

BACKGROUND***Sino-Soviet Relations***

In the early 1980s, Soviet overtures to China ran up against China's declaration of three major obstacles to better relations with the Soviet Union, namely, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Soviet troops along the Chinese border, and Moscow's support for the Vietnamese in Cambodia. Gradually, steps were taken which improved the climate for the establishment of better relations, including the announced Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and agreement to resolve border disputes and help end the Cambodian conflict.

From 1 to 3 December 1988, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qicheu was in Moscow for preparatory talks before a Summit meeting between Chinese and Soviet leaders. During the visit, the Chinese and Soviet Foreign Ministers announced agreement on a diplomatic-military group of experts to discuss methods of force reduction along their common border. Against the background of student-led pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing and other Chinese cities, Soviet President Gorbachev attended a Summit meeting with Chinese leaders on 15 to 18 May 1989, the first such meeting held between the two countries in thirty years. As reported in the communiqué issued at the end of the Summit, agreement was reached on various fronts. The two countries stated that their relationship would develop on the principles of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and peaceful coexistence. Both sides agreed to take steps to reduce armed forces on the Soviet-Chinese border to a minimum, with the Chinese welcoming the December 1988 Soviet announcement of the withdrawal of seventy-five percent of its troops stationed in Mongolia. The Chinese expressed the hope that the remaining Soviet troops would soon be fully withdrawn from Mongolia.

Concerning unresolved border issues, the countries agreed to upgrade the negotiations under way, from the deputy foreign minister level to the foreign minister level. In Shanghai at the end of his visit, on 18 May 1989, Gorbachev proposed talks to demilitarize the 6400-km border. The Summit communiqué also declared that neither country laid claim to hegemony in any form in the Asia-Pacific region or in any other parts of the world. Both also agreed to the active development of economic, trade, scientific, technological and cultural ties between their countries. Discussions were also held on the Cambodian problem (see the "Indochina Conflict" below).

The Indochina Conflict

The ten-year Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia continues to be a focal point of tension in East Asia. The major parties to this conflict remain the Soviet-funded, Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) under the titular leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The United Nations recognizes the Coalition as Cambodia's legal Government, although the PRK controls the greater proportion of the country's territory, including the capital of Phnom Penh. Most of the aid to the CGDK is channelled through Thailand from China.