Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance (1950-1980)

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Abstract

The twentieth century represents one of the most tumultuous and transformative periods in Chinese history. During this time, China experienced four major political transitions. In 1911, the imperial monarchy was overthrown and replaced by the Republic of China under the leadership of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or Guomindang). Shortly thereafter, power was fragmented among regional warlords. In 1927, the Kuomintang regained central authority, only to lose control again in 1949 to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which has remained in power ever since.

In addition to these domestic political changes, China's foreign relations and economic conditions were marked by instability and frequent setbacks. Throughout the first half of the century, parts of China remained under the control of Western powers as well as Russia and Japan. Chinese society continued to suffer from poverty and foreign

dependency. Relations with Japan deteriorated sharply beginning in 1931, culminating in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Following Japan's defeat, a civil war between the Nationalists and Communists ensued, ending with the Communist victory and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949.

Despite personal tensions between Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin, Mao opted for close alignment with the Soviet Union. In 1950, he traveled to Moscow and signed a new treaty entitled the **Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance**, a document that resembled an earlier 1945 agreement signed between Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek. The 1950 treaty was concluded for a 30-year term and can be divided into three distinct phases:

- **1950–1958**: A period of friendly and cooperative Sino-Soviet relations.
- **1959–1969**: Escalating ideological and political tensions between Mao and Khrushchev, culminating in military confrontations.
- **1970–1980**: A phase of silent rivalry and the eventual dissolution of the alliance.

This study examines the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations from the signing of the 1950 treaty until its expiration in 1980. It traces the development of the alliance across its three major phases and includes a comparative analysis of the 1945 and 1950 treaties. The research seeks to provide Georgian-speaking audiences with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Sino-Soviet "friendship", encouraging a more objective interpretation of this bilateral relationship and greater awareness of China's perspective on the Soviet Union.

Keywords: Chinese communists; People's Republic of China; Sino-Soviet relations; Mao in Moscow.

Introduction

Sino-Soviet relations have been marked by volatility and unpredictability since the establishment of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the necessity of formal agreements between the two nations became inevitable for both the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China. While political leadership in China changed over time, its geographic proximity to the Soviet Union remained constant, compelling successive governments to engage with their powerful neighbor.

Two bilateral treaties of a similar nature and title were signed between the two countries. The first, the **Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance**, was signed in 1945; the second, the **Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance**, followed in 1950. In both instances, China's participation stemmed from a position of limited diplomatic alternatives and the strategic need to improve relations with the Soviet Union.

However, peaceful coexistence and equality within these agreements proved difficult to achieve and sustain. Despite Mao Zedong's ambition to forge a stronger and more balanced relationship with Joseph Stalin—surpassing the prior ties between Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek—and his desire to substitute American aid with Soviet support, Stalin ultimately rejected the vision of a truly equal Sino-Soviet partnership. Mao's vision of a coexistent socialist China with equal status under Soviet leadership was not welcomed by the "elder brother". This mismatch in expectations led to the eventual deterioration of their alliance into a prolonged, albeit understated, conflict.

Methodology

This study employs both primary and secondary sources. Through historical inquiry and comparative analysis, it examines monographs, scholarly articles, and official documents to evaluate the historical foundations of Sino-Soviet relations. The methodological approach is designed to provide an objective assessment of the bilateral relationship and to present China's perspective within that historical context.

Findings

This article represents the first Georgian-language academic work to provide a detailed analysis of the preconditions, substance, and consequences of the first bilateral treaty between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. The research offers insights not only into the historical trajectory of Sino-Soviet relations but also into the strategic objectives of the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Zedong's actual stance toward the Soviet Union.

Discussion

The Founding of the People's Republic of China

The founding of the People's Republic of China was officially declared on October 1, 1949. However, preparations for the establishment of the new government had begun earlier. On September 12, Mao Zedong convened the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, during which he announced the initiation of preparations for the new administration. The conference lasted for twelve days and resulted in the drafting of the "Organic Law of the Central People's Government" and the "Common Program". During the same session, delegates also decided on the design and symbolism of the new national flag: it would feature a red background with one large yellow five-pointed star in the upper left corner, surrounded by four smaller yellow five-pointed stars. The large star symbolized the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, while the four smaller stars represented the alliance of the four social classes-workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie.

