

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

To : The Secretary
 Through: S/S
 From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *TH*

September 25, 1964

Subject: Possible Early Chicom Nuclear Test

As you are aware, a special estimate of August 26, 1964 stated that while the possibility of a Chinese nuclear test before the end of this year could not be ruled out, it would probably not occur until after the end of the year. There have been indications in the few weeks since this estimate was made that increase the possibility of an early test. There is even one report that Chinese officials recently told a Mali official that Peiping would announce its bomb on this October 1, their national day.

Chen Yi, whose references to a Chinese bomb have been more frequent than in the case of any other top official, made rather pessimistic remarks on Peiping's nuclear prospects in October 1963 and rather more optimistic remarks in May of this year. On the first occasion he spoke of the backwardness of China's industrial foundation and indicated it might be several years before a test. This May he said that China had reached the necessary industrial level and that it is not very difficult to perform nuclear experiments.

Assuming a capability to detonate, Peiping would have the following reasons to do so forthwith:

1. Testing could well raise morale at this critical moment among the Viet Cong, in Hanoi, and within Communist China by making the threat of US escalation in Indo-China seem less ominous. Peiping might also think this would

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help to deter such escalation by arousing concern in Free World public opinion over the ultimate consequences of a broadened conflict.

2. A test would make the CPR's fifteenth anniversary a truly memorable event. There has been little to crow about in domestic or foreign affairs for a long time, in fact since the 1959 celebrations of the Ten Great Years and the Great Leap Forward.

3. A test would give the forthcoming National People's Congress (probably November) and a possibly forthcoming Party Congress (now three years overdue) some meat on which to chew. It is evident that the regime continues to have a grave problem of infusing some sort of elan into its cadres, yet a cautious, realistic economic policy, to which the collapse of the Leap Forward seems to have held the regime, can hardly provide much inspiration.

4. The Moscow meeting of communist parties in December might be influenced in a sense favorable to Peiping. If the Chinese adhere to their apparent intentions to boycott the meeting, the Soviets might have even more trouble than is now foreseen in lining up a solid anti-Chinese front. If the Chinese and their allies should attend, they might be heard with greater respect.

5. Mao's health may be failing (the French Ambassador has reported indications of this though previous intelligence has rather suggested the contrary) and he and his comrades may want to have this accomplishment in the books during the leader's lifetime.

6. Peiping may see only a small margin in favor of the US position on Chinese Representation in the November UNGA, and may hope that a test might tip

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the balance against us. A few wavering governments could possibly find in the Chinese entry to the nuclear club a persuasive argument against their continued exclusion from the UN.

Even if the Chinese are still short of an actual capability to detonate, the above reasons might persuade them to claim such a capability on October 1.

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