Telegram from the British Embassy in Chungking to the Foreign Office, 25 March 1946

SECRET

No. 456

25th March, 1946

FROM CHUNGKING TO FOREIGN OFFICE[[1]](#footnote-1)

Your telegrams Nos. 495, 494, and 495.

[1.] The general terms of J.I.C report summarised in your telegram No.495 are not inconsistent with present Russian activities in the Far East.

 2. Soviet interest in Japan may however be more pressing than theoretically a waiting game would imply. Such evidence as is available indicates that Russia is interested in encouraging growth of a Japanese Communist party. Chinese reports which I cannot at present verify but which seem inherently probable, state that a number of Japanese prisoners of war are undergoing intensive political training before being shipped back to Japan. Russian aim in Japan may therefore be to prepare now the foundations of a Japanese organisation capable of taking over the administration immediately or very soon after American withdrawal. As Japanese Communist party is officially recognised this can be attempted without overt conflict with American interest. Should it be successful Japan would then be available either as a bane for extension of Russian influence, or as a defensive screen.

 3. As regards China the attitude of Russian representatives here leads me to conclude that reactions of National Government are to them a secondary consideration. Their main interest lies in guiding the activities of Chinese Communist Party, of which they appear to be making use.

 a. Militarily, to delay extension of Government influence into North China, Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria until a solid Communist foundation can be laid in these areas.

 b. Politically, to obtain Communist representation in Central Government (which is also in accordance with the United States policy) and possibly complete communist administrations (under nominal Central Government control which could not be other than loose and ineffective) in north and north-east.

I may add that present situation both political and military is such that Chinese Communists seem certain of attaining a part of these objectives whether there is a civil war or not. The possibility of civil war cannot be ruled out.

 4. Sin Kiang is already for all practical purposes an autonomous state but its inhabitants might not necessarily welcome too close an association with Russia. I consider Russian aims in this area would be adequately served by allowing the present confused conditions to continue. The Chinese Government show no signs of stability to produce any other result and I therefore think that Sin Kiang comes fairly low in Russian priorities for active penetration[[2]](#footnote-2).

 5. In the light of the above general remarks my answers to direct questions in your telegram No.494 follow:

 a. All available evidence points to a Russian desire to create a belt of satellite states. As Outer Mongolia is apparently virtually Russian territory a defensive zone south of it is required and it is therefore probable that Inner Mongolia is included in Russian “belt” which would the run from Sin Kiang (subject to what I have said in paragraph 4 above) via Inner Mongolia to Korea. The eventual shape of pre-Russian Administration in Manchurian section of “belt” depends on form of event, open civil war between Chinese Government and Communists. If there is civil war Communists with Russian backing are probably strong enough to hold the greater part of Manchuria unless the National Government receives much more active support from the Americans than the latter appear likely in those circumstances to provide. If there is no civil war Russian interest in Manchuria would be adequately safeguarded by their treaty rights over main railways and Port of Dairen plus the existence throughout the country of a strong communist influence; there may even be actual Communist administration this may be sop to National Government. In regard to “belt” in general I think it would be a mistake to regard it solely as a defensive zone. This would depend on Soviet policy at the time, but while no doubt security would be first and main objective such a belt would be equally suitable as a base for a political and (in the case of Japan) commercial offensive against politically unstable countries of Far East.

 b. See my remarks in paragraph 2 about Japan. The full development of Russian intentions may only appear after Allied withdrawal from the neighbourhood, but it is most probable that active preparations are now in hand for formation of a hard Chinese Russian block in the country.

 c. If I am correct in my assessment of Russian opinion of Chinese Government they are led more especially with pursuing their own aims in China and with aiding Chinese Communists than with any other counter measures which His Majesty’s Government or United States Government might be able to take. Also I anticipate they would regard His Majesty’s Government as being quite incapable at present of exerting any great influence (beyond general support of United States policy) either towards building up China, or on the course of events in Japan.

[TNA, FO 371/56831]

Keywords: post-war Asia, China

1. At the Cabinet meeting that took place on the very same day, 25 March, some reassuring signs – from the British perspective – were emphasized in regard to Soviet policy in Iran and Manchuria. The official news of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran was reinforced by information reaching London of analogous Soviet moves in Manchuria. See: C.M. (46) 27th Conclusions, 25/03/1946 // TNA, CAB 128/5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the conflict between the population of Xinjiang (back in November 1944 the East-Turkestan Republic had been proclaimed on part of that territory) and the central government of China, the USSR occupied a mediating position, gambling on being able to strengthen its influence in Xinjiang while still preserving it in China proper. In June 1946, the US Ambassador to the USSR W. Bedell Smith gave an assessment of Soviet policy in Xinjiang that differed from the British. He noted that the essential difference between events in Azerbaijan and Xinjiang consisted in the opportune use of the tipping point of events … Soviet actions in Xinjiang were extremely cunning and cautious. There the USSR positioned itself on the side which brought it advantage, or simply observed as local forces brought about events advantageous to them. (Bedell Smith to Byrnes, 06/06/1945 // NARA, RG 58, Box 4013, cited in: Gasanli Dzh. Sinꞌtszian v orbite sovetskoi politiki. S. 247). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)