

April 23, 1965

Intelligence Note from Thomas L. Hughes to the Secretary, 'Will Communist China Assist Other Nations in Acquiring Nuclear Weapons?'

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Summary:

Only months after China's first nuclear test in October 1964, INR looked into whether Beijing would help other nations get the bomb.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH*Intelligence
Note*

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *TH*

APR 23 1965

Subject: Will Communist China Assist Other Nations in Acquiring Nuclear Weapons?

Press reports indicating that nuclear scientists from the United Arab Republic (UAR) will go to Communist China for "advanced training" have aroused speculation about Peiping's willingness to give substantial assistance to foreign nations in developing nuclear weapons. Indonesia and Pakistan also have been mentioned in this context. The Chinese Communists themselves have not yet indicated any such willingness, and there are a number of factors which make it unlikely that they will render substantial assistance to any country within the next two or three years. Despite these factors, however, there remain reasons for continued concern about Peiping's intentions.

Possible Forms of Assistance. Three types of assistance in the field of nuclear weapons need to be considered: the transfer of finished weapons, the supply of fissionable materials suitable for weapons programs, and the provision of training and information. Each of these might actually be given or might merely be threatened. In addition, the prospect of such assistance might be held out to a friendly country without any real intent to give it.

Probable Forms of Chinese Communist Assistance. Until Peiping builds up for itself at least a modest stockpile of nuclear weapons, we expect that the Communist Chinese will be unwilling to spare either fissionable materials or finished weapons for transfer to other nations. Such a stockpile probably will not be accumulated for at least several years and may take as long as a decade. Before it is established, Peiping's felt need for preserving secrecy about its

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weapons program probably will prevent Communist China from imparting substantial training or information in this field to any but its closest and most dependable allies. Even now, however, Communist China could hold out the prospect of eventual assistance either to win the friendship of a nation or to threaten an antagonistic neighbor of that nation. Moreover, Peiping could begin by providing only a low level of training and information, or assistance on basic nuclear physics and peaceful uses, and could perhaps draw out and gradually increase this assistance hoping that this would satisfy the recipient country without really contributing to a weapons program. The backwardness and limited potential of the likely recipients of Chinese Communist assistance would facilitate Peiping's administering aid in this restricted fashion.

Peiping's Intentions. The November 22, 1964 People's Daily editorial remains Peiping's most significant statement regarding nuclear arms control. Although the editorial criticized a wide range of suggested controls, it did not attack the Soviet Union's proposal of a ban against the dissemination of nuclear weapons. Also, in arguing against a complete test ban, the editorial stressed that such a ban would be ineffective unless accompanied by other measures, among which was a ban against the import and export of nuclear weapons. The editorial did not, however, repeat Peiping's own 1963 four-step control formula which had specifically called for a ban on the transfer of nuclear weapons. Thus, while it did not express opposition to a ban on dissemination, the editorial also did not show any active interest in such a measure.

Before the Chinese Communists exploded their nuclear device in October 1964, they had openly criticized the Soviet Union for failing to provide sufficient assistance to other "socialist countries" in the field of nuclear weapons. The

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Chinese Communists stressed the importance and value of there being a number of "socialist" national nuclear forces. Since exploding their own nuclear device, however, the Chinese Communist leaders are not known to have commented on the possibility of China's assisting in this way. However, in connection with the October explosion, Peiping did say that the more thoroughly the US nuclear monopoly is broken the greater will be the possibility of completely prohibiting and destroying nuclear weapons. While this was obviously done in the context of justifying Peiping's own nuclear program, it raises the possibility that Peiping might still see advantage in further proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially among "socialist" nations, in order to reduce the likelihood that any nation would risk their use. Peiping might conceivably feel that such a development would place additional restraints upon the United States in the use of nuclear weapons, thus enhancing China's comparative advantage in conventional forces. However, because of the limitations noted earlier and the problems discussed below it cannot be concluded that Peiping will really even welcome proliferation, much less actually contribute to it.

Peiping's Problems. Were the Chinese Communists to extend assistance in some form to one nation, they would undoubtedly inspire demands for similar assistance from many others. In this connection, Peiping would probably be aware of the problems in assisting a nation like the United Arab Republic, with which its relations are very tenuous, without first giving or being prepared to give like assistance to such allies as Albania, North Vietnam, or North Korea. Furthermore, Peiping might be very reluctant to help an immediate neighbor such as Pyongyang, no matter how friendly, to move toward a nuclear capability. Demands from Indonesia and other radical Afro-Asian nations would also have to be

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dealt with. Finally, Peiping's rendering of substantial assistance in the nuclear field to another nation, be it "socialist" or not, would obviously stimulate efforts of third countries like India and Japan to develop or acquire nuclear weapons of their own. In any case, it seems likely that an awareness of these problems plus the obvious limitations on what it can do account for the fact that Communist China thus far seems cautious, indecisive and uncertain about helping other nations acquire nuclear weapons.

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