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By: TJS/ADPA Date: 3/17/99

USSR

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRET

INFORMATION

August 28, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KISSINGER

FROM: William Hyland *WH* *Return*

SUBJECT: Sino-Soviet Contingencies

The attached memo (Tab A) represents a highly personal and apparently minority view of our choices in the event of major hostilities between Russia and China. Still, you might find it worth reading before the interagency paper is submitted next week.

cc: Mr. Holdridge

Note to Hyland

1st class paper. Books.

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KISSINGER

FROM: William Hyland *WH*

SUBJECT: Sino-Soviet Contingencies

The two options being examined for the contingency of major Sino-Soviet hostilities should be subjected to much more rigorous examination and debate. As things now stand, the first approach -- strict impartiality -- seems likely to break down completely in the execution, and the second, -- shading toward China -- could have major consequences in our relations with the USSR.

Impartiality

This exists only in theory. In practice, the US will have to make choices which will have the net effect of a distinct sympathy for one or the other side.

Consider the following problems:

-- do we continue bilateral and four-power Middle East talks with the USSR? if strict impartiality means business as usual, we should continue them; but this will be subject to the interpretation that we are condoning Soviet "aggression;"

-- would we start or continue SALT? if we did the Soviets and most of informed opinion in the world (and in China) would see it as favorable to the USSR; if we refused to talk this would be a clear retaliation, not impartiality;

-- would we continue negotiations on a seabeds disarmament treaty?

-- consider a UN resolution condemning the USSR (introduced by Albania); could we abstain? Moscow would be overjoyed; could we vote against the USSR and be impartial, etc.?

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-2-

The point is, that in an effort to be truly impartial, we would probably wind up clearly supporting the USSR, unless we were prepared to take specific actions to indicate our disapproval, which would then amount to support to China. Indeed, trying to be even-handed and impartial or neutral once China has been attacked by major force, is clearly tantamount to supporting the USSR.

Even if all of the specific problems could be miraculously sorted out, the world at large and domestic opinion is going to scrutinize our position and conclude that we favor one side.

One way out of this dilemma could be not to adopt an avowed policy of impartiality but one of enlightened self-interest, regulating our reactions, statements, and actions to the actual situation. As many have pointed out a Sino-Soviet war, for a limited period and if limited in scope, is by no means a disaster for the US. It might just be the way to an early Vietnam settlement. It might also be a "solution" to the China nuclear problem.

In any case, it is worth considering the option of being mildly pro-Soviet, trying at the same time to be mildly pro-Chinese, depending on the scope and duration of hostilities.

In other words, instead of measuring our various actions against the criteria of impartiality or neutrality, to measure each against the national objectives of the United States, which are in the process of being defined in the NSSM-63 study.

Partiality Toward China

This variant does not seem to be very well thought through. Two reasons have been advanced:

- we will incline toward China to extract some Soviet concessions;
- we will incline toward China to prevent a shift in the Asian "balance" (the argument apparently being that a major defeat of China would result in Soviet predominance).

The notion of extracting Soviet concessions, once major hostilities have begun, is extremely naive.* The Soviets are not going to attack

*This is not to say that the Soviets would not pay some price in advance to prevent a more accommodating US policy toward China.

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-3-

China in some quixotic mood. If they take this drastic step, they will be fully and totally committed to pursue it to the end. They are already working up deep racial and political emotions in Russia. The Soviet leaders believe we should share their concern about China, and expect, at the least, sympathy and understanding for whatever actions they might take. They will almost certainly regard American gestures to China as sheer hypocrisy.

If this argument is even close to the mark, then the Soviet reaction to our slight partiality toward China is likely to be massively hostile. They might not be able or want to do anything about it at the time, but it will poison Soviet-American relations for a very long time.

The notion of supporting China to some small degree because of the effect on the Asian balance is rather fatuous. Only a slight knowledge of history suggests that foreign conquest of China is not very likely (the Soviets are not so inexperienced as to believe they can conquer China). A quick "victory" simply is not in the cards. The alternative of a long, inconclusive struggle is another problem, but it need not be decided in any contingency plan at this moment.

If the Soviet blow brings down the present regime, this would not be a great disaster. A replacement would have to be anti-Soviet to come to power. The alternative of a pro-Soviet faction surfacing in Peking after an attack is too remote to be discussed; even if the Soviets could find such Chinese leaders, their tenure in China would be brief, and their authority would not extend beyond a few provinces.

The idea that we can build up political credit with the Chinese leaders by displaying our sympathies is not very convincing. If we were serious in this regard we should take actions to forestall a Soviet strike, which the Chinese could claim we have full knowledge of (cf. press reports of such a strike in all US papers on August 28).

If the strike does occur, the only way to gain a real credit in Peking would be a straightforward anti-Soviet campaign. Anything short of this will probably be regarded by the Chinese as a charade. Indeed, the Chinese could already conclude that we know of Soviet intentions and are colluding with them. If and when it becomes public knowledge that the Soviets did in fact mention to us a strike against Chinese nuclear facilities, the Chinese will simply write us off as Moscow's tacit ally.

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-4-

In sum, there is a considerable danger that by trying to be slightly sympathetic towards Peking we will court a massive over-reaction from the USSR and still accomplish very little in the eyes of this or any other Chinese leadership.

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