



Analyzing Sino-Soviet Relations in the 50s and 60s through the Balance of Threat Theory

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Abstract

Sino-Soviet relations during the 1950s and 1960s were arguably one of the most complex bilateral relations during the Cold War period. The frictions between these two major powers, however, were often hidden under the banner of their alleged common ideology and complementary role inside the International Communist Movement. As a multi-faceted phenomenon, most of the available scholarly works examine it from diverse angles, without seeking to use an overarching theory that can be applied to the Sino-Soviet case. Therefore, this research paper suggests a theory should be found in order to explain such a drastic change in bilateral relations in a relatively short period of time. We understand that a shift occurred in Soviet foreign policy regarding China: the cooperation and alignment seen in 1954 escalated to armed conflict in less than two decades. Using Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat Theory as the analytical framework, this research examines the People's Republic of China (PRC) through the criteria defined by Walt—aggregate power, proximity, offensive capabilities, and offensive intentions—from a Soviet perspective to determine if changes in these areas would justify two specific points.^① First, the increase in threat perception from the USSR towards the PRC and, second, the USSR's actual reaction. As the paper will demonstrate, this theoretical framework can be applied to understand the reasons why the Soviets saw China as a threat to itself, but the Soviet reaction was not the reaction the Balance of Threat Theory would predict, namely alignment and alliance forming to contain the PRC.^②

^① Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", 25

^② Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", 27

Introduction

Scholars constantly seek new theories, models, and rules that explain or help predict past events, policy decisions, and future conflicts. In the complex world of international politics, these general frameworks take time to come by, as a plethora of factors will be responsible for the actual outcome of a given situation. From the individual personalities of the people involved in the decision-making process to domestic politics and the international environment, geopolitics is a complex affair that cannot easily fit into any pre-determined set of rules. That being said, it is still essential that international relations scholars continue to search, improve, and adapt existing and new theories in the field, helping us better understand the forces that move each state and, consequently, the entire world.

This paper aims to go beyond existing materials and evaluate if the Balance of Threat Theory is appropriate for understanding the Sino-Soviet fallout from the 1950s to the end of the 1960s. With a comprehensive research scope, this paper aims to confirm if the theory can effectively explain the Soviet Union's threat perception of the PRC and if the USSR's actual foreign policies towards China during this period align with the prediction of Walt's Balance of Threat Theory. The paper anticipates making a significant contribution to existing literature, either by confirming the theory's successful application in explaining the Sino-Soviet fallout and thereby enabling its use in other historical cases, suggesting adjustments to Walt's definitions for its use, or even discarding it entirely.

Literature Review

There are extensive scholarly works on the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations during the 1950s and 1960s that explore the fallout from different angles, such as the PRC's domestic environment, the USSR's change in its foreign policy, ideological differences, or international factors.

Lorenz M. Luthi, in his 'The Sino-Soviet Split',^① argues that there were three factors for the fallout in the late 60s, namely: China's domestic situation with the failure of the Great Leap Forward policy, which generated increasing criticism and subsequent purge of opposition voices inside the Chinese Government; Mao Zedong's response to the Tibetan Uprising, which was perceived as clumsy by the Soviets and the main cause to the Sino-Indian border conflict; and Sino-American rapprochement in the late 60s that was against the Soviet interests.

Christensen approaches the question from another angle, bringing in the domestic Soviet situation to explain the USSR's position on several issues that would differ from the Chinese and the building up of these differences over time as a cause for the fallout.^② For example, Christensen highlights Mao Zedong's dissatisfaction with the speed of Soviet help to Chinese and Korean troops on the ground in Korea during the Korean War (1950-1953), which then caused the Chinese to push for a cease-fire agreement that they might otherwise not have pursued.

In addition, Christensen also argues that there were radical differences in Chinese and Soviet positions during the Indochina settlements that would end up dividing North and South Vietnam.^③ Due to internal affairs, a new drive to pursue appeasement with the Americans, and the necessity to reduce spending because of its domestic economic situation—particularly in a conflict perceived as secondary due to its distance from Soviet borders—the USSR advocated for a ceasefire and distanced itself from the Vietnam issue. Meanwhile, despite its own economic

^① Luthi, "Visible Cracks 1959" in *The Sino-Soviet Split*

^② Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace", p122-154.