On October 1, Mao not only proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China, but also announced the renaming of the capital: the city previously referred to as *Beiping* would henceforth be officially known as *Beijing*.

The following day, Zhou Enlai, the newly appointed Premier of China, received the first official congratulatory message from the Soviet Union. The message included notice of the Soviet decision to est-

ablish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and of preparations to dispatch an ambassador. According to Chinese historians, it was on this day that Mao Zedong decided to visit the Soviet Union in December.

Throughout his life, Mao Zedong left China only twice, and both times for the same purpose and destination—to conduct negotiations with the Soviet Union. His first visit took place from December 6, 1949, to March 4, 1950. Despite the extended duration of the visit, the negotiations proved far more complex and challenging than initially expected.

Mao Zedong's Strategic Choice: The Policy of "Leaning to One Side"

Following the end of the Second World War, Joseph Stalin's expectations regarding the developments in China diverged significantly from the eventual outcome. Stalin viewed the Kuomintang (Guomindang) as the dominant political force in China and believed that political, economic, and military power was concentrated in the hands of Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi). He did not have hope of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or Mao Zedong. In fact, when Mao became the leader of the CCP in 1936, Stalin did not even formally recognize him. In Stalin's view, Mao was a "rightist" opportunist and a critic of the pro-Moscow faction. Consequently, Stalin initially favored Wang Ming as the ideal leader of the CCP—Wang had received his education in Moscow and was widely known for his pro-Moskcow stance. Even between 1938 and 1945, Stalin held onto the hope that Wang might eventually replace Mao.

On the other hand, Mao himself was not particularly fond of Stalin. Among the CCP leadership, he was one of the few who had never visited the Soviet Union and had not met Stalin or other prominent Soviet communists. In 1936, after realizing Stalin's resistance to his leadership, Mao told American journalist Edgar Snow in an interview: "We are fighting to free China from the Kuomintang, not to

hand it over to Moscow" (Snow, 1961:96). Mao only established direct contact with Stalin in 1944. He expressed interest in meeting him in 1947, again in 1948, and a third time in April 1949—but Stalin rejected all three requests. Stalin's reluctance likely stemmed from his belief that Chiang Kai-shek would ultimately prevail, and he was cautious about openly engaging with the communist leadership before the final outcome was clear. While he did provide considerable support to the Chinese communists, he sought to avoid irreparably damaging relations with the opposing side.

Before the end of World War II, the Soviet army occupied northeastern China and handed over Japanese weapon stockpiles in the region to the Chinese communists. At the same time, the Soviets seized industrial assets worth approximately $2 billion, gold bullion valued at $3 billion, 850 million Manchurian yuan, and established control over the entire northeastern territory. In 1945, the USSR signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the Kuomintang government and once again urged Mao to cooperate with Chiang Kai-shek. These developments deeply frustrated the CCP and intensified their desire to seek rapprochement with the United States. Chinese sources indicate that both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai preferred the idea of fostering ties with the U.S. over reliance on Stalin and the Soviet Union. In the immediate postwar years, they made several attempts to reach out to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and even proposed a secret meeting, albeit unsuccessfully. Nevertheless, Mao and Zhou continued efforts to win the support of American officials, particularly through engagement with John S. Service, head of the political division of the "Dixie Mission". On March 13, 1945, Mao again expressed to Service his interest in establishing relations with the United States, asserting that economic assistance from the U.S. was essential for China's development. Mao emphasized that such support would not lead to future economic competition and that the United States would remain the sole foreign actor involved in China's development. However, the U.S. ultimately chose to support Chiang

Kai-shek, seeing the Kuomintang as the legitimate governing authority in China.

