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By EE NARA Date 11/17/77

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June 23, 1969

SUBJECT: Implications of Sino-Soviet Developments: Meeting of June 21

PARTICIPANTS: EA - Mr. Green
 Ambassador Brown
 EA/ACA - Mr. Thayer
 EA/ACA - Mr. Anderson
 EUR - Mr. Swank
 EUR/SOV - Mr. Dubs
 INR/REA - Mr. Holdridge
 INR/REA - Mr. Platt
 INR/RSE - Mr. Killham
 INR/RSE - Mr. Baraz

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1. The meeting developed a consensus that (a) the Sino-Soviet border tension is serious and could intensify, but neither side apparently desires an escalation into major warfare; (b) suspicion of US collusion with the other exacerbates each side's nervousness; (c) the Soviets may be reacting by seeking to shore up relations with other states on China's periphery and with the US; (c) thus, Brezhnev's and others' references to collective security in Asia possibly heralds a significant shift in Soviet policy thinking; (e) the situation opens possibilities for increased US-Soviet cooperation in Asia and/or US exploitation to induce the Soviets to greater cooperation with us, especially in Viet-Nam and Laos.

File 32-1
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From the Chinese Side

2. The unbuffered Soviet threat to China's borders is now a major consideration in Chinese policy-making. The Chinese have responded both militarily and politically. They have been the provocateurs in this year's incidents, to show the Soviets that

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the PRC is unafraid, despite its relative weakness, and to forestall another Czechoslovakia. The risk of incidents along the border continues, although the Chinese do not want to escalate these incidents into a major conflict with the USSR. But the possibility of major hostilities exists, growing rather from accident than from design. The return of Chinese Ambassadors to posts abroad provides the Chinese with a means to shore up, in relations with other states, the PRC's position vis-a-vis the US and the USSR. Chinese suspicion of US-Soviet collusion is sincere, but the fact that they are making efforts internally to link the two enemies may reflect a doubt on the part of the top PRC leadership, whose paranoia is real, that Chinese down the line share the fear of collusion. PRC desire to prevent increased Soviet influence in Asia is an important element of PRC policy.

From the Soviet Side

3. The Russians are reasonably content with the results of the ICC, although 14 parties did not support them on China. Brezhnev's decision to strike at the Chinese in the ICC demonstrates the degree of Soviet concern over China. The Soviets have intensified in recent months the build up of military strength that has been developing for the past three years. Moscow is acutely sensitive to the anti-Soviet thrust of Chinese policy and is seriously concerned over Chinese irridentism, which is a threat not only in the east but also in the west, where other neighbors could press claims.

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Although the Soviet military power build up is evident, it is not today a force constituted for invasion to bring about Russian control of China. At the same time, the Russians now are not exerting great efforts to stimulate anti-Chinese feelings domestically; there is no jingoism such as that during the Ussuri River incidents. The Soviet Union does not want conflict with the Chinese, but it is aware of the need for deterrence. A surgical strike against Chinese nuclear installations may be appealing to some in Moscow, but this would not permanently remove the Chinese nuclear threat. A punitive attack along the border is a less unlikely possibility, but the Soviets would attempt to control the level. Although the Soviets may not be planning an attack, there seems to be little to hinder continued escalation of the tension between the two powers and little possibility for either side to back away. The exchanges regarding negotiation of border questions have not been conciliatory, and each has taken a position apparently foreclosing useful negotiations; there seems to be no common ground for agreement.

4. In their [#]approaches to third countries, the Soviets have not been over-dramatizing the Chinese threat, but they have mounted and orchestrated a consistent domestic and foreign campaign against the Chinese, and their paranoia about the Chinese remains. Moscow

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knows that in its dispute with Peking support from western communist parties is limited and it knows it cannot count on support from Hanoi or Pyongyang. The Soviet leadership, due in large part to the deterioration of relations with China, is impelled to consider the advantages of stabilizing political and military relations with the United States. This does not mean, however, that they have become sufficiently concerned to cooperate significantly, especially if we fail to exert what leverage we have.

South and Southeast Asia

5. We do not yet know enough to state with any certainty what Brezhnev and others mean by their allusions to Asian security, and even they may only be "thinking out loud" at this point. The Soviet Union, when its own national interests demand, has proven willing to take actions on a state-to-state basis even at the cost of weakening local Communist parties. The statements by Soviet leaders, and the developing international context in which they are made, suggest that the USSR may be interested in constructing arrangements at least for economic cooperation among states in the area. With the political compositions of the various states so disparate, any collective arrangements sponsored by the Soviets would virtually have to be of an economic rather than political or military nature. Moscow's interest may be in building stable and viable Asian nations, an interest similar to our

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own and one that is based on power rather than ideological considerations. Their efforts would grow from a desire to contain China and to forestall collusion in the area between China and the US. Additional factors in Soviet thinking may be an assessment that the US does intend to withdraw from the area and various indications, e.g. Thailand and New Zealand, of willingness to countenance a less rigid posture toward Peking.

6. Moscow may fear a long war in Viet-Nam because it would increasingly weaken North Viet-Nam, leaving it more vulnerable to the Chinese threat and requiring greater Soviet resources to support Hanoi. A solution of the type proposed by Clark Clifford might be in the Soviet interest by permitting gradual reduction of the drain on the North Viet-Nam, and hence the Soviet, economy. Similarly, the cessation of the bombing of the north may have in turn reduced Soviet concern about Laos. On the other hand, the USSR might prefer a Viet-Nam stalemate, because it might keep us in the area. Thus far, the Soviets have not cooperated with us sufficiently to promote a solution in Viet-Nam or Laos. Yet they, desiring unification of the two Viet-Nams and perhaps of Laos, are also seeking a solution that would not be to China's advantage.

7. Statements on Asian security have appeared to focus on South Asia, but this may only be coincidence, including the accident of Kosygin's timely visits to India, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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The recall of Soviet Ambassadors from Southeast Asia, following Kapitsa's trip, also suggests that Moscow may be thinking in terms of the whole southern arc. Whatever the case, the statements appear to be heralding a new line of Soviet thinking, crystallized by growing concern with the Chinese threat.

Policy Implications

8. Does this complex of developments mean, then, that the situation is ripe for fruitful US and Soviet cooperation in South and Southeast Asia? Should we move to encourage Soviet participation in regional efforts? Perhaps we should test the water by encouraging third countries to approach the Soviets. On the other hand, to balance and supplement this type of positive encouragement of the USSR, we have an opportunity to motivate the Soviets by playing upon their fear of the Chinese. If, as seems the case, Moscow's thinking about policy changes is stimulated partly by the currently-acute Sino-Soviet border tension, perhaps the most effective way of nudging the USSR in directions useful to us would be to suggest that we are more relaxed than Moscow about the Chinese threat. We could indicate that we are not particularly bothered by the Chinese presence in Laos, for example, and there are a variety of other gestures, including direct US initiatives toward the Chinese, that we could make. The present situation seems to offer opportunities for both attracting and needling the Soviets into greater cooperation with us in the area,

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especially regarding Viet-Nam and Laos.

cc: ; Ambassador Brown

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