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Background Information USSR

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OUTLINE OF US-SOVIET RELATIONS
SINCE THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

To judge from reports published in the Soviet press, the Kremlin is becoming increasingly disillusioned concerning its likelihood of making easy political headway in the face of President Kennedy's policies. Whether for calculated tactical reasons, or due to wishful thinking, or because of a genuine misunderstanding of the nature of the new administration, at first the Soviet press welcomed it in terms as warm as, if not warmer than, any used during the days of the "spirit of Camp David."

Pravda and Izvestia set the tone by publishing the full unexpurgated text of the President's inaugural address, accompanied by comment stressing that ordinary Americans were greatly hoping for a general improvement in US-Soviet relations, and for progress towards disarmament and peaceful coexistence in particular. At this stage Moscow Radio (January 20, 1961, in English to UK) spoke of the "lively sympathy" aroused by the President's address, and expressed hope for a return to the US-Soviet climate prevailing in the Franklin Roosevelt era.

Peking's attitude at the same time was conspicuously negative. It described the new cabinet as a "coalition of various US monopoly blocs" (Peking Radio, January 20th) and portrayed the individual members of it as tycoons, monopolists and capitalist magnates. Despite this truculence, Moscow maintained its original approach when reporting on the President's first news conference, which was said to be "calm and business-like" and "welcomed with satisfaction by many correspondents" (Moscow Radio Home Service, January 26th). Individual aspects of the new US policy which were praised included the decision to make thorough preparations before beginning the nuclear test ban talks and the technique of using "quiet diplomacy" to ease international tension.

On 29 January Pravda carried a selection of Tass messages from New York. They reported Mr. Rusk's statement that the President did not exclude the possibility of a summit meeting with Khrushchev, the order to restrain political speeches by US military leaders, and the satisfaction felt in the US at the release of the two RB-47 aircrew. The Soviet reader was given the impression that the first steps had been taken on the long road to an improvement in US-Soviet relations.

At the end of January Izvestia (30 January 1961) was still optimistic about the possibility of an agreement on the cessation of nuclear tests, pointing out that Edward Teller had not

been included in the US nuclear test study group, whereas Professor Hans Belt, of Cornell University, "who favors a ban," had been made a member. During this enthusiastic period, Mrs. Kennedy received favorable mention from Pravda as "the beautiful wife," a term with a much stronger impact in the Soviet than in the Western press because of its very rarity.

On 31 January Izvestia was still demonstrating an attitude of benevolent expectancy. The first steps taken by the President had "won the approbation of the world public," and his refusal to permit overflights was cited as evidence of the right trend. By this time there had been an almost total cessation of anti-American propaganda, which was carried so far that events in Laos, Congo and Cuba (the latter country having been noticeably deemphasized) were reported without mention of the US. For example the Santa Maria was reported to be "pursued in the Atlantic by a huge naval force" belonging to "the strongest allies of Portugal in NATO." Such evasive delicacy is a far cry from the anti-US diatribes in the 81-Party statement.

When the State of the Union message was published by Pravda and Izvestia (1 February), the papers carried a long but selectively censored text, without hostile comment. The President's assertion of US superiority in space technology was omitted, as were his proposals for boosting the US economy and his mention of the relentless Chinese pressures in Asia.

However mature consideration by the Presidium of the Kennedy proposals for strengthening US armed forces appears to have led to a marked change of attitude. On February 4th Izvestia and on February 5th Pravda spoke out, more in sorrow than in anger, against "words and notions from the old vocabulary," against the emphasis in the message on control over disarmament, and against the President's statement concerning the "aggressiveness" of the USSR and China.

The sensitivity of the USSR concerning Eastern Europe came to the fore in the magazine "Za Rubezhom" (Life Abroad) which

Even the stereotyped American capitalistic villains and army officers hung around with nuclear weapons who were the staple diet of Soviet cartoonists for so many years have been appearing less frequently in Krokodil, being replaced by West German militarists and Hammarskoeld, the "lackey of the colonialists."

March began badly with a Pravda attack on Mr. Adlai Stevenson, and criticism of "attempts by the Pentagon to step up the arms drive." Izvestia (March 9th) accused Stevenson of supporting the Eisenhower-Dulles doctrine of landing marines in "colonial" trouble spots, and of wanting to brandish a "big stick." By the middle of March it could be seen that the East European countries were carrying the main brunt of attacks on the Kennedy administration, with Moscow mildly using ridicule -- and Art Buchwald -- to poke fun at the Peace Corps project.

Perhaps one of the most sensitive points in Khrushchev's foreign policy armor is his commitment to advances in the Berlin problem. Consequently Moscow's Home Service has deplored the "absence of any constructive proposals" from statements made on it by Harriman, Rusk and White. Nevertheless Kennedy himself is presented in a positive light to Soviet audiences, as holding the view that agreements concerning Berlin made by the Eisenhower administration are no longer binding.

The Soviet reappraisal can therefore be seen to be concerned with those areas in which already it has begun to dawn on Khrushchev that he is unlikely to make real headway -- Berlin, Laos, the Congo, etc. It stops short of direct criticism of the President, and tries to give the impression that his subordinates are veering back to "the Dulles line." But in areas where Khrushchev is still hopeful for agreement, such as the nuclear test ban talks, disarmament and cultural exchanges, something of the early February spirit of optimism and expectancy still remains, even though it is now balanced by a more realistic appraisal of the difficulties as well as the opportunities presented by the new American policies. This more cautious approach is well demonstrated by the attitude of the Soviet delegate in Geneva, Mr. Tsarapkin, who began the negotiations by saying that although he was optimistic, success would depend on practical steps to be taken by the US (UPI, March 21st). It is normal negotiating technique to begin by creating the impression that all possible concessions have been made by the speaker's delegation, and that the onus for further progress rests on the other side. Similarly Soviet propaganda on disarmament (Pravda, March 13th) has sought to draw a picture of a USSR willing and ready to begin drafting a treaty on "complete and general disarmament," but hampered by a US which attempts to evade the issue. This Pravda article ended with a preview of Tsarapkin's statement by saying "it is high time to pass on from words to deeds." Fundamentally, in both the nuclear test and disarmament cases, the impression given by the Soviet press is that progress is still possible, provided that the US is willing to make further concessions. At the beginning of what

are likely to be difficult and protracted negotiations, this attitude is probably only to be expected. If it is more pragmatic than the unqualified optimism of January, it is still a marked improvement over the immobilisme demonstrated during the latter half of 1960.

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