In 1949, Stalin even attempted to orchestrate the secession of Xinjiang from China, much as he had done with Outer Mongolia in 1921. He promised Xinjiang leaders that he would recognize their autonomy and integrate the region into the Soviet Union as an autonomous republic. However, the Kuomintang military presence in the area obstructed these plans. Later, on September 28, 1962, during the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP, Mao reflected: "The roots of the Sino-Soviet conflict go back a long time. They did not allow China to carry out a communist revolution. In 1945, Stalin did not support our revolution—in fact, he told us he was against civil war and urged us to cooperate with Chiang Kai-shek and make concessions. We did not listen, and the revolution succeeded" (Xu, p. 519).

Despite the mistrust and prior tensions, after the communist victory Mao ultimately chose to pursue the "leaning to one side" policy. The newly established People's Republic of China lacked the capacity to rebuild the nation independently and was unable to maintain a position of neutrality in the emerging Cold War. A powerful ally was essential—one that could provide both political and economic assistance, which Mao believed only the Soviet Union could offer. Consequently, Mao soon began preparing for his first official visit to the USSR. He planned to spend three months there: the first month would be dedicated to visiting Leningrad and Stalingrad, signing treaties, and discussing communist theory and practice with Stalin; the second month was reserved for visits to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania; and the third month he intended to spend receiving medical treatment in the Soviet Union.

The First Meeting Between Stalin and Mao Zedong

In December 1949, Mao Zedong traveled to Moscow with several objectives: to offer congratulations on Stalin's 70th birthday, to seek the annulment of the 1945 Sino-Soviet Treaty, to negotiate a new

agreement, and to request economic and political assistance. However, Stalin did not extend a warm welcome to Mao, and their negotiations were marked by tension and difficulty. Upon his arrival at Yaroslavsky Station on December 16, Mao was met by Nikolai Bulganin and Vyacheslav Molotov, who escorted him and his delegation to Stalin's dacha. Mao offered to travel together in a single vehicle and to host them with a traditional Chinese meal he had personally prepared, but his gesture was declined. According to Chinese historians, this was perceived by Mao—who held strong personal pride—as a sign of disrespect.

That evening, Mao attended a formal reception hosted by Stalin, during which he expressed his admiration for Stalin and the Soviet Union. However, the private audience with Stalin that Mao had eagerly anticipated did not take place. Subsequently, Mao met with Kovalev, and according to Kovalev's reports, Mao made several requests: that the Central Committee respond to issues he had raised with Stalin on September 16; that a meeting be scheduled for December 23 or 24; and that discussions be arranged with key Politburo members, including Molotov, Mikoyan, Bulganin, and Shvernik. Mao also proposed two negotiation strategies.

The first plan involved finalizing agreements on Soviet loans, trade, air transport, and other matters. Mao believed that this approach required Zhou Enlai to travel to Moscow in order to co-sign the agreements, after which the two would visit Leningrad and Stalingrad. The second plan entailed discussing the same issues without signing formal agreements, which would negate the immediate need for Zhou's presence—he would only be summoned when the time came to sign. Mao emphasized that all decisions, including his personal medical treatment, were subject to Stalin's approval.

Although Mao had come to Moscow to request aid, he found it difficult to humble himself. He considered himself the head of a major nation and believed that the Soviet Union needed cooperation with China just as much as China needed Soviet support. Nevertheless, at

the December 24 meeting, Stalin did not even mention China, nor did he acknowledge Mao's presence, which infuriated the Chinese leader.

Only on New Year's Day 1950 did Stalin agree to renegotiate the treaty. He dispatched Molotov and Mikoyan to speak with Mao in detail, and Mao requested Zhou Enlai be brought to Moscow for formal negotiations. After this, Mao wrote to the Chinese Communist Party:

"At 8 o'clock today, Comrades Molotov and Mikoyan visited me. They asked for my opinion on the new Sino-Soviet agreement. I offered them three options:

(a) Sign a new treaty on Sino-Soviet relations. This would solidify bilateral relations in a new legal framework, which would greatly inspire Chinese workers, peasants, intellectuals, and the left wing of the national bourgeoisie, while isolating its right wing. Internationally, it would give us more political leverage in negotiations with imperialist countries and allow us to reassess past unequal treaties signed with them.

