Sino-Soviet Détente: How Far, How Fast?
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respond to his long-held convictions. But the timing and emphasis are undoubtedly dictated by his perceptions of the current priorities confronting him. The stage at which he finds himself at the moment is, in my view, critical. The whole of his strategy is based upon creating a bond with the people and evoking in them a positive response to his ideas. If he fails, the entire enterprise fails. The next 12 months are crucial.

For these reasons. Gorbachev is compelled to maintain a fast pace of change. He simply cannot afford to allow the momentum to slacken; to do so would be to permit the force of inertia to reassert itself. Also, if he is to overcome resistance within the Party itself, he has to push ahead with personnel change, policy innovation and democratisation—all at the same time. The risk inherent in such an approach is, of course, that resistance will turn into opposition, with a consequential threat, if not to his personal position, then at least to his programme of reconstruction. But, as he himself told the Central Committee, 'there is no other way'.

In his closing speech to the January 1987 plenum, Gorbachev stated that, with the holding of the meeting, the Central Committee had accepted the policy of reconstruction, and 'with that acceptance it is necessary to put an end to discussion about reconstruction. . . Reconstruction is not simply an idea, reconstruction is a reality.'

Apparently, in order to secure the Central Committee's endorsement of *perestroika,* Gorbachev had been obliged to threaten resignation. On this occasion the tactic worked; but he cannot afford to make the same threat too often lest his colleagues decide to call his bluff. On the other hand, the very nature of the Soviet political system forces the incumbent leader to bear the entire responsibility for the success or failure of policies. What Gorbachev needs, both as a form of protection and as a counterbalance to institutional—especially *apparat*—opposition is support from the base of society. That is why he constantly emphasises the role of the people, *narod.*

When politicians speak about 'the people' it is always tempting to suppose that they are engaging in cynical, opportunistic rhetoric. However, such a view in the case of Gorbachev would be a serious misjudgement both of his political style and of his analysis of the moral crisis confronting Soviet society. To him, the people must be, to use Ligachev's phrase, a 'dependable shield'; it is they who, armed with 'democratisation', must ensure that, as he put it in his speech to the Soviet Trades Union Congress (*Pravda,* 26 February 1987), *perestroika* becomes 'irreversible' and that the mistakes of the past do not repeat themselves. Everything, he argues, must be put under the supervision (*kontrol'*) of the people, and 'in order to resolve these tasks (of reconstruction) there is only one way—the broad democratisation of Soviet society'.

Democratising Soviet society (however defined) is a daunting enterprise. But Gorbachev realises that he must have the active cooperation of the mass of people if he is to stand any chance of achieving his goals; he needs their support, too, in order to prevent bureaucratic inertia reasserting itself; and he needs them most of all as some kind of guarantor of his own position as an effective leader. The irony is that the people, after decades of being excluded from any creative role in the political process and demoralised by the material and moral stagnation (*zastoi*) of nearly two decades of Brezhnevism are proving to be extremely slow to seize the opportunities that Gorbachev is offering them. It will be a major test of his skill to effect the '*psikhologicheskaya perestroika*' of society that is the indispensable precondition for restructuring society and the economy. If he fails, the consequences for the Soviet Union will be dire.

[1] See Peter Frank, 'Gorbachev's dilemma: social justice or political instability?', *The World Today,* June 1986.

Sino-Soviet détente: how far, how fast?

Gerald Segal

When the cloth of Sino-Soviet relations began to rip in the early 1960s, governments and scholars were slow to appreciate the importance of the rift for the strategic balance. Since then, much academic ink has been dispensed in explaining why the trends were misunderstood. Alas, in the early and mid-1980s, as Sino-Soviet relations warmed, similar errors of judgement have been made.

There are still those who argue that there has been no significant improvement in Sino-Soviet relations. Thus the purpose of this article, is to assess the extent of the Sino-Soviet détente, and how far it is likely to go.[1]

Domestic politics and Party ties

The original Sino-Soviet split had its deepest roots in, and was most lavishly nurtured by, ideological differences on how the domestic politics of a Communist state should be run. China's abandonment of the Soviet model and its experimentation with variations of peasant mass mobilisation challenged Moscow's view of itself as the guiding light of international Communism. In March 1966, China refused to attend the Soviet Party Congress, thereby severing Party-to-Party relations and committing the ultimate sin against Communist fraternity.

