

Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State

Moscow, February 1, 1961, 4 p.m.

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1813. As new administration will apparently have to move rapidly in determining our basic policy toward Soviet Union, I have attempted select, with no pretense at originality, number of considerations which seem to me worthy of emphasis this connection. Principal question I suppose is whether we should attempt to reach accommodation with Soviet Union and resolve principal issues by negotiation in serious manner; meaning being prepared take risks in order reach agreements. While I gather from President's and other statements that decision in affirmative has already been made, I think we should be under no illusions as to what can be accomplished within reasonable period time. I am on balance strongly in favor of making effort although there are substantial arguments against it. In brief, any other course would in my opinion cause further disunity in West, would greatly diminish our chances of influencing or winning newly-emerging and neutral countries, and would probably eventually end in war.

Soviet people ardently desire peace and friendship with US, in which they see best hope of peace and better life for themselves. Soviet Union is, however, in control of small group Communist leaders and likely remain so for long period time. It is on this leadership that I feel most qualified to speak as I have probably had more contact with these men than any non-Communist, but it is also here that I find most difficulty in reaching my own conclusions. Khrushchev is dominant personality but quite possible he could disappear from scene within next few years from natural or other causes, state health and methods operation. Fact which I believe we must constantly remind ourselves is that these men believing Communists. While true they are men who have ruthlessly fought way to power, they have almost religious faith in their beliefs and this motivates them to larger extent than generally believed. It is, of course, true that no Communist regime will consider itself entirely safe as long as there are powerful democratic, capitalist countries existing in world. It also true, however, that these men are nationalists and there is constant inner struggle between nationalism and their belief in Communism. This is part of their continuing difficulty with Chinese Communists. Their experience with Chinese Communists has made them realize, I suspect, that even all-Communist world

would leave them beset with enormous problems, but I repeat they believe and will go on working toward goal of world Communism for long time to come. To fail to do so would be to deny faith which justifies their position of leadership, but degree of effort and methods used are factors which our own policies can influence. Khrushchev probably most pragmatic and least dogmatic of all, but he basically as devout believer as any. He is reported once to have said something to effect that if Communism did not demonstrate its superiority and prevail throughout world, his life would have lost its meaning. Difficulty in appraising such men well expressed by Yugoslav Dedijer in article in London Times when he said "in every Communist leader there are different psychological layers which contradict each other: Original revolutionary idealism, bureaucratic attitudes developed over long Stalin phase Communist development, and finally pragmatism derived from today's realities. These elements intermingled, and often reactions to particular points depend on which layer has been reached." When Khrushchev speaks as chief of state of his desire for peaceful solutions, he is quite sincere and therefore effective. (He is liked and admired by nearly all my diplomatic colleagues.) At same time he has in his speech of January 6 frankly and bluntly expressed his Communist beliefs and policies. Most discouraging aspect of East-West negotiations is that we both look at same set of facts and see different things and this complicates arriving at solutions. From their visits to US, Khrushchev and some other leaders know that US is not ogre that their propaganda paints, and Khrushchev has frequently said to me that he realized it would take long time for US to come to Communism. Leadership convinced, however, that there are circles (military, Wall Street, monopolists) which are terrified by Communism as economic and social system and are disputing with forces for good in US. As they look around world they can find plenty of evidence which they can use to justify to themselves their belief in class struggle. They pose everything in these terms and do not accept that our support of rightist or reactionary governments motivated by our fear their attempt to obtain world domination for power reasons, and instead see it in terms of exploiters banding together to maintain exploited in subservience.

Most hopeful aspect is that evolution which has taken place in Soviet Union is proceeding rapidly. With abolition of mass terror an element of democracy has entered both party and country as a whole. Soviet people have little interest in international goals of Communism, and tend to be pro-American.

Their view of US and rest of free world distorted through years of isolation and intense propaganda, and they in general have come to accept Soviet system, although they would like to change and improve it. Nevertheless they exert

constant pressure toward accommodation with us. Year ago in my despatch 412, I attempted describe some current strains within Soviet system and I would today make little change in views there expressed although others would be added. I see enormous problems ahead for Soviet leadership, but not such as should lead us to expect any breakdown in system.

I am convinced that key to Khrushchev's policy, which I believe supported by bulk leadership, is that he believes if he can gain period of reduction tension and hopefully some diversion resources from armaments to productive purposes and possibly even aid in form credits and technology from West, he can lead Soviet Union into era Communism and, by way of example, set most of rest of world on path toward this goal. I am impressed by constant emphasis which all Soviet leaders with whom I talk put on desirability trade (and I am sure they have in mind credits and technological aid) with US. Whether or not Khrushchev actually said to Nehru that if he could have five years peaceful coexistence he could blow us over, remark is as Italians say "bentrovato."

Declaration Communist parties in Moscow, Khrushchev's January 6 speech and Suslov's report to CC were surprisingly frank in showing that apart from concern over possibility of war, Communists look upon their approach to West as temporary expedient. Given situation in which Soviet party found itself in relation to Eisenhower administration at time Moscow meeting of CP's it had little alternative to compromise with Chinese Communist position since it could not at that time demonstrate that there was any real possibility accommodation with West. Extent to which Soviet party will be prepared modify program outlined, should détente with West become fact, is something which only time can demonstrate.

I am sure we would err if we should treat Communist threat at this time as being primarily of military nature. I believe Soviet leadership has long ago correctly appraised meaning atomic military power. They recognized major war no longer acceptable means achieving their objective. We shall, of course, have to keep our powder dry and have plenty of it, for obvious reasons.

Although non-military, Communist threat nonetheless lethal as it stands today, and we shall be obliged devise better methods meet it or we will surely lose. Communists look at everything in terms of victory and defeat and probably realize that if Communist movement loses its dynamism it would risk breaking up. Unfortunately Chinese Communists have considerably rejuvenated revolutionary posture of Soviet party. Moreover, disunity of West and our failure meet challenge presented by newly emerging countries as well as our

failure deal adequately with problems of Latin America, have presented tempting prospects even to more mellowed Soviet Communists. On the other hand, even Soviet Communists have strong strain of nationalism and if he can offer hope of period tranquillity I would not exclude eventual complete break between Soviet and Chinese Communists. Great question is whether strains within Communist bloc and more importantly evolution of Soviet system will develop quickly enough to counterbalance added economic power which successful completion their 7-year plan will give them. Soviets are estimating they will over-fulfill plan by equivalent of \$100 billion. While doubtless exaggeration and while much of any excess will have to be diverted to dealing with problem agriculture and to satisfy growing demands their people, even one-fourth this amount if used, for example, for foreign aid programs, subversion, propaganda, etc., evoke awesome possibilities.

This will be followed by separate telegrams on some specific foreign policy questions.

Thompson

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