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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : GER - Mr. Ausland
Mr. Cash
Mr. Hillenbrand ✓

FROM : GER - J. K. Holloway *JKH*

SUBJECT: Summary of Studies on Policy Implications of Ulbricht's Demise

This document consists of _____ pages.

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I have pulled together a consensus from the CIA, INR and NIE studies on East Germany and the Ulbricht successor problem. I have reached more negative conclusions on the possibility of Western policy exploitation of Ulbricht's demise than INR or CIA (I hasten to add that one has to infer CIA's belief that a policy exploitation will be possible).

Attachment:

U. S. Policy and the Disappearance of Ulbricht

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Authority NW 39712
By BKT/NC 30 April 2013

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U. S. POLICY AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ULRICH

SUMMARY

The problem of the Ulbricht successorship is of moment to the United States to the extent that either the fact or the mode of his passing will require or make desirable a change in U. S. policy toward the East German regime or toward the Federal Republic of Germany. The choice or emergence of a successor to Ulbricht, while undoubtedly of long range significance for the GDR, will be of interest at the time of changeover only as it has implications for U. S. policy.

1. Ulbricht's demise through death or removal would not be likely to pose a threat to GDR stability.

1-a. Assassination of Ulbricht would make for a tenser internal situation but not one which would be uncontrollable.

1-b. If Ulbricht were to be removed summarily as a result of a significant shift in Soviet policy (an unlikely contingency), the Soviets would have made prior preparations to ensure stability.

2. This demise will probably not mean any change at the time in GDR and/or Soviet policy toward the FRG, Berlin or the US.

3. The eventual internal change after Ulbricht is most likely to be in the direction of a less-Stalinist regime but not to the extent that GDR/Soviet control of the East German population will be significantly weakened or basic Soviet policy on the German problem changed.

Given the above, the opportunities for initiative toward exploitation of the change by the West, either in policy or propaganda, are limited except in the case of 1-b. In that case we will have received, through other channels, feelers or indicators of the change which the Soviets wish to convey by disgracing Ulbricht. It is that change, not the fact of Ulbricht's removal, to which we will have to address ourselves.

There is some danger that any initiative by the West would lead to a belief that the disappearance of Ulbricht has significance for us in our attitude toward the GDR. This would not be accurate and it would be unfortunate to allow such a view to develop.

The possibility is always present, however, that the FRG may feel forced to a policy change toward the GDR at the power transfer to which the U. S. might well find itself co-opted. Such a change might enhance Soviet proposals for German confederation.

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DISCUSSION

To manage their East German Satellite, the Soviets have for many years relied on the capabilities of Walter Ulbricht. The Soviets are aware that he is an object of revulsion to the German people, and as such is a political liability. Nevertheless, his skill in coping with factions and rivals in the Socialist Unity Party (SED), and his agility in adapting himself to the changing winds of policy and doctrine coming from Moscow have made him virtually indispensable as boss of the East German regime. No individual or group in the SED at present is capable of effectively opposing him, even if disposed to do so. His presence is of great importance to the stability of the regime. While the Soviets may at some point wish to replace him by a person less unattractive to Germans, both East and West, they are unlikely at this juncture to risk his removal.

The inherent weaknesses of the SED, and its heavy dependence upon the 68-year-old Ulbricht, will make the succession problem especially difficult in East Germany. His death or incapacitation would almost certainly bring into question, not only in the population but also within the party, the durability of the hard-line policies with which he is so thoroughly identified. The Soviets at this juncture would be greatly concerned to head off a crisis of authority. While they are in a strong position to do this, the loss of Ulbricht would face the Communist regime with a test, and it is possible that overt manifestations of unrest would occur.

Ulbricht's party apparatus is not an altogether reliable instrument, especially at the local level, where functionaries are occasionally loath to force the regime's disagreeable policies upon the people. On the whole, however, it is adequate, and there is no evidence at present of the kind of party disunity that existed in Poland and Hungary prior to the upheavals of 1956. The regime has felt better able to enforce discipline upon the populace since the closing of the Berlin sector border made large-scale emigration impossible. However, the closing of the border, by denying escape to the more disaffected and rebellious elements of the population, has also complicated the regime's control problems.

The East German security forces could suppress almost any disturbances short of a widespread popular uprising of major scale. Since the closing of the sector border the frontier and alert police have been augmented in strength, and efforts have been made to improve their reliability and effectiveness. In addition, the six well-equipped army divisions would be a factor in any serious internal crisis, but the regime would probably be reluctant to employ them against the population because of doubts as to their reliability. The Ministry of State Security, through its informer network, keeps a careful watch on all these forces, and could detect at an early stage any attempts to organize significant dissident action against the government. However, the regime's control of the country rests in the

last analysis almost entirely on the population's awareness of the presence of Soviet force.

Should Ulbricht be assassinated, there would be greater tensions surrounding the naming of a successor or successors. In such a tense situation, the probability of incidents is always heightened. However, here again, the regime disposes enough strength to control such outbursts.

There is always the possibility (although it seems remote at this time) that the Soviets will connive at Ulbricht's removal in disgrace as a prelude to a significant switch in the direction of their German policy.

It was remarked above that a German policy change by the Soviets seems unlikely. The Soviet commitment to the establishment of a second separate German state within the Communist bloc is heavy. The commitment to a policy of attempting to neutralize the Federal Republic and to induce it to cut its ties to the West is not as heavy, but it is nevertheless a main plank of Soviet foreign policy. The Soviet investment in these objectives in terms of prestige, security and economics is too great to permit withdrawal for any but the most over-riding of political or military factors. Such factors do not appear to be anywhere on the horizon at this time. Thus, we must expect Soviet policy toward the GDR and FRG to remain generally constant no matter who heads either government. It is true that the departure of Ulbricht might enable the Soviets to attempt to introduce more flexibility into their policies (the same would be true of the departure of Adenauer) but the basic themes would remain the same. Such flexibility might enable the Soviets to develop a more moderate GDR leadership better equipped to pursue conciliatory domestic policies and to make the regime a more acceptable partner for the confederation schemes which the USSR regularly urges upon the FRG. If the regime were made more acceptable, the FRG might be inclined to change some of its policies toward the GDR. These would be marginal in that it could not be expected that the FRG would renounce either its claim as the only German successor state or its aim of reunification under the hegemony of Bonn. However, these marginal changes (in trade, travel policy, consular relations, international organizations, etc.) might have fairly broad practical applications. In the framework of its present relationship to the FRG, the US might find itself co-opted to many of these applications in a way which could require changes in some specific US policies toward the GDR.

The odiousness of Ulbricht has led the West to concentrate a propaganda campaign against him. In official conversations on Berlin we have reminded the Soviets indirectly that Ulbricht is reprehensible to us. These facts might lead the Soviets to expect that the US or the FRG would be prepared to pay some political or propaganda price for the removal of Ulbricht. The Soviets might expect at a minimum that the West would agree to more flexibility in its policies toward a GDR not headed by Ulbricht. There is some possibility that Western opinion or neutral nations might also expect

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the West to be less firm in its dealings with a more presentable GDR.

CONCLUSION

Soviet control of the GDR will remain almost complete despite any factors attendant upon Ulbricht's departure. US policy must therefore continue to take primary account of Soviet policy toward Germany, thus diminishing the possibility of any policy initiative by us toward the GDR even at the seemingly vulnerable moment of power transfer.

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