By the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping had taken China down the road of domestic reform. The Soviet Union, itself stuck in the rut of late Brezhnev immobilism, was slow to see the extent and the importance of the Deng reforms. In his last major speeches in 1982 (and most notably at Tashkent) Leonid Brezhnev offered the hand of reconciliation by suggesting that China was indeed a 'socialist' state.

Unlike the previous decades when China had been a 'left-wing deviationist', in the 1980s it was on the right, introducing more domestic market-oriented reforms and a more open door to the capitalist international market. The ideological challenge to Moscow was still there but it was more familiar, having been studied in the more flexible systems of Hungary and Yugoslavia.

Mikhail Gorbachev put to the test the theory that the parallel reforms in Soviet and Chinese Communism would bring the two states and Parties closer together. In his faster-than-expected sweep-out of the old guard, Gorbachev also swept out those who were cautious about the Chinese reforms. Soviet delegations visited China to study the agricultural and then industrial reforms. Chinese officials began commenting on the Gorbachev reforms and were clearly fascinated with the notion

that the two great Communist powers were engaged in similar exercises. Increasingly higher-level state-to-state delegations were exchanged, including in 1986, the restoration of inter-parliamentary relations. When Nikolai Talyzin, a candidate member of the Soviet Politburo, visited China in 1986, he became the highest ranking Soviet visitor to China since 1969.

However, the restoration of full inter-Party ties remained blocked by pride and principle on both sides. China made it clear since 1982 that it was willing to restore inter-Party relations with the east European states, but the Soviet Union would not allow it until it, too, could restore ties with the Chinese Communist Party. Beijing refused the latter request so long as Moscow acted in a 'hegemonial' fashion and encouraged Vietnam to occupy Kampuchea.

In 1986 Gorbachev challenged China to prove its sincerity in Sino-Sovet détente by lifting the ban on the east Europeans restoring Party-to-Party ties with China. Gorbachev demonstrated confidence in his European allies not to embarrass the Soviet Union. Deng Xiaoping acknowledged that the pressure for concessions was now on China, and in September 1986 swept away most of the previous roadblocks on the path to Sino-Soviet détente. He offered to travel to the Soviet Union for a summit with Gorbachev, thereby marking a restoration of Party-to-Party relations, if Moscow would just show some sign that it wanted Vietnam to leave Kampuchea. Deng's offer was a nice bit of theatre, but it also demonstrated just how far Sino-Soviet détente had come.

In January 1987, Vadim Zagladin, the Deputy Head of the Soviet Communist Party's International Department, pointed to a face-saving way for China to climb down from its 'principled' perch on inter-Party ties. Zagladin feigned perplexity as to why the two largest Communist Parties could not restore relations. He noted that relations had never really been formally broken off: China had 'just refused to attend the 23rd Congress of the Soviet Communist Party'.[2] He thus threw back at the Chinese their explanation when Party ties with east European regimes were restored in late 1986, that Sino-East European relations had never been severed, only lapsed.

Some still argue that this détente is skin-deep. They point out that Chinese and Soviet reforms are very different, with Beijing concentrating on rural reforms. China is further advanced in political reforms than Moscow and is more open to outside influences. These sceptics also suggest that international Communism can never have two leading powers. A third sceptical argument is that even if the reforms are the basis for Sino-Soviet détente, then that détente will collapse when the reforms inevitably run out of steam. The argument is that Communism is fundamentally incapable of real, sustained reform unless it abandons its basic ideological tenets. When that ideology goes, so goes the basis of Sino-Soviet friendship.