^③ Christensen, "Worse Than a Monolith"

struggles, China actively supported the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) communists. According to Christensen, the USSR's dilemma of reconciling communist prestige with geopolitical interests drove it away from some key players in the international communist movement, especially the DRV.^① The vacuum created by Moscow's absence in Vietnam would be filled by Beijing, which vastly increased its own influence in Southeast Asia and its prestige among the International Communist Movement vis-à-vis the USSR.

Shen and Xia argue that the fallout had substantial ideological reasons behind it, which well exemplified in the Moscow Conference of 1957, the largest gathering of world Communists since the birth of Marxism.^② During the conference, China and the USSR disagreed over the viability of a peaceful transition to socialism. At the same time, China advocated for including the possibility of war and class struggle in the conference's final document; the USSR was more reluctant to use such language. Shen and Xia further contend that beyond ideology, the two powers' dispute for influence could be seen in the very conception of the event. It was well accepted that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) headed the conference. Still, historical evidence presented by Shen and Xia shows a very active Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Chinese even being the side that brought up the idea of a conference in Moscow.^③

After the end of the former Comintern and Cominform, both Moscow and Beijing recognized the need to create a new channel of information exchange between the communist parties. The Moscow conference had a shared goal of establishing a mechanism to resolve the movement's internal issues, but there were sharp disagreements on how that goal would be reached.

The aforementioned authors are examples of the usual approaches used to analyze the Sino-Soviet fallout: China's domestic issues, the USSR's domestic issues, international factors, and ideological reasons. Although they are undoubtedly pieces of this complex puzzle, the gap of a major theory remains, and that is what this research proposal is about.

Methodology

The paper primarily adopts qualitative reasoning with the support of historical documents and data. As the theory comprises four different elements that constitute the variables through which states perceive threats from other states, each variable must be examined to determine how it will be measured. After understanding the variables and how to measure each one, this research will move on to collect data and historical evidence and try to understand how Soviet leaders perceived the PRC at each of the selected historical moments.

The decision to select specific historical moments to conduct this analysis aims to facilitate data collection by stipulating a specific point in time and, therefore, arriving at more specific sources than it would be possible if the period were to be analyzed as a whole. It is also important to point out that numerical data such as GDP and military spending measure factors like 'aggregate power' and 'offensive capabilities.' Given the difficulty in obtaining data from the Soviet Union and proving its accuracy, this paper utilizes multiple documents from the World Bank and other relevant specialized literature to corroborate the arguments and add credibility.

The paper focuses on three historical events: the Geneva Conference of 1954, the Moscow Conference of 1957, and the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969. The Geneva Conference was arguably a moment of great Sino-Soviet cooperation, with both sides aiming for common goals,

^① Christensen, "Worse Than a Monolith"

^② Shen and Xia, "Hidden Currents During the Honeymoon", p74-117.

^③ Shen and Xia, "Hidden Currents During the Honeymoon: Mao, Khrushchev, and the 1957 Moscow Conference," 74-117

albeit for different reasons, in implementing the cease-fires in the Korean Peninsula and Indochina. The Moscow Conference in 1957 was chosen as it demonstrates the struggle between China and the USSR inside the International Communist Movement. It shows that the PRC is willing to behave more aggressively on the diplomatic front, both complementing and criticizing the CPSU during the conference and occupying a more prominent position among the world's Communists. In this event, it can be argued that there was a significant change in how China was perceived by the Soviets, especially concerning the fourth pillar of the Balance of Threat Theory, namely aggressive intentions. Finally, the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969 will close the research as the *de facto* military confrontation between the two states, which ended contributing to pushing China towards rapprochement with the United States, a strategy that was being pursued by the USSR in the early 60s under Khrushchev and despised by Mao Zedong. As these three events respectively represent historical moments in which the relations were 'good,' 'deteriorating', and 'hostile', we believe they will allow us to portray a solid picture of the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations during this period.

Concepts

The Balance of Threat Theory of Stephen M. Walt advocates that states decide on alliance formation strategies based on their threat perceptions of other states.^① In other words, it predicts that states will align against other states that are perceived as threats.

