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By KM NARA Date 1/21/77

POL CHICOM-USSR

F800 006-0942

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

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- ACTION: AmConsul HONG KONG
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STATE _____

LIMDIS

1. The possibility of a Soviet attempt to knock out Chinese nuclear and missile installations is receiving increasing attention here. The following are excerpts on this subject from the latest NIE on the USSR and China (11/13-69):

"...The Soviet leaders might feel that even a small number of Chinese missiles would alter the strategic situation, and that as the force grew, the Chinese would be under fewer inhibitions in using ground forces. The Soviets might hope to prevent this development by using their air superiority to knock out Chinese nuclear and missile installations, while blocking Chinese retaliatory attacks on the ground with their own theater forces. The optimum period for exercising this option is beginning to slip away... .

"A body of recent evidence concerning Soviet military activity suggests that Moscow may be preparing to take action against China in

(8)

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the near future... This military activity seems disproportionate to any visible Chinese offensive threat...

"As above noted, we do not look for a deliberate Chinese attack on the USSR. We also believe that Moscow will seek to avoid becoming engaged in a prolonged and full-scale war with China. But the Soviets have set in motion an extensive series of measures--military, political, diplomatic--to ready themselves for continuing or increasing levels of hostility. Their preparations have already reached a stage which would permit them a variety of military options. Of these, the Soviets might find the most attractive to be a conventional air strike designed to destroy China's missile and nuclear installations. The Soviets might calculate that they would accomplish this objective without getting involved in a prolonged and full-scale war. We cannot say that they are likely to reach this conclusion, but we believe there is at least some chance they would..."

2. On August 18, Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy Davydov asked a Department officer how the US would react if the Soviet Union

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attacked and destroyed China's nuclear installations. Davydov put forth the following justifications for such action:

a. In the not too distant future the Chinese nuclear capability will pose a threat to the Soviet Union, and this capability would be eliminated for decades.

b. Such a blow would so discredit and weaken the "Mao clique" that dissident senior officers and Party cadres could gain ascendancy in Peking. The Cultural Revolution showed the extent of internal dissension in China.

c. China would not likely launch a counterattack since it would fear a more massive Soviet blow in return; furthermore, Mao's weakened position would inhibit him from getting involved in a war with the Soviet Union.

d. This action would not affect the US and would, in fact redound to its benefit by eliminating what could also become a threat to the US.

e. There is a danger that in absence of such action China might resort to a more reasonable, peaceful front behind which they

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would quietly build up their nuclear strength without raising any alarm.

3. To our knowledge this is the first time any Soviet official has mentioned to a US official the possibility of taking out Chinese nuclear installations. Davydov has spent several years in the US, is an experienced watcher of the US scene and has cultivated a wide sphere of contacts in the Department and related agencies. In past conversations with Americans he has frequently advanced speculations and assumptions to test reactions. Although it hardly seems likely that in raising a matter of such moment as an attack on these Chinese installations he would be acting on his own, we cannot be certain that he was acting on instructions.

4. Davydov's effort to elicit US reaction in this matter could be the first in a series of probes. Addressee posts are requested to report any similar probes immediately. In view of sensitivity of subject matter and our inability to make any conclusive assessment of Davydov's remarks, posts should refrain from initiating any soundings on this subject.

End

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