

~~SECRET~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

18 September 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE BOARD

SUBJECT: Sino-Soviet Relationship



1. It occurred to me that a number of points were left out of the interesting [redacted] seminar on Sino-Soviet relations, some of which were implied in [redacted] recent briefing and most of which point toward the possibility of even greater tensions in this complex relationship. Emphasis on the fact that there will not be a fundamental split is of course most necessary, particularly if anyone cherishes the illusion that the over-all security danger to the US might magically be diminished by some convenient revolution or internal schism on a grand scale. But this is a bit like saying there will be no revolution in the USSR -- it is true, but it can be (I should say has been) misleading by implying that nothing short of a dramatic revolution or a "split" can have real significance for the policymaker. (b)(1) (b)(3)

2. With even more than the customary apologies for oversimplification, the interjection of random thought, and the brevity of my exposure to recent material on the subject, I should like to

~~SECRET~~

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: DEC 2000

~~SECRET~~

outline (I) certain broad lines of probable development in each power that were left out of yesterday's discussion and the implication of which for the Sino-Soviet relationship were therefore overlooked (II) certain reflections on the nature of the relationship, and (III) an estimative conclusion for the next five years.

I

3. Basically, Communist China is in a period of rapid--probably convulsive -- economic development and transformation. Exactly how they do it is not so important for our purposes, as is the fact that China's accumulated national grievances and exaggerated sense of present historical importance, together with the blunt dictates of realistic economic self-interest and the apparent resolve of her present rulers -- all point to the fact that China will sustain as much of a garrison atmosphere, as much intense almost masochistic fanaticism as the traffic will bear. If they stop for breath once in a while -- as they have apparently done at the present (or are they indeed sustaining their momentum by activating the border situation again?[?]-- we should at any rate not look for any real abatement of the pace. Since their economic problems are even greater than were Russia's, it does not follow that they will allow themselves any respite analogous⁴ to the Soviet NEP in the twenties

- 2 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

(even should there be increased trade possibilities with the outside world). Despite what the Russians have said, they never really tried anything like the people's communes -- even under the extreme press of "War Communism" during the Civil War. Nor were they able to achieve basic collectivization at anything like the pace of Communist China in its earlier "leap."

4. In view of China's ambitious and grandiose efforts to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, I wonder if we should not allow for a greater range of uncertainty in estimating not only the dimensions of their future accomplishment, but the nature of their economic and scientific emphases. Particularly in science and technology -- where the Chinese have an old if dormant tradition, and where their work in Russian universities appears consistently to amaze their more advanced mentors -- it seems possible that China may be capable of more dramatic breakthroughs than our current estimates allow. Dramatic scientific advance in certain selected areas would be within the range of possibility as far as personnel is concerned. With proper concentration of technological effort, some construction might be possible which ^{would} yield greater prestige and dramatic impact results at less cost to the economy than broad ^{re} plans requiring further arrangement of the economy on a national scale.

- 3 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

5. Thus, just as the USSR's development has taxed our preconceptions about what differently motivated systems could accomplish, it seems to me that we should lean a little more heavily in the implied direction

[REDACTED] namely that a few dramatic technological developments may be forthcoming before long, and that an atomic capability may indeed arise within five years. At the very least, we should ask ourselves and our competent scientific estimators if it might not be technically feasible for China to work out a pattern of technological development that would short-cut several of the stages of development that took place in the process of technological evolution in the West or even the USSR. It seems to me that the business of blast furnaces in the back yard may be only the first in a series of dramatic experiments at new patterns of florid technological experimentation; and that they may well at least try to move directly and rapidly toward one or more of the major new modern sinews of war: rockets, atomic weapons, etc., more rapidly than analogies with our own or even Russian development would suggest.

F(b)(1)
F(b)(3)

6. Whatever the prospects for dramatic new economic or technological advances may be in China, the atmosphere of fanaticism, xenophobia, extravagant pronouncements and rituals, and a certain lack of realism will probably be increasingly familiar features of the Chinese landscape.

- 4 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Whether or not internal purges and violence develop in China in the wake of this forced industrialization and centralization, over-all domestic tension will almost certainly increase and the need for an atmosphere of mythical infallibility and stimulated xenophobia seem likely to increase.

