

Vietnam - Kosygin - Vietnam

Cy 3 of 3

~~SECRET~~

19

92-5

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JAN 2005

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

5 February 1965

(b) (3)

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 7-65

SUBJECT: The Dimensions of Kosygin's Trip

SUMMARY

Premier Kosygin's Hanoi trip is, clearly, the most distinct reflection yet seen of what appears to be a basic Soviet decision to contest the spread of Chinese Communist influence in the Far East. This constitutes the sharpest break to date from the foreign policies of Khrushchev, who had more or less abandoned the Far Eastern field to the Chinese.

This Soviet decision is also of major consequence for the Vietnam war. It indicates a Soviet estimate that, although there remains a chance that the US might expand the war, it probably will not, and that a Communist victory is drawing near. In the Soviet view such a victory, as matters now stand, would redound excessively to Chinese advantage. We accordingly believe that the Soviet leaders seek to share -- and guide -- what they believe to be a Communist bandwagon. Kosygin's efforts will probably be designed to inspirit the DRV and improve its defense capabilities, to deter the US from deciding to go North at this late date, and to enhance the DRV bargaining position for any negotiations with the GVN/US.

We should expect some Soviet proposals to negotiate a settlement, fashioned to facilitate subsequent DRV subversion of the South. The Soviet leaders would hope through such means to inflict defeat on the US without either expanded war or inordinate Chinese gain.

~~SECRET~~

[]

[]

A. Soviet Policy and Communist China

1. Kosygin's projected trip to Hanoi indicates a major development not only in the immediate Vietnam theater, but in general Soviet policy respecting the Far East. From the viewpoint of Moscow, Far Eastern developments over the last year or so were generally bad. Communist China became a nuclear power and grew more intractable than ever. North Korea and North Vietnam slid steadily toward the Chinese camp, while a purge was required to combat anti-Soviet tendencies in Outer Mongolia. Peiping captured the Japanese party. The Indonesian Communist Party confirmed its alignment with the CCP, and the massive Soviet investment in Indonesia failed to prevent a surging state-to-state rapprochement between the outlaws, Djakarta and Peiping.

2. Amid this deterioration of Soviet positions, Khrushchev acted like a man who had recognized a dead end and accepted it. In Indochina he gave every evidence of wishing to disengage and to leave the whole sorry mess to the Chinese and Americans to fight over. This became the first of his foreign policies to be reversed after his overthrow, and there have followed a series of reassertions of Soviet involvement in both Laos and Vietnam, climaxed by the announcement of Kosygin's trip. The responses to

these preparatory steps have apparently given the Soviets reason to believe that Hanoi could be worked back toward its earlier mid-position in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

3. There is good evidence that the new Soviet leaders concluded, from their first post-Khrushchev soundings, that China was no less an enemy than before. And the possibility that the US might be pushed out of Indochina, taken with China's other gains of late, must have suggested to them that China was making rapid strides -- abetted by Soviet default -- towards a dominant position in much of the Far East. In this context the journey of Kosygin to Hanoi -- despite the stop in Peiping en route -- takes meaning as signifying a basic Soviet decision to contest this Chinese advance.

4. If so, then how to contest it? In Vietnam itself, the Soviet answer is to go to the aid of Hanoi. Another possible action is to exert military pressure on the Sino-Soviet border, and indeed there is some suggestion of this in recent months. *surely X p ???* Beyond this, it is harder to see. The conflict with China should commend to the USSR a major effort to cultivate state relations with Japan, but this has not yet developed; Moscow remains unwilling thus far to make even the moderate concession of returning two

insignificant islands to Japan.* As for Indonesia, the USSR appears almost as powerless as the US to reason with Sukarno or to apply effective pressure on him. The Soviets apparently judge that their military aid cannot be used as a political lever without great danger of backfiring. In effect, they are reduced to endorsing Sukarno's policies, swallowing their disappointments and fears, and hoping that a post-Sukarno regime will reorient Indonesian policy in a more pro-Soviet direction.

5. It is sometimes suggested that the USSR, sharing with the US a common concern over China, might propose or agree to concert Asian policies with Washington. This seems very doubtful. In the first place, North Vietnam and Indonesia can hardly be won to the Soviet side by tactics of appeasing the US. In the second place, where Soviet and US interests coincide, as in India, Moscow finds its policies reinforced by Washington without any explicit coordination. In the third place, real collaboration still comes hard to the Soviet Communists.

