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SNIE 13-10-65

16 September 1965

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SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

PROSPECTS OF
CHINESE COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT
IN THE INDO-PAKISTAN WAR

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

NLJ 93-505

By iq, NARA Date 12-26-96

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Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD
as indicated overleaf
16 September 1965

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Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, and NSA.

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 16 September 1965. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB and the Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

16 September 1965

SUBJECT: SNIE 13-10-65: PROSPECTS OF CHINESE COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT
IN THE INDO-PAKISTAN WAR

CONCLUSION

We believe that China will avoid direct, large-scale, military involvement in the Indo-Pakistan war. An impending Pakistani defeat would, however, substantially increase the pressures for Chinese entry. Even in this circumstance we believe the chances are better than even that the logistic problems involved and the primacy of Vietnam in China's interests would keep China from undertaking a major military venture against India. In addition to propaganda, political support, and military gestures, China will probably offer material aid, but it probably cannot deliver more than token amounts. It will make threats and there is an even chance it will make small-scale military probes across the Indian frontier; the odds that it might launch a limited-objective attack similar to that of 1962 are somewhat lower. In either case it would expect to produce political and psychological effects far greater than the military importance would justify.

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DISCUSSION

I. COMMUNIST CHINESE INTERESTS

1. Communist China's primary external concern at the present time is the war in Vietnam and the possibility of a Sino-US confrontation developing there. To Peking, the Indo-Pakistan war provides opportunities for exploitation to advance Chinese interests but does not justify taking great risks. Peking is, therefore, likely to be cautious in its efforts to benefit from the fighting in the sub-continent.

2. In this context, China will strive to gain credit for helping Pakistan to demonstrate the value of China's friendship. Conversely, it will do what it can, without undue risk, to weaken and discredit India. Peking will also endeavor to use the Indo-Pakistan conflict to embarrass both the US and the USSR -- the longer it endures, the better. A prolongation of the conflict between two countries friendly to the US would clearly put the US in an awkward spot and threaten to lessen its standing with both belligerents. This would be seen by Peking as a way of advancing its major policy aim of reducing US influence and power in Asia.

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II. COMMUNIST CHINA'S MEANS OF INTERVENTION

3. Peking has already condemned India's actions as aggression and has given its moral and political support to Pakistan. It has given more substantial help to Pakistan by increasing tension along the Sino-Indian border through making increasingly threatening statements. It probably will exploit its diplomatic assets in the underdeveloped world in an effort to win support for Pakistan and condemnation of India.

4. The Chinese probably will offer military materiel to Pakistan, but they have little capability to provide weapons and material of the kind Pakistan needs most, such as modern aircraft and armored equipment. Even if they were to part with such weapons, the difficulties of transporting major items of equipment from China to Pakistan are formidable. Furthermore, because the Pakistani armed forces are trained for and almost completely outfitted with US and other Western arms, they would encounter serious short-run difficulties in adapting to the operation and maintenance of Soviet and Chinese types of weapons. In the longer run, Pakistani personnel could be trained to operate and maintain such weapons and the necessary supplies of spare parts and maintenance equipment could be brought into Pakistan, but it would take many months before the Pakistanis could make effective use of these weapons on a significant scale. The deployment of Chinese aircraft and personnel to Pakistani airfields would face many, but not all, of these problems.

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5. The only material way in which China could provide major and timely effective help to Pakistan is through the use or threatened use of Chinese military forces. Peking knows that the Indians are nervous and fearful of another Chinese attack. It almost certainly calculates that even very small military probes would cause the Indians great consternation and divert Indian effort and supplies away from the fighting with the Pakistanis. Indeed, the Chinese threat already ties down a significant portion of India's military forces: in the northeast, India has some six divisions and about 90 combat aircraft positioned to defend against the possibility of Chinese attack.

III. CHINESE COMMUNIST MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN THE AREA

6. Chinese Communist forces in the Himalayan area now consist of 60,000 men in Tibet plus 18,000 in western Sinkiang. Not all of these troops could be used in combat against India because some of them are support troops and others are required to control Tibetan dissidence.* The Chinese have several principal alternatives for launching a direct military attack against India.

a. An attack in Ladakh. This would threaten Leh, an important communication center and airbase, and the Indian rear in Kashmir. The

* We estimate that because of logistic and geographic factors the Chinese could attack with a maximum combat force of 150,000 troops along the entire Sino-Indian frontier. The buildup for such an operation could be accomplished within a month. We believe it would be detected in its early stages.