(b) Release a short joint communiqué from the countries' news agencies stating that discussions on the old friendship and alliance treaty had taken place and that consensus was reached on key points. This would contain no specifics, effectively postponing the issue for several years. In this case, Zhou Enlai would not need to travel to Moscow.

(c) Sign a declaration outlining the basic principles of Sino-Soviet relations without forming a binding treaty. This also would not require Zhou's presence.

After I presented these options, Molotov agreed that Option (a) was the best and said that Zhou could come. When I asked whether the old treaty could be replaced, Comrade Molotov replied, 'Yes'" (Li, 1997:98).

Mao instructed Zhou Enlai to arrive in Moscow by January 9, anticipating that the agreement could be finalized by January 20 and that they could return to China together in early February.

However, the signing ceremony for the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance* took place only on February 14, 1950, in the Kremlin. The treaty was signed on behalf of China by Zhou Enlai, Chairman of the Central People's Government and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and on behalf of the USSR by Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky. Both Chinese and Russian versions of the treaty were signed. On the same day, additional agreements were signed concerning loans and the administration of Changchun Railway. On February 17, Mao and Zhou departed the Soviet Union, while Chinese officials such as Li Fuchun and Ye Jizhuang remained in Moscow to continue negotiations on economic matters.

Differences Between the 1945 and 1950 Treaties

The Soviet Union and China concluded two treaties that were similar in name and content: the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance* in 1945 and the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance* in 1950. The first key difference between the two treaties lies in the historical and political contexts in which they were signed.

The 1945 treaty was a product of the geopolitical agreements reached at the Yalta Conference in February of that year. At the time, Stalin agreed to enter the war against Japan, but in return, he demanded significant territorial and strategic concessions from China. These included the recognition of Soviet control over Sakhalin Island, the ice-free ports of Dalian and Lüshun, control over railways in South Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, and the recognition of Outer Mongolia's independence. The Soviet Union made it clear that unless these conditions were met, it would not participate in the war against Japan. Only with the consent of the United Kingdom, the United States, and China would the USSR recognize Chinese sovereignty in the northeast and formally acknowledge Chiang Kai-shek as China's sole legitimate leader.

Between June and August 1945, negotiations were conducted by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Shijie and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. On August 15, 1945, they signed the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance*, along with several related agreements: on the Changchun Railway, Dalian, Lüshun and on Soviet military cooperation with the Chinese government following the entry of Soviet forces into three northeastern provinces during joint operations against Japan. The two sides also exchanged notes and additional documents concerning the status of Outer Mongolia. At the time, China had little choice but to accept these unequal terms.

By contrast, the 1950 treaty was concluded under significantly different circumstances. Although China was experiencing economic difficulties, the country was in a more stable position. The civil war had ended, the People's Republic of China had been established, and Japanese aggression was no longer a direct concern.

The second major difference between the treaties concerns the issue of Japan. The 1945 treaty was signed during an active conflict with Japan, while the 1950 treaty was signed after Japan's defeat. As a result, Articles I–III of the two treaties differ substantially. The 1945 treaty focused explicitly on cooperation during wartime against Japan, stating in Article I that the signatories would provide full military support to each other until final victory. In contrast, the 1950 treaty does not contain such a clause. Instead, it states: *"If one of the contracting parties is subjected to an attack by Japan or its allies, the other party is obliged to provide military assistance."*

Another difference lies in the provisions regarding alliances. Both treaties include clauses preventing the signatories from joining hostile alliances. However, the 1950 version adds a more explicit commitment: *"Neither party shall join any alliance directed against the other, nor participate in any group, action, or measure aimed at the other."*

Article IV of the 1950 treaty further outlines that the two parties shall consult one another on all major international issues affecting

their mutual interests, with the goal of promoting peace and global security. Such a provision is absent from the 1945 treaty, which instead includes the following points:

- Article V commits the parties to strengthening economic and cultural ties in the spirit of friendship and cooperation, based on mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality, and non-interference in internal affairs.
- Article VI provides for mutual post-war economic assistance to support national reconstruction and global prosperity.
- Article VII affirms that the treaty shall not affect the obligations and rights of either party as members of the United Nations.

