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# Soviet Attitudes Toward the US

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DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

*Concurred in by the*  
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

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The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, and NSA

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## SOVIET ATTITUDES TOWARD THE US

### THE PROBLEM

To assess current Soviet attitudes toward the US, particularly in the light of the Vietnam and Dominican Republic situations, and to estimate probable Soviet foreign policy in the next few months.<sup>1</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

A. Khrushchev's successors, seeking new ways to cope with the Chinese challenge to Moscow's authority, have altered the priorities of Soviet foreign policy. They began to do so very shortly after gaining power and well before present US policies in Vietnam went into effect. The new leaders did not set out deliberately to reverse the course of East-West relations which had developed after the Cuban missile crisis. Rather, they gave first priority to efforts to repair the USSR's position in its own camp and in the underdeveloped world, consciously accepting as a consequence a deterioration of relations with the US. (*Paras. 1-4*)

B. This revision of policy has led the Soviet leaders to re-enter the Vietnamese crisis and to assume increasing commitments there. Vietnam has now become a pivotal issue in Soviet foreign policy, setting narrow limits on Moscow's freedom of maneuver in other areas of East-West relations. (*Paras. 5-7*)

C. Nevertheless, Soviet conduct continues to reflect a concern to avoid high risks and a desire to remain in contact with Washington. In time, experience may persuade the Soviet leaders that competition with China on the latter's terms is unprofitable and that a hard-line

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, this estimate does not consider Soviet reactions to any major changes in US policies toward the DRV or the DR.

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foreign policy is inconsistent with efforts to promote domestic economic growth. During the next few months, however, we expect the USSR to give vigorous opposition to the US on a wide range of issues. We believe that present conditions, particularly the situation in Vietnam, virtually preclude Soviet willingness to improve relations with the US. (*Paras. 8-14*)

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## DISCUSSION

### The Change in Soviet Policy

1. In the seven months following the fall of Khrushchev, the USSR's attitude toward the US has undergone a change. Shortly after they took power, the new leaders began to play down the spirit of detente. Although Moscow still made an effort to keep open the option of positive relationships with Washington, a harder line was manifest even before February, when the US responded to the Viet Cong attack on Pleiku by bombing the DRV during Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. This posed the issue acutely, and since that time Moscow has taken a number of positions which have brought it into broader opposition to US policies.

2. Some indicators of a change in the Soviet line appeared immediately after the accession of the new leaders in October. Within a week, hints emerged that the showdown with China which Khrushchev had scheduled for December was to be postponed, as in fact it subsequently was. Official statements began to lay greater stress on the themes of Communist unity and national liberation, while peaceful coexistence received reduced attention and the test ban treaty went almost unmentioned. In November, when the US and Belgium mounted the Stanleyville rescue operation, Moscow went beyond propaganda attacks to join the UAR and Algeria in military aid to the Congolese rebels, taking no pains to maintain secrecy. During these first months, statements of Soviet leaders about East-West relations gradually altered, with optimism giving way to a darker picture which presented the West, and particularly the US, in a more unfavorable light.

3. One of the most urgent problems facing the new leaders was the need to cope with the pressures generated by Communist China. Peiping has long been seeking to establish that any accommodation at all with the US is a betrayal of Communist principles and interests. Under this indictment, it assailed a whole series of Khrushchev's post-Cuban moves on two major counts: that his policies directly harmed the socialist countries and that they delivered underdeveloped countries and national liberation movements into the hands of the imperialists. Khrushchev responded with heated denials, continued to stress good relations with the US, and counterattacked with a campaign to isolate the Chinese and perhaps even expel them from the Communist movement.

4. This way of conducting the Sino-Soviet dispute produced considerable disorientation inside the Communist camp but did not muster the strength sufficient for an all-out Soviet attack on China. Khrushchev nevertheless persisted; moreover, even though the test ban treaty was not followed up by other important agreements, he continued to insist that the climate of detente created the most favorable circumstances for Communist advances. His successors evidently do not regard these as the correct tactics for the present phase. In their view, Khrushchev's detente policies were not leading to gains for the Soviets sufficient to counter those the Chinese were making. The new leaders

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did not set out deliberately to reverse the course of East-West relations which had developed after the Cuban missile crisis. Rather, they gave first priority to efforts to repair the USSR's position in its own camp and the underdeveloped world, consciously accepting as a consequence the deterioration of relations with the US.

5. In this context, the most pressing question was Vietnam, an issue which not only combined the national interests of a Communist state and the fate of a "liberation struggle" but, even more, was closely bound up with the Sino-Soviet dispute. Khrushchev had virtually written off Vietnam, consigning Hanoi to the Chinese camp. Soundings during the visit of a high-ranking DRV delegation to Moscow in November evidently encouraged his successors to change this policy and to offer military and economic aid to North Vietnam. They may have thought merely to share in the credit for an impending Communist victory, and they probably underestimated the risks of the new course, but in any case the upshot was to deepen their commitment to the DRV. Vietnam has now become a pivotal issue in Soviet foreign policy, setting narrow limits on Moscow's freedom of maneuver in other areas of East-West relations.

