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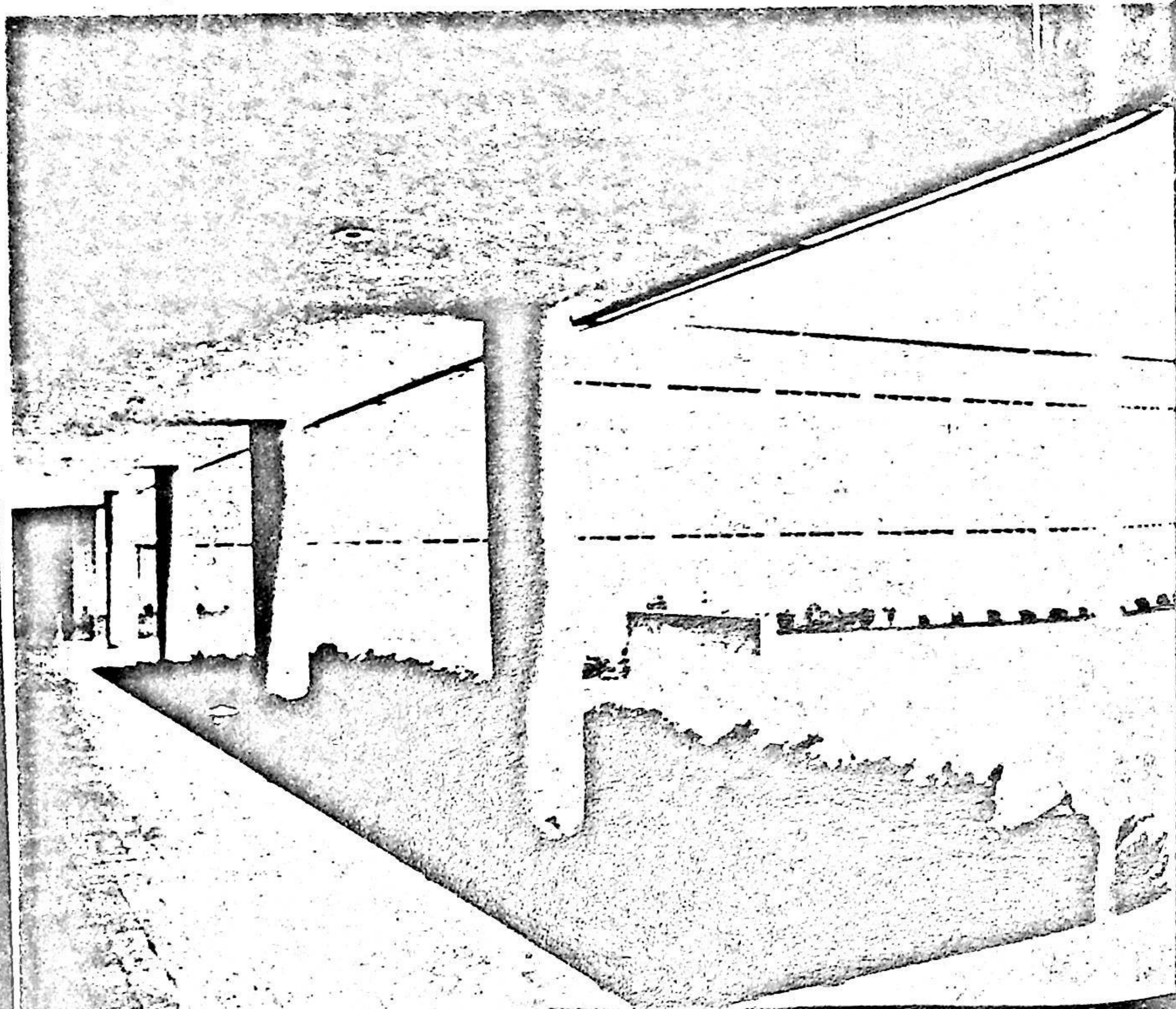
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SINKIANG:

A Sino-Soviet Trouble Spot?

