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~~SECRET ONE~~

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

LIKELIHOOD OF THE DELIBERATE INITIATION  
OF FULL-SCALE WAR BY THE USSR AGAINST  
THE US AND ITS WESTERN ALLIES PRIOR TO  
THE END OF 1952



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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE IN FULL

NIE 48

Published 8 January 1952

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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# NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

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Date 6/24/53

HRP 93-3

The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff participated with the Central Intelligence Agency in the preparation of this estimate. All members of the Intelligence Advisory Committee concurred in this estimate on 7 January 1952.

# LIKELIHOOD OF THE DELIBERATE INITIATION OF FULL-SCALE WAR BY THE USSR AGAINST THE US AND ITS WESTERN ALLIES PRIOR TO THE END OF 1952

## THE PROBLEM

To estimate whether the USSR is likely *deliberately to initiate* general war, i.e., full-scale war against the US and its Western allies, prior to the end of 1952.

## CONCLUSION

On balance we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin will *deliberately initiate* general war during 1952. We believe that the Kremlin prefers to pursue its objectives through methods short of deliberate resort to war with the US and its allies, and moreover, probably estimates that possibilities for progress through such methods will continue to exist through 1952. We believe that in these circumstances the Kremlin is likely to be deterred from a deliberate resort to war with the US and its allies in 1952, by the certainty of extensive destruction in the

USSR as well as by the risk that the Soviet system might be destroyed.

We recognize, however, the continuing grave danger of a general war in 1952 resulting from a Kremlin action or series of actions not intended to have that result, or even from actions which, in the Kremlin's view, entailed that risk, but not the certainty thereof. We recognize also the danger that general war might arise from Soviet-initiated hostilities which the Kremlin intended to limit to a particular area.

## DISCUSSION

### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### Soviet Objectives

1. The principal immediate Soviet objectives evidently are:

- a. To divide the West;
- b. To consolidate and extend Soviet power and influence wherever possible. (During the period under consideration Asia appears to offer the best opportunities.);
- c. To prevent Western, West German, and Japanese rearmament;

d. To prevent implementation of the US overseas-bases policy.

2. We believe the USSR, in pursuit of its objectives, will during the period of this estimate:

- a. Seek to maintain an advanced state of war-readiness and offset any increase in the capabilities of the US and its allies;
- b. Seek to prevent the development of any threat to the vital interests of the USSR or to Soviet control of the Satellites;

c. Seek to expand the territorial limits of the Soviet orbit;

d. Seek to undermine and secure control of governments not yet under Soviet domination;

e. Seek to force countries of the free world to adopt a policy of neutrality in the East-West struggle and to deny their resources, including strategic sites, to the US and its allies.

### The Place of War in Soviet Strategy

3. The basic strategy under which the Kremlin appears to have acted in the past employs the following concepts:

a. The preservation of the established communist state, the USSR, is essential to provide a secure base and strong support for revolution in other states. In turn, revolution in other countries is necessary for the preservation and completion of the revolution in the USSR.

b. No permanent accommodation is possible between this State and the capitalist world. The doctrine of the impossibility of peaceful co-existence between communism and capitalism and the inevitability of ultimate frightful collision before one side or the other prevails remains valid.

c. Capitalism, in that it is subject to irreconcilable contradictions, bears within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Depressions, class conflict, economic rivalry, colonial awakening, etc., will weaken the capitalist world and create revolutionary situations. The USSR must provoke and exploit such situations through political warfare\* and, if appropriate, through the use of Soviet military force.

d. A grave danger exists and always will exist that the capitalist world, alarmed by the rising revolutionary tide, will unite to attack and destroy the USSR.

\* Political warfare as here used includes all manner of political and economic pressure, diplomatic action in the UN and elsewhere, propaganda and front activities, Communist Party and Communist-controlled trade union activities, support of all kinds of revolutionary movements, and psychological warfare.

e. The USSR must seek to avoid the final world struggle until capitalist power has been sufficiently undermined, but must be ready at all times to assume the offensive if the situation should warrant it.

f. Recent Soviet pronouncements suggest that the Soviet rulers believe that the struggle between capitalism and Communism has reached an advanced stage in which the world is divided into two camps, and that the Western camp is now seeking not only to prevent the spread of the revolution, but also to destroy the Soviet-dominated camp.

