MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

CONFIDENTIAL

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR ROBERT C. MCCARTHY

FROM: JACK MATLOCK

SUBJECT: American Academic on Soviet Policy

The telegram from Moscow I mentioned this morning is attached at Tab I. It reports on the observations of an experienced American academic who spent about ten days in discussions with senior Soviet officials, including Boris Ponomarev, candidate member of the Politburo and head of the Central Committee's International Department, and several other Party and Institute officials not often seen by Americans.

Among the source's conclusions were:

--Fear of war seemed to affect the elite as well as the man on the street.

--A degree of paranoia seemed rampant among high officials, and the danger of irrational elements in Soviet decision making seems higher.

--The election next year seems to have become a key determinant in Soviet foreign policy making, with the aim not to permit the President to assume the role of peacemaker.

--There seems to be a growing climate of neo-Stalinism and outright chauvinism on the lower levels of the bureaucracy.

The scholar also was told that Andropov had directed a more activist role in the Middle East, and that Andropov is increasingly seeking to take control over foreign policy and to undermine Gromyko.

Paragraphs 2-11 are the most relevant ones in the long cable.

Attachment:

Tab I Moscow telegram 15409 of December 10, 1983.

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BY GS NARA DATE 9/28/85
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 15409

EXDIS
E.O. 12356: DECL: 20YR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ECON, PIRG, UR
SUBJECT: AMERICAN ACADEMIC ON SOVIET FOREIGN AND
DOMESTIC POLICY

1. (C) ENTIRE TEXT

2. SUMMARY: AN AMERICAN ACADEMIC WITH EXCELLENT ENTRÉE
TO THE SOVIET POLITICAL ELITE BRIEFED EMBASSY ON HIS
DISCUSSIONS HERE NOVEMBER 28-DECEMBER 8. HE BELIEVES,
BASED ON THESE DISCUSSIONS, THAT A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT HAS
TAKEN PLACE IN SOVIET THINKING AND ATTITUDES, ESPECIALLY
TOWARDS THE U.S. OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS. WHERE
EARLIER SOVIET DECISION-MAKING WAS FOUCUSED ALMOST
EXCLUSIVELY ON PRAGMATISM AND REASONED CALCULATION
OF SOVIET INTERESTS, EMOTIONALISM AND EVEN IRRATIONALITY
ARE NOW ENTERING INTO PLAY. THE ACADEMIC PERCEIVES A
GROWING PARANOID AMONG SOVIET OFFICIALS, AND SEES THEM
LITERALLY OBSESSED BY FEAR OF WAR. HE BELIEVES THAT
THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS HAVE BECOME THE CENTRAL
DETERMINING FACTOR IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY.

3. THE ACADEMIC HAS NOTED, FURTHER, A CERTAIN SENSE
OF LEADERLESSNESS AND A LACK OF AN INTEGRATED FOREIGN
POLICY, WHICH HE ATTRIBUTES TO ANDROPOV'S LENGTHY
ABSENCE FROM THE SCENE AND THE UNCERTAINTY THIS HAS
GENERATED. HE FEELS THAT THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT
DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP--PARTICULARLY ON
DOMESTIC POLICY--AND PINPOINTS THE LOWER PARTY ORGANS
(AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL) AND THE ECONOMIC BUREAUCRACIES
AS THE MAJOR SOURCES OF OPPOSITION TO ANDROPOV'S DOMESTIC
PROGRAMS, AND ANTICIPATES THAT ANDROPOV WILL SHORTLY
ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME THIS OPPOSITION THROUGH WIDESPREAD
PERSONNEL CHANGES IN THE ECONOMIC MINISTRIES AND AT
LOWER PARTY LEVELS. ALTHOUGH THE ACADEMIC SENSED THE
SAME WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION AMONG HIS INTERLOCUTORS
AS HE HAD DURING A PREVIOUS VISIT IN MAY OF THE NECESSITY
FOR ECONOMIC CHANGE, HE DETECTED MUCH LESS OPTIMISM
THAT THE KIND OF CHANGES REQUIRED TO BREAK OUT OF THE
CURRENT IMPASSE COULD BE REALIZED. HIS OWN BELIEF
IS NOT ENTIRELY UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO PURSUE OTHER THAN A GRADUAL, INCREMENTAL APPROACH
TO ECONOMIC CHANGE, AND THAT EACH SMALL STEP WILL BE
ABSORBED BY THE SYSTEM RATHER THAN REFORM IT.