Anthony Harrigan

IN VIEW of the current disagreement between the Soviet Union and Communist China, it is time that students of military affairs take a look at the Sino-Soviet border area in central Asia. It is not outside the realm of possibility that some form of armed conflict may take place along this border in the years ahead.

"To outsiders," E. K. Faltermayer of *The Wall Street Journal* said recently, "the possibility of Red China encroaching on Soviet territory might seem remote. It doesn't to many Russians." The fact is that Red China, with upward of a half billion people and deficient in materials needed for industrial production, long has looked on the Soviet Far East with covetous eyes. Asiatic Russia has vast deposits of coal, enormous forests, diamonds,

gold, abundant supplies of nonferrous metals, and considerable hydroelectric power production.

The Sino-Soviet frontier is approximately 4,000 miles long, a much longer boundary than any shared by other nations in the world. It extends from the Sea of Japan in the east to the Pamir Mountain Range near India's northwest frontier.

On the Chinese side of the border are Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, and Sinkiang. Across the border are the Soviet territories of Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, Kirghizia, and the region known as the Soviet Far East.

Whatever settlement is made of ideological disputes between the Soviet Union and Red China, nationalistic ambitions for territory seem certain to remain constant. Indeed, in

appraising Communist China, it would be a grave mistake to overlook traditional Chinese ambitions in central Asia.

The late George E. Sokolsky, who lived in China for many years and who also was familiar with Asiatic Russia, wrote in May 1962 that:

Red China plans to expand China to the Ch'ien Lung Line which means that its actual territorial control would have a line from Turkistan to the Bay of Bengal.

This means that China's ambitions would extend westward to a region not remote from the Soviet's Caspian Sea.

Ch'ien Lung, who was cited by Mr. Sokolsky, lived from 1711 to 1799. For much of his lifetime he devoted himself to conquering new territories for China. It was during his reign that China expanded to her greatest extent and, it has been said, Mao Tse-tung's ambition is to restore China to the limits of Ch'ien Lung's empire.

Soviet Interest

The Sino-Soviet border area has a long history of strife. As early as 1643, the Russians occupied the area west and east of Lake Baikal.

But the big Russian drive came in the 19th century. Prior to 1858, four divisions of what is now the Soviet Far East—the Maritime and Khabarovsk regions and the Amur and Sakhalin Provinces—belonged to China. In that year Count N. Muraviëv-

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Amurski, governor general of eastern Siberia, fixed the Russo-Chinese border along the Amur and its right bank territory. Between 1858 and 1860, Russia forced China to cede the above-named territories. The Soviet Government proved no less interested in Asia, and Sino-Soviet border incidents continued after the 1917 Revolution.

Japan's expansion onto the Chinese mainland resulted in serious trouble between Soviet and Japanese armed forces. In 1938 and 1939 the Soviet and Japanese Armies tested each other in two full-scale battles along the Manchurian border.