In order to explain how states measure threat perception, Walt came up with a framework composed of four variables: aggregate power, proximity, offensive capabilities, and offensive intentions. The paper offers a definition for each of the four variables:

1. *Aggregate power*. According to Walt, "The greater a state's total resources (size, population, latent power, and economic capabilities), the greater a potential threat it can pose to others."^② Size and population can be measured by very objective measures, but as Walt doesn't provide a way to weight latent power and economic capabilities, we decide to use both nominal GDP and GDP growth between 1950 and 1970. Nominal GDP is understood to be an adequate measure of economic capabilities as it gives us a general understanding of the overall output of any given economy. GDP growth will be the indicator of latent power, as big economies facing a recession (negative GDP growth) demonstrate more solid economic capabilities but lack latent potential as their overall economy is shrinking.

2. *Proximity*. This variable is divided into three categories: shared land border, same landmass, and different landmass. Threat perception increases with proximity, being highest in the first category and lowest in the last.

3. *Offensive capabilities*. Measured in terms of both nominal military spending and growth in military spending as a percentage of GDP, both for the PRC and the USSR. This is admittedly an oversimplification, as further analysis into technical specifications of a given country's arsenal, military personnel and logistics capabilities are all important factors for understanding the so-called 'offensive capabilities'. As data on the PRC and USSR on this matter is hard to come by due to both secrecy measures and lack of records, the paper uses military spending and its growth rate as indicators of 'offensive capabilities'.

4. *Offensive intentions*. This is a perception of intentions and, therefore, a subjective factor. To measure this variable, the paper turns to historical documents, records of conversations,

^① Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", 3-43

^② Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", 3-43

speeches and academic work to better grasp how Soviet leaders perceived the PRC in each of the three historical moments mentioned before.

Research

As previously mentioned, this paper will analyze the PRC through the lens of the four variables as perceived by the Soviets. Given the importance of changes in each variable across the three selected periods, the research will proceed on a variable-by-variable basis. After presenting data for each of the four pillars of the Balance of Threat Theory,^① the article will discuss the implications for Soviet threat perception regarding the PRC. A conclusion will follow, discussing the overall threat perception and the strategies actually employed by the Soviet Union in its dealings with China.

Aggregate Power

Aggregate power will be measured in territory length, population and both nominal GDP and GDP growth over the selected period. For territory length, we used current sources as China's territories have not suffered any changes since the 1950s.^② The source for population will be the Trading Economics database.^③ The PRC's GDP information is based on both the World Bank^④ and Chinese domestic sources.^⑤ As the studied period (especially the early 50s) presents conflicting information, more than one source was needed to ensure higher data accuracy. The USSR's economic information is based on the work of William Easterly and Stanley Fischer.^⑥

Table 1 – Nominal GDP and GDP growth

-	China's GDP	USSR's GDP	China's GDP growth	USSR's GDP growth
1950	22.32	304.29	-	-
1955	35.00	441.60	57%	45%
1960	59.72	629.00	71%	42%
1965	70.44	803.59	18%	28%
1970	92.66	1000.00	32%	24%

Sources: World Bank, Xueqiu, Easterly and Fischer

Table 2 – Aggregate power variables

-	1954	1957	1969
PRC's Size	10.45 mi km ²	10.45 mi km ²	10.45 mi km ²
PRC's Population	552 million	654 million	822 million
PRC's GDP growth compared to previous period	57% since 1950	71% since 1955	32% since 1965
PRC's GDP as a percentage of USSR's GDP	8%	9%	9%

Sources: Trading Economics

^① Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", 3-43

^② University of Washington. "A Visual Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization"

^③ Trading Economics, "China Population"

^④ World Bank. "GDP current US\$ - China"

^⑤ Xueqiu, "【数据】中美苏经济总量三国演义 (1950-2021)"

^⑥ Easterly and Fischer. "The Soviet Economic Decline", p341-371

Table 1 shows the nominal and GDP growth rates of both the PRC and the USSR during the 1950s and 1960s. In Table 2, the PRC's GDP never reached 10% of the total USSR's GDP, even though it showed higher growth rates for most of the period analyzed. From an economic perspective, that can also be attributed to a lower basis for calculation, meaning that countries coming from a lower comparative base tend to demonstrate higher growth rates than more industrialized and developed economies. Table 2 gives an overall assessment of the four variables within *aggregate power* over 1954, 1957, and 1969.