4. It would be unsafe to take these Soviet concepts as an infallible guide to Soviet courses of action in the future. The USSR is a totalitarian state and experience suggests that totalitarian states are subject to internal pressures and compulsions which may result, without warning, in the use of foreign war as an instrument of national policy. However, Soviet use of war for this purpose can probably be better controlled than has been the case with respect to other totalitarian states in modern history. Therefore, Soviet courses of action can never be predicted with confidence. In particular the possibility of deliberate initiation of general war cannot be excluded at any time merely because such initiation would contradict past Soviet political strategy. Further, the possibility of deliberate initiation of general war cannot be excluded even if, judged from the outside, it seemed certain that the interests of the USSR would be better served by other courses of action.

5. While Soviet theory and practice offer no sure guide as to when and under what circumstances the USSR would deliberately resort to war against the US and its allies, they leave no doubt that the USSR is the implacable enemy of the non-Communist world. While in Soviet theory and practice war is an acceptable, and on occasion necessary, instrument for attaining Communist objectives, the Kremlin presumably prefers if possible to attain its objectives by courses of action short of resort to general war. However, Soviet theory and practice suggest that it would probably resort to armed attack at any time when:

a. Conditions are such that the USSR regarded the situation as highly favorable, or

b. No other method appeared available to counter what the Kremlin considered a threat to the preservation of the USSR.

#### FACTORS WHICH MIGHT DETER THE KREMLIN FROM DELIBERATELY INITIATING WAR AGAINST THE US AND ITS ALLIES IN 1952

##### Risks Involved and Uncertainty of Outcome

6. The Kremlin probably estimates that in the initial phase of a general war begun in 1952 Soviet and Soviet-controlled forces could seize and hold extensive and important areas of Europe and Asia and thereby enhance the USSR's power position. It might also estimate that it could, at the very outset, deliver an atomic attack on the continental US of sufficient strength to reduce materially the US capability for countering Soviet operations. However, the Kremlin would probably not expect a Soviet atomic attack on the continental US to eliminate the threat of atomic counter-attack and prevent the mobilization of the US industrial and military potential.

7. It is impossible to estimate the Kremlin's conclusion with regard to the relative effectiveness of Soviet and US atomic warfare capabilities or with regard to the relative importance of atomic and conventional weapons in determining the issue of a war. The Kremlin would undoubtedly expect the West to react to Soviet initiation of a general war by launching an immediate atomic attack on the Soviet orbit, with consequent widespread destruction. We believe, however, that the Kremlin probably estimates that the USSR could survive this attack and maintain sufficient relative strength to carry on the war.

8. The Kremlin might believe that after the USSR had extended the areas under its control and survived the initial allied retaliation, it could fortify its newly-won positions and mobilize its newly-acquired resources. It might calculate that the economic and other losses suffered from continuing US attacks would be offset by the industrial and manpower resources it had acquired in Europe and Asia. While the Kremlin would doubt-

less anticipate difficulties in establishing and maintaining firm control over the defeated populations and would also anticipate internal difficulties, its whole concept of state power suggests that it would expect to cope successfully with these problems.

9. In these circumstances the Kremlin might estimate that the resulting Soviet power position would deter the West from attempting to recover the areas overrun by the USSR. Furthermore, the Kremlin might believe that the loss of European and Asiatic resources, including manpower, might make it impossible for the US to carry the war through to a successful conclusion. The Kremlin would undoubtedly expect the US government to be extremely tenacious and resourceful in its attempt to prosecute the war, even if denied support from Europe and Asia and subjected to increasing domestic pressure for peace. However, it might estimate that as the war dragged on opposition in the US to the war might rise to the point where the people would refuse to make the sacrifices necessary for the continuance of the conflict and thereby oblige the government to accept a compromise settlement.

10. On the other hand, the Kremlin would have to recognize that, despite initial Soviet successes, at least a substantial portion of the power potential of the US would remain, and probably would in time be mobilized and brought to bear in a continuation of the struggle. In these circumstances the Kremlin would expect to be faced with operations of such magnitude as, at the least, to make the war long and costly to the USSR. The Kremlin would have to consider, in this event, whether or not it could survive the political, economic, psychological and military strains of a prolonged war of attrition.\*

\* The Director of Naval Intelligence would add at this point the following paragraph:

"In weighing this question, the Kremlin would have to recognize the grave danger that in a prolonged war of attrition the USSR would be subjected to persistent and growing air attacks, including atomic attacks, possibly resulting in serious economic breakdowns and the disruption of Soviet administrative and police machinery. With regard to newly-overrun areas the Kremlin would have to

(Footnote continued at bottom of next page)

11. In view of the foregoing, it cannot be assumed that the Kremlin would necessarily expect to suffer defeat in a war with the US initiated in 1952. Nevertheless, the Kremlin would probably estimate that such a war would be a hazardous gamble on its part, involving at a minimum the certainty of widespread destruction in the USSR and at the same time carrying with it the risk that the Soviet system itself would be destroyed. This uncertainty would probably make the Kremlin reluctant deliberately to initiate a general war in 1952.