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Chinese Communists would hope that the Indians would divert forces away from the Pakistani-Indian fighting. We believe that if the Chinese decided to intervene with military force, they would see advantages in this alternative as a means of directly assisting the Pakistani forces in Kashmir.

b. An attack in the border area between Ladakh and Nepal.

The Chinese claim a wedge of territory north of Joshimath. We believe that this alternative, although militarily of a small scale, would have the psychological impact of appearing to threaten New Delhi.

c. Attacks through the Chumbi Valley in Sikkim and in NEFA.

A combined Chinese attack in these two areas would provide an opportunity to bring relatively large forces to bear against the Indians. This would be a far more serious undertaking, both militarily and politically, than an attack in Ladakh. It is the route by which the Chinese would attempt a major advance if they had determined on a major war against India; it could also, of course, be the area for a lesser probe or even for a limited-objective attack designed primarily for political and psychological effect and for a military diversion. Chinese protests against Indian "aggression" have focused most frequently and in greatest detail on the Sikkim border, and Peking has laid a foundation of charges which might be used to justify military attacks against forward Indian positions in this area. Nevertheless, for actions short of a major invasion of India, the disputed NEFA territory would probably be more attractive to China than the clearly-established frontier of Sikkim.

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7. Sporadic air attacks could be mounted across Burma from airfields in southwest China and across Nepal from air fields in Tibet. The Chinese could also launch ground attacks against India through Nepal and Burma, but for political reasons, if for no others, the likelihood of such an attack is slight.

8. The Chinese air force would face very formidable difficulties in maintaining logistic support over extended lines of communication and in operating from inadequate bases in the Himalayan area. It could not deploy more than 200 aircraft including about 25 jet light bombers to these airbases for use against India.* Ground support of Chinese forces by fighter aircraft would be extremely limited in time and area in any potential Sino-Indian conflict areas. With a lack of adequate early warning on both sides, air-to-air combat would be sporadic. Bombing by the small number of Chinese Communist medium bombers, while possible, would carry no great military weight. This force would have almost no capability to support Pakistani ground forces in the west.

9. The Chinese forces presently stationed near the Indian border are adequate to conduct small-scale probes and harassing movements without augmentation from China proper. With some reinforcement, these forces could launch a limited-objective attack similar to that of 1962. Activities

* There have never been any substantial numbers of combat aircraft stationed in Tibet. None are known to be there at present. However, we believe that POL and supplies have been prepositioned in the area and that combat aircraft could be moved in on very short notice.

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on either of these limited scales would bring reactions in India and in the world at large far out of proportion to the Chinese effort. New Delhi would feel obliged to strengthen Indian defenses in any "threatened" area, and it would be particularly sensitive to a Chinese probe against its outposts in Ladakh.

10. A major Chinese military effort against India, involving a further buildup in Tibet and Sinkiang could be accomplished without much strain on China's military manpower, but it would heavily tax China's motor transport capabilities and would result in a heavy drain on POL supplies. Supplies for Chinese Communist military forces in the Sino-Indian border area are transported by road from rail-served base depots in Chengtu in Szechwan, in Lanchow and Hsiatung in Kansu, and in the vicinity of Urumchi in Sinkiang. From these railheads supplies are moved into the frontier area by truck over long (500 to 1,800 miles) and difficult routes.

IV. FACTORS INFLUENCING PEKING'S POLICY

11. There are various political considerations which encourage at least limited Chinese participation in the Indo-Pakistan war. In addition to complicating New Delhi's immediate defense problem, action by Peking would re-emphasize to the sub-Himalayan states of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim the limitations of Indian power compared with that of China.

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It would also show Karachi and others that Peking could be relied upon even at some risk to Chinese security. Peking would calculate that it probably could manipulate its actions so as to avoid any successful Indian counteraction or escalatory response, thereby showing Indian military relations with Peking's political foes -- the US and USSR -- to be unprofitable. On the other hand, Peking could not be completely certain that once engaged it could avoid deeper involvement, especially if its limited participation failed to gain the desired results.

12. There are strategic considerations militating against a major use of Peking's capabilities against India. The most important is the war in Vietnam. Peking feels it has a great deal riding on the outcome of that struggle and is concerned that it might become directly involved in fighting with the US in that area. The Chinese are therefore anxious to keep their material resources available for the assistance of North Vietnam and the defense of China against the US. Any peripheral adventure that would divert elements of Chinese strength would be unwelcome. The Chinese may believe that they could quickly demoralize Indian troops and cause panic in New Delhi. However, Indian forces, especially in Sikkim and NEFA, are considerably stronger and better prepared than they were in 1962. If those forces remain in place and make the Chinese come over the crest of the mountains to dislodge them, it would require a much

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greater Chinese effort than it did in 1962 to achieve similar results. Finally, the Chinese would almost certainly be concerned lest a large-scale involvement of their forces in the Indo-Pakistan war might bring them into direct conflict with the US.