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4. THE ACADEMIC'S INTERLOCUTORS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT
ANDROPOV HAD UNDERGONE AN OPERATION BUT CLAIMED THAT
HE WAS NOW BACK AT WORK ALEET IT ON A SOMEWHAT LIMITED
SCHEDULE. THE ACADEMIC GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT
USTINOV HAD STOOD IN FOR THE GENERAL SECRETARY DURING
THE LATTER'S ABSENCE. CHERNENKO HAD BEEN COMPLETELY
BYPASSED. END SUMMARY.

5. THE ACADEMIC IDENTIFIED THREE MAJOR CURRENTS IN
SOVIET THINKING THAT HAD EMERGED SINCE HIS VISIT HERE IN
MAY:

-- A GENUINE SENSE OF CONCERN OVER TRENDS ON THE INTER-
ATIONAL STAGE AND A FEAR OF WAR THAT SEEMED TO BE SHARED
BY SOVIET CITIZENS GENERALLY. THE OFFICIAL LINE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS IS GENERALLY BELIEVED BY THE POPULACE.

-- A GROWING CLIMATE OF NEO-STALINISM, PARTICULARLY
EVIDENT AT THE RAION (DISTRICT) LEVEL AND AMONGST THE
YOUNGER GENERATION, FED BY STRONG FEELINGS OF PATRIOTISM
AND EVEN CHAUVINISM. THERE IS A GROWING SENSE THAT THE
SOVIET UNION IS BEING PUSHED AROUND BY THE U.S., AND THAT
RESOURCES MUST BE MORTIIZED TO COUNTERACT THIS THREAT.
UTILIZING THE ADVANTAGES WHICH A CENTRALIZED ECONOMY
POSSSESSES IN THIS REGARD. THE COROLLARY TO THIS IS
THAT DOMESTIC ECONOMIC CHANGES CANNOT BE AFFORDED AT THIS
TIME.

-- A HIGH DEGREE OF PARANOID AMONG HIGH OFFICIALS WITH
WHOM THE ACADEMIC SPOKE. NOT UNLIKE THE ATMOSPHERE OF
THIRTY YEARS AGO, SINCE HIS MAY VISIT, THE ACADEMIC
HAS NOTICED THAT ATTITUDES HAVE BECOME MORE PERSONAL AND
EMOTIONAL, ESPECIALLY WITH RESPECT TO THE U.S., AND HE
FOUND DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY OF IRRATIONAL ELEMENTS
IN SOVIET DECISION-MAKING. HE CITED THE STRAIGHTFACE
CLAIM MADE TO HIM BY ONE OFFICIAL THAT THE KAL FLIGHT
HAD BEEN DELIBERATELY STAGED BY THE U.S. -- NOT AS AN
INTELLIGENCE FLIGHT -- BUT TO PROVOKE THE USSR AND ANTI-
SOVIET FEELINGS IN THE WORLD.

6. THE ACADEMIC DECLARED THAT THE STATEMENT RECENTLY
MADE BY BREZINSKI THAT THE SOVIETS "WOULD CRAWL BACK
TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE" WAS COMPLETELY INCONSISTENT
BT
EXDIS
E. O. 12356; DECL: CDR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ECON, FINR, UR
SUBJECT: AMERICAN ACADEMIC ON SOVIET FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY WITH THE POSITIONS TAKEN BY HIS SOVIET CONTACTS HERE. ALL OF HIS SOVIET INTERLOCUTORS HAD UN-equivocal STATED THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD NOT RETURN TO SEPARATE UNFAMILY TARES, MOREOVER, ALL HAD EXPECTED THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD NOT CONTINUE WITH START NEGOTIATIONS EITHER, BUT THIS HAD BEEN EXPRESSED AS PERSONAL OPINION RATHER THAN AS A CATEGORICAL STATEMENT.

7. THE ACADEMIC FELT THAT THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS HAVE BECOME THE KEY DETERMINANT OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY MAKING IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PREVENT THE PRESIDENT'S RE-ELECTION. THE SOVIETS ARE DETERMINED NOT TO ALLOW HIM TO ASSUME THE ROLE OF PEACEMAKER. SOVIET INTERLOCUTORS CLAIMED THAT THE SOVIET SIDE HAD CONSISTENLY SHOWED RESTRAINT VIS-A-VIS THE U.S. BUT HAD MET WITH NO RESPONSE FROM PRESIDENT REAGAN. THEY CLAIMED TO SEE NO INCENTIVE WHATSOEVER FOR A POLICY OF RESTRAINT IN THE FUTURE. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM THE AMBASSADOR, THE ACADEMIC ACKNOWLEDGED THAT NONE OF HIS SOVIET CONTACTS HAD CITED ANY SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF PAST SOVIET RESTRAINT.


