

DECLASSIFIED  
Authority NND 969000  
By KM NARA Date 10/21/97

INR/REA: JH Holdridge/eb  
(Drafting Office and Officer)

SECRET

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

38

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE AND PLACE: La Provencal Restaurant  
June 11, 1969

DATE: June 13, 1969

SUBJECT: Comments of Soviet Embassy Officer on China and Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Yuri Linkov, Second Secretary, Embassy of the USSR  
John H. Holdridge, Director, Office of Research and Analysis for East Asia and Pacific, Bureau of Intelligence and Research

COPIES TO: EA - Mr. Green  
EA/VN (2)  
EA/ACA (2)  
EUR/SOV (2)  
INR (15) plus INR/REA (5)  
Embassy MOSCOW  
Amconsul, HONG KONG

29

JUN 19 1969

CONFIDENTIAL

After a few opening pleasantries, Mr. Linkov quickly got down to business by asking me what I thought of the Moscow Conference of Communist Parties. I told him that, very frankly, I had been surprised by the way that Mr. Brezhnev and others had attacked the Chinese head-on, as well as by the vehemence of these attacks. The assumption had been after the preparatory conference that the question of China was not to be brought up, and I found it surprising that in an atmosphere already noteworthy for disunity the Soviet Union would wish to inject an additional controversial element. Linkov then referred to Brezhnev's remarks concerning the Chinese threatening the USSR with both a conventional and a nuclear attack, and said that in such circumstances it was necessary for the USSR to "inform everyone about the real nature of the situation." I mentioned to Linkov that my reading of the Chinese references to conventional and nuclear attacks were in the context of the Soviets threatening China and not the reverse; was this not, then, a distortion of what the Chinese had actually said? Linkov shrugged and repeated what he had said before on the necessity of telling everyone about the real situation.

Linkov asked me if I thought the Chinese would attack the USSR. I responded by reminding him what I had said before concerning the Chinese policy of remaining tactically on the defensive, referring him to the Chinese caution with respect to the Vietnam war. I added that the Chinese position had been made fairly plain by Miyamoto, the Japanese Communist Party Chairman, in his account of a conversation with Mao Tse-tung in February or March 1966: regarding Vietnam, at least, China did not wish to commit its strength prematurely but felt instead that its duty was to build up its strength for World War III. I added, however, that if

3

SECRET

GROUP 3  
Downgraded at 12 year intervals; not automatically declassified

NET 5

POL  
Chicom - US  
RA  
POL 27

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 969000  
By KM NARA Date 1/21/97

SECRET

- 2 -

both China and the USSR kept raising the tensions between one another, it seemed possible that some junior lieutenant could make a wrong decision and thereby create an incident which could grow into something far more serious.

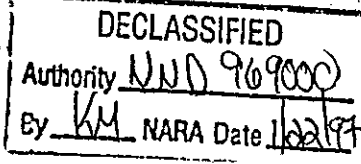
I then asked Linkov point blank whether the Soviet Union intended to attack China. What about the report that foreign tourists were being prevented from travelling on the Trans-Siberian Railroad any farther west than Khabarovsk? The latter question shook Linkov somewhat and he said that he had not heard of this report; he added rather carefully that he assumed the travel restriction was due to "some troop movements." But, he continued, he did not anticipate any action by the USSR against China. It was simply that the USSR had to prepare for any contingency.

Linkov then referred to my remark on China preparing for World War III which, he assumed, meant war with the US, and contrasted this with recent statements by highly-placed US officials such as Secretary of State Rogers on the desirability of improving relations with Peking. Did this mean that the United States no longer saw the possibility of war with China? I replied that our judgment of Chinese attitudes and policies toward us remained unchanged, noting parenthetically that the only new element was the possibility that World War III for the Chinese might now involve the Russians as well as or instead of the US, and emphasized that we saw no chance for any change in China's attitude toward the US so long as Mao Tse-tung remains on the scene. I reminded Linkov that I had told him of this already many times. Linkov's response was to ask why it was, then, that we kept expressing a hope for an improvement in Sino-US relations? I repeated what I had also told him before, namely, that as a long-range policy the United States certainly did not see its interests served by remaining in a position of acute tension with a country of 750 million people. I assumed that those considerations would also apply to Soviet policy toward China. Linkov admitted that this made sense, and claimed that the Soviet difficulties with China involved only the Chinese leadership and not the Chinese people. I observed that such might be the case in theory, but it was awfully hard for the Chinese people to see that the anti-China leadership policies of the USSR did not extend to China and the Chinese people as a whole.

Linkov wanted to know if the US would be pleased if the Soviet Union and China fought one another. I told him that the United States could take little comfort from the possibility of a major conflict developing between China and the USSR on the grounds that a war of any magnitude might well extend into other areas of the world and indeed threaten a large proportion of the world's population.