7. By contrast, the atmosphere in Russia appears to be moving almost as inexorably towards the gratification of long-overdue and increasingly realizable concessions to consumer demands and a general "relaxation of tensions." It matters relatively little that the party in general and Khrushchev in particular are trying periodically to generate ^{new} ideological enthusiasms for remote goals -- return to leninist norms of party life, overtaking America, pushing on to Communism, etc. Except for the rapidly anachronistic toughs such as Kuusinen and Suslov (significantly enough chosen to lead the delegation to China) no one appears willing (let alone able) to underscore ideology with blood and tears, without which real sweat is unlikely to be forthcoming. Ideological pronouncements have acquired a synthetic quality in the wake of the increasingly coarse level of Khrushchev's language and reasoning and the admission of fallibility. It seems not unreasonable to assume that the vaunted "ideological unity" which is alleged to link them in some unshakable (but quite unexplainable) way, may confine itself to increasingly ritual statements of ultimate belief rather than coordinated common programs of action.

- 5 -
~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

8. It seems to me that as far as the Chinese are concerned about ideology, the papacy has moved to Avignon. They are in a stage of development which needs a myth of infallibility; and they do not, moreover, feel themselves implicated in past Soviet mistakes. Their occasional -- and increasingly infrequent -- exercises of assent to specifically Soviet formulations are probably only a function of the Soviets continued ability to call the tune whenever they wish to pressure the Chinese to do so. The fact that the Soviets will be able to extort this kind of ideological obedience for some years as a measure of their superior power does not mean that they are recognized to possess very much, if any, genuine moral or ideological hold over the Chinese. The Chinese retrenchment on communes can be more convincingly explained by their own second thoughts on economic grounds than by editorials in Pravda or even secret Soviet pressure.

9. Thus, I feel strongly that the alleged common ideological bond between the two is already of minor importance in the relationship, and is likely to become increasingly so. The general popular front and relaxation of tensions line (including such possible developments as freezing of atomic tests) are all very much in the Soviet interest and relatively little in the Chinese.

- 6 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

10. In general it appears probable that the frustrations and aggravations of the Chinese will be a more serious irritant in the relationship than the apprehensions of the Soviets. Nonetheless, if one accepts the probability that the increasing pragmatism of Khrushchev's speeches and policies is to some extent an irreversible trend in the USSR, it seems a matter of logic that they will be increasingly concerned with the eminently practical concerns any great state feels over the rapid growth in strength and self-confidence of any contiguous power with which one has no well-established tradition of friendship. While it may be true (as said at the seminar) that the Russians are not as concerned as some Western observers would have them with the demographic explosion and insular arrogance of their Chinese allies, the implication that they are not really concerned flies in the face of the anticipatory appreciation of changes in "the balance of forces" which is instinctive in seasoned Communist leaders. Soviet leaders when asked if they are apprehensive about China consistently reply that "this is a bourgeois way of looking at things, there is enough room for everyone, etc." The answer appears to come from men who would like to believe this, but who have their more worldly doubts. It has the flavor of appealing to a comforting ideological hope rather than asserting a confident belief about the future.

- 7 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

II.

11. While playing two sides of the street simultaneously (as in, say, the India-Chinese border question) may offer occasional incidental advantages to both the USSR and Communist China, this cannot be the preferred way of doing things -- particularly for the Chinese whose claims are being muted -- unless a far greater measure of tacit understanding exists in the relationship than seems to be the case.

12. It is perhaps worth underscoring the total lack of warmth that characterizes the Sino-Soviet relationship -- apparently at all levels. The self-imposed (and gladly accepted) isolation of Chinese students in Russia is a case in point, as is [REDACTED] observation about the correctness and evident lack of warmth of Sino-Soviet cultural and diplomatic contacts in Peking. It may not be irrelevant to recall that, historically, the Russians were perhaps the most vigorous of all European proponents of the "yellow peril" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries -- possibly because of their own extreme discomfiture at being labelled "Eastern" by many Western Europeans (a point I found many thinking Russians unusually sensitive about last summer). Whatever Lenin may have said

F(b)(1)
F(b)(3)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

about the colonial peoples (and it was more paranthetical than is usually thought), their pose of fraternal benefactor to China is a relatively recent, unfamiliar, and probably rather awkward posture for a people whose popular cowboys-and-indians type folklore is built around throwing off a previous Asian conqueror, and whose frequently used term for the Chinese, kitashki, is perhaps even more disrespectful than the English "chink."

