CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Main Aspects of Current Soviet Foreign Policy

This paper lists and attempts to answer in summary form most of the principal questions now being asked about Soviet foreign policy. The questions fall under three main topics: (1) the mood of Soviet-American relations, (2) factors underlying current Soviet conduct, and (3) Soviet intentions with respect to certain major issues.

The Mood of Soviet-American Relations

1. What explains the "deterioration" in the climate of Soviet-American relations over the last year, and how serious is it?

There have been many fluctuations in the temper of Soviet-American relations over the years; it does not appear that there is anything in the present distemper which is out of the ordinary. In particular, there is no evidence that the Soviets have made any deliberate decision to worsen the atmosphere. In fact, the general line of their policy at this time is one that aims at keeping tensions under control, primarily to facilitate contacts on major matters now under negotiation -- SALT, the Middle East, and Berlin.

The uglier climate of recent months seems to be mainly the product of unintended circumstance -- partly chance events and partly actions taken by either side which it felt it had to take whether or not the other side took umbrage. And when one side did so act, the other reacted, at least verbally. Also, as the Soviet-American contest has widened to a global scale over the last decade or so, it has become possible for other actors on the international scene, who move for reasons of their own, sometimes to complicate Soviet-American relations whether or not the US and USSR want that at any given moment.

The present "deterioration" began with the US action in Cambodia and was deepened by the Soviet complicity in the violation of the Suez standstill, by the Jordan civil war and accompanying US and Israeli military movements, by the Soviet probe to test the acceptability of naval facilities in Cuba, by the US retaliatory raids against North Vietnam, and most recently by the Leningrad trials and the reactions to them in this country and elsewhere.

All of these episodes appear to be of a transitory character, sharpening only for a time the tension which is in any case chronic in Soviet-American relations. These relations have been characterized in recent years, moreover, by an increasing capacity to decouple a particular focus of tension from the relationship as a whole. Ultimate issues are not posed nowadays by

every confrontation and during the present period of "deterioration" much has proceeded normally. SALT, for example, which touches the most vital issues of power, seems to have been entirely unaffected.

The odds are very good, therefore, that the present ugly mood will pass when Moscow has some new reason for accenting the positive and when the context of events makes this feasible. Given the basically hostile and competitive nature of the Soviet-American relationship, however, that too will be temporary.

Factors Underlying Soviet Conduct

2. Are there signs of any basic improvement in Soviet attitudes in the foreseeable future? How do the Soviets react to the President's call for an era of negotiation rather than confrontation?

Basic Soviet attitudes are unlikely to change for a long time. Repetitious as it is, it is impossible to discuss Soviet policy without noting once again that it proceeds from profoundly different perceptions and motives than our own. In the US the working premise of people and leaders, stubbornly revived however often refuted by events, is that conflict with the USSR is owing to misunderstanding and must be temporary; Soviet leaders think that it is fundamental and long-lasting.

What Americans think can be compromised, Russians think means ineradicable conflict.

The reasons for these basically different approaches lie deep in the histories of the two societies, both of which build their concepts about the nature of politics and conflict on their own radically different national-cultural experiences. In the present Soviet system, moreover, the elite which holds power has for a half century based its claim to a monopoly of authority on an alleged external threat from the "imperialist" West. If anything, this elite regards itself, in a political and ideological sense, and despite the growth in its material power, as more beleaguered than ever. Thus the nature of the Soviet system makes the maintenance of what would be seen in the West as normal state-to-state relations extremely difficult; for that matter, Soviet relations even with other Communist states are hardly "normal."

When the current American administration says that it is trying to move from an era of confrontation to one of negotiation, this is almost certainly perceived on the Soviet side as either a ruse or a sign of weakness. And mistrustful as they are, the Soviet leaders are probably never quite sure which it is. Thus even though it is true that negotiations have become more frequent and have come to embrace a wider range of issues in recent years, for the Soviets they remain a mode of struggle and not an approach to settlement.

