

S-E-C-R-E-T

3 April 1967

SOV/EE Staff Rumination

SUBJECT: Some Reflections on the Cold War

Recent and proximate discussions of the Cold War have prompted the following dissenting rumination. It may not be a very rewarding exercise -- much is obvious, much is inconclusive -- but I was moved to the effort by my concern over the shape of an NIE to come (NIE 11-7-67: Trends in Soviet General Policies) and by my discontent with the notion that, changes in the world notwithstanding, the Cold War remains essentially untouched. To hell with plus, ca change, plus c'est la meme chose!

1. This paper argues that changes in the cold war in recent years have been of sufficient size and scope to alter some fundamentals of the conflict and, incidentally, to make misleading the very term, cold war, itself. The transformation seems to have been in kind, not merely in degree, and if so, this would mean that we have indeed arrived at a new stage in East-West relations.

2. At the same time, this paper does not suggest that the US-Soviet struggle is at an end, or is even likely to be within the conceivable future. As the world's leading great powers, the US and the USSR are probably destined to play antagonistic roles for the remainder of this century. It is hard to see how it could be otherwise, except in the face of a common enemy. In any case, some degree of Soviet hostility to the US and to many US interests is almost certain

GROUP 1

Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
declassification

S-E-C-R-E-T

to survive, with or without a militant communism to nourish it, and some degree of US suspicion and vigilance is likely to endure for at least as long.

3. But surely, in the current debate over the nature of the cold war, there is a middle ground between the genuine US-Soviet truce envisaged by some and the permanent and high-pitched Soviet threat foreseen by others. Indeed, this is what seems to have been emerging ever since the watershed year of 1962. The major question is, and may remain for some time to come, of course, just how transitory this middle ground will prove to be. It is the estimate here -- made in the full knowledge that tomorrow could bring a rebuttal of events -- that the forces which are responsible for the present relatively relaxed state of relations between the US and the USSR and for the present condition of the international scene as a whole (Vietnam excluded) are on the whole strong and durable. As a consequence, it is also the conclusion of this paper that the cold war, as we have known it, is unlikely to revive.

#### A DEFINITION

4. The term cold war needs defining. It is a highly subjective label, even slogan, and its meaning is obscure. Here, then, for purposes of discussion, is an attempt at definition.

5. The cold war, as it developed and as it came to be known, was more than great power competition. It was:

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

-- essentially a US/Western struggle against what amounted to a single enemy, the USSR;

-- active and intense political warfare, world-wide and with virtually no rules or codes of conduct;

-- and a contest which often involved the threat of actual military hostilities.

6. The cold war was also a state of mind and a series of misconceptions. It was widely feared in this country and Europe in the 1950's, for example, that the USSR wished and intended to use its massive armies to invade Western Europe. The anxiety was no less real and no less important simply because it was probably baseless. Indeed, encouraging Western concern and fostering erroneous Western convictions played a significant role in Soviet cold war strategy (e.g. the missile gap).

7. Finally, the cold war, like all wars, came to have a distinct character which represented more than the mere sum of its parts. It was people, incidents, and impressions, interacting and in motion. It was Stalin and Khrushchev; Iran, Turkey, Trieste, Czechoslovakia, Berlin, Korea, Berlin, the Congo, and Cuba; Sputnik, the rattle of rockets, Checkpoint Charlie, and more. And on our side too: the Truman Doctrine containment, McCarthy, NATO, CENTO, and SEATO; agonizing reappraisals, rollback, "Ich bin ein Berliner", eyeball to eyeball; and all the rest.

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

THE CHANGE

8. If we accept these definitions, we can see how well they apply to the present state of affairs.

-- First, the question of a US/Western struggle against a single enemy, the USSR: The struggle today is vastly different. One can no longer speak of a common US/Western Front, nor of a single enemy. Both Blocs have fragmented. In Vietnam, the US is waging a war without Western help, indeed with considerable Western opposition; the war was not begun by the Soviets; our primary enemy is a small Asian Communist country over which Moscow exercises no control and perhaps not even much influence; and the USSR -- despite its support of Hanoi -- is willing to conduct business with Washington on a normal basis even while the US is bombing its Communist ally.

