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EDITORIAL

Research centres have a regrettable way of not being self-supporting. An equally regrettable fact is that public interest cannot be relied upon to produce public beneficence. In the recent experience of this research centre, indeed, the latter has declined as the former has increased. Matters within the Central Asian Research Centre's purview which have attracted public notice during the last 15 months form a fairly long list. Yet during this period the Centre's financial backing has fallen to a level only sufficient to maintain three research staff for 1969, and insufficient to maintain a research centre worthy of the name thereafter.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 caused a seismic shock in all branches of Soviet studies. It conveyed both a general and a particular message. In general, it reminded a tranquillized international public that the Soviet establishment must still by its very nature react violently to any moves for loosening of the system from within. In particular, it raised again the question of the national aspirations of non-Russian nationalities within the Soviet orbit. A research centre that was not under imminent threat of closure during this period might have been better able to respond to these signs of the times.

Three conflicts which at present agitate world public opinion—those in Vietnam, the Middle East and Nigeria—all involve the Soviet Union closely. The past year has seen momentous developments in all of them, together with a more intense and at the same time more complex Soviet involvement. But the more tangled the skein has become the less attention has been available for it.

The Sino-Soviet frontier clash of March 1969 may or may not have been in the nature of a storm signal; but it has at any rate had the effect of making the USSR's Asian frontiers a subject of public attention. This Centre's ability to provide interested enquirers with information on this and allied problems still tenuously exists, and is utilized. But obviously, since the Centre's finances diminish as international problems grow sharper, any major outbreak would put us out of business altogether.

A recent survey by two Soviet writers of Sino-Soviet relations from 1948 to 1967* has finally provided an authorized and circumstantial Soviet account of the mass migration of refugees from Sinkiang to Soviet territory which took place in the spring of 1962.

This account gives the number of refugees as "more than 60,000". It explains that during the Russian Civil War some hundreds of thousands

* O. Borisov and B. Koloskov, "The Policy of the Soviet Union concerning the CPR", in M. I. Sladkovskiy, ed., *Leninskaya politika SSSR v otnoshenii Kitaya* (The Leninist policy of the USSR concerning China), "Nauka", 1968.

THE USSR AND THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

In the last months of 1968 the Soviet Union was faced with a dilemma. If it continued its pressure on the Arab states for a political solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it might well antagonize Arab public opinion, which was now far more interested in action than in negotiation. On the other hand, to resign the field to the militants was to invite the ascendance of forces over which Moscow would have no control.

In November, the Israeli air raid on the Nag Hammadi power station on the Nile had provoked a specially sharp Soviet reaction. The raid had demonstrated the vulnerability of the Aswan High Dam itself to Israeli air attack; and Moscow radio has since then stated that the Nag Hammadi damage was a principal subject of discussion with a Soviet delegation which visited Cairo for talks on the High Dam in November. However, even in the vehement Tass statement about the Israeli air raid a place was found for reference to Arab readiness for peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. The statement also hinted at a danger of the situation getting out of control: "It is the duty of all peace-loving states to prevent another dangerous explosion in this region."¹

Early in December, it seems, the Soviet Union had made its choice: it would persevere in its exertions to confine the militancy of Arab leaderships to the political plane. A *Pravda* leader of 3rd December entitled "Restore Peace in the Middle East" significantly repeated word for word the phrase in the November Tass statement about preventing "a dangerous explosion". A "realistic basis" for Middle East peace, it said, was afforded by the Security Council resolution and the UAR's programme for stage-by-stage implementation of the resolution. A political settlement of the crisis was "in the interest of all nations", and the USSR would do everything necessary to facilitate it.

The Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko paid a visit to Cairo from 21st to 24th December. According to President Nasir's confidant Hasanayn Haykal, the purpose of Gromyko's visit was to brief Nasir on the Soviet-US talks on the Middle East which were initiated during the UN General Assembly session. According to Haykal, these Soviet moves had earlier been proposed to Nasir when he was in Moscow in July 1968. During Nasir's visit, Haykal said, Brezhnev asked the Egyptian President to say frankly if he really wanted a peaceful solution of the Middle East crisis, or if what he wanted was revenge for the Arab defeat. Nasir's reply had been: "Peace—if there is an honourable way to peace based on justice."²

of Russian nationals, predominantly Kazakhs and Uygurs, settled in Sinkiang, and that most of them adopted Soviet citizenship. They were in general well treated in the first years of the Chinese People's Republic, but from 1958 onwards they began to suffer discrimination in property, legal and other matters. Those employed in state and Chinese-managed undertakings were victimized, their national customs were ridiculed, they were forbidden to use their native language, and at the beginning of 1962 a complete ban was imposed on exit permits for Soviet citizens wishing to return to their country. "As a result, in spring 1962 more than 60,000 inhabitants of Sinkiang, unable to stand harsh living conditions, hunger, national discrimination and the anti-Soviet rampage, made a spontaneous dash for the Soviet Union."

The Soviet authorities, the account continues, conducted "explanatory work" among these people, either to persuade them to return to the CPR, or to regularize their position should they be set on resettling in the USSR. The Soviet government invited the Chinese government to send representatives to do likewise. The Chinese leadership refused, aware that very few would want to return to where they had been so ill treated ; and in fact only a few individuals expressed such a desire, mainly people who had left many relatives behind them in the CPR. The Chinese leadership at first demanded that all the refugees should be returned to the CPR at gunpoint. But at the same time they refused to accept persons prepared to return to Chinese territory of their own free will. Finally, in view of Soviet unwillingness to evict forcibly people—"in the overwhelming majority old people, women and children"—who had fled from Chinese territory for self-preservation, the Chinese Foreign Ministry in September 1962 asked the Soviet government to permit those who wanted to enter the USSR to do so with the minimum of formalities.

The "anti-Soviet rampage" also affected the Soviet consulates in Sinkiang. Soviet diplomats were detained and searched. The associations of local Soviet citizens were closed and their leaders arrested on false charges of anti-government activity. "In these conditions the Soviet government was obliged to close the Soviet Consulate General in Urumchi and the Consulate in Kuldja. Subsequently at the insistence of the Chinese side the Soviet trade mission in Urumchi was abolished."

The conclusion of agreements for trade exchange between Iran and the Soviet republics adjacent to her frontiers, the Turkmen and Azerbaydzhan SSRs (see below, "Central Asia in the Soviet Press", and also *Mizan Supplement A*, No. 1, 1969) is an interesting development. The trans-frontier trade itself is of course nothing new, but the emergence of the Soviet republics as the specific trading partners is. This marks a stage in the USSR's promotion of the functional role of its southern republics in its relations with Middle East countries.