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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL 1995

14 May 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Sino-Soviet "Deal" in Southeast Asia?

1. Recent Communist military action in Laos has raised the question whether the USSR and Communist China have reached a reconciliation of differences and, in particular, whether they have made a "deal" providing China with a free hand in determining Communist policy in Southeast Asia.
2. For the past month or so both Moscow and Peiping have been publicly treating each other with considerable circumspection. There has been no suggestion in public media, however, that there has been any resolution of the issues which divide the two. In fact, private Chinese critiques of Soviet policy and even of Khrushchev personally have continued, Moscow's reiterations of its fundamental positions concerning the proper "Leninist" approach at home and abroad have continued to appear, and the Sino-Soviet

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struggle for dominance within various international front groups has in no way abated. Consequently, we regard the current period of reduced polemics -- not the first of its kind -- as a lull in the dispute rather than as a harbinger of rapprochement.

3. Despite their differences elsewhere in the world concerning both specifics and the underlying strategy and doctrine, the Soviets and the Chinese have to date cooperated effectively in Laos and Southeast Asia. Although there were signs of Soviet-Chinese frictions at Geneva in the summer and fall of 1961, there is good evidence of cooperation in the field, for example, in regard to the Soviet airlift through China to North Vietnam and Laos. While there probably have been differences over tactical decisions, on the whole we believe that there have not been serious disagreements among the Soviets, the Chinese, and the North Vietnamese who have the principal initiative in Laos, and to some extent Soviet and Chinese support reflects their desire to cultivate Hanoi.

4. The Chinese Communists and the North Vietnamese have almost certainly been less convinced of the virtues of a political settlement in Laos than have the Soviets, and more eager for an acceleration of military activity. Nevertheless, we have no doubt

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that the Soviets concurred in the Nam Tha operation. * The Soviet-North Vietnamese airlift into Laos participated in the supply build-up at Muong Sai preparatory to the attack and air-dropped supplies to the Communist forces during and after the attack. Moreover, the Soviets have not reflected concern over the attack and publicly endorse the view of the Pathet Lao that they were forced to attack by Phoumi's build-up at Nam Tha and that Muong Sing fell as a result of a coup within the Laotian Army garrison there.

5. Thus, in summary, we do not believe that there has been any major new development in the Sino-Soviet dispute and think it highly unlikely that the Soviets have granted the Chinese a free hand in Southeast Asia. It is possible, however, that the situation now opening in the wake of the Nam Tha operation will offer the Communist side more alternatives, and therefore more occasions for differences and disputes, than has been the case since the decisions reached at Geneva. The Chinese and North Vietnamese may push hard for a further intensification of military activity in the whole area. The Soviets almost certainly believe that to

* See paragraphs 4-9 in SNIE 58-4-62, "The Current Military Situation and Outlook in Laos," dated 14 May 1962

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withdraw from the area would be to abandon North Vietnam to predominant Chinese influence and to allow the risks of wider East-West conflict in this area to pass beyond their control. Should Sino-Soviet tactical differences become so serious as to preclude the degree of coordination which has obtained thus far, we believe that the Soviets, rather than resigning their present role, would make every effort to retain their influence over Communist activity and policy in Southeast Asia.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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