

# McNamara Breaks U.S. Silence On Sino-Soviet Border Tension

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Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara gave the first official United States comment yesterday on "serious border problems" between the Soviet Union and Communist China.

The Soviet Union is "strengthening" its defenses along its vast border with China as a result of mounting tension with China, McNamara told Congress. That tension, he said, shows no sign of abating.

Until now, the United States has avoided any comment on this topic. There have been unofficial reports of physical clashes at several points along that border.

Official silence on the subject has been maintained to avoid feeding Chinese charges that the United States and the Soviet Union are "conspiring" against China.

But yesterday, apparently by coincidence, another high American official also touched on the delicate subject.

Under Secretary of State Nicholas deB. Katzenbach was

asked—in a question session following a speech to the Senate Forum of student leaders—about a possible joint U.S.-Soviet effort to checkmate Peking militancy.

"We couldn't close our minds to any kinds of combinations, any kinds of alliances," Katzenbach replied.

McNamara's brief comment on Sino-Soviet border tension was made in his 209-page military posture report to Congress. His annual report is a more comprehensive, and often more candid, world review than any public presentation issued by the State Department. At several points, McNamara spoke hopefully of the possibilities for tension-reducing agreements with the Russians.

"The dispute between the two major Communist powers has now reached a point where the Soviet Union has not only renewed the exchange of bellicose statements but is also strengthening its military posture in response to serious border problems with China. "While an outbreak of hos-

tilities between China and the Soviet Union does not appear probable at this time, the tension on the borders is likely to continue.

The "current upheaval" in China, McNamara noted, showed that the "general belief" that the leadership of China was "monolithic" under Mao Tse-tung was "erroneous."

McNamara himself in the past has warned of greater danger of Chinese expansionism than many experts estimated. He said yesterday that events in China "have made it necessary for us to re-examine some of the basic assumptions which we have made about the Peking regime."

Although there has been "a temporary reduction of Chinese interest in the outside world," McNamara said, "there has been no diminution in their support of the Communist efforts in Vietnam and in Thailand. There is no question but that Peking and Hanoi are attempting to foment insurgency in Thailand."