-- Second, concerning the proposition that the cold war is active, intense, and world-wide political warfare: Surely, insofar as it is directly related to the USSR, the activity has diminished, the intensity of the struggle has waned, and some de facto rules of the game have begun to emerge. As a consequence, the conflict is not so warlike, and hostility between the US and the USSR is no longer so passionate. Europe has been quite calm for more than five years, and elsewhere, though

- 4 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

great power competition is omnipresent, the Soviets are as likely, for their own good reasons, to try to calm down a violent situation as to provoke further discord (as in India vs. Pakistan, Indonesia vs. Malaysia, and as in various countries plagued by internal strife, such as Indonesia and Venezuela). Moreover, Moscow's tactical interests in some situations have for a time paralleled those of the US, as they have, for example, in India, in China, and, potentially, in regard to a nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

-- Third, concerning the question of actual or potential military hostilities: This is an element of the old cold war which has almost completely vanished as a day-to-day kind of concern. The USSR no longer rattles rockets in the same old way, positively avoids this approach when dealing with the Europeans, and mentions it to us only in the context of relative military strengths (and here their references often seem to be defensive reactions to their own inferiorities) and only by implication in its pronouncements about the dangers of US escalation in Vietnam. The notion that all of us in the West must live under the Soviet gun -- so carefully cultivated by both Stalin and Khrushchev -- no longer really exists and is no longer encouraged by the Soviets.

- 5 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

-- Fourth, concerning the loose category of characters, incidents, and impressions: Excluding Vietnam, which should not be seen as a manifestation of the cold war, at least as we have defined it, it is impossible to come up with a series comparable to that suggested in paragraph 7 above. Stalin and Khrushchev have gone and have been replaced by members of a committee who, while ruthless and unfriendly, are essentially cautious, and who, while not always polite, would not be caught dead pounding their shoes at the UN. In any case, there have been no Checkpoint Charlies of late, no need for agonizing reappraisals, and no eyeballs together. Instead of rollbacks, there are bridges. Instead of COCOM, there is FIAT.

THE REASONS: PRESSURES AND ADJUSTMENTS

9. The thaw in the cold war has not come about because of any magic Soviet awakening, any sudden enlightenment, or any conscious decision by the Soviet leadership to abandon the one true faith. Indeed, much of the change has come about as the result of pressures not of the Soviets' own devising and adjustments to these pressures, some deliberate, some not.

10. Problems at Home. The differences in temperament and style between Khrushchev and his successors, especially the greater patience and prudence of the latter, have certainly contributed to the course

S-E-C-R-E-T

of Soviet conduct. This is perhaps most apparent on the home front, where serious economic problems have confronted the leadership for years, and where Brezhnev and Kosygin have introduced a new note of sober endeavor. They seem to appreciate, as Khrushchev did not, the need for solid (as opposed to propagandistic) domestic achievement. They also seem disinclined, as, again, Khrushchev was not, to try to cover failure at home with glory abroad. More relaxed and realistic than their predecessor, more aware of the nature of the soft spots in the Soviet economy, they feel they can and must devote a large share of their energies to problems close at hand. It would be easy to exaggerate the degree of preoccupation with internal affairs -- the present leadership is by no means tinged with isolationism -- but emphasis on domestic concerns does encourage them to avoid international disruptions, and probably accounts for a part of their discontent over Vietnam as well.

11. Trouble Abroad. Khrushchev, in 1964, at the time of his removal, was himself something less of a zealot than he once had been; it is hard to be enthusiastic in the face of repeated defeats. The collapse of the Berlin campaign in 1961, the Soviet back-down in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, and the great grain failure of 1963 all took their toll in terms of the man's stature and morale. His successors would like to avoid a comparable series of setbacks; one

- 7 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

way to do this, abroad anyhow, is to refrain from sticking their necks out in international circumstances which are likely only to end up in confrontation and retreat. Someone in the Soviet leadership at some time came to realize that Soviet policies toward the US need not be permanently frozen into an oscillating pattern of showdown and peace offensive. And someone also began to recognize, at long last, that bluster and threat indeed worried the states of the Western alliance but also served to unite them.

12. The Strategic Balance. Of course, underlying the above is Moscow's appreciation of the key strategic fact of life: US will and US strategic superiority. And this appreciation is apparently coupled with a realization that, the precise strategic equation aside, the maneuverability of the two great powers is severely limited by the inflexibility of the nuclear response and the suicidal implications of general war. The area of conflict between the US and the USSR is thereby more clearly defined, and both sides now seem to comprehend the outer limits of the arena. At least, for the past five years or so, neither has behaved as if the mettle of the other could be tested beyond those limits.