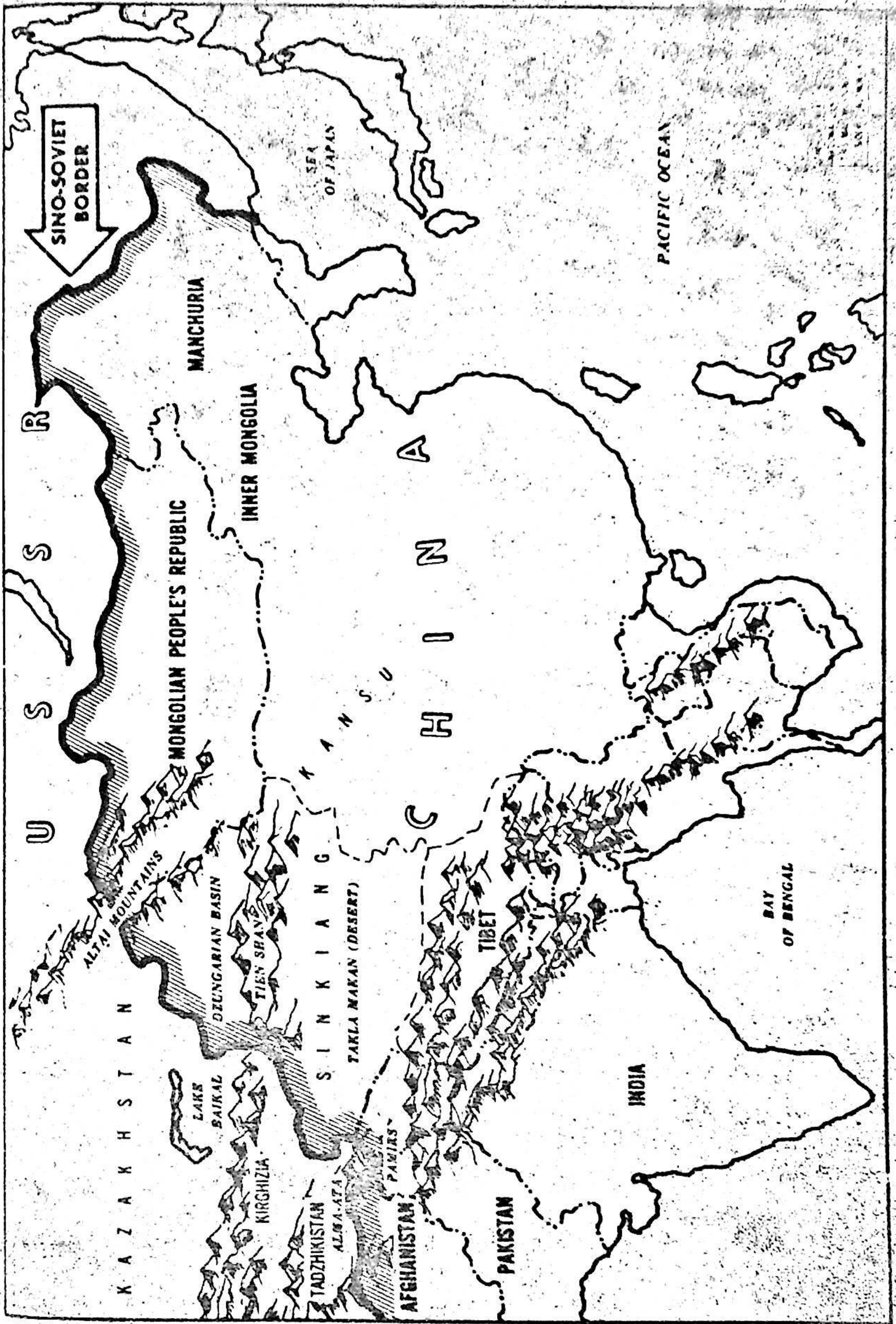
It is interesting to note that the Soviets supported a faction of nationalists in Sinkiang during the 1940's in an effort to establish an independent Eastern Turkistan Republic, a satellite they envisioned as being similar to the Mongolian People's Republic. The "liberation army" of this Chinese secessionist group was led by a Soviet Army officer. But with the success of the Communist power drive in China in the late 1940's, the Sino-Soviet border difficulties came temporarily to a halt.

Possible Difficulties

If there are to be fresh difficulties in the future, it is likely that they will take place in Sinkiang. To understand why this is so, one has only to look at a map and follow the Sino-Soviet border.

In the east there are substantial populations and a condition of widespread and thorough settlement. Any Chinese encroachment near the Soviet's Pacific frontier would be sure to escalate into a major conflict because the conditions are not unlike border conditions in Europe.

Then, for approximately 2,000



miles. Chinese and Soviet territories are separated by the buffer state of Mongolia. This land is as Poland was to Russia and Germany in prewar days.

West of Mongolia is Sinkiang, where Soviet and Chinese territories meet in the great Altai range of red sandstone mountains. Continuing southwest along the border, one finds the Dzungarian Basin with an elevation of 600 to 1,500 feet completely ringed by mountains of the Tien Shan Range. Located here is the historic Dzungarian Gate, the ancient highway from China to the Kazakh Steppes and the Volga. The Tien Shan, with peaks over 20,000 feet high, snowfields, and glaciers, separates this area from the Tarim Basin to the south. Proceeding southwest along the Sino-Soviet border, one continues in a mountainous region. These mountains meet and join the mountains along the Afghan and Pakistan-Indian borders.

