

MUNICH, 20 March 1972 (Communist Area Analysis Department:
Soviet Affairs -- r.r.g.)

The Soviet Embassy in Peking has leaked to the Western press the news that Leonid Ilyichev, the Chief of the Soviet delegation responsible for negotiating on the border problem with China, will arrive in Peking to-day, 20th March 1972. (1)

This visit heralds the resumption of the annual round of talks, held every spring, concerning the territorial dispute. Last year Chou En-lai the Chinese Premier, met Ilyichev and the Soviet Ambassador, V.S. Tolstikov, on 21 March 1971. (2) This year there is a mild improvement in public relations policy, in that the meeting was announced in advance, instead of two days later, but there is as yet a conspicuous absence of anything resembling the optimism of 1971 which forecast a tripling of Sino-Soviet trade during the year. (3)

for the border talks themselves, neither those held in 1969, 1970 nor 1971 have brought any perceptible alleviation of the tension which has existed since long before the fighting began on the Ussuri River in March 1969. Indeed as recently as October 1971, Kosygin told a Canadian journalist that no great progress had been achieved.

In the new context of power politics after President Nixon's visit to Peking, it is just possible that the Kremlin may have been shocked into producing a slightly more accommodating posture for Ilyichev to discuss than was the case in the past three years. But the overt signs are certainly unpromising. Before, during and after the Nixon visit, the barrage of anti-Chinese propaganda in Soviet media has reached heights unattained since the frontier skirmishes of 1969.

Moreover the chances are that Peking will feel that its hand has been greatly strengthened by the President's visit and the relative success of Chinese foreign policy during the last year, in which case Mao and Chou En-Lai would be still less likely to moderate their demands for major Soviet concessions in the question of the "unequal treaties."

Moreover it seems probable that two prerequisites are necessary for any successful outcome to the talks. One would be a reduction of mutual recriminations in the press, of which there is no sign from the Soviet side at present, and the other would be a run-down in the military deployment. In 1969 the USSR had not more than 30 divisions (about 270,000 men) in the immediate frontier areas, rising to 32 in 1970, and 33 in 1971. When and if this trend is reversed, or at least stabilized, Ilyichev's chances of making progress may improve.

(1) Western News Agency reports from Peking, 19 March 1972.

(2) TASS, 23 March 1971.

(3) NYT, 24 March 1971.

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