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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

28 July 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Trends in Soviet Foreign Policy

Changes in Soviet Conduct Since the Summit Collapse

1. In the two-month period since the breakdown of the Summit a significant change has developed in Soviet conduct toward the West, and especially toward the US. Although there has been no acknowledged change in policy, the tone of Soviet statements and propaganda has hardened considerably in recent weeks. This memorandum discusses the motivations which may currently be operating in Soviet policy and considers some of the factors which may bear on Soviet behavior in coming months.

2. In one sense, of course, Soviet policy and conduct had to be different after the Summit breakdown. The 18-month period prior to Paris was dominated by a trend toward active negotiation of the major East-West issues. The nuclear test talks entered a serious phase with concessions and movement toward agreement being made on both sides. In the fall of 1959 a formula was found for resumption of the long-interrupted disarmament negotiations.

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Although there was an intermittent drumbeat of threats on the Berlin question, from the time of the MacMillan visit to Moscow early in 1959 these seemed intended to influence the terms of negotiation rather than to make negotiation impossible. Khrushchev had, especially after his visit to the US, given increasing credit to the Western leaders for their good intentions. He based his position as leader of the Bloc, even against a vigorous Chinese challenge, on the proposition that negotiations to deal with major causes of tension could succeed.

3. The one result of the U-2 affair and Khrushchev's handling of it at Paris which was clear immediately was that this proposition was invalid, for some time at least.* Initially Khrushchev adjusted to this by adopting a pose of patience: if the West was not yet ready to negotiate, the USSR had no pressing need to do so, it could wait. He said on 28 May: "Our policy is correct and just. Why should it be changed?" But this could have been no more than an interim phase in the interest of maintaining the fiction that

* In memoranda written for USIB during the Summit week the Board said that it was likely Khrushchev had decided even before the Summit that it was not going to produce progress on the central issues of Berlin and Germany, and that this was one of the reasons he used the U-2 incident as he did in order to insure the breakdown.

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Soviet policy is always consistent, never veering from its purposeful devotion to the "right" course.

4. In fact, there was no doubt that the dramatic breakdown of the Summit was the end of a phase. The real question was how the Soviet leadership would set its course thereafter. Would it concentrate its efforts on rebuilding the shattered bridge of contact and work its way back to a new basis for negotiation? Or would it allow the new gulf to widen, perhaps even adopt a line of conduct which actively encouraged a new increase of tensions?

5. In recent weeks, and especially since the Bucharest meeting of Communist parties in late June, the choice the Soviets have made has become more clear. They have given up the pretense that they looked forward to a resumption of negotiations and have launched into a phase of aggressive agitation and propaganda with the US as the principal target. They have used the events in Japan, in Cuba, the Congo and the case of the RB-47 to disqualify the US as a negotiating partner. They attribute to the US all the worst motives and intentions associated with the classic description of the imperialist villain in Communist demonology. Khrushchev has also reverted to the practice of frequently invoking the Soviet missile threat. The change has amounted to a deliberate shift

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of activity from negotiating to propaganda forums, illustrated by the break-up of the Ten-Nation talks on disarmament and the demand that the UN Assembly take up the subject. The only remaining negotiation, that on nuclear tests, is stagnated, and could be broken off at any time. The conduct of policy has thus been transferred from the diplomats to the hatchet men in the agitprop departments.*

6. In a way, the abusive language now being employed represents the norm to which the Communists always revert when negotiations are not in prospect. The modicum of trust and good will which the latter require be attributed to the "imperialist enemy" is an ideological embarrassment in the Communists' white-black mental world, as Khrushchev's defensive speeches in the period prior to the Summit clearly showed. To smite the enemy hip and thigh is the easy and natural thing in a political system immersed in demagoguery; to deal in the reasonable terms of adjustment and compromise, as negotiation requires, always seems to border on betrayal.

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7. That this behavioristic explanation of the recent change in Soviet conduct is part of the story is doubtless true, but there is surely an element of calculation present also. During a period when they see no favorable prospect for negotiations, that is, at least during the life of the present US administration, the Soviets intend to use every opportunity to discredit US motives and policies in the eyes of world opinion, to weaken the trust placed in US leadership by allies, and to create new problems and distractions for US leaders. They hope that, if and when negotiations are resumed, the moral position of the US world-wide will be weaker, its allies less firm in their support, and the pressures for concessions to the USSR greater.

8. This fits the Soviet concept of a negotiation as a single encounter in a continuous political struggle. The aim is, not to compromise differences, but to enforce concession and submission on the "enemy." The ability to do this depends upon mobilizing political forces prior to negotiation so that irresistible pressure can be brought to bear on the opponent once he enters the negotiating chamber. The intervals between negotiations are devoted to what is called "mass struggle," that is, propaganda and agitation to build up the necessary pressure. That Soviet policy is currently in one of these phases where the dominant motif is "struggle" was

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made clear by Khrushchev in replying to a question on disarmament at his Vienna press conference on 8 July. Discounting the prospects for negotiations on disarmament, even if they were shifted back to the UN, he said:

"The Pentagon will never agree on disarmament... A struggle must be waged... The people must be called upon, the earth must be stirred up against all those who hamper and wreck the solution of the disarmament problem. Then a solution on disarmament can be found, then peace will be attained, when the people take their destiny into their own hands."