THE MIDDLE EAST

9. THE ACADEMIC CITED THE MIDDLE EAST AS AN EXAMPLE OF AN AREA WHERE THE LACK OF A COHERENT SOVIET POLICY IS EVIDENT. WHILE SOVIET OFFICIALS HAD WARNED THAT "YOU CAN BE SURE WE WILL REACT" TO ANY U.S. ACTION AGAINST SYRIA, THE SCHOLAR FELT THAT IN FACT HIS INTERLOCUTORS HAD NO CLEAR IDEA WHAT FORM THIS REACTION WOULD
10. The scholar was told that Andropov had recently written a memorandum addressed to the Central Committee International Department in which he reportedly asserted that Soviet policy in the Middle East was too passive and reactive and directed that the Soviet Union take the initiative. Whether Andropov had in mind diplomatic or military actions was unclear. The scholar maintained that, on a more general plane, the General Secretary was increasingly fretting to take control over foreign policy and to undermine Gromyko.

11. The ambassador suggested three factors which he thought could account for the change in the atmosphere and attitudes which the academic had encountered here: the turn for the worse in Andropov's health, the KAL incident, and the reality of the INF deployments. The academic agreed with this assessment, laying particular stress on the first factor. There had been a great sense of confidence amongst his interlocutors half a year ago, he said. A sense of the possibility of positive change because of the unity forged by a strong leader. Andropov's absence from the scene for the last few months had permitted differences to emerge and had generated a sense of leaderlessness. Whether Andropov could again assert himself as the strong leader whom all believed was necessary and behind whom all could unite was for the moment problematic.

Andropov's health

12. The scholar's contacts indicated that the General Secretary had undergone an operation (the date and nature of which were not specified) and had been by
13. AT ANY RATE, ACCORDING TO THE ACADEMIC, ANDROPOV WAS NOW BACK AT WORK ALTHOUGH UNDER STRICT ORDERS TO LIMIT HIS SCHEDULE. THE SCHOLAR HAD BEEN TOLD THAT THE GENERAL SECRETARY WORKS CURRENTLY EIGHT HOURS A DAY WITH A ONE-HOUR MID-DAY RECESS (COMMENT: THIS SCHEDULE WOULD ACCORD WITH THE PATTERN OF ANDROPOV'S MOTORCADE MOVEMENTS.) WEEKENDS WERE TO BE RESERVED FOR REST.

14. THE SCHOLAR IS CONVINCED THAT THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP (HE DID NOT PROVIDE ANY ELABORATION) AND THAT OPPOSITION TO ANDROPOV'S EFFORTS AT ECONOMIC REVIVAL IS CENTERED IN THE ECONOMIC BUREAUCRACY AND IN MID-LEVEL PARTY ORGANS AT THE RAION DISTRICT) LEVEL. THE SCHOLAR CHARACTERIZED THE RAIDOM SECRETARIES, TYPICALLY MEN IN THEIR 30'S AND 40'S, AS INTENSE PATRIOTS--EVEN CHAUVINISTS--WHO BELIEVED THAT THE COUNTRY SHOULD BE MOBILIZED TO MEET THE CHALLENGE FROM THE U.S. THEY WERE NOT ACTIVE SUPPORTERS OF ECONOMIC CHANGE. "IT WAS ANYBODY'S GUESS" WHETHER ANDROPOV'S RETURN TO A MORE ACTIVE ROLE WOULD RESULT IN THE ELIMINATION OR ISOLATION OF THIS OPPOSITION TO CHANGE. BUT THE SCHOLAR FELT SURE THAT ONE OF HIS GENERAL SECRETARY'S GOALS WILL BE TO UNDERTAKE A "CLEANING-OUT." HE BELIEVED THAT THERE WOULD SOON BE MAJOR PERSONNEL CHANGES IN THE MINISTRIES AND AT LOWER PARTY LEVELS, AND SAID THAT PROMOTIONS INTO THE POLITIBURO MIGHT BE ANNOUNCED AT THE UPCOMING PLENUM. (COMMENT: PRESS COVERAGE OF THE ONGOING PARTY-ELECTION CAMPAIGN...
15. The scholar said that he had heard from two sources that Andropov had sent a hard-hitting letter to all party organizations in October that declared in no uncertain terms that the fatherland was in danger and underscored the necessity of reviving and reinvigorating the Soviet economy. Reportedly Andropov stressed that he was not exaggerating the external danger to the nation, and he warned that the time had passed when a "formalistic" approach toward changes mandated by the center would be tolerated and that those who did not support these changes assiduously would be dealt with ruthlessly. (Comment: We have recently heard a similar report from a Chinese diplomat, who speculated that the intent of the letter had been to prepare the country for an increased defense burden.)