13. China. China is not a signatory of the unwritten contract suggested above. It is, nonetheless, very much an interested party. Indeed, its alienation from both contestants has influenced the behavior

- 8 -

S-E-C-R-E-T



S-E-C-R-E-T

of each, though in opposite directions. US policy is less constrained as a consequence of the Sino-Soviet split -- as, for example, in Vietnam -- while Soviet policy is more so -- as, again, in Vietnam. The precise effect of Sino-Soviet struggle on Moscow's approach to world problems is not easy to gauge, and it is tempting perhaps to overemphasize the degree of threat the Soviets perceive on their eastern flank. Nevertheless, the disintegration of the communist camp, the appearance of an openly hostile policy in Peking, and the emergence of at least a potential threat to Soviet border security probably do tend to encourage Soviet interest in international equilibrium. They also tend to sap Moscow's energies and to spoil its concept of a single prime antagonist, the US; it may be that the US is still the principal opponent of communism, but China is certainly beginning to look like the main enemy of the Soviet Union. Moreover, no matter how facilely they seek to explain it all away to the world at large, the Soviets know in their hearts that the Chinese defection throws doubt on the efficacy of Soviet power and the inexorability of ultimate communist triumph.

14. Ideological Decline. Communist thought is not immune to temporal ravage and theological decay, and we have been witness to both. In fact, dogma in the USSR simply ain't what it used to be, and, though certainly not down or out, it is beginning to reel in the ring. This means, at home, a slow and reluctant effort to deal with

S-E-C-R-E-T

problems in a less ideologically encumbered light; the revival of private plots on the collectives and the institution of interest charges on capital are cases in point. Abroad, it means roughly the same sort of thing, a subtle altering of perceptions, a gradual scaling down of extravagant expectations, and a slow accumulation of somewhat more aware and sophisticated concepts of our life and times. This is not to say that an ideological recovery of sorts is out of the question. It is to say, however--- as stated in last year's Soviet general policy estimate (NIE 11-7-66) -- that there is a tendency in the USSR for the leaders "to temper their revolutionary outlook in the world with concerns of national interest and great power status."

THE REASONS: CHANGING ISSUES

15. In addition to the more or less specific kinds of pressures and adjustments outlined in the preceding paragraphs, a number of developments of a more general nature have had important effects on Soviet attitudes and policies. And though few issues between the USSR and the United States have actually been settled, changes on the international scene have had the effect<sup>of</sup>/modifying, moderating, or making irrelevant some of the old divisions. This can perhaps best be seen in terms of what has happened over the past several years in three principal areas of cold war concern and conflict: Europe, the Third World, and the Communist World itself.

- 10 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

16. Europe. Once the scene of intense cold war struggle, Europe is in today's world an island of serenity. The old hard and fast divisions between East and West Europe are melting. The USSR's determination to erect a barrier between the two has diminished, partly because of the refusal of the Eastern European states to remain behind it, partly because of Moscow's confidence that serious (i.e. sudden and violent) threats to stability within Eastern Europe have been eliminated, and partly because of Moscow's reconsideration of its own best interests. At the same time, US determination not to admit the existence of two Europes, East and West, has also faded. Even the US attitude toward the West European Communist Parties has altered; the old belief that these parties were simply Soviet-controlled instruments of the cold war has given way to a new interest in assessing their role within the context of local politics.\*

17. In any case, while the USSR is perhaps no less interested than ever in reducing or removing the US presence and in isolating West Germany from the remainder of the continent, Moscow now plays an entirely different game. Gone is the sense of urgency, gone are the threats of violence and military action, and gone are the ultimatums and moves against West Berlin. Instead, because it has finally learned that Soviet bludgeoning breeds Allied unity, because NATO has begun to

---

\* This seems to have been the case most recently in the case of France, where Communist victories have been looked at chiefly in terms of their impact on De Gaulle and French politics as a whole. The USSR's view of this election, by the way, also illustrates the pervasiveness of the changes which are sweeping over Europe: The Soviets' attitude toward Communist progress in France is obviously complicated by their concern to maintain good relations with their principal "ally" in the West,

S-E-C-R-E-T

unravel all by itself, and because of its own concerns about the independentist movements in Eastern Europe, the Soviet leadership now yearns for respectability and membership in a "secure" European community. The Soviets, in fact, have developed a vested interest in not rocking the boat. And if they have not yet seen the futility of achieving communism in Western Europe, they have at least recognized that such achievement must be put down as a matter for the remote future. In the meantime, the best that Moscow probably can hope for is some kind of Soviet-West European rapprochement, gained at the expense of Bonn and Washington, and some kind of general recognition of the status quo in central Europe. While this design and its means of accomplishment would certainly be inimicable to US interests, they are at least several steps removed from those typical of the cold war; Europe is now an area of contention, but not of confrontation.

