East 8 armoured and 46 infantry divisions.³¹ It is also reported that there are about 50 MRBMs targeted on the Soviet

29. Gerald Segal, "The Soviet Threats at China's Gates", *Conflict Studies*, No. 143, The Institute for the Study of Conflict, London, 1983, p.4.

30. *Ibid.* p. 16.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

maritime districts in the Far East and 20-30 IRBMs and a few multi-stage limited range ICBMs targeted against cities and industrial areas across the Urals, including Moscow.³² Thus, on the 45000-mile Sino-Soviet border the world's two largest armies, equipped with conventional as well as nuclear arms are facing each other in one of the potentially biggest military confrontations, next in importance only to the East-West military confrontation in Europe.

In point of reduction of tensions in the borders, the complex security needs of the two countries and their mutual mistrust remain the main obstacles. From the very beginning of her current gesture Soviet Union was aware of the fact, that without reducing her forces deployed against China she could hardly normalize her relations with the latter. That is why late L.I. Brezhnev in his Tashkent speech, while expressing his country's willingness to normalize Sino-Soviet relations emphasised that the Soviets are "ready to discuss the question of possible measures to strengthen mutual trust in the area of the Soviet—Chinese border".³³ It was an indication that the Soviet leaders were prepared at least partially to meet the long-standing Chinese demand of reducing the Soviet forces deployed along the Sino—Soviet border. At the same time, they also want that the reduction of forces should be on a mutual basis by taking into account the security requirements of the both sides as to build mutual confidence.

This question has been discussed during the talks between Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Leonid Ilyichev and his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen held in Peking and Moscow on October 1982 and March 1983 respectively. The differences on this issue was less in comparison with the differences on the other issues of mutual discord. During the latest round of talks held in Moscow the Soviets have proposed a mutual withdrawal by both sides while China insisted on

32. S.K. Ghosh, "Border Dispute : Limitations of Resolution". *World Focus*, (Vol. 3, No. 6, New Delhi, 1982), p. 11.

33. *Survival*, Vol. XXIV, No.4, (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1982), p. 186.

first step by the Soviet side.³⁴ Thus, latest position of the two sides regarding the troops reduction along the Sino-Soviet border indicate that they undoubtedly have come closer than earlier.

Regarding the Kampuchea issue initial Soviet position was that it would discuss only bilateral issues with China, not the issues concerning the third countries. But, China all along insisted on the inclusion of Kampuchea problem in the agenda of Sino—Soviet talks. Because of the overthrow of Pol Pot regime (a pro—Chinese one) by Vietnamese military intervention and the instalation of a pro—Vietnamese regime in Kampuchea China has developed a sense of being humiliated in the ragional politics by Viet Nam with the Soviet backing. In addition to this, the formation of an alliance among the Indo-Chinese countries and the Soviet backing to that alliance increased the China's sense of being encircled by the Soviet Union. China needs some sorts of concession regarding Kampuchea issue to keep her face as a regional power and to neutralize the opposition from within the country to Sino—Soviet normalization.

During the October talks in Peking Soviet side agreed to discuss the Kampuchea issue, where China presented a 5-point proposal on the settlement of the dispute, which includes the demands such as : the cessation of Soviet support for Viet Nam in Kampuchea, gradual withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea within a fixed time and a joint guarantee of independence and neutrality of Kampuchea.³⁵

Although no fruitful discussion on the Kampuchea issue was taken place during the October talks, still then the inclusion of the issue on the agenda of the talks itself was an encouraging sign.

Since the October talks, Soviet Union is employing continuous diplomatic efforts designed to find out peaceful means to settle the Kampuchea problem. In this regard, the dilemma facing the Soviet Union is how to find out a solution to Kampuchea problem

34. *The Guardinn*, March 27, 1983.

35. *Far Eastern Economic Review* March 3, 1983. p.10.

acceptable to Peking without antagonizing Viet Nam. With this end in view, in recent months the Soviet Union has advised several times both China and Viet Nam to set off in search of a peaceful settlement to the Kampuchea problem.