The shift of emphasis from negotiation to propaganda and the purpose of this change was made even more clear in a statement to the Communist-front World Peace Council by its executive head on 9 July:

"Great advances had been made in bringing them (the great powers) together at the summit meeting and at the disarmament committee.... We must realize now that it is not going to be sufficient to bring some governments to the negotiating table. Popular pressure must be made so great that once there, they must agree to real disarmament and to the abandonment of the cold war."

The Outlook

9. It is easier to describe the change in Soviet conduct than to answer the questions it raises. The most important of these are: How long is the new phase likely to last? Is it likely to include, in addition to the tension-raising language and agitation which is all that it has involved thus far, actions which would carry risk of producing situations of serious crisis?

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10. References to a new Summit in 6 to 8 months have tended to drop out of Soviet propaganda. This gambit was probably in any case only a way of underlining the insult to the President. The Soviets must certainly realize that a new President could not entertain another Summit until a long chain of preparatory events, perhaps including the appearance of a personality other than Khrushchev on the Soviet side of the table, had taken place. However, the Soviets could return to the path of negotiation at a lower level. If they decided that the time was ripe to make progress from their point of view through negotiation, the summit would not be essential. It was a device that fitted the temperament and the tactics of Khrushchev, suitable as a demonstrative way of collecting concessions if the West was prepared to make them, but not suitable for serious negotiations. If they were really ready for a new round of serious negotiations, the Soviets might well prefer more normal methods. And they would be likely to think that the resumption of contacts at more routine levels would not be difficult at any time, despite the present deterioration in the atmosphere. In short, the fact that the Soviets have made a Summit impossible for a long time does not mean that they have foreclosed negotiation altogether.

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11. On the whole, it seems unlikely that the Soviets have yet decided upon anything more far-reaching than a period of vigorous abuse of the US until a new administration is installed. This does not mean that they are certain to alter their tone after January 1961, but only that they have not now decided to persist in it indefinitely. They are nothing if not tactically-minded and, since we believe that they do eventually want to be able to use channels of negotiation, they are not likely to have decided already to go on souring the atmosphere without pause right into the period of a new administration. It would also serve to underline and justify their repudiation of the old administration if they greeted the new one more mildly. The present violence of their language is not therefore evidence of an intention to bring about a profound and long-term deterioration of East-West relations. It should be remembered also that the Soviet polemical style always employs a large trowel and that what Westerners tend to regard as irretrievable excesses do not necessarily appear so to the Soviet mind.

12. The real test of the Soviets' intentions, however, is whether or not they actually take actions involving risks. So long as it is only polemics which causes the deterioration, the presumption has to be that we are witnessing a limited and probably short-term variation in Soviet tactics. So far there have been

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no serious indications that the Soviets are planning to undertake actions involving a degree of real risk. Rude noises have again been made about Berlin, but these have so far been, if anything, even more imprecise than many in the long series of ominous statements made since November, 1958. They can be explained by a desire to avoid the impression that after so much agitation of this question the Soviets are in fact retreating from their demands. While we have always stressed the danger that Khrushchev could underestimate the risk of a unilateral action, the Soviets have certainly shown that they appreciate that there is some degree of risk. No evidence has yet appeared requiring us to alter our basic view about the Soviets' approach to the Berlin problem -- namely, that they do realize that a change in the status of Berlin can be safely achieved only through negotiations. Moreover, it seems likely that they would consider a further round of East-West negotiations as a necessary prelude to a separate treaty with East Germany. At the very least, a move on Berlin would probably be preceded by some preparations to minimize the risk and would not come as a bolt from the blue.

13. Leaving aside targets of opportunity which might attract an aggressive Soviet response, there are not many other areas where Soviet-initiated action seems probable. The implied threat to expel the Western military missions from East Germany is not implausible. It would be a dramatic way of stating, and enforcing

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in defiance of the West, the basic Soviet position on Germany that all the Four-Power accords are dead. It is a step that might well appeal to the Soviets in the current phase. They might calculate that it would sharply increase Western concern about Berlin without actually incurring much risk. It is also possible that if the Soviets wished to heighten tensions further at this time they would prefer that this be done by a Chinese initiative. The Chinese have opportunity and capability for aggressive action, and a Soviet green light for some limited move might improve the troubled relations of the partners as well as provide a further testing of US nerve without immediate Soviet involvement.