The language and structure of the 1945 treaty reflect the dominant position of the Soviet Union at the time, in contrast to the more equal footing apparent in the 1950 treaty.

A third significant difference concerns the duration of the treaties. While both were initially concluded for a term of 30 years, the mechanisms for extension differ. The 1945 treaty stipulated that if neither party requested termination at least one year before its expiration, the treaty would become indefinite. In contrast, the 1950 treaty stated that if no party sought to terminate it a year before expiration, it would be automatically extended for an additional five years.

Soviet Support on the International Stage

Following the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty, relations between China and the Soviet Union developed significantly in the years 1953 to 1957. During this period, China, with Soviet assistance, managed to resolve a number of internal and external challenges. Whereas the Soviet Union had previously maintained a dual policy approach in its relations with the United States, after the treaty, it openly opposed U.S. positions concerning Taiwan.

When the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, China attempted to take advantage of the situation to seize Taiwan. Two days

later, the United States declared its opposition to the use of force by China against Taiwan. On June 28, Zhou Enlai publicly asserted that Taiwan rightfully belonged to China and that no external interference could alter this fact.

On December 2, 1954, the United States and the Taiwanese authorities signed a Mutual Defense Treaty. In response, on December 8, Zhou Enlai issued a strong statement condemning the United States. The following day, the Soviet representative at the United Nations General Assembly's Special Political Committee submitted a motion requesting the Assembly to take measures against the United States, accusing it of committing aggression against China. Subsequently, on January 31, 1955, the Soviet Union submitted a formal proposal to the UN Security Council titled *"Concerning the Aggressive Acts of the United States of America Against the People's Republic of China in Taiwan and Other Chinese Islands"*. In this proposal, the USSR condemned U.S. aggression and called for the withdrawal of American troops from Taiwan and other Chinese territories.

Following the conclusion of the Korean War, international tensions eased to some extent. Both China and the Soviet Union took coordinated steps regarding the Japan issue. On October 12, 1954, the two nations issued a *Joint Declaration on Relations with Japan*, in which they affirmed that Japan would receive full support from both countries in its efforts to establish political and economic relations with them. The declaration also stated that any actions Japan undertook to ensure the conditions for peaceful and independent development would be fully supported by China and the Soviet Union. This declaration served as the foundation for their respective policies toward Japan during that period.

Subsequently, from April 26 to July 21, 1954, the Geneva Conference took place. This marked the People's Republic of China's first active engagement in international diplomacy. Given the Chinese Communist leadership's lack of experience in negotiating with Western powers, Zhou Enlai first traveled to Moscow on April 1. He

remained there for two days, during which he received detailed instructions from Molotov regarding the upcoming international conference, and then proceeded to Geneva. During the conference, Molotov met with Zhou almost daily to provide ongoing coordination and guidance.

The last notable instance of Sino-Soviet diplomatic cooperation occurred in 1971, when the Soviet Union supported the restoration of China's legitimate seat at the United Nations.

Sino-Soviet Joint Management (1950–1955)

The period from 1950 to 1955 marks a phase of joint management between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, as well as the gradual withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Chinese territory. During this time, several key sectors—including the Changchun Railway, petroleum companies, non-ferrous metal industries, civil aviation, and shipbuilding enterprises—were managed jointly by both governments.