13. There are also some political inhibitions on Chinese military involvement in the Indo-Pakistan conflict. When China moved against India in 1962, one result was increased US military aid to India. This strengthened India's armed forces and increased US influence and presence in the area, both undesirable from Peking's point of view. Peking probably estimates that a Chinese attack against India now would bring further such undesirable results. To be sure, the Chinese might reason that any US military aid to India at this time would destroy the remaining US equity in Pakistan and increase Pakistan's dependence on China. Peking might consider this a sufficient gain to offset the increased US military involvement in India. For these same reasons, however, the Pakistanis, in any conditions short of desperation, would be likely to discourage any such Chinese involvement.

14. The course of the Indo-Pakistan war itself will be an important factor in influencing Peking's policy.

(a) A prolonged and inconclusive conflict, bleeding both India and Pakistan and intensifying the embarrassment of Washington and Moscow, would be in accord with Peking's interests.

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(b) If Pakistani military efforts were meeting with success, Peking would try to assume some of the credit and to this end, might even harass Indian forces along the frontier.

(c) If, on the other hand, Indian efforts were moderately successful, there would be about an even chance that the Chinese would engage in limited probes across the frontier to alarm the Indians, hoping to relieve pressure on the Pakistanis and retain the Chinese position in Karachi; the chance they might launch a limited-objective attack similar to that of 1962 is somewhat less.

(d) A series of Indian successes sufficient to threaten the political and military integrity of Pakistan would pose a dilemma to the Chinese. They would seem forced to choose between a serious loss of face through letting their new-found friends go down in defeat or the grave risks involved in drastic action to attempt to reverse the course of the war. The latter course would mean a major Chinese commitment far from the primary Vietnam theater and the possibility of becoming involved with the US. The Chinese might still undertake some limited military probes, but in the circumstances, we believe they would prefer some loss of face to becoming engaged in a major war with India. We believe that any commitment the Chinese may have made to the Pakistanis leaves Peking considerable freedom of maneuver.

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(e) An Indian invasion of East Pakistan would somewhat increase the likelihood of Chinese involvement. But the Chinese could not prevent the Indians from seizing their main objectives in this weakly-defended area, and we doubt that the Indian invasion would in itself be the cause of a major Chinese intervention. However, even limited military probes on the nearby Sino-Indian border would probably divert some Indian forces away from East Pakistan and at the same time demonstrate to Rawalpindi the sincerity of Chinese support.

V. INDONESIA'S PART

15. With Chinese encouragement and support, the Indonesians, already vociferously on Pakistan's side, might be persuaded to send some of their more advanced military equipment to assist Pakistan. Indonesia could conceivably send some of its military aircraft or use its destroyers and submarines to harass and distract the Indian Navy. The modern combat aircraft, all of Soviet make, would need Indonesian crews and maintenance forces. It would also be difficult to get the aircraft to Pakistan; and Indonesia may be too worried about its own defense against a possible confrontation with Britain to want to spare any of its modern weapons. The capabilities of Indonesia's navy are extremely low, especially in waters removed from the main Surabaya base. However, Indonesia, even without Chinese encouragement, will probably attempt to support Pakistan with modest shipments of war materiel.

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VI. POSSIBILITY OF RUNAWAY ESCALATION

16. There is still the possibility that Communist China might unintentionally get deeply involved through a process of escalation. Chinese moves along the frontier such as seizure of Indian reconnaissance patrols and advance outposts designed to worry the Indians, encourage the Pakistanis, and improve local Chinese defense positions, might draw an Indian response that required an increased Chinese response in return, and so on. It is more likely, however, that India would be too preoccupied by its war with Pakistan to engage in provocative responses on the Chinese frontier, and China, for its part, would avoid being provoked into a course of action it was anxious not to take.

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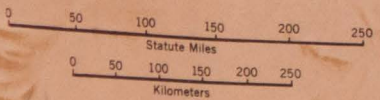
CHINA-INDIA BORDER

TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

SELECTED AIRFIELDS
6000 FEET AND OVER
6000 FEET AND UNDER

RAILROAD ROAD TRAIL

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES SHOWN ON CHINESE COMMUNIST MAPS



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