At the same time, the Soviet Union is exerting pressure on Viet Nam at least to appear more flexible. It was reported that already at the end of the previous year, the Soviet Ambassador in Phnom Penh suggested the Indo-Chinese countries to improve their relations with China by concluding "bilateral and multilateral treaties" with it.³⁶

Soviet pressure on Viet Nam coupled with the latter's failure in gaining recognition for the Heng Samrin Government and her worry about the possibility of a rapprochement between China and the USSR made the Vietnamese position over the Kampuchea issue flexible to a considerable extent. In the recent past a number of attempts have been made by Viet Nam to bridge the gap between herself on the one side and China and the ASEAN on the other regarding the issue. At the initiative of Romania from mid-1982 Chinese and Vietnamese diplomats have begun low level contacts in Bucharest. The Bucharest meetings are believed to have encouraged Hanoi to upgrade the level of contacts, which are expected to be resumed in Peking to identify areas of negotiation.

Further flexibility of Viet Nam has been reflected in her announcement in the wake of Indo-Chinese Summit which closed on February 23 that there would be an annual partial withdrawal of her troops from Kampuchea if the security situation permitted. However, a total withdrawal would require three conditions: termination of "Chinese threat", and of the "use of Thai territory" by the resistance guerillas, and guaranteed security for the regime of Heng Samrin in Phnom Penh.³⁷ Though the proposal met with widespread scepticism from China as well as from ASEAN, it was not

36. *The Guardian*, November 28, 1982.

37. *Asiaweek*, March 11, 1983, p.9.

entirely meaningless. It was for the first time, that Viet Nam had mentioned an annual withdrawal as a regular feature.

Meanwhile, a change in Chinese posture concerning the Kampuchea issue is gradually taking place. The Chinese leaders now seem to realize that Kampuchea problem is not a consequence of Sino-Soviet contradictions. But the fact is that, Viet Nam just has taken the advantages of world-wide Sino-Soviet rivalry to fulfill her long-standing ambition of becoming the predominant power in the Indochina region. Now China accused that "Vietnamese regional hegemonism is responsible for the situation in Indochina" with out mentioning as was the practice before, the role of Soviet hegemonism".³⁸ While calling for an end to the Soviet backing for Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina, Peking recently underlined contradictions developing between Hanoi and Moscow.³⁹ Such perception of Soviet—Vietnamese relations could make China more willing to seek some improvements in her relations with Moscow in the hope that it would further strain the letter's ties with Hanoi and let China to take the advantages of Soviet—Vietnamese contradictions.

A third obstacle on the way of Sino—Soviet normalisation, according to Chinese claim, is the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Although, the Soviet Union officially sticks to her previous position that she should withdraw her troops from Afghanistan "as soon as aggression from Pakistan and Iran and subversion from China has stopped",⁴⁰ still a certain degree of flexibility in her position regarding the issue, particularly, in the post-Brezhnev period has been observed. The fact that on the very day that Brezhnev was buried, Yuri Andropov chose first and foremost to talk to Afghan Prime Minister Barbak Karmal and the leaders of countries most immediately concerned—India and Pakistan—is a clear enough sign of Soviet determination not to get mired indefinitely in this particular

38. *The Guardian*, November 28, 1982.

39. See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 17, 1983, p. 22.

40. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 3, 1983, p. 10

mess. Subsequent Soviet policy regarding the issue including her increasing interest in the UN mediation also prove the point.