To be sure, there is much that deserves caution when assessing the reform process in China and the Soviet Union. Student riots and the recent purge of Hu Yaobang in China suggest just how difficult and fragile the reform of a one-Party state can be.[3] Nevertheless, so close is the reform process in both states that Soviet and Chinese commentaries on each other's reforms can often be read as comments on their own. The Soviet adoption of special economic zones and joint ventures with foreigners is only the latest evidence that both countries are learning from each other. The purge of Hu Yaobang, if anything, slows the Chinese reform process down to the pace and style of its Soviet counterpart.

There may be no necessary link between these domestic policies and bilateral relations, but the improvement in state-to-state and Party-to-Party relations has closely followed the parallel reforms. The relationship now stands a few brief steps short of the highest level.

The military confrontation

The Soviet Union and China are the only two members of the great power triangle to share a substantial frontier. As a result, when Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated in the 1960s, the conflict spread to their long frontier. The military buildup was not the cause of the rift; it merely followed the worsening of relations in other spheres.

Of course, when the rift deepened and the military confrontation came to include border clashes, the military dimension to the split became a crucial dimension of the relationship. In 1969, hundreds of Soviet and Chinese soldiers were killed in a series of skirmishes, and the Soviet Union even threatened a surgical strike to eliminate China's nuclear weapons capability. A quarter of all Soviet soldiers and equipment were deployed against China while nearly a half of China's forces were ranged against Moscow.

The easing of this tension, much like the original Sino-Soviet split, was primarily the result of Chinese initiatives. As part of its desire to concentrate on modernisation at home, China reassessed the international environment and found it to be less dangerous than previously diagnosed. The Soviet economy was stagnating; Soviet armed forces were bogged down in Afghanistan; and the Americans under President Reagan were providing a more vigorous challenge to Soviet power.

The result of this reassessment was a decision to modernise the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Chinese armed forces received new models of weapons, including nuclear delivery systems. Most important, the PLA was cut by 1m men (scheduled for completion in 1987) and at least 100,000 soldiers were removed from the frontier with the Soviet Union. This, the largest act of unilateral disarmament since the reduction of the Soviet armed forces by 1m men in the early 1960s, did not go unrecognised in Moscow.

The number of Soviet divisions along the frontier has remained nominally constant for a decade. But the Soviet state of readiness has been steadily reduced since the early 1980s. Some 80–90,000 Soviet troops have been pulled back from the frontier. This, coupled with the Chinese moves, is the single largest arms control measure in the post-1945 world and has been the result of tacit agreement.

The Soviet Union has also begun to orient its Far Eastern forces more towards offshore threats. In 1986 it established a new forward command post for the independent Far Eastern theatre, not on the frontier with China but on the coast facing Japan and the United States. The orientation of Soviet forces was now clearly shifting to the United States and away from China in East Asia.

Not surprisingly, there were no reported border incidents between 1980 and 1985. The one incident in the past seven years, in July 1986, was minimised by both sides and to the extent that it was publicised at all, it may have represented merely a signal from Chinese opponents of the rapidly gathering détente.

The incident, reported in August 1986, was notable because it followed Gorbachev's major speech on 28 July at Vladivostok. The Soviet leader offered two key concessions to China. The first was the announcement that talks had begun with Mongolia about the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The Soviet position had long been that no such withdrawal could be achieved unless the 'threat' from China was reduced. A Chinese-Mongolian consular agreement swiftly followed the Gorbachev speech. In January 1987 the Soviet Union announced agreement with Mongolia on the withdrawal of one full-strength motorifle division, with some 13,000 troops and 250 tanks. The Soviet Union had finally taken the practical step long demanded by China.

Perhaps of even greater importance was Gorbachev's admission that the Chinese claim that the border ran down the middle of the river channels was correct. Thus Moscow recognised the Chinese territorial claim to Damansky Island and went a long way towards eliminating the cause of Sino-Soviet disputes regarding border demarcation. This was yet another concrete Soviet concession to China. In February 1987, Sino-Soviet talks on deliniating the frontier opened in Moscow.

