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POSSIBILITY OF DIRECT SOVIET  
MILITARY ACTION DURING 1948

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POSSIBILITY OF DIRECT SOVIET MILITARY ACTION DURING 1948

Report by a Joint Ad Hoc Committee \*

THE PROBLEM

1. We have been directed to estimate the likelihood of a Soviet resort to direct military action during 1948.

DISCUSSION

2. Our conclusions are based on considerations discussed in the Enclosure.

CONCLUSIONS

3. The preponderance of available evidence and of considerations derived from the "logic of the situation" supports the conclusion that the USSR will not resort to direct military action during 1948.

4. However, in view of the combat readiness and disposition of the Soviet armed forces and the strategic advantage which the USSR might impute to the occupation of Western Europe and the Near East, the possibility must be recognized that the USSR might resort to direct military action in 1948, particularly if the Kremlin should interpret some US move, or series of moves, as indicating an intention to attack the USSR or its satellites.

\* This estimate was prepared by a joint ad hoc committee representing CIA and the intelligence agencies of the Department of State, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. The date of the estimate is 30 March 1948.

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ENCLOSURE

DISCUSSION

1. The Soviet military forces are estimated to have the current capability of overrunning all of Western Europe and the Near East to Cairo within a short period of time.
2. Soviet military forces along the frontiers of Western Europe and the Near East are estimated to be combat ready and generally so disposed that they could launch an immediate offensive.
3. Since the end of the war Soviet Ground Forces have been reorganized to provide a substantial increase in mobility, more effective firepower, and improved leadership on all levels. The mobilization system permits tripling of strength within 30 days. The air forces have been provided with a substantial number of jet aircraft and several regiments of long-range bombers and are now organized into fifteen air armies, as compared with seventeen at the end of the war. An extensive air defense system has been developed along the Eastern and Western frontiers, employing an increasing number of jet interceptors and an effective radar system deployed in depth. There is evidence of increased emphasis on the development and production of long-range high-speed submarines. Soviet industrial production has continued to emphasize military rather than civilian requirements.
4. By exploiting the postwar political and economic instability in Europe and the rest of the world along traditional Marxist lines, Soviet leaders have already obtained very substantial results. The exploitation of such unstable conditions is the cheapest and safest method by which Soviet leaders can obtain their objectives.
5. Certain basic factual data can be produced to help determine whether or not Soviet leaders would stand to gain or lose by exercising their current military capability of overrunning Western Europe and part of the Near East. Many factors bearing upon this problem, however, would still have to be determined on the basis of estimate and logic rather than upon factual evidence. (This problem is under detailed study.)
6. The determination at this time of whether or not Soviet leaders intend to employ their military capability rests, in the last analysis, essentially upon logic rather than upon evidence. We have no access to the thinking or decisions of the Kremlin and little contact with lower echelons of Soviet officialdom. Such evidence as is currently coming to hand, however, suggests that Soviet leaders do not presently intend to exercise their military capability of overrunning Western Europe and part of the Near East. Since the Czechoslovakian coup there have been some reports suggesting that Soviet leaders may intend shortly to resort to military action but these have been from unevaluated sources and can logically be interpreted as attempts by Soviet or anti-Soviet elements to exploit for their own purposes the fear psychosis prevalent throughout Europe as a result of the timing and rapidity of the Czech coup.
7. The intelligence agencies have generally taken the position that the USSR, in spite of its current military capabilities, would not commit itself to a course of action

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leading to war until, in the opinion of Soviet leaders, its economic potential had become adequate for a global war and until it possessed a reasonable stock of atomic bombs. It has also been assumed in some quarters that if, prior to the realization of the above objectives, the USSR were faced with impending stability in Europe, it would temporarily abandon its expansionist policy, consolidate its gains, and await the opportunity to promote and exploit new conditions of instability as they might develop in the future.

8. The positions taken in 7 above require a careful reappraisal, particularly in the light of recent US policy statements and other measures against Communist expansion.

CONSIDERATIONS WHICH MIGHT INDUCE THE SOVIET LEADERS TO RESORT TO MILITARY ACTION, IN THE ORDER OF THEIR IMPORTANCE:

9. Soviet leaders may become convinced that the US actually has intentions of military aggression within the near future. In view of the well known suspicions inherent in the minds of Soviet leaders, and the isolation of most of these leaders from the west, it is possible that the Politburo might come to this conclusion.

10. Even if Soviet leaders did not expect imminent US aggression, they might estimate that an ultimate military clash with the US was inevitable and that, in view of current Soviet capabilities for overrunning Western Europe and the Near East, it would be to the USSR's advantage to strike at these areas in 1948. Soviet leaders may estimate that their military superiority relative to the Western Powers is now at its maximum. The USSR is faced with the prospect of (1) US rearmament and presumably the rearmament by the US of the Western European Powers now joined in a military alliance and (2) increasing US production of atomic bombs and longer range aircraft which will increase US capabilities for covering strategic Soviet targets.