The newly established People's Republic of China faced not only severe economic challenges but also a lack of administrative experience in state governance. Many infrastructure projects and assets located on Chinese soil had come under Soviet control, initially through a series of "unequal treaties" and later as a result of Japan's defeat. These remained in Soviet hands after 1945.

In February 1950, China and the Soviet Union agreed to jointly manage these resources during a transitional period. Under the agreement, both countries would share the profits, and ultimately the assets would be returned to China. On April 25, 1950, the China Changchun Railway Company was officially established as the joint Sino-Soviet body to oversee the Changchun Railway. Between 1950 and 1952, 455 kilometers of dual-track railway and 191 kilometers of automated signal block systems were restored. During the same period, 2,600 freight cars were manufactured, and 5,150 freight cars and 943 passenger cars were repaired.

On December 31, 1952, the transfer of all railways and related properties to China was completed. This included two railway lines totaling 3,000 kilometers—from Manzhouli to Suifenhe, and from Harbin to Dalian and Lüshun—along with equipment that had been acquired, repaired, or newly constructed during the joint management period. The transfer also encompassed communication lines, rail branches, public and technical buildings, residential quarters, economic institutions, subsidiary enterprises, and associated industries.

On July 28, 1951, the Chinese and Soviet governments signed an agreement in Beijing to modernize China's shipbuilding industry and naval production, based on the principles of equal rights and joint equity. As a result, a Sino-Soviet Shipbuilding Company was created for a term of 25 years and was officially established on January 1, 1952, based in Dalian.

On October 12, 1954, both governments signed a joint communiqué in which the Soviet Union pledged to sell its shares in four Sino-Soviet joint-stock companies to China by January 1, 1955. The total sale price was set at $400 million USD, to be paid by China over a ten-year period. After the transfer of shares, the Sino-Soviet Civil Aviation Company was incorporated into the Chinese Civil Aviation Administration. The remaining three companies were: the Xinjiang Petroleum Company, the Xinjiang Non-Ferrous Metals Company, and the Dalian Shipbuilding Plant.

On May 8, 1955, Soviet troops stationed in the Lüshun region were formally withdrawn. A signing ceremony between China and the Soviet Union for the return of the Lüda region took place on May 24, and on May 26, the last Soviet military commanders departed from the area.

Sino-Soviet Mutual Assistance

In February 1950, the Soviet Union granted China a credit of $300 million, half of which was allocated to engineering projects, while the other half was used to procure naval equipment. Following this agreement, the Soviet Union dispatched experts in various fields to

China, and Chinese students were admitted to Soviet universities. Between 1950 and 1960, more than 10,000 Soviet specialists were sent to China on various assignments. From 1951 to 1962, approximately 10,000 Chinese engineering and technical personnel, along with around 1,000 scientists, pursued studies or internships in the Soviet Union. During the same period, over 11,000 Chinese students graduated from Soviet universities.

Between 1954 and 1963, the Soviet Union transferred to China more than 24,000 sets of scientific and technical documents, including blueprints for 1,400 major industrial enterprises—virtually free of charge. In addition, it extended a long-term concessional loan amounting to 1.816 billion rubles. With Soviet assistance, the People's Republic of China succeeded in building a comprehensive industrial base, including sectors such as aviation, automotive and tractor manufacturing, electrical engineering, heavy and precision machinery, instrumentation, radio engineering, and various branches of the chemical industry.

On October 12, 1954, China and the Soviet Union signed an additional protocol outlining further Soviet support. The agreement covered the construction of 15 new industrial plants and the delivery of supplementary equipment to 141 enterprises previously covered under earlier treaties. Approximately 150 industrial projects were completed, 146 of which were finalized during China's First Five-Year Plan. These projects encompassed aviation, electrical machinery, armaments, aerospace, shipbuilding, steel production, chemicals, coal, petroleum, medicine, and other sectors.

In return, the Chinese government also offered various forms of assistance to the Soviet Union. After the Korean War, the USSR faced difficulties in acquiring strategic materials such as tin, aluminum, zinc etc. China, as a producer of such materials, exported substantial quantities of rare metals to the Soviet Union. In late summer 1952, China agreed to Stalin's request to construct a rubber factory on Hainan Island.

