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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

8 November 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Soviet Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Cuban Crisis

1. The Cuban crisis is not yet fully resolved, and its further course may involve prolonged and severe tensions. This might lead the Soviets at some point to adopt a generally aggressive stance toward the US, which could affect their behavior on other East-West issues. Nevertheless, it now seems possible to gauge the general outlines of the policies which the USSR wishes to pursue in other matters of contention, especially on the questions of Berlin and disarmament, in the period immediately ahead.

2. The course of the crisis in Cuba has undoubtedly shaken the confidence of the Soviet leaders. They will feel obliged to reassess the validity of their own policies and judgments about their opponents. This process of reassessment will focus mainly on the general Soviet posture toward the West. But this in turn will be influenced by internal Soviet politics, which may already

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be in a state of division and confusion, and the status of Bloc relations, particularly the Sino-Soviet conflict which has been notably worsened by Soviet conduct in the Cuban crisis.

3. For the immediate future, however, extreme alterations of course in foreign policy seem unlikely. Retaliation is of course appealing, but the mood of the US, the coalescence of support behind the US, and the temper of the uncommitted world all argue strongly against it. There has been no evidence of a Soviet disposition to seek occasions for reprisals, and in fact the official Soviet position -- that the outcome is a victory for the USSR -- puts a little additional weight against this response.

4. The chances for an early move toward genuine detente seem even lower. Soviet bargaining power is at a low ebb, and they would conclude that, when the West was under little pressure to make concessions, general settlements could only be at the expense of Soviet interests in such matters as Berlin and disarmament. They will almost certainly wish, as a general principle, to repair the present disarray and find means to restore an image of strength before they are ready to consider any real diplomatic give-and-take.

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5. Thus the likeliest immediate outlook, in our view, is for a period of reconsolidation masked by verbal activity and propagandistic initiatives. There are opportunities for limited gains in this approach, insofar as the USSR can play upon the war fears which heaved up during the crisis, and the general hopes that the super powers will now have to find a more reasonable way to live with each other. The newly dramatized issue of foreign bases will evidently be employed in this connection. But in general we believe that the USSR will find this a poor time to alter its positions and a good time to talk for talk's sake, especially on such prime issues as disarmament and Berlin.

Disarmament

6. There is as yet no evidence to suggest any change in the Soviet position on general disarmament, and some reason to expect that none will soon occur. In the Cuban affair, the USSR has sought to avoid the principle of inspection and to insert in its place the principle of verification of completed disarmament measures, thereby staying in line with its stated position. The less the Soviets want to negotiate seriously, however, the more important they find it to pose as the champions of negotiations. Disarmament has always provided a ready forum for the agitational abuse of diplomacy, and now

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is a better time than most for reasons suggested above. The foreign base question, the concept of the nuclear-free zone, and an attack upon upon US surveillance policies all might be expected to find considerable resonance in the post-crisis period. The outlook is therefore for a considerably show of activity in this field which is unlikely, however, to include any substantial changes in Soviet positions.

7. A nuclear test ban, however, poses a more immediate problem for Soviet decision. There is some evidence that prior to the Cuban crisis and during it the Soviets saw this as an issue which could be resolved with minimum concessions. If the Soviet leaders feel that an early move to arrest the arms race and reduce tensions is now necessary, they may be prepared to give serious consideration to ending tests, either in agreement with the US or under a general moratorium.

8. Berlin. One of the most notable features of Soviet behavior during the Cuban crisis was the failure to exploit the Berlin problem in any way against the US. The Soviets evidently regarded the Cuban crisis as so dangerous in itself that any move to broaden the confrontation would bring intolerable risks. With the tensions over Cuba reduced the Soviets may believe that they can safely revive the

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Berlin issue. They may even be stimulated to do so by a sharpened appreciation of the importance of a predominance of power and tactical advantage in the immediate area of contention, these factors being in their favor at Berlin as they were in the US favor over Cuba. Moreover, Berlin would be the most meaningful area for Soviet action if the USSR is seeking a gain to offset its defeat in Cuba.

9. On the other hand, the Soviets must recognize that the US has a publicly established and much firmer commitment in Berlin than the USSR had in Cuba. Thus they are still confronted with the choice of risky unilateral actions and unattractive negotiations. They probably believe that unilateral encroachments would now be more dangerous because the US, having prevailed in Cuba, would be encouraged to take stronger countermeasures. At the same time, the alternative of negotiating for a mutually acceptable compromise is perhaps more difficult for the Soviets than before, because any important concessions would tend to confirm before the whole world that not only in Cuba, but in other questions as well, the Soviets were acting from weakness.

10. We believe that the Soviets are likely to reject these extreme alternatives, pending a general re-evaluation of both their own policies and the attitude of the West. Recent public and private statements by Soviet officials, including Kosygin's Bolshevik

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Anniversary address, suggest no major initiative on the Berlin issue is contemplated at present. As a temporary expedient the Soviets may submerge the Berlin question in the broader negotiations over a NATO-Warsaw Pact detente, thus obscuring and rationalizing their refusal to take decisive action. If they follow this line, the Soviets will probably not move toward an early agreement, until the general line of their policies is determined.

The Longer Run

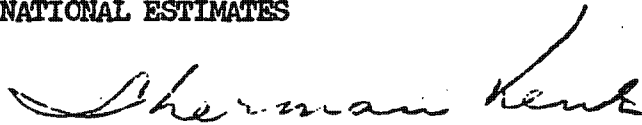
11. Although the immediate Soviet reaction to the Cuban affair may be an effort to gain time for rebuilding and consolidating, the Cuban crisis poses insistent questions about the future course of Soviet policy. And these questions have become sharper at the very time when economic problems are getting harder to solve and the Sino-Soviet breach widens. Moreover, this whole constellation of problems must be faced by a leadership which has experienced a serious reverse, and it is difficult to believe that this experience left undisturbed the structure of that leadership and the individual judgments of its members.

12. These considerations suggest that 1963 could be a year of unusual importance in the evolution of Soviet policy making.

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Arguments can be constructed for substantial and even fundamental changes, and while the arguments themselves point in different directions, each of them constitutes a stronger case than could be made a year ago. We should not expect a smooth and massive shift onto a new tack; contradictions seem much more likely. But the contradictions may well be more acute, the policy fluctuations wider, and the implications for the US more far-reaching than we have become accustomed to in the years of "peaceful coexistence."

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sherman Kent". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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