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9 July 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR**SUBJECT: Recent Evidence on BISON Production**

1. We have reviewed the recent evidence relating to aircraft production at Plant No. 23, Moscow/Fill, as it may affect the judgment reached in SNIE 11-7-58 (Strength and Composition of the Soviet Long Range Bomber Force, 5 June 1958), that production of the present version of the BISON has virtually stopped. During the past six months we estimate that up to seven or eight BISONs have been produced as follows: January, 2; February, 1; March, 0; April, 0; May, 2; June, 2 (possibly 3). The estimates for May and June represent maximums which may be revised downward upon receipt of additional information. The BISONs produced in May and June probably represent completion of two fuselages seen on the field in February plus some additional production.

2. There was good evidence in January and February to indicate that the effort at the final assembly area had been reduced to

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one shift; some recent information suggests that a partial second shift is now employed. Even so, the average production rate of approximately one BISON per month over the last five months is somewhat lower than would be expected with a one-shift operation at the plant.

3. Although the production estimated for May and June could be interpreted as pointing to a resumption of full scale BISON production, strong evidence that production is in fact phasing out has been provided by observations of the factory on 14 and 21 June. On both occasions, the hangar doors at Plant No. 23 were open, revealing that the final assembly positions were empty, a situation which had not been noted before. Our production analysts believe that this evidence reflects either the termination of BISON production or the last stages of the phasing out process, during which production gaps of the sort noted in March and April may occur. In the latter event, a few more BISONs might be turned out before production stopped completely.

4. In SNIE 11-7-58, we estimated total cumulative BISON production to be about 85 aircraft as of 1 April 1958. Completion

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of as many as four (possibly five) BISONs during May and June would raise this total to 89 or 90. In our opinion, this would not affect the total of 100-125 BISONs and BEARs estimated in operational units as of mid-1958.

5. When SNIE 11-7-58 was published, there was evidence that aircraft design work and/or retooling had been instituted at Moscow/Fili in the fall of 1957. On 31 May, the US air attache observed five trucks departing from the plant, carrying large aircraft parts. This sighting suggests that parts of a new aircraft or a modified BISON had been produced at Moscow/Fili and trucked away for assembly elsewhere. This procedure was followed in the first BISON production. The completed BISONs seen at the field in the last two months have had no major external modifications.

6. We continue to believe that BISON performance characteristics are unsatisfactory to Soviet planners. In view of the downward trend in production beginning in the fall of 1957, we interpret the evidence to date as indicating a phase out of BISON production at Moscow/Fili and possibly preparations for production of a new

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aircraft. However, as noted in SNIE 11-7-58, if the cut-back in production merely marked the modification or redesign of the BISON, production of an improved model could begin at any time. The range of 100-200 heavy bombers in operational units in mid-1960, projected in SNIE 11-7-58, takes into account the Soviet option to re-institute moderate production of known heavy bomber types, and to introduce a new type before mid-1960.

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