More prosaically, tension along the border was reduced by the opening of more border-crossing points, the refurbishment of cross-border rail lines, the restoration of monuments to past cooperation against Japanese aggression, and the increased local trade. The state-to-state trade now includes several 'dual-use' technologies such as aircraft and helicopters which have military application. Soviet officials now brief the Chinese after superpower summits and have adopted reasonably similarly phrased denunciations of the American Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). It used to be a proud boast of American foreign policy that only it had such special contacts with the Chinese. This is now no longer so.

Some argue that, even with the troop reductions, the Soviet Union still poses the single largest threat to Chinese security. China and the United States still cooperate in maintaining a listening post to monitor Soviet nuclear tests. The sceptics further argue that China's military modernisation will only result in a stronger PLA that will eventually be able to challenge the Soviet alliance with Vietnam. The continuing existence of border incidents and the fact that some people feel strongly enough to make them public suggest that the Sino-Soviet border is far from tranquil.

It is true that the Soviet Union remains the single most important military threat to China. Not even a further, more formal arms control agreement is likely to change that. Nevertheless, it seems that détente has set in. For the time being, the Soviet Union seems to be interested in pocketing the savings so as to invest in economic development. But should a stronger Soviet Union seek to increase its military spending, it is by no means clear that it would do so in the China theatre. The implications of Sino-Soviet military détente are far-reaching for western security.

Economic cooperation

One of the aspects of Sino-Soviet détente that is quantifiable is economic relations. Even the most entrenched sceptics admit that Sino-Soviet trade is booming. Sino-Soviet trade which had fallen to pathetic levels by the late 1970s, accounting for about 1 per cent of both states' trade, is growing at speed.

By 1986, it had topped $2·6bn, or more than 10 times the 1977 figure. China has become the second largest exporter to the Soviet Union (after Japan) of any Pacific basin state. China accounted for 18 per cent of total Soviet trade in the region and second only to Japan of any state in the region. Projected trade growth as outlined in the 1985 five-year trade accord suggests trade will become even more important to both parties (up to $6bn per year), despite China's overall increase in foreign trade.

The latest trade pact, signed in 1986 by the head of Gosplan, Nikolai Talyzin, includes the return of Soviet advisers to China after 25 years. They will help refurbish 17 ageing Soviet plants delivered in the 1950s and help establish seven new enterprises. The advantages for the Soviet Union in trade with China focus on the provision of consumer goods and food, mainly for the Soviet Far East. To the extent that the difficult lifestyle in the region is responsible for the Soviet failure to attract successful projects to the Far East, trade with China will help by improving living conditions and enhancing prospects for growth in the region. Trade with China is also often on a barter basis and includes no huge trade imbalances or debilitating loan repayments.

These last three factors are also attractive to China, especially in the light of its trade problems with western states. In recent years China has found it difficult to manage the transition to capitalist foreign trade practices and the large swings in trade deficits that result. Chinese planners remain more at ease with the planned trade of Sino-Soviet economic relations. What is more, Soviet equipment is usually less expensive (if less modern) than its western counterparts. As a follow-on to familiar Soviet equipment it causes less dislocation in the Chinese economy than the new generations of western equipment. The fact that the Soviet Union and China are engaged in similar economic reforms also means that cooperation between enterprises and planners is likely to increase.

The sceptics about Sino-Soviet trade are on the defensive, but they do argue that this is a sideshow to the main event of Sino-western trade: the goods that are traded are second-rate and merely stop gap measures until Chinese reforms take hold. They argue that China and the Soviet Union are more natural competitors than cooperators in trade, both mainly in the market to export shoddy goods and bulk raw materials. They also argue that the diverging paths of economic reform will make the two states even more rivals in the international economy. What is more, as the limited Sino-Soviet trade grows, it eats into traditional Soviet trade relations with India and Vietnam and therefore will cause the Soviet Union to reassess its encouragement of Sino-Soviet trade.

Most of these arguments were made before and during the early parts of the Sino-Soviet trade boom. So far, they have proved too pessimistic and reflect more the excessive optimism about western economic appeals to China. They also suggest a deep-seated misunderstanding of the priorities of trade for a Communist 'command' economy concerned about excessive entanglement in the western economic system.

