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SNIE 11-16/66
28 July 1966

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

CURRENT SOVIET ATTITUDES
TOWARD THE U S

Submitted by

Richard Helms

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

28 July 1966

DATE

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

Concurring:

Dr. Sherman Kent, for Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
Mr. George C. Denny, Jr., for The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
Vice Admiral Rufus L. Taylor, for Director, Defense Intelligence Agency
Dr. Louis W. Tordella, for Director of the National Security Agency

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

28 July 1966

SUBJECT: SNIE 11-16-66: CURRENT SOVIET ATTITUDES TOWARD THE US

THE PROBLEM

To assess the short-term outlook for Soviet-US relations, with particular reference to Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

On balance, we continue to hold the view that the men who took over from Khrushchev almost two years ago have been conspicuous in their cautious approach to both foreign and domestic problems. They will go as far as they consider prudent in their support of Hanoi. We do not foresee either a shift to a more radical and venturesome line of action or initiatives toward a peaceful settlement.

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DISCUSSION

1. Over the past several weeks, the Soviet government has further sharpened its attacks on US policies in Vietnam and has taken a number of additional steps to chill its relations with the US. These latest moves are clearly intended to underline Soviet condemnation of US bombing of POL facilities in North Vietnam early this month. The Soviets cancelled their participation in a sports meet in this country, at the last minute. They have refused permission for an American news network to film shows in the USSR, have staged anti-US protest rallies in the USSR and have in general been responsible for some deterioration in US-Soviet cultural relations.

in public statements, the USSR has vigorously renewed its endorsement of Hanoi's terms for a settlement.

2. At the same time Moscow has avoided some provocative moves which it might have made. For example, since the spring of 1965, the Soviets have not permitted mass demonstrations against the US Embassy in Moscow, in contrast to recent mass protests in East Europe. After considerable hesitation, the Soviets agreed to permit a US industrial exhibit to open next month in the USSR as scheduled, thus keeping to the letter if not the spirit of the new cultural exchange agreement. Berlin, that sensitive touchstone of US-Soviet relations, has remained quiet. Indeed, there are

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indications on Moscow's part of a desire to minimize the chances for friction there, e.g., it has acted to expedite the movement of Allied traffic into West Berlin. Despite the lack of progress, the USSR continues to participate in the Geneva disarmament talks and Soviet officials in Geneva have in recent weeks showed serious interest in negotiating a treaty governing space exploration.

3. These contradictory manifestations indicate the growing complexities of the USSR's position in regard to Vietnam, its relations with the US, and its position in the Communist world. The USSR has made important gains in its contest with Peking by supporting Hanoi and calling upon all Communist countries to participate in joint action to aid the DRV. In order to maintain this improved position they must continue to support Hanoi, and, at the same time, disprove the endless Chinese charges of US-Soviet "collusion." For these reasons, they remain unwilling at present to take any initiatives to bring about a negotiated settlement. But the Soviets have shown themselves keenly aware of the dangers of escalation and reluctant to become deeply involved in the war. These attitudes have placed important limits on Soviet reactions to events in Vietnam.

4. As a result of this dilemma, the Soviets, in order to register their disapproval of US policy, have turned to such well advertised areas of US-Soviet relations as cultural exchanges. The Soviet leaders recognize that the publicized sector of relations is an area especially vulnerable

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to Chinese attack. By the same token, the Soviets also recognize that they can attract the most dramatic publicity when bilateral exchanges and contacts are abruptly cut off. Moreover, US-Soviet exchanges in general may be under something of a cloud in the Soviet leadership because of the concern it has manifested recently over its control of the Soviet intellectuals. Thus, for internal Soviet reasons, as well as because of the Vietnamese war, certain areas of US-Soviet cooperation are likely to suffer. In sum, a generally hostile climate between the US and the USSR is likely to continue for some time.

5. Indeed, it may get worse. Thus far, Soviet policymakers have confined their actions to those areas of US-Soviet relations which are secondary and presumably expendable. But further developments could impel the USSR to adopt more radical measures. The crucial question, of course, is whether the worsening in relations will be reflected in some new and dangerous Soviet action in Vietnam or elsewhere. Moscow's inability to influence thus far the course of events in Vietnam, pressures from North Vietnam for more effective assistance, and the contest with China for influence in Hanoi and elsewhere, are all factors which could cause the USSR to consider actions which it has thus far avoided.

6. We continue to believe, however, that despite uncertainty and apprehension concerning US policies, Soviet leaders see no realistic alternative to continuing their present course of action. The Soviets

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probably still have no clear idea of how the Vietnamese war will develop. They appear to be intent on limiting their own risks and we think that they will try to maintain this policy. But while we can be fairly confident of the policy the Soviet Union prefers and will try to pursue, there are still forces at play which could draw Soviet policy onto a course of greater risk.

7. As US military pressure on Hanoi increases, Soviet actions might be intensified with more overt participation of personnel or improvement of defensive weapons systems. Because of the USSR's present involvement in the DRV's air defense, this is a special area of responsibility for Moscow. Up to now, the Russians have not emphasized their role in Hanoi's air defense. However, if this system continues to prove relatively ineffective, the Russians might be called upon to supply the DRV regime with more assistance, such as MIG-21s, improved radar, or more technical and advisory Soviet personnel.

8. Moscow has recently revived its earlier pledges to send "volunteers" to support Hanoi if requested. Such statements, made jointly with Warsaw Pact allies, seem primarily intended to undercut Peking's charges of US-Soviet "collaboration" and to highlight China's isolation, though the Russians may also hope that the move will have a deterrent effect on US

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actions in Vietnam. Privately, some Soviet officials have gone out of their way in conversations with the US to disclaim any intention of actually sending volunteers. However, it is just this sort of tactic which illustrates Moscow's continuing dilemma in Vietnam. If Hanoi did eventually call for such support, although Ho Chi Minh has recently said such a move was unnecessary, the USSR would probably send additional technical personnel and declare their presence openly. Even then, the Soviet leaders would try to avoid the appearance of direct US-Soviet combat.

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