3. How do the Soviets view the current world situation, especially in terms of the opportunities and risks for themselves?

If the Soviet leaders compare the relative power position of the USSR today with that of a decade ago, on the whole they must see reason to be gratified. They have overcome the enormous lead in strategic weaponry formerly held by the US; they have built a navy which is regularly active in the world's strategic and politically sensitive seas; they have greatly enlarged their influence and presence in the Middle East and in Asia. Taken together, these developments mean that the USSR has moved far toward its aim of becoming, like the US, a true world power.

The Soviets will also register on the plus side of the relative power equation the fact that the US has suffered serious political and material strains because of Vietnam. Their press reflects some toying with the notion, apparently inconclusively so far, that the US is becoming so preoccupied with internal problems and divisions that its will and capacity to play a world power role is declining. Reading the American political psyche for signs of this will be a serious Moscow concern in the years ahead.

Of course, the Soviet leaders must acknowledge some setbacks of their own as well. During the 60's China changed from ally to enemy. Relations with

Eastern Europe remain complicated and sometimes troubled. The Soviet economy performs less well than had been hoped and a technological gap has opened between the USSR and other advanced industrial states.

The attitudes and conduct of the Soviet leaders suggest that they nevertheless view the outlook for further gains in Soviet power with at least a measured optimism. Their doctrines dispose them to believe that their position in the Third World will continue to grow stronger at the expense of "imperialism". They hope to see, and they think they can help to further, a decline in the US role in Europe, still the most critical theater in the Soviet-American power contest.

The situation is not one, however, which the Soviets seem to think justifies frontal confrontations or large risks. American power is still too great and the dangers in uncontrolled situations too critical. Maneuver and probe, cautiously controlled, remain the preferred Soviet style.

4. What weight should now be attached to the Soviets' internal problems as a factor influencing their conduct?

The internal problems of the system are extremely serious, but are probably not critical in the short term -- in the sense, that is, that some sort of breakdown of the system is foreseeable or that Soviet external policy will soon be seriously constrained by the need to deal with internal problems.

The single most important cause of all these problems can be described in an ironical paraphrase of Marx: the USSR is a developing society trying to advance into the modern industrial age presided over by a political superstructure which now actually inhibits its development. In Marx's analysis, such systems are doomed, though naturally, as history has shown, the timing of their breakdown and disappearance depends much on the accidents of circumstance.

In the USSR, political superstructure means the Party. What began as a "vanguard" for change and progress has become a stultifying force concerned above all with the preservation of its monopoly of power. The experience of all innovative and modernizing societies shows that their progress depends on the free flow of information and ideas and on freedom for advocacy of institutional change. But the Soviet Party has come to fear that any change will threaten its control. Thus even the very tentative economic reforms projected in 1965, which were intended in the name of efficiency to give some limited autonomy to industrial enterprises in the management of their affairs, have now been rendered largely meaningless by the restoration of control to the paralyzing and Party-dominated central bureaucracies.

The forces which advocate a more open system -- intellectuals, scientists, and economic managers -- have grown more bold and vocal in recent years. But in terms of organized power capable of changing the society they

remain pitifully weak. The decline in rates of economic growth and the technological lag of Soviet industry, together with the restiveness of growing numbers of educated people over being denied access to the outside world, will sustain pressure for change. But it now appears that the power monopoly of the Party is unlikely to be seriously challenged in the near term.

Sooner or later, however, the challenges now being raised will generate controversy at the upper reaches of the Party itself. Aspiring leaders will contend over whether to move toward greater suppression or toward concessions. With an aging top leadership which will need to be reshuffled in the next few years, disputes over power and policy in these matters seem likely to sharpen. While the timing and outcome of personal power struggles are unpredictable, none of the potential contenders for future power we know of can be credited with a desire to change the system in any basic way.

