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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

28 October 1957

MEMORANDUM\*

SUBJECT: Comments on Various Military Factors Affecting Soviet Capabilities and Intentions over the next Five Years

1. Significance of the Soviet Satellite Launching. While the present earth satellite is not itself a military weapon of significance, the successful Soviet launching and orbiting of a satellite of this size, taken together with two probable tests of an ICBM flight vehicle, has considerable military significance. It shows a high order of Soviet technical capability, especially in propulsion. These events do not, in our view, indicate a greatly increased Soviet military capability in the immediate future. They have, however, resulted in an immediate increase in Soviet scientific and military prestige in the eyes of many peoples and a number of governments.

2. Estimated Availability of the First Operational Soviet ICBM. The intelligence community has not yet firmed up a revised estimate in the light of the above developments,

\* The findings of this paper do not necessarily reflect the agreed view of the Intelligence Advisory Committee.



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but our tentative conclusion is that the USSR could have a few prototype ICBMs of 5500 n.m. range operational in 1959. It is possible that, if the Soviets decided this was desirable, a shorter range version of the ICBM (say, 3600 n.m.) could be available earlier. For either version improvements in reliability and accuracy, as well as quantity production, would take a further period, but in any case we estimate that the USSR is capable of having considerable numbers of operationally deployed ICBMs during the next three to five years.

3. Heavy Bomber Production. Our current estimates indicate that Soviet heavy bomber strength in units as of 1 July 1957 was at least 90 BISONs and BEARs. Moreover, the rate of production is gradually rising and we estimate that the Soviets will have a total of at least 400-600 tankers and heavy bombers in units by mid-1960.

4. This estimate represents a rate of heavy bomber production lower than we had earlier estimated and well below maximum Soviet production capabilities. We believe it likely that the USSR is carrying out a relatively modest or stretched-out heavy bomber program, in part because of the likelihood that other delivery systems will be available in a few years. However, we do not believe that the USSR will risk foregoing a substantial medium and heavy bomber force until it has acquired a substantial nuclear delivery capability with more

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advanced systems. We base this judgment on the substantial heavy bomber delivery capability indicated by even the figures given above, the USSR's already extensive jet medium bomber capabilities (850 in units by mid-1957), which are also increasing, Soviet development of in-flight refueling, and progress in air-to-surface missiles as well as in other fields.

5. Soviet Position over the Next Five Years. In our opinion the Soviet leaders almost certainly still regard the US as having superior nuclear capabilities and have concluded that at present the USSR, even if it launched a surprise attack, would receive unacceptable damage in a nuclear exchange with the US. We believe that notwithstanding probable further improvements in Soviet nuclear and delivery capabilities, the USSR almost certainly will within the next five years not be confident that it can attack the US without receiving unacceptable damage in return. Under these circumstances we believe that the USSR is not likely itself to initiate general war or undertake courses of action gravely risking general war during the next five years. If the Soviet ICBM progresses very well for them, they might be less inhibited during the latter half of this period.

6. But we also believe that the Soviet leaders are probably confident that their own growing nuclear capabilities, added to their already great conventional strength, have

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reached the point where the US and its allies will also be deterred, except under extreme provocation, from initiating general war, or from reacting militarily in any local situation in a manner which would gravely risk broadening such a conflict into general war. In sum, we consider that, although the USSR probably still considers itself in a somewhat weaker nuclear position than the US, it probably regards itself as progressively achieving greater freedom of maneuver without gravely risking general war.

7. Moreover, in the light of the continued increase in Soviet capabilities, particularly in nuclear weapons, missiles, and long range bombers, we believe that even if the Soviet leaders feel that their present nuclear capabilities are inferior to those of the US, they expect this inferiority to become progressively less significant during the next five years.

8. Impact of the above considerations on Soviet Courses of Action in the Middle East. We do not see how the USSR could regard its recent ICBM vehicle tests and satellite launching as altering its present military capabilities vis-a-vis the US. We continue to believe that the USSR will seek to avoid grave risks of general war arising from its own actions.

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9. On the other hand, the USSR may believe that the psychological impact of its recent successes in rocketry, against the background of the growth in its over-all nuclear capabilities, has reinforced the inhibitions on Western military action or counteraction in the Middle East. Under these circumstances the USSR might estimate that it could go to considerable lengths in reacting militarily to Western or Western-inspired actions without incurring grave risks of general war. Thus the possibilities of miscalculation must be taken into account. On balance, however, despite the Soviet warnings we continue to regard major Soviet military counteraction to Turkish intervention in Syria, for example, as unlikely. For elaboration of this view reference is made to the paper entitled "Probable Soviet Action in Various Contingencies Affecting Syria". (SNIE 11-11-57 previously distributed.)