The United States and Sino-Soviet relations

Although the United States was slow to appreciate the Sino-Soviet split, it did eventually recognise it as the single most important change in the strategic balance since 1945. Although much of this belated discovery of the great power triangle was exaggerated, it did suggest that bilateral Sino-Soviet relations did have an important American dimension.

Under the more conservative President Reagan there was less interest in manipulating the 'China card'. The Administration argued that Sino-American relations would have to be based on 'more intrinsically positive' dimensions. Not surprisingly, Sino-American relations stagnated. This stagnation was also the result of China's own reassessment of its position within the great power triangle. China had long recognised that its security depended on the policies of the superpowers. But precisely because it had previously tilted too far towards the United States, in the 1980s China assumed what it called a more 'independent' policy. China improved relations with Moscow, but by the mid-1980s recognised that a Sino-Soviet détente needed to be balanced by an at least steady-as-you-go détente with the United States.

Sino-American relations have remained warmer than Sino-Soviet relations. But the gap has been closing. Despite continuing (if relatively minor) American arms sales to China and the continuing (and also limited) military cooperation, China still snubbed the United States over port calls for the American navy in 1985. China pursued a 'two Americas' policy by seeking American aid while denouncing American policy in the third world.

By 1986 China and the Soviet Union had clearly gone a long

way in removing the United States factor as a source of dispute. Both agreed that a modicum of détente with the United States was healthy, but both also made plain their disagreements with Washington. Moscow and Beijing discussed the United States at their bi-annual meetings and both even publicly agreed on denouncing the United States policy on SDI, nuclear tests and intermediate nuclear weapons in Europe. By 1987, China was even apportioning more blame on the United States than the Soviet Union for the strategic arms race and blocking an arms control agreement.[4]

The upshot of these trends is that the United States has become less important for Sino-Soviet relations that at any time in the past 25 years. Under the Reagan Administration, the United States did not seem terribly concerned with that state of affairs. Some analysts argued that the United States was the de-facto guarantor of Chinese deterrence of a Soviet threat and remained the key to Chinese access to western trade and technology. The temporary freeze in superpower relations would soon end, they thought, and Moscow would dump its China card in place of a more important, and closer relationship with Washington.

Of course, imbalances in the three sides of the great power triangle remain. But by 1987 the triangle had become more balanced than at any time since its formation. What is more, for the first time in 25 years, Sino-Soviet relations are not the most hostile of the three axes. The more mature Sino-Soviet relationship in the 1980s has become less amenable to manipulation by Washington than ever before.

Sino-Soviet relations and the third world

When China split with the Soviet Union, their disagreement was reflected in their differing policies towards the developing world. Beijing sought to take advantage of its third-wcould never have held out in the long run. But China to weaken the Soviet appeal to the third world and win over the radical governments and movements. In almost every single case, especially outside of Asia, China lost the contest with the Soviet Union.

When China discovered the benefits of cooperation with western states in the 1970s, it often dropped its espousal of revolutionary causes. It even found itself on the same side of various third-world issues as the United States, supporting Pinochet in Chile and Mobutu in Zaire. The guideline, such as it was, for Chinese policy in the third world was anti-Sovietism. When China decided that it was leaning too far to the American side and that extreme anti-Sovietism was harmful to its claim to lead the third world, it shifted its policy.[5] Where China once denounced Cuba as a Soviet stooge, it now improved relations and exchanged praises. Nicaragua was recognised and the United States' policy in the region came in for sharp criticism. In Africa, China recognised Angola with its MPLA regime despite having done its level best to keep the movement from power less than a decade earlier. Elsewhere in the region, the United States was attacked by China for supporting the South African regime and for not doing enough to relieve crippling debt that hampered development.