6. It is likely that the very newness of the post-Khrushchev leadership has something to do with the change in line. In an effort to establish their authority, Khrushchev's successors have been under pressure to appear as unfailing supporters of the causes of their allies and clients. This has the effect of giving these allies and clients greater leverage over Soviet policy. North Vietnam is the obvious case, but this factor probably also played a part in the Soviet decision to give unusual backing to East Germany in the intense harassment of last month's Bundestag meeting in West Berlin.

7. Against this background of reappraisal and changing priorities, various US actions have also affected Soviet calculations. A number of issues active in the first months after Khrushchev's fall—US emphasis on "building bridges" to Eastern Europe, the UN payments crisis, the Congo—probably added to the new Soviet leaders' doubts about the wisdom of detente. Subsequently, the US military buildup in Vietnam, and particularly the bombing of the DRV, served to demonstrate to them that the USSR could not hope to support Hanoi and still preserve an atmosphere of relaxed tensions in Soviet-US relations. These actions also reflected a US willingness to use force, despite restraints of world opinion, which probably dismayed the Soviets and indicated to them that US policy had taken an assertive turn. US intervention in the Dominican Republic, occurring well after the new Soviet line had been established, has merely reinforced the latter view.

8. Nevertheless, Soviet conduct continues to reflect a concern to avoid high risks and an awareness to the danger of challenging important US interests. In Vietnam itself, Moscow almost certainly is using its limited influence to urge caution upon Hanoi and to keep alive the option of negotiations. Its military aid, while it now includes a variety of weapons, has arrived slowly and in small quantities. In its relations with the US, Moscow shows a desire at

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least to remain in contact with Washington and to preserve certain cooperative links created in recent years. These factors indicate that present Soviet behavior contains much which is tactical in nature.

#### The Outlook

9. To some extent, the present Soviet line is probably the result of an unplanned accumulation of commitments, in response to the factors discussed above, which have carried the new leaders to a point which forecloses for the time being the option of detente tactics. We foresee no early reversal of this course. In particular, the increasing Soviet commitment to the DRV virtually precludes any substantial efforts to improve relations with the US, especially so long as bombing of the DRV continues. By the same token, the changes are slim that the USSR will make any positive response to possible US efforts to improve relations. The current Soviet line will also produce negative reactions and tactics on many other international issues. These will be focussed on the US; it is already evident that Moscow exempts Paris from its harsher approach, and it may attempt flirtations with other US allies.

10. The further course of the Vietnam crisis will have a great effect upon Soviet thinking and general tactics. If, for example, the US substantially widened the scope of its attacks on North Vietnam, the Soviets would feel compelled to harden further their general line. Apart from what they might do in Vietnam, they would probably take some of the demonstrative steps from which they have thus far refrained, such as announcing an increase in military expenditures or severely harassing the US Embassy in Moscow. They might even go so far as to abrogate the test ban treaty. If, on the other hand, the Vietnam crisis somehow lost some of its intensity, this would give the Soviets new flexibility. They would probably use the opportunity to begin working back toward a more balanced posture *vis-a-vis* the US which afforded wider options for future maneuver.

11. In a somewhat broader perspective, there are factors at work which contradict those elements now in the ascendancy in Soviet policy-making. If detente has its drawbacks for the USSR, so do increased tensions, and the gains of the latter are no more certain. One of the considerations behind Khrushchev's decision to relax tensions, for example, was the desire to refute the advocates of greater defense expenditures and devote more resources to improving living standards and industrial modernization. His successors are likely to find themselves confronted with the same problem, for they are also committed to civilian programs scarcely compatible with major increases in defense spending.

12. With respect to China and the US, Khrushchev's successors may find that they have fallen into an error opposite to his. They apparently judge that he had too heavily engaged Soviet policy in the effort at rapprochement between Moscow and Washington. In reaction to this, however, they find themselves

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embarked on a kind of "me-tooism" which accepts Peiping's definitions of the terms of struggle within the Communist movement.

13. In our view, the Soviets will find little profit in competition with the Chinese on these terms. Any initial hopes that China could be induced to cease its attacks have certainly been destroyed by now. Nor is the USSR likely in this way to arrest the general decline of its influence in other Communist parties and revolutionary movements. Some Communists, particularly in Europe, are dissatisfied with the abandonment of detente; some militants subscribe to the Chinese charge that detente has never really been abandoned; many are made uneasy by the new departure and the danger of larger war in Vietnam. Thus the time may come when the Soviet leaders judge that their new tactics have greatly limited their freedom of action and laid them open to greater risks, but have not shored up Soviet authority to any significant degree.

14. The future course of Soviet foreign policy is also bound up with the future of the collective leadership. There has almost certainly been jockeying for position in the months since Khrushchev's fall.<sup>2</sup> The working out of political rivalries, which is certain to be related to the formulation of new five-year economic plan and preparations for the approaching Party Congress, can hardly fail to involve foreign policy as well.

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<sup>2</sup>This question will be examined in greater detail in NIE 11-65, "Soviet Politics After Khrushchev," scheduled for publication in June.

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