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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE CONSULTANTS

SUBJECT: Soviet Foreign Policy Perspectives

NOTE

We are thinking of doing another Estimate on the main lines of Soviet foreign policy. Since we last approached the subject, about 2½ years ago, Soviet behavior abroad seems to have gained in vigor and Moscow seems to have become somewhat readier to take chances, e.g. in the Middle East. We will need to consider to what extent this posture signifies a change in Moscow's perception of its opportunities and its limitations. The ensuing paragraphs state a number of propositions and ask a number of questions which bear on this aspect of the problem. They are not the outline of the projected new Estimate as a whole. In this connection you may want to look at NIE 11-9-71 (Soviet Policy in Asia) and NIE 80/90-71 (The Soviet Role in Latin America), which are on the table.

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C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

1. There was a time, during the first years after the present ruling oligarchy took over, when it was common to describe its policies, external and internal alike, as static, or stagnant, or immobile, or even paralyzed. Where domestic policy is concerned the rule is still hold the line. But the same cannot be said about Soviet foreign policy. Here, since at least 1967, when Moscow undertook a greatly enlarged role in the Mediterranean, there has been considerable movement.

2. A more active Soviet foreign policy can be accounted for in a number of ways. It is not simply the result of Moscow's energy and ambition and growing strength. It is due in a number of instances to developments which were haphazard, or even accidental, e.g., the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the US' difficulties, the extremes of Chinese behavior. Be this as it may, the conservative Soviet leadership, while still forswearing high risks, is clearly pursuing a more assertive policy and is extending its commitments abroad. Does this mean that, looking at its international prospects, it sees enough in its favor to warrant a mood of self-confidence? Evidently it does. But we would also suggest that there are reasons why Moscow's self-assertiveness is guarded and its self-confidence fragile. We

- 2 -

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

do not see signs that the Soviet leadership -- which is probably short on long-term perspective in any case -- has developed a comprehensive view of the world or has concluded that the "correlation of forces" has shifted in its favor. There is much that is experimental and short term in Soviet policies and considerable uncertainty in Moscow concerning the likely courses of its major adversaries, the US and China.

Basic Security Requirements

3. Moscow's central security concerns are its strategic relationship with the US, its position vis-a-vis China, and its role in Eastern Europe. The attainment of nuclear parity with the US is a fundamental element in Soviet self-confidence, important to the protection of its strategic position and its prestige as a superpower. SALT is seen as a means of confirming the USSR's equality with the US in this regard. It may also be a means of discovering whether it is to the USSR's political and economic advantage to stabilize the relationship at roughly its present level and perhaps eventually at some lower level.

4. The Soviets have in recent years considerably enlarged their capabilities, mainly naval forces, for distant operations.

- 3 -

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

They regard these, like their strategic weapons, as an essential attribute of their role as a global power. These means have so far had application mainly in the Middle East, but Moscow seems to believe that they can be used elsewhere in the future to assist it to expand the area of its influence at the expense of both the US and China. The question which thus arises is whether Moscow believes it will have the opportunity under the cover of mutual deterrence to pursue a more active and flexible policy at the sub-atomic level.

5. The Soviets know that US prestige is at a low ebb and that Washington is reexamining its international role. They probably have reason to suppose that the US may no longer be willing to engage the USSR in the same ways and on the same scale as previously. They cannot fail to take comfort from this development, and they will almost certainly be inclined to push their luck a little harder here and there. Are they persuaded, however, that the US faces a prolonged period of domestic discord, which might cause it to reduce substantially its foreign engagements? Do they also foresee a diminution of US military and economic strength? Would they see this as giving them a chance to relieve their own defense burdens or all the more reason to

- 4 -

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

keep up their military strength? But if the Russians do see the US as a waning force, they are not sure that it knows how to behave in a manner which befits that role. They say that they are troubled by the unpredictability of the US -- the zig-zags in its policy -- and they probably are. They can see themselves running afoul of the US at several points -- in the Middle East and Caribbean, for instance, if they press the US too hard. This is something to be avoided, not only because of the risk of direct encounter with the US, but because a severe turn for the worse in the climate of US-Soviet relations might damage Soviet policies elsewhere -- as in Europe -- and might mean the denial of US cooperation in undertakings of interest to the Soviets (e.g., nuclear nonproliferation). Among their other concerns would be the fear of pushing the US toward detente with the Chinese.

6. Moscow has gained for the short term some increased freedom of maneuver by pacifying its border with the Chinese, but nothing is fuller of uncertainties than the long term relationship with China. It is very much to be doubted that the Russians really believe, as they say, that the Mao regime is an aberration which will sooner or later be corrected. But, having considered, and evidently rejected, the possibility of a military

- 5 -

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

solution, do they have any alternative to a waiting game? This entails, for now, combining high defensive readiness along the border itself with attempts to construct a barrier of containment in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Far East. But the Chinese, winding down the Cultural Revolution and emerging from their diplomatic isolation, are making this less easy for the USSR. They are pursuing their rivalry with the Russians in many parts of the underdeveloped world where their ideas have some appeal in leftist movements. Their influence is one more source of disruption among the Communist parties, even in Eastern Europe. And they are causing tremors in Moscow by their response to US overtures. Their potential as a strategic threat to the USSR will, of course, grow with time unless they subscribe to some kind of restraining covenant. This they are unlikely to do except at a political price the Russians will find it hard to pay.