14. Taking into account that the change in Soviet conduct is very recent and probably still in an early phase, a summary estimate might run about as follows: The element of pressure and intransigence is clearly increasing in Soviet policy. It has always been our estimate that phases of this kind could be anticipated when the movement of events made this seem desirable from the Soviet point of view.* Thus far there are no persuasive indications

* NIE 11-4-59, 9 February 1960: "We expect to see elements of both pressure and detente combined and varied as tactical advantage may suggest. For the nearer future the present emphasis on negotiation and accommodation seems likely to continue; later the motif of pressure and struggle will probably reappear."

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that the Soviets intend to pass from aggressive language to aggressive action of a kind which could involve serious risk. They probably realize that the aims currently sought by Soviet policy cannot be won through aggressive pressure or ultimatum alone, certainly not without excessive risk, and will therefore keep open the possibility of again resorting to channels of negotiation. It is too early to conclude that the present phase will be a prolonged one, or even necessarily that it will be marked by a consistent trend toward further deterioration in relations. Much is likely to depend on contingencies which may arise unrelated to any Soviet initiative and on the opportunistic responses the Soviets would then think appropriate.

Factors of Uncertainty

15. To describe the present phase in East-West relations as presenting a "fluid situation" is to take resort to a hackneyed phrase to cover a very confused picture. But the phrase may be more justified than it usually is -- with the effects of the Summit breakdown still being worked out, with US elections in prospect, and with more than the usual quotient of turbulent local situations spread all the way from Tokyo to Havana. Not all of this fluidity has an immediate bearing on Soviet policy but there are some factors which do make a projection of Soviet policy particularly risky at present.

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16. One of these factors is the evident tension in Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviets seem to have obtained in the Bucharest communique of the conference of Bloc parties a formal acknowledgment of the correctness of their general line and therewith of their continuing preeminence and authority within the Bloc. Having obtained this they have made some semantic concessions to the Chinese. More important, the whole content of their propaganda against the US comes close to talking Chinese. This may be a deliberate attempt to bridge the differences with China or to avoid seeming to lag behind the Chinese in revolutionary ardor, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is unlikely that the Soviets would allow themselves to be taken in tow by Chinese belligerence, or would voluntarily consent to Chinese actions involving undue risk. Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders are bound to regard the preservation of Bloc unity as a vital interest. We cannot be sure how far they might go to adjust Soviet policy to Chinese desires in order to avoid a more serious deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations. During a phase when they have no desire to conciliate the West, they might be willing to go a considerably greater distance than they have been until now.

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17. There is also some question of the effect on relations among the Soviet leaders of foreign policy developments in recent months. For two years or more Khrushchev has dominated the conduct of foreign policy, bringing to it his characteristic agitprop style. On the Berlin question he mounted a campaign of agitation and bluff which has not only failed to achieve results, but which may still either prove costly in prestige or bring serious risk of war. His wide-ranging interventions, as recently on Cuba and the Congo, serve no immediate Soviet interest and are more likely to hamper than to encourage the spread of Soviet influence. Beyond this, he has managed to bring relations with China to a critical state. There may well be men in the Soviet leadership who, although they do not differ greatly on objectives, would nevertheless prefer a more cautious and conservative conduct of policy. While we have thought that Khrushchev enjoyed a very considerable ascendancy over his colleagues, we have not thought that his authority was absolute. He appeared to preside over a consensus in which his own voice was the loudest. But if his colleagues took a sufficiently serious view of the developments resulting from his policies, it is not impossible that the consensus could shift. In this case,

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some constraints could be imposed on him, or more likely, he would himself alter course and head off in the new direction still baying at the head of the pack. Such a check might not visibly affect his position in the leadership, but could affect the future course of Soviet policy.

18. Finally, the US election period introduces some element of uncertainty into US-Soviet relations. The Soviet leaders have shown some signs of departing from their old cliché that since there are only two "bourgeois" parties the outcome of elections make no difference. They seem to think now that there are varying attitudes toward the USSR in the US or at least that personalities make a difference. (This is not to say that they have a preference or would try to influence the outcome of the elections; they probably have no very clear notion of what to expect of Senator Kennedy even if they feel they know the Vice President.) There is no evidence that the Soviets believe the common observation that the elections limit the ability of the US administration to respond to challenge or to react decisively in a crisis. It seems unlikely that they would undertake a risky action on this calculation alone.

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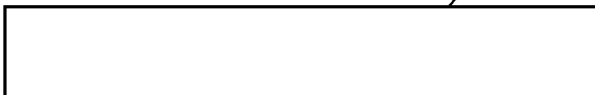
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However, they may well consider that US behavior is less predictable during an election period, especially as they show signs of not finding it very predictable even in normal times. Altogether, it seems probable that the US elections introduce some element of uncertainty into the Soviets' estimate of future US behavior, and therefore into their own policy.

19. Given the known or inferred factors of uncertainty referred to in the three preceding paragraphs, it is entirely possible that contingencies which might arise over the coming months would elicit Soviet responses of an unexpected kind. The summary estimate made in Paragraph 14 should therefore be read with this caution in mind.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:)



SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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