Internal problems of the kind the USSR now faces can have effects on foreign policy. For example, it seems likely that the economic strains of recent years have contributed something to Soviet interest in SALT, and that the hope for credits and trade with West Germany was one factor behind the attempt to develop a new relationship with Bonn. But internal problems have not so far compelled the USSR to compromise on any central issue or to suspend its steady effort to extend its power and influence in the world.

Soviet Intentions in Prime Areas of Negotiation and/or Confrontation

5. Does the Soviet approach to SALT offer hope of reaching significant agreements?

When we published NIE's on SALT in November 1968 before it began and again in February 1970 after the first Helsinki session we stressed that the Soviet approach would be extremely tentative. We believed that the Soviet leaders had not been able to agree among themselves on anything more than an exploration of the possibility of stabilizing the strategic relationship by agreement. It did not appear that they had agreed on the desirability of such an agreement in principle or that they were prepared to extend any trust or take any risks to achieve it. The evident opposition from some military quarters argued that few if any of the leaders would be likely to risk advocacy of a really binding or comprehensive agreement. The Soviet approach as we judged it was open to the construction that the talks would be used merely to effect a pause in the strategic arms race, or at most, that only a very limited agreement would be entertained.

After three SALT sessions this appraisal still does not seem too far off the mark. The effect of the Soviet attitude in the negotiations so far has been to limit the scope of any possible agreement. It is still possible that the latest

Soviet move to go to an ABM agreement only, leaving offensive systems to further negotiation or a tacit "understanding", is a tactical maneuver to bring pressure on the US to alter the positions it has presented. It seems at least equally likely that an agreement of this scope is the most the Soviets are now prepared to contemplate. Indications remain strong, however, that they do wish to avoid the expense and uncertainties of competition in ABM deployment.

While the further course of negotiations obviously depends as well on positions the US may take, it does seem likely that the Soviets will wish to avoid a breakdown of the talks. This would cast a large cloud over Soviet-American relations generally as well as over the strategic arms race itself. The Soviets will almost certainly wish to keep the talks alive in some form to prevent too radical a deterioration in relations, and also for whatever continuing effect they might have on slowing new US decisions in the strategic arms field.

6. What are Soviet aims in the Middle East and how real is the danger of a Soviet-American clash?

The aim of displacing Western influence in the Middle East with a dominant Soviet one has been pursued with tenacity and at considerable economic cost for 15 years. When they began with arms sales to Egypt in 1955 the Soviets were probably proceeding opportunistically and without full appreciation of the

complications for their policy which would ensue. They hoped, counting on the growth of indigenous anti-Western forces, on a maximum of influence and a minimum of commitment. They are now deeply and directly involved; early in 1970 they crossed a new and important threshold when they stationed their own combat forces in the UAR. Except briefly in Cuba in 1962, this is the first time Soviet forces have been used outside Bloc territory. The fact that there are potential military and political risks involved, of a kind which have not been characteristic of Soviet policy hitherto, is some measure of how deeply the Soviets now think their interest and prestige have become involved.

Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders do not appear to think that there is any imminent danger of a new outbreak of hostilities which, because of their own likely involvement, could bring a major confrontation with the US. Probably their calculation is that the military situation has been stabilized and the Israelis deterred by Soviet military moves of the last year. In any case, they evidently count heavily on diplomacy, among the Four and now through the revived Jarring mission also, to contain the danger of hostilities. They would be very unlikely to support an effort by the UAR to mount a ground attack across the Canal. Given the UAR's military weakness and Israel's willingness to hold the occupied territories indefinitely in lieu of peace, the Soviets are probably right that, for a time at least, the risks in the situation are controllable.

At present the Soviets would probably like a negotiated settlement, provided that the bulk of Arab terms were met. They will use the negotiations to try to maximize pressure on Israel for withdrawal, to isolate it and to complicate US-Israel relations over this issue. But the chances for a settlement both sides could accept seem likely to remain poor.