7. In the broader setting of Asia, the Soviets face a formidable problem in seeking to assess the overall correlation of forces in the decade ahead. They face, in fact, a series of crucial imponderables: the policies and strengths of post-Mao-China; the scope and intensity of US interests in Asia; the impact of Japan's growing strength; and, in general, the effects of the

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

emerging quadrilateral balance of forces in Asia, i.e., the consequences of the interaction between the four major powers on the scene. (NIE 11-9-71)

8. Our draft Estimate on the Changing Scene in Europe discusses the Soviet position in Eastern Europe and its policy toward Europe. We propose here, therefore, merely to pose a number of additional questions which might be examined more fully in an Estimate on Soviet policy. Moscow is now committed to the belief that Eastern Europe constitutes an indispensable security and ideological buffer. As long as this remains true, the Soviets seem likely to continue along their present course of seeking to effect tighter economic and military integration. But will this not, even if accomplished, mean that Eastern Europe will increasingly become an economic, political, and military burden to the USSR? Can Moscow consider an alternative -- steps which would permit the East European states some measure of increased autonomy within the Soviet "sphere of influence" -- so long as liberalization within the USSR itself is ruled out? To what extent will Moscow's choices in this regard affect its approach to Western Europe? What are the prospects for an agreement on force reductions? What will be the economic and political

- 7 -

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

consequences for the USSR of progress toward integration in Western Europe? Is Moscow chiefly interested in undermining the US position in Europe or does it have an interest in European stabilization for its own sake?

The Soviet Position in the Third World

9. The Middle East is the most striking example of Moscow's success in substituting its own influence for that of the West. It is also a case in which military instruments have had a large role in the strengthening of the Soviet political position and therefore the first real test of the efficacy of the USSR's recently acquired capacity to operate militarily outside traditional spheres. Here it has come face to face with the dilemmas as well as the advantages which stem from a substantial military commitment. The choices it makes in the future between more cautious or more forward lines of action there will probably be symptomatic to some degree of its attitude toward further involvement in other areas. Though Soviet involvement in the Middle East has been partly a result of calculation and partly a result of happenstance, it has led to steadily increasing engagements and to a position where the USSR sees itself as having interests worth defending even if this has meant raising the level of

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L



military risk. Much of this pattern could be repeated elsewhere. But circumstances in the Middle East may prove to have been unique both because of the special opportunities offered by the Israeli-Arab conflict and the special dangers presented by the US commitment to Israel.

10. Concerns related to the Arab-Israeli conflict seem certain to have a central place in Moscow's decisions pertaining to the shape and size of its military presence in the Middle East for some time to come. For the sake of safeguarding its political standing with the UAR and its own military prestige, the USSR cannot readily accede to the UAR's being subjected to further military humiliations at the hands of the Israelis and, on this account, a substantial and probably prolonged Soviet involvement in the UAR's air defenses is foreseeable. The state of play between the Arabs and Israelis will also no doubt have something to do with deployments to the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron since deterrence of Israeli attack on certain Egyptian ports, as well as intelligence-gathering vis-a-vis Israel, are among its missions. But, in present circumstances, both political and military considerations are likely in Moscow's thinking to continue to weigh against its assuming any substantially greater

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

risk of direct military involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It probably believes that its interests will be better served if it can maintain a judicious balance between political and military pressures, as on the whole it has succeeded in doing up to now.

11. The Soviet presence in the Middle East will no doubt also serve and be shaped in the future, as it has from the beginning, by objectives which have only a tangential relation to the Arab-Israeli issue. These concern, in the first place, the various operations of the Soviet Mediterranean squadron aimed at countering NATO naval forces, and the 6th Fleet in particular, including the improvement of maritime reconnaissance and ASW capabilities. The naval and air facilities which the Soviets have acquired in the UAR as a dividend from the 1967 war have enabled them to expand their NATO-oriented operations in the Mediterranean. Evidence that the Russians are on the way to gaining access to additional facilities of this kind on the UAR's Mediterranean coast, in the interior of the UAR, and along the Red Sea may point to a further expansion of such operations in the future. Is it also possible to see in this the beginnings of the formation of a network of air and sea communications

- 10 -

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

leading from the USSR through the Mediterranean toward the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean area?

12. The kind of easily exploited opportunity which the Arab-Israeli conflict has given the Russians in the Mediterranean is not available to them in the Indian Ocean. The evident Soviet preference for preserving some freedom of maneuver in the Indo-Pakistan dispute means that even that festering problem does not offer them such an opportunity. There is, however, a considerable potential for turbulence at many points along the littoral of the Indian Ocean and its contiguous waterways, the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. Can one conceive of circumstances arising in which the Russians would consider a show of force and even a threat of intervention to be politically expedient and low in risk? They showed off the coast of Ghana in 1969 that they do not disdain the practice of gun-boat diplomacy. There are possible trouble spots in some corners of the Indian Ocean where even a small number of naval units might be able to tip the balance in a local conflict -- within a state or between states, whether they actually intervened physically or not. Any such use or threat of force might, of course,

carry the risk of deeper involvement, locally or with outside powers. By and large, the Soviets have been cautious about accepting such risks. Is it correct to suppose that they will continue to be cautious?

