

5 January 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Under Secretary of State

SUBJECT : Intelligence Considerations Bearing on a Possible Exchange of Naval Visits between the US and the USSR

1. From the standpoint of intelligence collection an exchange of naval visits with the USSR would probably work to the advantage of the US. It is almost certain that we would find out much more about the Soviet navy that we don't know than they would learn about ours. (The

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With respect to purely naval intelligence, the Navy Department should provide the responsible evaluation; however, since you have requested CIA's views, I am setting forth below some of the considerations involving both naval and other intelligence which we consider relevant.

2. To derive maximum benefit from an exchange we would have to consider carefully which types of Soviet ships we would want to see and which Soviet port we wanted to visit. It is essential to get some kind of commitment from the Soviets to send the types of ships that we ask for.

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3. It seems likely that for prestige purposes the Soviet squadron would be headed by one or more Sverdlov class cruisers whether we asked for them or not. Aside [Redacted] which might be new, it does not appear likely that a great deal of new intelligence could be garnered from the inspection of these ships -- their technical features are relatively well known as a result of previous visits to western ports and study by design analysts. This same degree of knowledge exists concerning all Russian surface warships built prior to about 1952. Since that time, however, several classes of surface ships have appeared about which we do not know enough. The "Tallin" and "Kotlin"

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classes of fleet destroyers are important new ships and might provide the key to whether the Soviets intent to operate surface forces at great distances from Russian bases. Similarly the "Riga" and "Kola" classes of escort destroyers are new and might reveal much concerning Soviet progress in anti-submarine warfare.

4. The Soviets' most important offensive naval arm, of course, is the submarine force. It is extremely unlikely that a "Q", "W", or "Z" class submarine would make an exchange visit. Vessels of these types probably would provide the most useful intelligence which could be gathered from any known Soviet ships. On the remote possibility that Soviet "friendliness" might go this far, it certainly would be worthwhile to ask for a new submarine.

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7. Though we have not been asked to evaluate the policy considerations pro and con the suggested exchange of visits, we would call your attention to the following possible factors motivating the USSR in proposing the exchange. From an intelligence point of view we believe that the Soviets would estimate that the exchange would:

(a) Contribute substantially to the Soviet propoganda claims of desiring "peaceful coexistence" and friendly relations with the US.

(b) Afford the opportunity for the Soviets to publicize to their people the increasing might of their fleet.

(c) Set the precedent for having Soviet warships operate far from home waters, thus leading to a peaceful challenge of the dominance of the seas by the US Navy.

(d) Given an opportunity for attempting the defection of one or more American sailors in a Soviet port. This chance would likely be remote, but if a defection occurred, the Soviets could reap tremendous propaganda capital.

8. Several of the above considerations can doubtless be argued with equal logic to work in our favor: for example, the possibility of a Russian defection, or some lowering of Russian naval morale. We could expect nothing better than a standoff with the Soviets in the field of exhibiting peaceful intentions unless it were made clear that we were the ones to initiate the exchange offer.

9. The point seems to remain that throughout the world the US is generally believed to have possessed the supreme naval power since World War II and the Russians have never been considered in the same league. Following an exchange of visits by squadrons of comparable size and the attendant publicity, there would inevitably be some change in this concept. The Soviets would henceforth be thought of by many people throughout the world as a naval power to be reckoned with, and one which might some day rival the US as the foremost naval power in the world. On the other hand, there would be a considerable loss of prestige and political favor in many parts of the free world if the USSR publicly offered an exchange of naval visits and the US rejected the offer.

10. This memorandum does not purport to cover the counterintelligence and domestic security considerations involved in permitting a Soviet naval contingent to visit the US. It is assumed that the Department will be competently advised on this score by the Department of Defense and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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