In short, this part of the Sino-Soviet border is very close to a region where Chinese imperialism is now being manifested; Red China's conquest of Tibet also emphasizes the long-range, continuing interest of the Peking regime in conquering lands to the west.

Borderland

The name Sinkiang means borderland. A former province of China, it today bears the name "Sinkiang Autonomous Region." The territory is 660,977 square miles in size, with a population (as of 1958) of almost six million. Uighurs, a Moslem Turkic-speaking people, comprise 75 percent of the population; the Kazakh, people related to the Kazakhs across the border in the Soviet Union, comprise the second largest ethnic group.

The Uighurs are agricultural people settled in oases along the northern edge of the Tien Shan where it borders the Dzungarian Basin. The Kazakhs are nomadic herders who graze their livestock in the Dzungarian pasturelands. At last report, approximately 300,000 Chinese were in Sinkiang; they are government officials, military personnel, merchants and professional workers.

Sinkiang's economy is chiefly agricultural, and grain crops and cotton are planted extensively. Development of irrigation after 1949 brought new areas under cultivation. In addition, about 60 percent of Red China's wool comes from Sinkiang. Oil was found in 1960 and prospecting is continuing for tungsten and other nonferrous metals. A major rail line crossing Sinkiang from Kansu Province to the junction of Aktongai on the Turksib railroad in the Soviet Union was opened for service in the early 1960's.

Across the Sinkiang border in the Soviet Union is the same kind of mountainous, wild country. Most of Kirghizia, the Soviet Republic of central Asia west of the Takla Makan Desert, is above 5,000 feet. In the Kazakh region to the north, anti-Russian guerrilla warfare flourished for many years.

Classical Conflict

Clearly, the Sinkiang border constitutes a region ideally made by nature and history for classic central Asian border warfare. In the mountains and deserts, Red China and the Soviet Union could duel as China and India have dueled. Conflict could take place without any formal declaration or without a major war resulting. Moreover, the empty lands of Sinkiang, with a border cutting through mountainous country, afford Red

China wide opportunities for making threats with the Chinese population bomb. If Red China were to move large numbers of Chinese into this remote western territory, it would be the greatest kind of threat to the Soviets and one most difficult to counteract.

Soviet fear of this population bomb was in existence even before the present Chinese regime took power. Throughout the Stalin era, as well as during the Khrushchev years, the Soviet Government has put heavy stress on developing the lands opposite Sinkiang. This concern for building up the Soviet population in Asiatic Russia is evidenced in the following figures: In 1926 the population of the Soviet Far East was 1,200,000; by 1959 the total had risen to 4,300,000.

Sizable cities also are growing up in the area. Alma-Ata, located in the Tien Shan Range west of Sinkiang, had 455,000 people in 1959 and spe-

cializes in production of heavy machinery.

Differing Maps

One indication of potential trouble to come between the Soviet Union and Red China may be found in the maps prepared by the two countries. On these maps the Sino-Soviet border is often 60 miles apart; the disputed territory totals more than 25,000 square miles. In this connection it is appropriate to bear in mind that the mountain warfare between Red China and India had its alleged beginning in controversy over border positions.

Thus it would appear that if there is an increase in Red Chinese aggravation with the Soviet Union sufficiently great to lead to some form of overt action or pressure, it is almost certain to result in difficulties somewhere along the 4,000-mile border. Sinkiang is the most likely spot for action or pressure to be exerted.

... what will be the course of the deep-seated differences between the USSR and Red China?

The ideological dispute between the USSR and Red China—apparently centered on how to effect our destruction—is certainly their problem even though we can assure them that neither of the solutions over which they are divided will work.

... The efforts of the Communist leaders to resolve their dilemmas will be as ruthless and violent as will serve their purpose. These efforts—all tied to the goal of world domination—mean a continuation of the grave military danger we have known for the past 17 years. All changes in this danger have been in the direction of growth rather than of decline.

General Earle G. Wheeler