The PRC's size, as in territory size, remained the same throughout this period, but since China possesses a massive territory, this factor can contribute to perceptions of threat, as big countries usually have access to vast resources and manpower. When it comes to population, China can also be perceived as a threat since, not only did it have the world's biggest population throughout the 1950s and 1960s, its population also grew at a staggering rate in 20 years.

Latent power can be seen in tables 1 and 2 through China's GDP growth, which presented much faster growth rates throughout the 1950s than in the following decade. This fact in itself conflicts with historical facts, since the period that showed the slowest Chinese economic growth is the same period when China and the Soviet Union engaged in military confrontation. In theory, higher growth rates would mean higher latent power which would predict higher threat perception.

Lastly, we come to economic capabilities, the fourth pillar of aggregate power. This can be seen in tables 1 and 2 through China's nominal GDP and its GDP when compared to the USSR's economy. As mentioned before, the PRC's GDP never surpassed 10% of the USSR's in this period. Following the Balance of Threat Theory logic, that should mean a low threat perception from the Soviets regarding China when considering its economic capabilities.^①

In conclusion, by analyzing the 'aggregate power' variable alone, it is not possible to predict an increase in threat perception from the USSR regarding the PRC. Out of the four pillars, 'size' and 'population' would increase threat perception. 'Economic capabilities' would decrease threat perception as the PRC's GDP never surpassed 9% of the Soviet Union's GDP. The only pillar that showed changes throughout the 50s and 60s was 'latent power', and it should have increased threat perception in the first two historical entries (1954 and 1957) but decreased it in 1969, mostly as a result of China's domestic struggles with the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Since the sub-variables inside 'aggregate power' pose both positive and negative coefficients to measure threat perception, this variable alone can explain China's relative importance on the world stage but not the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations.

Proximity

In terms of proximity, the PRC and the USSR shared two land borders, separated by Mongolia. One is in northeast China, in the Manchurian region, and the other in the northwest, in Xinjiang. Countries that share a land border are more prone and sensitive to each other's actions, as they are direct neighbors and what one side does might directly affect and spill over the shared border. So, proximity can be understood as a constant factor contributing to threat perception from the USSR regarding the PRC, as they are immediate neighbors with two separate border sections in two very sensitive regions. In fact, the Sino-Soviet border clashes, the third historical event analyzed in this paper, precisely happened in one of the aforementioned regions, the Chinese northeast in 1969. This only goes to show that Sino-Soviet proximity did increase the threat perception of the USSR vis-à-vis the PRC.

^① Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", 25

Offensive Capabilities

The third variable in this equation, offensive capabilities, will be measured in terms of military spending, as explained before. The source for PRC data was obtained through the ‘Our World in Data’ database,^① while the USSR’s information came from Gomulka and Schaffer^② as well as Ofer.^③ It is important to point out that Soviet military spending information was not available for all the years analyzed, namely 1954, 1957 and 1969, but instead only for parts of that period; so, the closest data available will be used as an approximation.

Table 3 – Military spending as a % of GDP

	China	USSR	China growth	USSR growth
1950	15.08%	9.00%	-	-
1960	11.34%	12.00%	101%	176%
1970	26.03%	13.00%	256%	72%

Source: Ofer and others

China’s military spending showed an average decrease in the 50s and an upward trend throughout the 60s. It remained higher than the USSR’s for most of this period by percentage of GDP ratio. However, since the PRC’s GDP was roughly 10% of the USSR’s during this period, the Soviet Union had much higher nominal military spending and even showed higher spending growth from 1950 to 1960.

Hence, this paper concludes that, based on military spending, ‘offensive capability’ could have been a factor in increasing Soviet threat perception vis-à-vis China during the analyzed period, as the PRC’s military spending more than tripled over 20 years. On the other hand, it is also important to highlight that even with a higher than 300% increase, it still remained well below Soviet figures, as China had less than 10% of the USSR’s GDP.

Offensive Intentions

As the only non-numerical factor in the threat perception equation, offensive intentions were measured based on historical documents, speeches and other academic papers that focused on the Soviet Union’s foreign policy.