18. The Third World. As a battleground of the cold war, the non-aligned world once seemed to the combatants to be very much a three-or-me proposition. Thus, for example, as the USSR moved into Africa, once a Western preserve, it appeared that state after state might move into the Soviet orbit. This is presumably what the Soviets wanted and expected, and it is certainly what the West feared. But, of course, it is not what happened. The Soviets were bested in the Congo, embarrassed in Guinea, and reduced in Ghana. They have done well in Algeria (though Ben Bela's ouster was a major setback), and, of course,

- 12 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

the UAR. But nowhere in Africa have the Soviets succeeded in setting up a client regime, and nowhere have they found a native movement willing to subordinate itself to the USSR.\* They have discovered, as indeed have we, that most Africans wish neither the Communist nor the Western worlds to run things in Africa and that, though happy to receive assistance from both sides, these people generally dislike and distrust white outsiders of whatever political persuasion. The Soviets now know this and appear more or less reconciled to it. Competition with the West in the Third World arena will almost certainly remain at high pitch and will often be conducted on a low level; the Soviets are not about to retire or to give up their wish to dominate the former colonial areas. But the old attitudes of the contestants -- thee or me, all mine or all yours -- are no longer likely in most instances to set the tone and establish the objectives of the contest.

19. The Communist World. It is, of course, in the Communist world that the most dramatic changes have taken place since the late 1950's. Stalin conceived of other Communist Parties simply as instruments of Soviet power; Khrushchev knew better, but still thought of other parties more or less as (sometimes unruly) subordinate divisions of the Soviet corporate parent; the present leadership only maintains

---

\* The same is true in Asia, where old Soviet hopes -- as in Burma and Indonesia -- have also been crushed, and it is much the same even in Latin America, where Cuba stands as an eccentric monument to success of sorts, but where progress elsewhere can apparently be made only very slowly, using conventional means in relations with conventional governments, and in dispute with Castro (who continues to hold out

S-E-C-R-E-T

the hope, and holds out the goal, of continued Soviet dominance of the world communist movement, or at least the non-Chinese part of it. But whatever its attitudes toward other communist states and parties, the USSR's view is no longer controlling. It would appear -- on the basis of what the present leadership has not been able to do, despite its efforts to correct Khrushchev's mistakes and to restore priority to precisely this area of policy -- that its ability to restore effective Soviet leadership to the movement is really more likely to decline than to grow. And inevitably, as Soviet leadership wanes, the policies of the various parties will diverge and come into conflict with each other, and this will involve even those policies most closely related to the competition with the West or, within individual Western countries, those associated with the struggle for domestic power.\* Marxism-Leninism, as such, is simply not sufficient to bind these parties together, and the threat of US capitalism and US imperialism -- real as it may be to some of these parties -- is already too spectral in most areas of the world to serve in its stead.

## EPILOGUE

20. A case can be made (and often is) that the changes in the cold war are superficial and temporary, that Soviet fundamentals

---

\* It is now possible to suggest (as Richard Lowenthal has) that the new Popular Fronts in Western Europe are likely to so transform the Communist Parties as to make them indistinguishable from the Social Democrats. Be that as it may, it is no longer possible simply to assume that these parties are extensions of Soviet power and would happily hold to the Soviet lead if they should somehow actually come to power.

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

remain unaltered. In this view, the Soviets are now only engaged in a cold war holding action against the day when new offensives are possible. But, even if this is so, the deliberate decisions and conscious plans of the present Soviet leaders will not, in the end, be determining, as, indeed, Khrushchev's were not for him. The forces at work on these leaders -- internal difficulties, US policies, other problems abroad, the strategic balance, etc. -- will count for more.

21. Serious observers who profess to see no real changes in the nature of the cold war are well aware, of course, that Moscow has changed its tune in recent years, reappraised the balance of forces on the world scene, and stretched the time frame of its expectations. What these observers suggest, however, is that this tack will either be abandoned someday or will become a true course only after a very long period of time. But even admitting, for the sake of argument, the legitimacy of these two propositions, the answer suggests itself. The factors -- the realities of power, the failures of Soviet policies -- which induced the Soviets to make even the "superficial" changes mentioned above are still in existence, and there are no responsible estimates around which suggest their early demise, no matter how much the Soviets may hope for it.