13. In general, is the trend toward a steady expansion of the Soviet capabilities for distant operations likely to be sustained? If it is, emphasis may be on both extending the geographical range of operations and on developing improved capabilities for logistics and air support. Unless unforeseen events intervene -- the outbreak of large-scale conflict on the Sino-Soviet border or the onset of a political or economic crisis at home, for example -- the momentum of military growth will itself probably be enough to carry the Soviets in that direction. They will, moreover, have a continuing interest in improving and extending their ASW and intelligence-gathering operations. In any case, Moscow is evidently convinced that such a further expansion is required for the enhancement of its international prestige and the protection of its positions in the Third World. And it will no doubt continue to view this area as an active front in its competition with the West and the Chinese.

14. In some parts of the Third World Moscow has lowered its sights, and its outlays. The experience of recent years has led the Soviets to adopt a pragmatic and differentiated policy. They have, nevertheless, made impressive progress in the relatively short time they have been actively engaged in the Third World. They have shattered the ring of containment and have greatly enlarged the arena of competition with the West. Diplomatic and trade ties have proliferated and are now very nearly universal. The USSR is the dominant great power influence among the radical Arab states. It can compete on fairly even terms with the West in most of Africa. Its influence is firmly established in South Asia. In Southeast Asia and Latin America their influence continues to grow.

15. Moscow has long regarded Latin America as a special case, warranting a fair degree of Soviet reserve because of US preponderance there. There are signs that this reserve may be diminishing. The pattern of change in the area -- with the growth of radical nationalism -- seems to be promising in the USSR's view and its interest and activities have increased. The USSR's Latin American policy seems no longer encumbered by the confusion and disarray which set in after

the Cuban crisis. Moscow may believe that it can help to hasten the decline of the US position and that with time many Latin American governments will look increasingly to the USSR.

16. What are the constraints on Soviet conduct in Latin America? The situation there is probably still sufficiently variegated and obscure as to warrant some uncertainty in Moscow about future developments. Would the USSR want to acquire more client regimes with the accompanying political and economic obligations and the attendant danger of arousing strong counteractions in the US and among other Latin American governments? Have the Russians come to recognize that it is not an easy matter to harness nationalism in the underdeveloped world to their purposes? Any precipitous move to expand military involvement in Latin America would risk a serious worsening of the general climate of Soviet-American relations. Nevertheless, is it not likely that Moscow sees its present naval activities in the Caribbean as laying the foundation for a larger military presence in Latin America at large?

The Domestic Scene

17. The USSR's economic resources have so far been sufficient to enable it both to establish a position of nuclear

parity and to support an expansion of its international commitments. The present leadership is an Old Guard presiding over the preservation of a mechanism which has, among other things, enabled it to accomplish these things. Why tamper with it? The notion, widely held by Western Sovietologists, that the Party is obsolescent and incapable of fulfilling in an advanced industrial society the tasks of political and social mobilization -- such a notion is probably totally incomprehensible to the Soviet leaders. But they have recognized for some time that the Leninist ideology, in the absence of the Stalinist coercive apparatus, is not enough to move the nation and have relied on old-fashioned nationalism to perform a good part of that function. Does this not, when put beside the USSR's larger military role abroad, open the way to increased military influence and, if so, with what consequences for internal politics and foreign policy?

18. The Soviet leadership also recognizes the symptoms of technological lag, though not necessarily its causes. It no doubt understands that unless it makes headway in the modernization of its economy through the introduction of new technology and advanced organizational techniques, it faces

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

the prospect of falling further behind the West in the economic race. Economic considerations are one factor in Soviet thinking about arms limitations. They also figure in the effort to promote detente in Europe.

19. Quite apart from open protest and the ably articulated dissent of such as Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, there is a growing tendency among the educated elite to question official policy, or at least not to respond favorably to it simply through fear or reflex. Some foreign specialists believe that the problem of national minorities -- Soviet Jews, the Baltic peoples, the Moslem peoples of Soviet Central Asia, even the Ukrainians -- is becoming or is about to become more acute. This problem, or potential problem, is there but difficult to assign a weight to. Neither is it easy to foresee what is likely to transpire within the leadership itself. It has postponed its own renewal but cannot go on doing so. The changeover might be accompanied by an intensification of political conflict in which the posing of alternative policies might figure. In any case, there is probably enough on the domestic scene that is disturbing to the regime to give it cause to seek to avoid a serious international crisis.

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20. There are other points that would need to be taken up in an assessment of the Soviet outlook: the USSR's position vis-a-vis the non-Communist border states (Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan), its view of the non-Bloc Communist Parties, and, in general, the influence of ideological considerations on its international conduct. Our principal aim, however, would be to consider whether the mainsprings of the present assertiveness in Soviet policy are strong and durable and whether the US can expect in the period ahead to face intensified pressures from the USSR.

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