Starting with the Geneva Conference of 1954, it is important to understand Stalin’s foreign policy towards China. Although the conference took place one year after Stalin’s death, Stalin’s foreign policies dominated throughout the Geneva Conference as Khrushchev still struggled to consolidate his power. Stalin’s foreign policy was highly focused on increasing the USSR’s unilateral defense, especially after 1947, by creating a security zone around its borders. This would mean support for the PRC’s and Mao’s revolution. But according to Zubok, Stalin learned a lesson in Asia: “You can make the revolutionary process serve your foreign policy, but only at your own risk and with serious, unintended consequences.”^④ Under these circumstances, Stalin was cautious with regards to full support for the Chinese Communist Party. He had main ideological differences with Chairman Mao, regarding him as “excessively independent, with his roots in peasant revolt rather than proletarian revolution.”^⑤

^① Our World in Data. “Military expenditure as a share of GDP”

^② Gomulka and Schaffer, “A New Method of Long-Run Growth Accounting”

^③ Ofer, “Soviet Economic Growth: 1928-85”, p1767-1833.

^④ Zubok and Pleshakov, “Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War”

^⑤ Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War, p46

Besides the PRC, Stalin also refrained from openly supporting other Communist movements in order to get concessions and deals from the West. As Zubok summarizes the situation in 1949: “Stalin’s decision to shake Mao’s hand in 1949 was one of hard-boiled realism, but once it happened, the partnership between the Kremlin and the leader of the Chinese Revolution inevitably became a test between the Soviet paradigm and a no less exceptionalist Chinese revolutionary nationalism.”^① Based on the evidence provided by Zubok, we conclude that the moment of Sino-Soviet rapprochement, which includes the 1954 conference, saw the relations between the PRC and the USSR evolve to high levels of cooperation. Stalin’s decision to wait for Mao’s response before giving the North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung the go-ahead to invade the South serves as additional proof of this.^② The same evidence also shows that Stalin and the Soviets never perceived Chinese intentions as friendly; quite the opposite is true, but Chinese offensive intentions were not enough to deter Sino-Soviet rapprochement in this case.

The 1957 Moscow Conference of world Communist parties saw a change in Soviet leadership, with Khrushchev now firmly in power and advocating for his ‘peaceful coexistence’ doctrine, which sought greater rapprochement with the West. Ideological differences between the two sides increased during this period, as Khrushchev himself recalled: “Everyone joined the chorus of speeches on how to avoid war, but here came Mao Tze-tung saying we shouldn’t be afraid of war.”^③ In another passage, he mentioned, “Mao considered himself God. Karl Marx and Lenin were both in their graves and Mao thought he had no equal on Earth.”^④ Khrushchev’s personal accounts of the Chinese leader show that, although there was a reshuffle in Soviet leadership with his consolidation of power since 1954, trust failed to build up and Chinese intentions were still perceived as unfriendly and a barrier to the development of Khrushchev’s ‘peaceful coexistence’ doctrine.

The nature of Stalin’s and Khrushchev’s mistrust regarding the Chinese is a matter for scholarly debate, but that the USSR continuously perceived Chinese intentions as dangerous and aggressive is confirmed by the historical evidence. However, in both instances, *realpolitik* played a bigger role. Under Khrushchev, assistance to China increased 100-fold and the USSR supported the PRC in both the Taiwan Strait crisis (1954 and 1958), even with speeches of both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai stating that the PRC was willing to drag the Soviet Union into a nuclear war with the US over Taiwan.^⑤

Fast forwarding to 1969, China was in the middle of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Soviet Union was under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev (since 1964). Given the USSR’s domestic situation and the risks it posed for its own stability, the USSR increased criticism of the PRC during this period.^⑥ The border demarcation, which was an issue on the bilateral agenda since at least the beginning of the 1960s, saw both sides conduct provocations and minor border violations. Robinson stated: “The picture that emerges shows not much more than minor harassment between two unfriendly powers who disagreed upon some specifics of border demarcation and who found the border a convenient place to express the general tension.”^⑦

A survey that was conducted with 306 periodical articles and radio broadcasts from October 1st, 1968, through the end of February, 1969, highlights the overall Soviet comments about

^① Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, p58

^② Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, p58

^③ Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, p210-235

^④ Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, p210-235

^⑤ Zubok and Pleshakov, “*Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*”, p210-235

^⑥ Robinson, “*The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development*”, p1175-1202