22. It is precisely the existence and nature of these factors which argue for more than a temporary suspension in the cold war. The present leadership will someday be replaced, and its successors could of course revert. But the problems of the economy and of popular

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

discontent will probably be much the same tomorrow as they were a few years ago and are today. The inability of Soviet policy to score any remarkable breakthroughs abroad is unlikely to change significantly in the foreseeable future, and relations with China -- though they might improve somewhat after Mao -- are probably destined to remain strained for some time to come. The ideological decline could be arrested, but the effort would probably be costly and the results impermanent.

23. Only in the area of the strategic balance will there probably be a development of sufficient importance to justify, or make very tempting, the consideration of a real change of course. The USSR is likely someday to reach a point in its weapons development and deployment which will seem, at least to Moscow, to represent the achievement of parity or near parity with the United States. Will it then conclude that this change in the balance of forces would permit the assumption of new international risks? Will it come to believe that, in addition to deterring general war, its strategic power would deter the US from reacting as before in, say Berlin? No one can be sure of the answers to these questions. But surely everything in the Soviet cold war experience should tell Moscow that it cannot use its power to intimidate the US, and surely everything it has learned about the balance of forces, modern weapons, and the risks and uncertainties of threatening their use should tell it that the consequences



S-E-C-R-E-T

of crisis could be fatal. And even should there be a decline in the balance-of-terror deterrence, a number of considerations suggest that "both the US and the USSR will continue on their course of not undertaking initiatives which might provoke the other to a strategic initiative."

24. Finally, one might say in summary that some of the heat has gone out of the cold war. But this would imply that the war is getting colder, and the process more nearly resembles that of a warming up, a thaw. If, in 1948 and 1950 and 1956 and 1962 the temperature almost sank to absolute zero, we have since come a long way. It is still very cold, and there is no law which guarantees us against the return of glaciers. But surely it is more comfortable than it used to be, and, from the Soviet side, there has been ample, and perhaps long lasting, reason for the improvement.



25X

---

\* ONE Memorandum by Willard Matthias, "Prospects for Change in the Structure of World Power," 6 March 1967, p. 7.

UNCLASSIFIED CONFIDENTIAL SECRET

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICIAL ROUTING SLIP**

TO	NAME AND ADDRESS	DATE	INITIALS
1	Sherman Kent	32002 1/67	
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>DIRECT REPLY</b>	<b>PREPARE REPLY</b>
<b>APPROVAL</b>	<b>DISPATCH</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>
<b>COMMENT</b>	<b>FILE</b>	<b>RETURN</b>
<b>CONCURRENCE</b>	<b>INFORMATION</b>	<b>SIGNATURE</b>

**Remarks:** On 6 March 1967, [redacted] sent a 25X1 memorandum to the DCI entitled "Soviet Policy in the Present Phase." The memo argues persuasively that the cold war is far from over, and concludes that "what is taking place is merely a tactical adjustment of the kind often before seen in Soviet policy, and that no significant moves toward terminating the cold war are in sight."  
 The DCI himself has recently presented similar conclusions in his testimony to congressional committees.  
 The position that the cold war continues without major change forms an important part of the Agency's rationale for its covert action programs.

FOLD HERE TO RETURN TO SENDER

<b>FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO.</b>	<b>DATE</b>

UNCLASSIFIED	CONFIDENTIAL	SECRET
--------------	--------------	--------

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICIAL ROUTING SLIP**

TO	NAME AND ADDRESS	DATE	INITIALS
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

<input type="checkbox"/> ACTION	<input type="checkbox"/> DIRECT REPLY	<input type="checkbox"/> PREPARE REPLY
<input type="checkbox"/> APPROVAL	<input type="checkbox"/> DISPATCH	<input type="checkbox"/> RECOMMENDATION
<input type="checkbox"/> COMMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> FILE	<input type="checkbox"/> RETURN
<input type="checkbox"/> CONCURRENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> INFORMATION	<input type="checkbox"/> SIGNATURE

**Remarks:**  
 I realize, as a consequence of all the above, that the cold war has become a subject of some delicacy. In the paper which is attached, I present a case for a contrary view of the cold war; it is, in part an informal dissent to the work by [redacted] I do not seek in this paper to deal with the problems associated with covert action, a matter beyond my competence. But I would like to mention here my conviction that the rationale for such action need not (and probably should not) rest on a belief in the perpetuation of the cold war, as such. US covert action programs will long be necessary with or without the cold war.

**FOLD HERE TO RETURN TO SENDER**

<b>FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO.</b>	<b>DATE</b>
[redacted]	4/4/67