While the Soviets could themselves tolerate a prolonged stalemate, they may conclude eventually that the Arabs will not and that Arab-Soviet relations will begin to suffer if no movement occurs. Even then, it seems doubtful that the Soviets would favor a renewal of military pressures on Israel. They could think that a partial withdrawal by both sides liberating the Canal, also no doubt an important objective of their own, would gain time and assist further negotiations. Whether or not such a move succeeded, the Soviets, despite or because of their political gains in the Arab world, have worked themselves into a major dilemma.

It is conceivable that at some point the wisdom of pursuing a forward policy in the Third World, with all its risks of involvement with unreliable and unpredictable allies, will become a subject of controversy in Moscow. The further course of events in the Middle East could have an important bearing on future leadership struggles and on Soviet policy in the Third World generally.

7. Is there still a threat from the USSR in Europe? What aims are the Soviets now pursuing there?

There probably never was an active military threat to Western Europe in the sense that the Soviets ever seriously entertained the idea of overt aggression there. But there was, and potentially still remains, a danger to the security of Western Europe arising from the disproportionate power of the USSR and Europe's historically demonstrated capacity for division within itself. US policy worked successfully at overcoming these particular sources of danger. If the security ties between the US and Europe should ever be weakened, a Soviet policy of pressure and intimidation aimed at exploiting divisions within and among European states would almost certainly be revived at some point. Hegemony over a Balkanized Europe must appear to the Soviets as a natural goal.

One reason for pursuing such an aim as opportunity offers is the likely Soviet suspicion that the hegemony it already holds over Eastern Europe will never be secure so long as the latter faces a prosperous and stable Western Europe developing new forms of unity. The Soviet position in Eastern Europe has been and can continue to be maintained by military power, but it remains politically fragile. Not even the Soviets can doubt that if the real political forces in the area were unleashed -- forces striving for the recovery of national independence,

for radical changes in existing institutions including the Communist parties, and for free contact and economic exchange with the West -- the present regimes would be quickly and radically transformed.

Partly to cope with this situation, Soviet policy in Europe has for several years past pursued a general line of detente which is to culminate in a European Security Conference. In such a conference the West would be expected to sanction the existing arrangements in Eastern Europe, including by implication the Brezhnev Doctrine which asserts a Soviet right of intervention there. With this in hand, the West is then also to be induced to expand economic relations, i.e., to provide larger credits. The Soviets probably believe that enlarged economic links between the West and the Eastern European states would be less risky in the political context which the ESC would create.

European security as a policy theme has a maximal dimension also. The Soviets hope that the further relaxation of tensions in Europe which would result would help to hasten US military withdrawal. With the US-European security link visibly diminished they would expect to have more freedom of political maneuver and more opportunity to develop their political influence in those Western European states which might be vulnerable.

The detente line for Europe has led the Soviets to undertake a major shift in their policy toward West Germany. While the Germans appear to have made the greater concessions in the actual words of the Soviet-German Pact, the Soviets have contributed the abandonment of their years-long propaganda of vilification of the Federal Republic. No doubt they thought it was of declining usefulness anyway and could always be revived if the political constellation in West Germany should change. Nevertheless, Bonn may in consequence find it easier to develop relations with Eastern Europe, an important facet in its present policy course. So the Soviets are taking some risks by their present course.

One risk they will not take is to respond to West Germany's desires for a "humanization" of its relations with East Germany. The Soviets know, and in any case are constantly warned by Ulbricht, that the East German regime cannot tolerate freer contact with West Germany. The reluctance of the Soviets to "improve" the situation around Berlin, a quid pro quo they probably did not expect to be asked to deliver when they signed the pact with Bonn, shows the limits of the policy of detente. On the whole, assuming that the US does not allow its security ties to Western Europe to deteriorate, the chances for any important change on the European scene do not seem impressive for the present.