^⑦ *Ibid.*

the PRC: criticism of Chinese internal politics during the Cultural Revolution, rejection of the Maoist ideological line, opposition to Chinese foreign policy towards both socialist and capitalist countries, and defense of the Soviet policy toward China.^①In a speech from 1968, Brezhnev emphasized the responsibility each Communist party had, not only to its own national movement, but also to the world Socialist movement as a whole, and that their action should refrain from damaging other Socialist countries: “This means that each Communist Party is responsible not only to its own people but also to all the Socialist countries, to the entire Communist movement. Whoever forgets this, in stressing only the independence of the Communist Party, becomes one-sided. He deviates from his international duty.”^②

As seen on the assessments of both the 1954 and 1957 Soviet threat perception on the PRC, 1969 demonstrated the same pattern. In the Soviet eyes, not only did these perceptions become a reality during the border clashes, but mistrust had been building up throughout the period analyzed in this paper. Regarding ‘offensive intentions’ then this paper concludes that Soviet leaders always perceived Chinese intentions as dangerous, and this was a constant factor on all three historical periods. Since there were no changes in this variable, it alone cannot explain the change in behavior from the USSR towards the PRC from 1954 to 1969.

Conclusion

After analyzing both numerical and historical evidence concerning the four pillars of the Balance of Threat Theory for the three selected historical periods, this paper concludes that Walt’s theory can only be partially used to understand both the Soviet perception of threat and its reaction regarding the PRC.^③

The theory predicts two things: that the perception of threat is based upon four pillars (aggregate power, proximity, offensive capabilities and offensive intentions) and that when countries perceive another country as a threat, they will balance against it.

Table 4 - Conclusions

Threat perception (+/-)	1954	1957	1969
Aggregate power	+/-	+/-	+/-
Proximity	+	+	+
Offensive capabilities	-	+	+
Offensive intentions	+	+	+
Conclusion	+	+	+

Table 4 summarizes this paper’s findings, attributing positive (+), negative (-) or both coefficients for each pillar in each historical data. The bottom line shows the research’s conclusion regarding the threat perception of the USSR regarding the PRC as positive for all three periods.

As the ‘aggregate power’ variable is further divided into sub-variables, it retains both coefficients as sub-variables; ‘size’ and ‘population’ would have a positive coefficient, whereas ‘latent power’ would be positive for 1954 and 1957, but negative in 1969, and ‘economic capabilities’ would be negative in all entries.

Since few variable changes were detected throughout the analyzed period, meaning that most factors remained constant, it is reasonable to infer that Soviet leaders continuously saw China

^① Ibid.

^② ISN, “Brezhnev Doctrine – Speech by First Secretary of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev”

^③ Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power”, p3-43

as a potential threat in all historical periods. Although this conclusion is supported by the historical evidence provided earlier, the theory would also predict that if the USSR saw the PRC as a threat, it would have balanced against it, forming alliances to contain the threat.

Even though Soviet leaders never fully trusted the PRC and its leader Mao Zedong, relations with China became closer and warmer in the first two chapters of our historical series (1954 and 1957). Due to factors not included in the Balance of Threat equation, the Soviet Union chose or had no option but to improve Sino-Soviet relations, even against its leaders' wishes. This concludes that the theory cannot be fully used to understand Sino-Soviet relations. Although it did explain the threat perception, it failed to predict Soviet foreign policy towards the PRC.

Furthermore, this research suggests two possible improvements to Walt's theory: either the conclusion can be further discussed, meaning that consideration should be given to the possibility that states do not necessarily balance against another state perceived as a threat, or there are other elements that need to be factored in when evaluating threat perception. To discuss whether states might not react as predicted by the Balance of Threat theory, the theory's framework should be applied to other historical cases. This would allow scholars to establish a comparison base and evaluate how the theory behaves in other scenarios.

Regarding the possibility of adjusting the theory's pillars, this paper raises two suggestions. First, the theory should clearly define what measures can be used to weigh the four pillars in the Balance of Threat theory, particularly 'latent power', 'economic capabilities' (both sub-items of 'aggregate power'), and 'offensive capabilities. As Walt did not explicitly point out how these items should be measured, it is natural that different studies use different methods and arrive at different conclusions. The second suggestion would be the addition of extra variables in this equation, as the theory in its current form does not include factors outside the bilateral relationship of two given states. Ideological alignment and heads-of-state personality traits can also be considered; both these factors played a significant role in the Sino-Soviet case.

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