ECONOMIC REFORM

16. While Soviet contacts evinced a continued recognition that major economic changes were essential, the scholar detected a markedly decreased conviction that such changes could be successfully implemented. The scholar himself was pessimistic that current efforts would make an appreciable dent in a system still governed by an unreal pricing mechanism and a lack of meaningful material incentives. There seemed to be no way, he asserted, of breaking the vicious productivity/incentives circle. While the soon-to-be introduced experiment in increased enterprise autonomy did indeed represent the most meaningful step taken in the sphere of economic change since the late 60's, it was ultimately doomed to failure. It was typical of previous efforts at economic change in that it was limited in application and incremental in approach. As it stood, it was likely to be absorbed and thus smothered within the system even if the experiment produced positive results within the five ministries where it is to get underway next January. The scholar BT
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ALL SECTION 04 OF 04 MOSCOW 5409

EXDIS
F.O. 12356 DECL: ODDR
TAGS: PGOV, PSEL, ECON, PNSR, UR
SUBJECT: AMERICAN ACADEMIC ON SOVIET FOREIGN AND
- DOMESTIC POLICY
CITED ONE ECONOMIC OFFICIAL WHO CONCURRED WITH HIS OWN
Pessimistic Assessment of the Experiment's Likelihood
of Having a Measurable Impact on the Economy as a Whole.

17. THE ACADEMIC COMMENTED THAT THE MILITARY APPEARS
TO HAVE SOMETHING OF AN AMBIGUOUS ATTITUDE TOWARDS
ECONOMIC CHANGE. ON THE ONE HAND, THEY ARE WORRIED
ABOUT THE WEAKNESS OF THE CIVILIAN ECONOMY AND ARE
ESPECIALLY CONCERNED ABOUT SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL
PROGRESS. THIS IMPELS THEM TO SUPPORT CHANGE ON A
FAIRLY MAJOR SCALE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MILITARY
RECOGNIZE THAT THE PROCESS OF CHANGE WILL YIELD
LIMITED IMMEDIATE BENEFITS FOR THEM AND MAY EVEN CONSTRCT
THEIR SHARE OF THE RESOURCES PIES. ONE THING IS CERTAIN--
THE MILITARY STRONGLY BACK THE ANDROPOV DRIVE FOR GREATER
WORK DISCIPLINE.

18. IN RESPONSE TO A QUERY ON RYZHKOVD (WHOM THE SCHOLAR
DID NOT SEE ON THIS TRIP), THE SCHOLAR SAID THAT HE
REMAINED ACTIVE AS HEAD OF THE CC'S ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT.
WHICH WAS CONCENTRATING ON THE STRATEGIC ECONOMIC ISSUES
AS DISTINCT FROM DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONAL ISSUES.
THE ACADEMIC REFERRED TO HIS EARLIER UNDERSTANDING THAT
THIS NEW DEPARTMENT WOULD SUPERSEDE THE OTHER CC ECONOMIC
DEPARTMENTS (RE: MOSCOW 5473) AS NO LONGER CURRENT.
WHILE THERE WOULD BE NO ACROSS-THE-BORD ABOLITION OF
THE OTHER ECONOMIC DEPARTMENTS OF THE CC AS HE REPORTED
IN MAY, SEVERAL OF THEM MAY BE FUSED. IN ANY EVENT,
THE ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT HEADED BY RYZHKOVD IS CLEARLY
IN CHARGE OF LONG-TERM STRATEGIC THINKING ON THE ECONOMY.

19. THE SCHOLAR HAD HEARD LAST MAY THAT A NEW STAFF WOULD
BE CREATED FOR THE DEFENSE COUNCIL - IT WOULD BE PART OF
AN NSC STAFF COMPOSED OF MILITARY OFFICERS IN MUFTI
AND CIVILIANS. THE IDEA WOULD BE TO GIVE ANDROPOV
A STRONGER STAFF. ON THIS TRIP THE ACADEMIC HAS HEARD
THAT THIS STAFF EXISTS BUT IS NOT PLAYING A MAJOR ROLE -
PERHAPS ANOTHER CASUALTY OF ANDROPOV'S ILLNESS. THE
SCHOLAR EXPECTS ITS ROLE TO INCREASE, HOWEVER.
IC. THE ACADEMIC'S INTERLOCUTORS HAVE INCLUDED POLITBURO
CANDIDATE MEMBER PONOMAREV, CC INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT
DEPUTY CHIEF ZAGLADIN, IMEMO DIRECTOR YAKOVLEV, IUSAC
DIRECTOR ARBATOV, IEWSS DIRECTOR BOKOMOLOV AND OTHER
OFFICIALS IN ECONOMIC ORGAN AND INSTITUTES.
HARTMAN
BT