

## China Watch by Gregory F. Buhyoff

### A new 'neighborly' diplomacy

*Involving India, Pakistan, Vietnam, and probably the Sino-Soviet about-turn, it is more important than Washington says.*

Not only the Soviet Union, but also China's southern neighbors have picked up something new in the wind of Chinese diplomacy. Diplomats from countries with enduring suspicions of China, such as India and Vietnam, see a recent Chinese attempt to portray itself as somewhat less strident, and are not sure what to make of it. They wonder what relationship China's new diplomatic flurry has to the ongoing Sino-Soviet talks. Certainly no one in these countries believes China has "changed its stripes," but Peking appears at the very least to be trying out new tactics. Policy makers in Washington—who blithely insist nothing is changing in China's foreign policy—had better take a new look at this diplomacy.

In mid-October, former Indian Ambassador to Peking G. Parthasarathy, a close personal aide to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, made an "unofficial" visit to China. At that time Deng Xiaoping told Parthasarathy that there was no reason why outstanding disputes between the two countries could not be resolved if both sides showed the desire and good will. Foreign diplomats in New Delhi are now saying that they expect Peking to make a "new initiative" to resolve the long-standing border dispute at bilateral talks which could be held as early as December.

Dr. K. Subrahmanyam, Director of the Institute for Defense and Strategic Analysis (IDSA), told a recent seminar in Delhi that there may well

be a policy dispute inside the Chinese leadership on policy toward India. He urged a careful, unhurried look at any Chinese overtures, noting that Deng Xiaoping had compared China's 1979 invasion of Vietnam with its earlier "punishment" of India in 1962.

Another Indian analyst pointed out that China's conciliatory statements toward India in its English-language publications have not been echoed in the Chinese-language ones.

Nonetheless the Indian analysts note China's attempt to at least portray itself as more conciliatory and are trying to decide the best response.

Similarly, Vietnamese diplomats note that in the weeks since the beginning of the Sino-Soviet talks, the number of military incidents along the Sino-Vietnam border had decreased markedly.

However, they warn, temporary decreases in Chinese attacks have occurred before. Currently, the top three leaders of Vietnam, Truong Chinh, Le Duan and Pham Van Dong are all in Moscow for "health" reasons.

Clearly, the consequence of Sino-Soviet talks for Sino-Vietnam and Soviet-Vietnam relations will be discussed.

Only a month ago, on the occasion of an earlier Truong Chinh visit to Moscow, Vietnam and the Soviet Union signed a joint communiqué saying that improved Sino-Soviet relations were in the interest not only of those two countries, but also of Vietnam.

However, the Vietnamese well know that Chinese-Vietnamese enmity long predates communism, and they remain both cautious and suspicious.

Perhaps the next indication of what is in store for Chinese diplomacy may be the Asian tour of China's friend, Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq. Several days before the Parthasarathy visit to China, Zia arrived in Peking. While there, he made conciliatory remarks about India in an interview with the BBC. Moreover, Zia commented in Peking that "If Sino-Soviet relations improve, I think it will contribute to world stability and peace, and we cannot but appreciate the efforts the Chinese leadership is making in a dialogue with the Soviet Union to normalize relations."

Particularly striking was the fact that in all the references to Afghanistan, the Soviet Union was not attacked by name.

Pakistan's Zia and the Chinese leaders went out of their way to praise each others' countries as supporters of the Non-Aligned movement, at a time when Peking is trying to build up its "Third World" credentials and diminish its image as an ally of the United States.

Following the China trip, Zia went to North Korea, a country friendly to Peking that also happened to hold membership in the Non-Aligned.

At the beginning of November Zia leaves for another trip, this time to India for talks with Prime Minister Gandhi—the first Indian-Pakistani summit since the early 1970s. He then moves on to the Southeast Asian nations, countries Zia has not traveled to before. In addition to whatever efforts Zia makes to boost his own status internationally, one cannot help believe he will also talk to his hosts about his own recent discussions in Peking.