Throughout the 1950s, China exchanged large volumes of agricultural and industrial products-including mining materials—for Soviet equipment and machinery. Between 1950 and 1962, China supplied the USSR with food products valued at 2.1 billion rubles. These included 5.76 million tons of soybeans, 2.94 million tons of rice, 1.09 million tons of vegetable oil, and 9 million tons of meat, among other goods. The value of the mineral products and technical materials China provided to the Soviet Union during this period exceeded 1.4 billion rubles. Key items included 100,000 tons of lithium sand, 270,000 tons of quartz for piezoelectric use, 7,730 tons of mercury, and 180,000 tons of calcite, among others.

In addition to receiving scientific and technological assistance, China also shared its own expertise with the Soviet Union—particularly in the form of scientific and technical materials and technologies related to Chinese silk production.

Sino-Soviet Confrontation and the End of Friendship

Following Stalin's death, Mao Zedong aspired to become the leader of the global communist movement, a role for which he did not consider Nikita Khrushchev suitable. This ambition gradually intensified tensions between China and the Soviet Union, culminating in a definitive deterioration of relations by 1958.

On November 2, 1957, Mao visited Moscow for the second time, this time to attend a meeting of representatives of communist and workers' parties from around the world. His objective was to present China's ideological position and to submit a document jointly drafted by the two parties. On November 10, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party submitted a "Draft Proposal on Peaceful Transition" to the Soviet Communist Party, outlining China's views. The next day, both delegations presented the Moscow Declaration draft to the international conference.

During this visit, Mao publicly declared that a U.S. attack on the USSR would not succeed and would only lead to casualties. He also emphasized that China had already repaid part of the 6.2 billion ruble

Soviet loan, with the remainder to be paid during the second and third Five-Year Plans. However, Mao also expressed dissatisfaction and set a confrontational tone.

The open conflict began on April 18, 1958, when the Soviet Union informed Chinese Defense Minister Peng Dehuai of its intention to construct long-wave radio transmitters in China for use by Soviet submarines. The project budget was 110 million rubles, with the USSR covering 70 million and China 40 million. The equipment would be jointly operated upon completion. The Soviets also requested permission for their military vessels to refuel, undergo repairs, and allow their crews to rest in China. Mao refused, citing infringement on national sovereignty, stating: "No. The British and other foreign powers have been present on our territory for quite long enough. We will no longer permit anyone to use our land for their own purposes." (Zhang, 2009:3)

By 1959, the USSR had begun interfering in Chinese internal affairs, particularly by attempting to exploit tensions between Mao and Peng Dehuai. In June of that year, the USSR unilaterally canceled the 1957 agreement on providing China with nuclear weapons technology, including atomic bomb blueprints and scientific data. It also began restricting scientific and technical cooperation and withdrew Soviet specialists from China, taking sensitive documents with them.

Mao believed that war between socialism and capitalism was inevitable. He asserted that the First World War had produced the Bolsheviks, the Second had led to the Chinese Communist Party, and a Third would defeat U.S. imperialism. Despite the potential for massive casualties, Mao declared that Beijing was unafraid of war. Khrushchev criticized this stance, prompting Mao to label him a traitor. Efforts to resolve tensions culminated in the November 1960 Moscow Conference of 81 Communist Parties, during which China was compelled to sign a final declaration that opposed Mao's position.

Sino-Soviet conflict extended to other global crises. For instance, during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, Moscow acted unilaterally

without consulting Beijing. It also failed to support China in the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. On March 8, 1963, China published a list of territories it claimed were illegally seized by Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, including parts of Siberia and regions totaling over 500,000 square kilometers. China demanded written acknowledgment of these unjust treaties. The USSR refused.