Reverting back to topic A, that is, the possibility of an improvement in US relations with China, Linkov wanted to know if the Warsaw Talks would soon resume. I replied that I had no idea as to when the next Warsaw meeting would take place -- he was thoroughly familiar, I assumed, with the circumstances of the cancellation of the last scheduled meeting. Was there, then, any contact between US and Chinese

SECRET



SECRET

- 3 -

officials in any other part of the world? When I told him that I knew of no such contact, he refused to take "no" for an answer and kept prodding me on this score. I finally told him that I was not going to give him a flat answer and would prefer to keep him guessing.

As a parting shot on China, Linkov raised once again the question of possible Chinese Communist intervention in Vietnam. I dismissed this one quickly, stating that the Chinese appeared to have accepted Hanoi's decision to work toward a negotiated settlement, and I doubted that Peking would do anything to impede it. I told him, therefore, not to bring up the old saw about the US needing to accept Hanoi's terms quickly so as to preclude the Chinese getting into the act and blocking a peaceful settlement.

On the subject of Vietnam, Linkov wanted to know first what had gone on in Midway — what had President Thieu said to President Nixon? I simply referred him to the joint communique, remarking that I thought this covered the ground very thoroughly. But what about a coalition government, he asked, referring to newspaper accounts that the US would not oppose such a coalition? My answer was that we were prepared to accept anything that the Vietnamese people themselves were prepared to accept on the basis of a free choice and without outside interference. We then engaged in a fairly protracted give-and-take on the need for further movement on our side's part toward accepting the position of the other side, in which I repeated the line that it was up to the Vietnamese people themselves to reach a solution, not us, and why didn't the NLF or the so-called "Provisional Revolutionary Government" get together with the GVN in private talks to work out a solution? President Thieu was willing to do so, and it seemed strange that the Communist side would not follow suit. Linkov finally came right out and stated flatly that it was the "duty" of the United States to tell the GVN to compromise further, e.g., by accepting Hanoi's position on a "peace cabinet" or a coalition government. I responded by asking him if the Soviet Union felt that it also had a "duty" to tell Hanoi what to do, to which he replied "of course," but then backed away hastily by saying that the Soviet Union naturally expressed its opinions to Hanoi. I then suggested that the Soviets tell Hanoi that a genuine compromise was necessary, not simply a facile US/GVN acceptance of Hanoi's terms, and that Hanoi would do well to move in this direction in the shortest possible time.

I then picked up the theme of time, recounting on how much time Hanoi had already wasted in moving toward a negotiated settlement. It had taken Hanoi one whole year to change the tense of one word — "could" to "will" with respect to talks taking place once the US stopped the bombing — with the military picture going against Hanoi in the meantime. I also pointed out that even after Hanoi decided to move into a negotiating phase it squandered a very significant proportion of its military manpower in the Tet Offensive and subsequent offensives in 1968, from which it had lost further military ground. I saw no advantage to Hanoi in wasting any more time, during which it would suffer even further losses. Linkov did not dispute what I had said, but rather tended to agree by remarking that Hanoi was, in fact, now drafting persons of a younger age than before into the armed forces.

SECRET

SECRET

- 4 -

We also sparred a bit on the nature of the "Provisional Revolutionary Government," with Linkov maintaining it had validity and with my position being that it had no more reality than the NLF, possessing neither a capital nor any new faces. We then shifted to the subject of troop withdrawals, regarding which I stated that the Communists had the choice either of responding to the US initiative with an equivalent withdrawal or seeing the war drag on with the odds, as I had already stated, going against them. Linkov wanted to know what I thought of the capability of the ARVN; I told him that the ARVN had figured prominently in accounting for the very lopsided casualty ratio which was now a feature of military operations in South Vietnam -- the North Vietnamese and VC losing several hundred men per major engagement with only a few losses on our side. As to the staying-power of the GVN, I mentioned to him that in IV Corps, from which we had recently received first-hand reports, the regional and provincial forces were being recruited throughout the area with no difficulty, and I took this as a sure sign that the people in the Delta felt that the odds were on the GVN side since recruitment would not proceed in this way if it looked as if the VC were winning. I reminded Linkov that regardless of the volume of supplies which the USSR and its friends were sending to Hanoi, the only items that reached the South were war materials which added nothing to the well-being of the people in the Communist-held areas; on the other side, the GVN was receiving large amounts of American economic aid and was becoming increasingly effective in getting this aid out to the people. I felt that in this situation politics hardly mattered -- what was important to the average Vietnamese peasant was which side was actually doing the best for him.

In conclusion, we talked briefly about the question of free elections. Linkov's position was that there could be no free elections so long as half a million American troops were in Vietnam. I discounted this position, remarking that it would certainly be possible to hold free elections after a cease-fire with the assistance of international supervision of some sort. Linkov took the line that international supervision would impair the freedom of the elections, and also maintained the position that it would be necessary for all foreign troops (he stressed the word "foreign") to be removed. After first knocking down his obvious effort to imply that there were no North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam, I stated that his argument merely supported the necessity for a mutual troop withdrawal.