11. Soviet leaders might estimate that if they overran Europe and part of the Near East they would vastly improve their military security and might obtain either a military stalemate or a negotiated peace based on the following considerations:

a. That Soviet acquisition of Western Europe and the Near East might make it too difficult, or at least too costly, for the US to attempt an invasion of these areas by ground forces. The situation would differ greatly from that obtaining in World Wars I and II. In those wars the US had beachheads on the continent or in England and the Soviet Union was an ally or a neutral in the rear of Germany. In this case the US would be faced with the manpower and space of most of the Eurasian land mass.

b. That domination of the channel coast would enable them to neutralize the UK.

c. That under these circumstances:

(1) the US public might not support the continuation of the war even if the military so desired, and

(2) the US in any event would be restricted to an air war and naval blockade, which, although capable of inflicting substantial damage on the Soviet and European economies, would not be able to dislodge the USSR from its newly won position.

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d. That the denial to the Western Powers of Near Eastern oil would seriously impair their war potential.

12. The Soviet leaders might believe that, in spite of the currently impoverished condition of Western European economy and the vast difficulties inherent in the organization, control, and assimilation of this area, the quickest and easiest way to remedy the economic deficiencies of the USSR would be to seize the industrial capacity, the technical skills, and the scientific resources of Western Europe.

13. Soviet leaders might estimate that the European recovery program will succeed in stabilizing Europe for a protracted period and thereby deny them the possibility of gaining control of Western Europe through revolutionary and subversive methods.

CONSIDERATIONS WHICH MIGHT RESTRAIN SOVIET LEADERS FROM  
RESORTING TO DIRECT MILITARY ACTION DURING 1948, IN THE  
ORDER OF THEIR IMPORTANCE:

14. The ultimate effectiveness of the European recovery program in stabilizing the economic situation in Western Europe is still far from assured, particularly in the light of Communist capabilities for disruption in Italy and France. The opportunities for further Soviet gains through the exploitation of economic, political, and social instability, while recently diminished, are by no means exhausted.

15. Soviet leaders have been in the past habitually cautious and deliberate, and, consequently, might be reluctant voluntarily to incur the risks inherent in a major war.

16. The occupation of Europe and the Near East would impose serious problems on Soviet leaders and expose them to grave risks.

a. The maintenance of military and police forces adequate to protect the defensive position gained by the occupation of most of Western Europe and the Near East would place a serious strain on both the economic resources and manpower reserve of the Soviet Union. Assuming that war with the US continues following the conquest of Western Europe and the Near East, the hostile populations of these areas and the satellites would form an enormous subversive element that would become particularly dangerous with the approach of US forces.

b. In addition to the problem of physical security, the control and assimilation of the economies of Western Europe and the exploitation of the resources of the Near East would impose a tremendous strain upon Soviet administrative organs and personnel resources, even with the help of well organized local Communist parties in some areas.

c. Soviet personnel would be exposed to the standard of living and political ideas of Western Europe. Following World War II, the Soviet leaders have had a serious problem of reindoctrinating not only the returned soldiers but the entire Soviet population. The exigencies of war, entirely apart from the possibility of any alien contamination, appear to undermine Soviet ideology and discipline.

17. The basic economic deficiencies of the USSR in terms of requirements for global war against the US:

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a. The USSR suffered enormous physical damage in World War II and has probably not regained production levels of 1940 in all basic industries.

b. Capacity is inadequate in a number of vital fields, including transportation, communications, and in the production of steel, oil, and machine tools.

c. In order to exploit the European economic potential, the USSR would have to supply raw materials and food to an already impoverished European continent cut off from the resources of the Western Hemisphere and other parts of the world outside the Soviet Union and her sphere of influence.

18. Soviet leaders may anticipate that, in spite of the European recovery program, the Marxist prediction that the capitalist world will collapse of its own accord will be fulfilled, following the economic dislocation of World War II.

19. The US has a growing stock of atomic bombs, Soviet leaders may not regard this weapon as a decisive factor, and may have considerable confidence in the USSR's defensive capabilities against atomic attack; they probably recognize, however, that atomic warfare can inflict vast destruction and loss of life on the USSR.

20. The Soviet population is definitely war-weary and has long been promised an improvement in its standard of living. While the Russians traditionally unite to repel foreign invaders, Soviet leaders might question whether, under present circumstances, they could risk the possibility of a protracted global war.

21. The politicians in the Politburo have always been suspicious of the military. War would again bring the military to the fore and might constitute a real or imagined threat to the Party leaders.

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