On February 25, 1964, border negotiations resumed, but the situation deteriorated rapidly. Mao threatened to annex Outer Mongolia to expose Soviet weaknesses. Khrushchev, fearing Chinese nuclear capability, even contemplated preemptively striking China's nuclear facilities. After Khrushchev's removal, Brezhnev managed to avert outright war, but on October 15, relations between them were formally severed. Ironically, the day after ties were cut, on October 16, China successfully tested its first atomic bomb, signaling its emergence as a nuclear power despite Soviet obstruction.

Between 1964 and March 1969, Chinese sources report that Soviet forces violated the Sino-Soviet border 4,189 times. Armed clashes occurred in March 1969, notably on Zhenbao Island (Damansky) on the Ussuri River and on other disputed islands in Heilongjiang province and the Xinjiang border. The war situation has resumed. Although Beijing did not demand immediate territorial return, it insisted on renegotiating unequal treaties and sought acknowledgment of historical injustices. China demanded the return of 600 of 700 islands on the Ussuri and Heilongjiang rivers, covering around 400 square miles, and an additional 12,000 square miles in the Pamir Mountains. The USSR refused both the territorial claims and the characterization of the treaties as unequal.

In response, the USSR increased its military presence along the Chinese border, deploying up to one million soldiers by 1973, equipped with nuclear weapons and over 100 anti-ballistic missiles. It also stationed approximately 150 naval vessels in the Pacific. China mirrored this buildup, placing nearly a million troops along the border, deploying short-range missiles near Soviet cities such as Vladivostok

and Irkutsk, and preparing medium-range missiles targeting Soviet Central Asia and Siberia. Concurrently, China sought rapprochement with the United States and Japan to prevent a joint Soviet-American encirclement.

In June 1973, the USSR proposed a non-aggression pact, but China rejected it. In November 1974, China itself offered to sign such a pact, seeking to normalize trade and transport ties while maintaining political separation. Chinese leaders—Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Kang Sheng, and Deng Xiaoping—agreed to resume limited practical cooperation. However, in 1980, China declined to renew the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, marking the final formal break. Although war was averted, bilateral tensions persisted and the era of Sino-Soviet friendship came to an end.

Conclusion

Bilateral relations between states, no matter how amicably they are presented, are fundamentally driven by strategic calculations rooted in national interests and security concerns. The friendship between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China exemplifies this dynamic. Their alliance was not merely a consequence of ideological alignment but rather a reflection of pragmatic necessities facing both powers. For China, emerging from the devastation of World War II, years of Sino-Japanese and civil war, Soviet support was critical for national reconstruction, industrialization, and international recognition. For the Soviet Union, cultivating a partnership with China served as a strategic counterweight in its global rivalry with the United States—particularly under the assumption that, in the event of a third world war, China could function as a powerful and populous ally.

In 1950, the two countries formalized their cooperation through the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, which included provisions for mutual military support in the case of external aggression. Despite the shared ideological foundation of socialism, the relationship soon revealed an asymmetrical nature: the Soviet Union did not treat China as an equal partner, instead asserting

its dominance in international affairs. This hierarchical approach increasingly irritated Chinese leadership and intellectual elites, who adhered to a longstanding perception of China as a central and sovereign civilization—often referred to as the "Middle Kingdom".

While Soviet propaganda frequently highlighted the extensive assistance provided to the newly established People's Republic of China—particularly in technological and economic spheres—these acts of support came with significant concessions from the Chinese side. Mao Zedong was compelled to recognize the independence of Outer Mongolia, temporarily surrender control over the mineral-rich Xinjiang region, and grant the Soviet Union access to key infrastructure such as the Changchun Railway and the ports of Lüshun and Dalian. Moreover, China committed substantial military and human resources to the Korean War, including the deployment of millions of so-called "volunteers", resulting in significant casualties—including the death of Mao's own son.

Over time, tensions between the two powers escalated, gradually transforming their partnership from nominal friendship to strategic rivalry. By the time the treaty expired in 1980, the alliance had effectively dissolved without direct military conflict, marking the end of what had been presented as a close socialist camaraderie.

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