13. From the Chinese side, although little is known of their real attitudes, their general coolness to Russians has been manifest, and they probably tend to lump all Europeans together in their thinking -- speaking openly, for instance, and with curious lack of differentiation of the need to overtake first the UK, then the USSR, finally the US. No matter what the size of Soviet aid or how "fraternal" the Soviet external posture may be, Chinese official sensitivity and testiness appears to be such that even a few slights and say the status of Outer Mongolia would be enough to rankle very deeply with the Chinese. If the estimate is correct that Soviet pressure to be effective must involve reminders of Chinese dependence on the USSR for economic and technological aid, any such pressure will almost certainly be viewed, at least in part, by the Chinese in the classical context of imperial pressures. Thus the Soviets will in effect be continually faced with the choice between losing their leverage over China or increasing Chinese resentment while exercising it.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

14. More directly relevant is the absence of any apparent present basis for friendly interparty understandings or coordination on anything more than broad agreement on common enemies and the general desirability of a Communist society. Again, the historical record shows a well-documented record of past quarrels between the Chinese Communists and their distant Soviet supporters. While all discussion of more recent internal Chinese party matters is conducted in the dark, Kennan feels that there was the most bitter negotiation over the initial aid agreements when he was ambassador in Moscow early in 1952. I think the contention can be made that the only major Chicom elite purge since coming to power was at least partially designed as a warning to the USSR, (or at least would be so interpreted by the Soviet leaders). The Kao Kang purge of early 1955 -- conducted at a time when Soviet policy was in a state of considerable uncertainty on matters deeply affecting the Chinese (such as allocations to heavy industry) was directed against the one man in the Chinese leadership who had not made the "long march" and had independent negotiations with Moscow (in the summer of 1949 as the ruler of Manchuria, then the only part of China under firm Communist control, and perhaps the only part which Stalin really cared about). Whether or not Kao Kang's alleged regionalist views contained in fact any special favoritism to Moscow, this was a

- 10 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Chinese
good way of telling Moscow (and indeed/ Communist subordinates) in a recognizable language that no potential channels of communication with China except those going direct to Peking would be tolerated. (The opinion of OCI analysts that the recently dismissed military leaders were more pro-Soviet than their successors would -- if justified -- indicate that the Chinese are further fortifying their monolithic front for hard bargaining with their Soviet allies as well as possible hard policies toward their enemies.)

15. Although estimates cannot be excessively labyrinthine^N in their search for evidence, it seems to me that some consideration should be given not only to probable differences of interest in areas of common involvement, but the ways in which gestures to third parties by the two allies may be subtle means of communication, inducement, and even warning to each other. Excessive Chinese castigation of Yugoslavia last year almost certainly contained implied warnings to the USSR itself (which could not be made openly) against a "soft" policy detrimental to China. Soviet moves to conciliate and aid India -- including the recent unprecedented "neutral" statement on the Sino-Indian border dispute -- probably have, as a partial (perhaps only partially conscious) motivating force, a desire (a) to open up other avenues of direct communication into the fluid Asian picture than exclusive reliance on Peking would

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

afford, and (b) to reestablish the possibilities for penetration and influence in this more traditional and almost equally populous area of Russian interest.

16. In short, given no dramatic changes in the political leadership of either power or in the general international situation, it seems fair to expect a continuing acceleration of tension in the Sino-Soviet alliance for three fundamental and interrelated reasons:

(a) the radically divergent patterns of projected economic and social development that seems likely to prevail for the next decade: an increasingly automated economy subject to greater local and consumer pressure the one hand, and a highly centralized manual economy mobilized for the frantic building of sinews of industry;

(b) the attendant popular attitudes in the two countries, which will almost certainly give an increasingly different content to the prevailing policy emphases of the two countries: creeping pragmatism vs. semi-mythological ideological fanaticism;

(c) the related tendency to look to different paths for future foreign policy gains: on the one hand a continued attempt

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

primarily to soften and divide the opposition while opening up new areas for more gradual and long-term popular front gains: on the other a need to gratify a still-sensitive national pride by establishing a unique role for China in Asia through more traditional and brutal methods of subversion, intimidation, and utilization of overseas Chinese and ^{irridentist} incidentalist claims.

17. Although strenuous efforts will continue to be made to provide a facade of ideological unity (which may even include agreed programs to frighten the West), these will be unlikely seriously to arrest this trend unless dramatic new foreign policy gains (or losses) were to open up in the Sino-Soviet camp. On balance, the odds seem better than even that the Sino-Soviet relationship, while remaining an alliance in some form for years to come will (a) come to differ in degree rather than in kind from their relations with other states, with ideology a waning cohesive force, common enemies and abiding one, and (b) be sufficiently delicate in form and complex in nature that the possibility of external influence having an effect on it in some instances can not be as confidently excluded as in the past.

- 13 -

~~SECRET~~