

October 29, 1968

Telegram Number 5186/92, 'Chinese Foreign Policy'

Citation:

"Telegram Number 5186/92, 'Chinese Foreign Policy'", October 29, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France. Obtained by Enrico Fardella and translated by Garret Martin.

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Summary:

Relying on British assessments of the situation in China, the French Ambassador in London reports that Chinese foreign policy is the outcome of debates between anti-Soviets and anti-Americans within the CCP.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

London, 29 October 1968
Received..... at 20h35

Telegram number 5186/92

Communicated by the Department to Beijing 206/12 - Hong Kong 114/20 - Hanoi 190/96 - Moscow 1039/45 - Washington 3173/79 - Tokyo 30/36

Chinese Foreign Policy

The Bureau of Chinese Affairs in the Foreign Office notes that the Beijing government, despite the assets it holds, has not managed until now to rule out the perspective of a negotiated settlement of the Vietnamese conflict. If peace was achieved, not only would that strike a blow to the Maoist conception of revolutionary struggle, but this peace would also end the difficulties that are currently tearing apart America to China's great joy. Moreover, peace would benefit the Soviets who could trump their conciliatory actions.

But, we are told, the Chinese will be forced to adapt to this less than ideal situation: they would not dare act in a way that could push North Vietnam to the Soviet side, and thus be harshly judged by world opinion. China's press has given up on mentioning Vietnam and finds consolation in bringing up the revolutionary struggles that are taking place in certain Western countries, such as France. But, to compensate in a more concrete manner its eventual Vietnamese setback, it is not impossible, according to the British services, that Beijing might increase its aid to insurrection movements in other Asian countries, especially Thailand and Burma. Such a policy would not necessarily be incompatible, up to a certain point, with the normalization of Sino-Burmese relations that we are currently witnessing. That said, taking everything into account, it is not impossible that the Beijing government might deem that it would have more to gain by returning to the Bandung principles rather than a full support for subversion. From this angle, the Foreign Office is waiting for the trip that Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi are supposed to be taking in certain Asian countries, noticeably Pakistan and Cambodia. But, whatever path the Chinese take, our interlocutors believe it is unlikely that China will regain an undisputed influence with Hanoi, even in peacetime.

Chinese foreign policy, we are told, can be explained less by the enduring debate in Beijing that pits 'revolutionaries' against 'pragmatics', and more by the one between anti-Soviets and anti-Americans. The latter could accept an ideological truce with the USSR in order to have a freer hand to fight American influence in the world. But for Mao Zedong, whose point of view has now prevailed, the number one enemy is the USSR. All methods are acceptable to fight the latter. This explains the alternative use, or even simultaneous use, of a revolutionary tactic and a moderate tactic. The current ambiguity of China's policy is less visible at the strategic level - where undeniably anti-Soviet feelings are dominant - than in regard to tactics: on this level, the dispute between 'revolutionaries' and 'pragmatics' never ends. This analysis is substantiated, we are told, by the continuous deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations and the growing tension on the borders between both countries. According to British experts, this tension does not signal war in the short term, but it does reveal the immense reciprocated mistrust between the two communist giants.

Signed Geoffroy Chodron de Courcel