

Jp 0482

MR ROWELL

c Sir Robin Butler

Sino-Soviet Relations: Gorbachev's Call for a Summit

In an interview granted to the Chinese journal "Liaowang" in December, but published on 10 January, Gorbachev once again signalled his readiness for a Sino-Soviet Summit. He said that Soviet-Chinese border talks had got off to a good start and claimed that a Summit would be the "logical development" of the political dialogue which was being established. The Chinese have reacted, through a Foreign Ministry spokesman, by once again restating the need for the Soviet Union to get Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia.

2. The interview, and Gorbachev's suggestion of a Summit, has been given considerable prominence in the Soviet domestic and international media. The version broadcast by the Chinese news agency, Xinhua, however, omitted the Summit reference. The Chinese doubtless intend that foreign observers should note the omission, and draw their own conclusions.

3. The repeated Chinese refusal of a Summit should not, however, obscure the progress that has been made in Sino-Soviet relations at a lower level. There have been many visits, and commercial and economic links have expanded considerably in recent years. The very fact that a Chinese journal should publish an interview with a Soviet leader, for the first time for many years, suggests a more flexible Chinese attitude. We do not expect any sudden change in the Chinese position. Chinese concerns about Soviet support for Vietnam, and the other "obstacles" which they claim hinder full Party relations, are genuine, and progress is likely to be slow.

13 January 1988

PERCY CRADOCK