On the other side, careful observation of the Chinese official statements and news commentaries confirm that her posture on Afghan issue is undergoing a change with the slight but substantial change of her overall attitude to the Soviet Union. It is apparent, that the Chinese leaders did not think that their own security was seriously threatened by the Soviet intervention. They could very well realize the fact that the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan is not as much designed to encircle China as it is a step towards the Persian Gulf and the West Asia. That is why, Deng Xiaoping affirmed that, "It is a matter, which concerned Westerners, in particular the Americans far more than the Chinese".⁴¹ While from the beginning of the Afghan problem China held that any compromise would only be rewarding oppression, in a recent statement Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Ziang expressed his country's willingness to support "the attempts made with a view to reaching a political solution" in Afghanistan.⁴² Informed Soviet sources indicate even a more flexible stand on the issue. A Soviet high-ranking China-watcher Dr. Lev Delusin, head of the China department of the Institute of Oriental Studies dropped hints to foreign journalists that "China was reducing its interest in seeing Karmal Government replaced by an Islamic fundamentalist regime"⁴³ Thus, it appears from the previous discussion that while China keeps clamouring for a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan it also concedes that such a withdrawal could be accompanied by negotiations leading up to the establishment of an Afghan regime acceptable to Moscow. Thus, it is clear that the present Soviet and Chinese views on the subject are not entirely irreconcilable.

While the Soviet Union and China are inching towards a *modus vivendi* of the two states regarding the key issues of mutual

41. *Guardian*, November 28, 1982.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Guardian*, March 27, 1983.

discord an improvement of their mutual relations and some signs of reconciliation regarding the other issues are obvious. Mutual polemics between the two countries have been reduced to a significant extent. Officials from both sides expressed confidence that the process of normalisation, though slow and long is on course. During the latest round of Sino-Soviet talks held in Moscow in last March, a bilateral trade agreement was signed for 1983. The new agreement provides for a total trade turnover of \$800 million, while in 1982 Sino-Soviet trade amounted some \$300 million.⁴⁴

Chinese policy towards East European allies of the Soviet Union is also undergoing a substantial change. It was evidenced by the fact that China refrained from comment on the imposition of Martial Law in Poland and did not join the USA and the other Western countries in imposing sanctions against Poland or the USSR. Instead it has reached agreement with Poland on a 30% increase in their mutual trade during 1982.⁴⁵ Recent statements of Chinese officials confirm that now China not only realize the necessity of the development of mutually beneficial cooperation between China and the East European countries but also employing continuous efforts to develop cooperation with them. Some signs of reconciliation of the Sino-Soviet differences in the Third World, particularly in Africa also have been observed in the recent past. In September, 1982 China recognised the pro-Soviet Angolan regime. Diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level were established between the two countries on January 12, 1983. In a joint communique signed by the two sides in Paris on the same day China condemned the "Systematic aggression of the South African racist troops against Angola" and supported the later "in its just struggle to safeguard its national independence".⁴⁶ Chinese gesture of goodwill could very well be designed to sweeten the atmosphere in which the bargaining with Moscow will take place.

44. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 24, 1983, p.80.

45. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVIII, 1982). p. 31463.

46. *Beijing Review*, (Vol, 26, No. 4, 1983), p.9.

Conclusion

The quest for rapprochement in Sino-Soviet relations, which is being observed in the recent years owes its origin to a number of factors pertaining to the security needs, internal economic and political developments as well as foreign policy objectives of both the countries. They have some ambitious long-term programmes of economic development, fulfilment of which will require enormous amount of material and human resources both in qualitative and in quantitative terms. Both the sides have by now realized that alternative to rapprochement is beneficial to neither of them. While the two largest communist powers—the Soviet Union and China—were maintaining a costly confrontatton, its main beneficiary became the anti-communist West as it was depriving the formers of taking the prospective advantages of mutually beneficial cooperation and decreasing their manoeuvrability in the internatinal politics.

Despite the fact that none of the countries lacks in their willingness to improve mutual relations, they find the task a very tough one. The bitter mutual hostility of last more than two decades have left many problems too difficult to be resolved quickly. As a result of continuous diplomatic efforts the differences between the two countries on the key issues of mutual discord seem to be reduced, but they still remain too wide to be bridged easily or within a short time. Attitude of both the countries, particularly, the extent of their flexibility in the forthcoming rounds of negotiations on Sino-Soviet normalization would depend on a number of factors such as: change in the perception of Sino-Soviet relations on the part of the leadership of the two countries; their relations with the West, particularly, with the U. S., and the overall climate in the regional and international politics.