6. If the foregoing arguments are valid, they seem to lead back to a Soviet need for actions which could weaken China directly.

*

Perhaps the reason is that the USSR fears to open up territorial questions in even the slightest way lest this stimulate irredentist demands in China and East Europe.

These could include a total economic embargo, military incursions, incitement of dissidence in Chinese border regions, or -- as an extreme -- attacks on Chinese advanced weapons facilities. Yet Moscow must feel the outlook for such sanctions unpromising. Some of them involve a greater degree of manifest hostility than the Soviets probably want to display at this stage. Moreover, Peiping could cut off Soviet land communications with Southeast Asia. The Chinese could also bring added disruption to bear among Communist and rag-tag groups the world around.

7. These difficulties make the belated Soviet decision to combat China's burgeoning Far East influence all the more notable. Perhaps Khrushchev was right in acquiescing, and maybe his successors will sadly come to see it that way, too. But, if so, a second climb-down will be all the more embarrassing and expensive for the USSR. We may thus see new efforts to raise the Soviet stock in India, Pakistan, Japan, and Burma. Above all, however, it looks as if such Soviet offsetting is to be attempted in the Vietnam theater, primarily for what Moscow may be able to accomplish there, but also as a demonstration to others that the USSR remains an Asian power.

B. Soviet Policy and Vietnam

8. In Moscow's view the VC, the DRV, and the Chinese must appear on the way to victory in the war. A US defeat would of course profit Soviet interests. But such Soviet profit would have been won at considerable cost, for Chinese influence in the Far East would almost certainly be advanced and the CCP's anti-Soviet case for "wars of national liberation" validated dramatically. The US's declining political base in the South and the US's continued hesitation to go North -- or even to retaliate to post-Tonkin Gulf provocations -- must almost certainly have led Soviet leadership to conclude that although the US might still expand the war, the chances favor US acceptance of deterioration or US negotiation out. In past crises -- Southeast Asia, offshore islands, and Near East -- the Soviets have characteristically offered dramatic "support" only after they judged that the accompanying risks had passed their peak. So it may be in the present case.

9. Thus, at little cost and little believed risk, Kosygin and comrades may expect that they can gain credit with DRV leaders by offering them military aid against possible US attack and political aid against actual Chinese pressures. The Soviets may consider that improved DRV defenses, now backed up by revived Soviet concern, and

by Soviet technicians on the spot, will heighten US reluctance to try victory through air power in North Vietnam. The Soviet leaders must also believe that in the event that, contrary to their expectations, the US should lash out against the DRV, the increased presence of the USSR would enhance its voice in Communist responses and thereby help to keep an expanded war from assuming proportions endangering the USSR's security.

10. Finally, the Soviet leaders must feel that if the coming weeks or months bring success to the Communist cause in Vietnam, a major initiative can increase the Soviet and diminish the Chinese share in the advantages of victory. They probably even feel that Soviet prestige and influence would be better served by a negotiated US withdrawal from South Vietnam to which they contributed, than by a total collapse of the GVN or an outright Viet Cong military victory. Accordingly, we should be alert to the possibility that the USSR, having strengthened the DRV's military and bargaining stance, may propose some negotiated settlement of the conflict. Such terms would probably be ostensibly reasonable, designed to afford the US a plausible and face-saving formula for disengaging from its present scale of involvement in South Vietnam, while in fact facilitating subsequent DRV subversion of South Vietnam.

The Soviet leaders would hope through such means to inflict defeat on the US without either expanded war or inordinate Chinese gain.

11. There would be obvious uncertainties in this course from the Vietnamese Communists' point of view. After Dien Bien Phu, they accepted a negotiated settlement instead of pressing their military advantage. They hoped then that subversion and political action would soon bring them the fruits of victory, yet for 10 years these fruits have been kept from them. They might be loath to see this happen again. However, they would almost certainly consider that the chances of another such frustration were slight. What kept South Vietnam afloat after the French departure was the advent of the US. Now, if the US withdraws its present massive support, there would be no other bulwark in sight. The DRV/VC would almost certainly have considerable confidence that in these circumstances they could take over South Vietnam in fairly short order and with little risk of serious challenge.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



SHERMAN KENT
Chairman