In the Middle East, China continued to conduct large-scale business with Israel, albeit covertly. Saudi Arabia and Jordan were China's main trading partners in the region. But despite this pragmatism, China's official position became far more critical of the United States, and the Soviet Union was often left blameless for the endemic conflict. Chinese and Soviet officials met in Beijing in January 1987 to discuss the situation in the region, something that China and the United States had apparently never seen fit to do.[6]

China's pragmatic line is most evident in its arms sales policy. In a startling reversal of past policies, Beijing moved up to the fourth largest arms exporter by the early 1980s. Its less sophisticated, but rugged and inexpensive weapons are well suited to third-world combat. China has done especially well out of the Iran–Iraq war, selling to both sides. It has also sought new partners in the third world for co-production of weapons, finding interested parties especially in Latin America.

This tough new approach is neither pro- nor anti-Soviet, but rather part of China's independent and pragmatic foreign policy. It suggests a retreat from close involvement in the politics of developing states, in favour of a more self-centred view.

The one area of the third world where this relative disinterest was not present was Asia. In some cases, like the Koreas, China's détente wth Moscow meant Beijing was not very upset when the Soviet Union improved relations with North Korea in the mid-1980s. China's priority was stability in the region so it could get on with modernisation and of course trade with South Korea. That trade is unofficial, but by 1986 it was worth over $1bn a year, far more than Beijing's trade with North Korea.

In Afghanistan, China had first broken off talks with the Soviet Union in 1979 because of the Soviet invasion. Although Beijing declared that the Soviet occupation of a Chinese neighbour was an obstacle to normalising relations, China resumed talks with the Soviet Union without a prior Soviet withdrawal. Beijing apparently decided by 1984 that the issue was beyond its control, and as long as its ally, Pakistan, was satisfied, China would accept a deal that left Moscow in control in Kabul.

What remained was the third obstacle, Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea. In the 1980s, the Chinese line even on this most vexed issue began to moderate. China had fought a bloody and futile war to force Vietnam to give up its regional power aspirations. Without Soviet support, soon came to see that Soviet bases in Vietnam were mainly aimed at the United States, so China no longer demanded their closure. As Vietnam became increasingly successful in containing the Kampuchean rebels to the Thai frontier, China no longer launched major diversionary forays.

In December 1986 China made overtures to Vietnam's neighbour, Laos, no doubt in an attempt to help isolate Vietnam. But Beijing also made it clear that it viewed the presence of some 45,000 Vietnamese troops in Laos as 'a bilateral matter between Vietnam and Laos'.[7] That precedent of viewing Vietnamese troops as a bilateral matter could one day be applied to Kampuchea.

Deng Xiaoping admitted the extent of the progress in Sino-Soviet relations in September 1986 when he responded to Gorbachev's initiative at Vladivostok. Deng said that even an indication of Soviet disapproval of the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea would be enough to bring Deng to Moscow for a summit. In the ensuing round of Sino-Soviet talks in October 1986, the Soviet Union probed the implications of this new Chinese position. The Soviet side pointed out that China kept moving the goal-posts of normalisation, suggesting that Beijing was not serious. China admitted that it had an obstacle with the United States, Taiwan, but still Sino-American relations were normalised.[8]

Moscow did recognise the need to ease the Kampuchean problem. Its own attempt to improve relations with the members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) was hampered by Vietnamese intransigence. But Gorbachev, with domestic priorities in mind, recognised that domestic changes in Vietnam would have to precede changes in foreign policy. The dramatic shift to reform in the Vietnamese Communist Party hierarchy in November 1986 was vivid proof of new trends and probably also of Soviet influence.

For those who are sceptical about the extent of Sino-Soviet détente in the developing world, there is much at which to scoff. It is true that most Chinese changes further from home are confined to verbal utterances. But these verbal changes were important pointers in the 1960s when the Sino-Soviet split first became evident. It is also true that widespread Chinese pragmatism often leaves Beijing with extensive practical relations with western allies while official Chinese policy supports sides favourable to the Soviet Union. But it is also this pragmatism that has moved Beijing to drop the Afghan obstacle and moderate its position on Vietnam.

It is also true that China's new interest in the international, western-dominated political economy leaves little room for a Soviet or international Communist role. China is more interested in the economies of East Asia than the Communists of Indochina. But there are also signs (for example, Gorbachev's July 1986 initiative) that the Soviet Union is also adapting its position. Changes in the Soviet Foreign Ministry certainly indicate it is taking the region more seriously, and more as it comes, than as Moscow would hope it might be.[9]

Towards normalisation: but how fast?