8. How does Asia, and particularly China, figure in Soviet plans for the future?

China's future role as a great power appears to be as much of a puzzle to Moscow as it is to the West. Faced with the ideological hostility which has marked the Soviet-Chinese relationship throughout the 60's, with the revival of Chinese claims to Soviet territory, and with Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons, the Soviets have reacted by taking extensive security measures. These have included an enormous buildup of forces on their frontiers and the assignment of some portion of their nuclear forces to deal with China.

Resort by the USSR to some form of pre-emptive military action against China has been much discussed in the West, but it is doubtful that the Soviets themselves have entertained such a notion seriously. They must be aware that an overt attack on China would entail the highest political costs to their world position and influence. If the affair could not be quickly concluded, as it probably could not be, they would risk new turmoil in their Eastern European sphere and perhaps other dangers. Instead the Soviets have relied on their strengthened border forces to contain Chinese incursions, on their vast nuclear superiority to deter the Chinese, and on an attempt to engage the Chinese in negotiations. Probably also they think that their problem with China owes much to Mao's personal predilections

and they hope, without any more basis for this than others, that it will be possible to come to terms with a post-Mao China.

Apparently with some notion of containing China should it prove hostile in the long run, the Soviets have been diplomatically active throughout Asia in recent years. Their major effort in India and Pakistan was partly conceived in this sense in addition to being an effort to displace US influence. Similarly, their steady support to Hanoi and the development of diplomatic and trade relations with the states of Southeast Asia are directed against China. Most important, they have worked at improving their relations with Japan, though without notable success so far.

The long-term nightmare which apparently haunts the Soviet leaders most when they think about their future policy problems in Asia is the possibility of a rapprochement between China and the US. Once the American involvement in Vietnam is ended this fear is likely to become more active unless, as the Soviets would hope, the US role in Asia then tends to diminish. If it does not and if Chinese-American relations should move toward normalization, the Soviets would see themselves faced with grave choices, the real gravity of which in fact they would tend to exaggerate greatly. They would probably make still greater exertions to improve their own relations with China. If this continued

to be impossible, new perspectives in Soviet-American relations could be opened up.

9. What role does Latin America play in Soviet policy calculations?

In recent years Latin America, except for Cuba, has apparently had a low priority for the Soviets. While they probably continued to believe, as they did when they took up relations with the self-proclaimed "Marxist," Castro, that setbacks to US influence in Latin America could be doubly damaging to the US world position, the opportunities for instigating such setbacks were not attractive. Such revolutionary turbulence as existed was not amenable to their control, or even their influence for the most part. They have confined themselves to a quiet but steady effort to develop diplomatic and commercial relations with the existing governments, obviously in the hope of developing gradually an influence which could be applied in an anti-American sense.

The developments in Chile present a new kind of situation. The Soviets have reacted with some caution, probably in part because they are uncertain how the forces at work there will play themselves out, and in part because they do not wish to complicate their relations with the US unnecessarily and prematurely. They may be chary as well of being asked to assume new economic

burdens in Latin America should the "socialist" experiment in Chile prove unable to pay its own way, as seems very likely to be the case.

Generally, however, developments of the kind taking place in Chile represent a model of what the Soviets would like to see elsewhere in Latin America -- an indigenous movement of revolutionary political forces of the left able to gain power on its own, and committed to pursue policies hostile to the US and friendly to the Soviet Union. The Soviets probably realize that the circumstances in Chile, including the existence of an effective Communist Party, have no parallel elsewhere in Latin America. They will hope for the survival and success of the new Chilean regime as an example to others, and will support it discreetly and within limits.

If the regime has difficulty surviving, it seems doubtful that the Soviets would advise the Chilean Communists to try to retain power at all costs. They would be conscious that the conduct of the Chilean Communists will be followed closely in Europe and would not wish the prospects of the more important Communist parties there to be diminished by violent tactics on the part of the Chileans. As so often before, the Soviets would be likely to give priority to the foreign policy interests of the USSR over the interests of a foreign Communist party. Probably they also believe that if things go well for Soviet policy and for pro-Soviet forces in other areas they see as now more crucial, then gains in Latin America will eventually follow.