When troops are withdrawn from the frontier, trade is booming, higher-ranking delegations are swapped and the words exchanged are warmer, few can doubt that a significant détente is under way. Sino-Soviet relations are not as close as Sino-American relations, but the gap is very narrow in some areas. Sino-Soviet relations are clearly better than the other superpower side of the triangle.

The implications of this trend have already been felt in western relations with China in the military, political and economic spheres. Soviet foreign policy is more confident and it may be developing a major opening in the new politics of the Pacific. These trends are likely to continue.

The question remains, where are Sino-Soviet relations heading? The obvious target is 'normalisation', but to some extent that has already been achieved. Certainly, the spell that the Sino-Soviet rift cast on Soviet and Chinese foreign policies has been shattered. Normalisation can be defined as anything from honeymoon to cold war. For the sceptics only a return to the honeymoon of the 1950s will constitute normalisation. For the ardent advocates, the present reduction in tension is enough to be called normalisation.

A more practical definition of normalisation is the restoration of Party-to-Party relations. If Zagladin's words and the Chinese interpretation of ties to east European Parties is anything to go by, the definition of Party ties can be altered at short notice. Certainly the visit of the Party leader of either side (or of Deng to Moscow) would constitute a restoration of Party relations, as would attendance at a Party Congress.

So far, Beijing has made major changes in domestic and foreign policy that made the détente of the 1980s possible. Since then, the Soviet Union has been encouraging China to restore normal relations by a series of increasingly compelling and concrete concessions. The pressure is on, and China has gradually given way on the intensity and scope of its obstacles to détente.

In essence, there is only one obstacle left to Sino-Soviet normalisation. With détente along the Sino-Soviet frontier achieved and the relegation of the Afghan issue to the sidelines, the Vietnam question is all that stands in the way. To a great extent the Soviet Union and China have gone a long way to putting the Vietnam obstacle on the side, much as China has done with the Taiwan issue in Sino-American relations.

The Soviet Union is clearly willing to normalise relations now, but China seems to feel the need to move cautiously. Most of the steps on the road to normalisation have taken place gradually, but both the Soviet Union and China are capable of sudden decisions, once the more gradual momentum for détente has built up. It is probably no longer a question of if Sino-Soviet relations are normalised, but rather when. The answer to 'when' seems to be 'soon', before Deng goes to meet Marx.

[1] This article will not repeat all the detailed evidence to support the trends discussed below. For those interested in such detail, see the author's *Sino-Soviet Relations After Mao* (London: IISS, Aldephi Paper No. 202, 1985); 'Sino-Soviet Relations', *The World Today,* May 1984; 'Sino-Soviet Détente', *The Journal of Communist Studies,* Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1985; 'Modernising Foreign Policy' in David Goodman, Martin Lockett and Gerald Segal, *The China Challenge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul for the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Chatham House Papers, No. 32, 1986).

[2] Hungarian TV, 'Panorama' in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), SU/8462/i, 10 January 1987.

[3] See Dennis Duncanson, 'Reform and power in China today', *The World Today,* March 1987.

[4] Huang Tingwei and Song Baoxian, 'Disarmament: New Aspects of an Old Issue', in *Beijing Review,* No. 3, 1987.

[5] Lillian Craig Harris and Robert Worden (Eds), *China and the Third World* (Dover, MA: Auburn House, 1986).

[6] Tass in Russian, 10 January 1987, in BBC/SWB/FE/8462/A4/1.

[7] *Far Eastern Economic Review,* 15 January 1987.

[8] Kevin Devlin, 'How the Sino-Soviet Talks Went: L'Unità Revelations', Radio Free Europe Background Report, No. 157, 4 November 1986.

[9] Alexander Rahr, 'Winds of Change Hit Foreign Ministry', in Radio Liberty Research Bulletin, No. 274, 16 July 1986; and *Far Eastern Economic Review,* 14 August 1986.