### Prospects For Achieving Soviet Aims By Methods Short of Deliberate Initiation of General War

12. The Kremlin probably estimates that opportunities will continue to exist, at least during the period of this estimate, for furthering both its immediate and long-run objectives by methods short of the deliberate initiation of full-scale war against the US and its allies.

13. Communist doctrine stresses the strategic importance of the so-called "colonial areas," especially in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, which are regarded as having a vital bearing on the world power balance. Bringing these areas under Soviet control, or at least denying their assets to the West, is regarded as one of the most important steps in preparing for the final phase of the world struggle. At present the Kremlin probably sees in the instability of these areas favorable opportunities for early Communist gains.

14. Although probably recognizing that it has little chance in 1952 of making territorial gains in Europe without deliberate resort to general war, the Kremlin probably believes

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weigh the logistical and security problems of maintaining, across broad expanses of conquered territory, adequate support and control of extended Soviet forces; the danger of the ideological contamination of Soviet occupation forces; the possibility of widespread guerrilla resistance, probably supported and directed by the Allies; and, perhaps most important, the possibility that Allied bridgeheads on the Continent might be held throughout the initial phase of the war, and might in time be built up sufficiently to permit a major counter-offensive."

that current and future economic difficulties, particularly in the UK and France, and divergent interests and attitudes among the Western Powers may prevent the establishment of a position of strength in the West. Furthermore these difficulties may make Western Europe increasingly susceptible to various possible Soviet maneuvers, such as the "peace" campaign, the relaxation of tensions, trade overtures, exploitation of the fear of war, and intimidation by the display of military force, and may make possible the growth of the Communist movement in the West.

### FACTORS WHICH MIGHT INDUCE THE KREMLIN DELIBERATELY TO INITIATE GENERAL WAR

15. In view of the above considerations we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin would deliberately initiate general war during 1952 solely for the purpose of expanding the area under its control. With respect to China we believe that the USSR would react to the progressive expansion of the present conflict in Korea by giving increased aid to the Chinese Communists, even to the extent of committing Soviet forces and thereby creating a *de facto* war between the US and the USSR in the Far East, but would probably not deliberately initiate general war.

16. If, however, the Kremlin concluded that a Western attack on the USSR were imminent and unavoidable, and that Soviet chances of surviving such attack would be improved by seizing the initiative and attacking first, it would almost certainly do so. We have no way of knowing what interpretation the Soviet leaders may be placing upon the information available to them concerning Western plans and preparations. But in view of apparent long-standing Kremlin concern over any real or imagined threat to Soviet security, of Marxist warnings over the ever-present danger of capitalist attack on the Communist world, of expressed Soviet suspicion of various recent Western military measures, and of various recent statements by Western public figures and of articles in the Western press, we believe that the Kremlin is probably disturbed over Western intentions.

17. There are, however, cogent considerations which probably lead the Kremlin to believe that a deliberate Western attack during 1952 is unlikely. The West will still be far from that degree of mobilization which the Kremlin probably considers necessary for a successful attack on the USSR. Western forces on the Eurasian continent will still be far from achieving effective offensive capabilities against the present military power of the USSR and the growing military forces of the Satellites.

18. Even if the Kremlin did not anticipate an imminent attack by the West, it would probably deliberately initiate general war if it came to the conclusion that an irreversible adverse shift in the balance of military power were developing, that it could not otherwise be checked or countered, and that it constituted a grave threat to Soviet security.

19. The Kremlin may estimate that already the balance of military power is shifting to its disadvantage because of: (a) progressive integration of the West; (b) the increase in Western defense production; (c) recent Western mobilization measures and the prospect of German and Japanese rearmament; and (d) the increasing atomic capabilities of the US.

20. However, we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin will, during 1952, conclude that the foregoing developments will necessarily result in a major shift in the balance of military power. The Kremlin probably foresees many

difficulties in the implementation of a vigorous, united and lasting Western program for building military strength and corresponding opportunities for exploiting these difficulties. It may estimate that sooner or later such a program will fail because of political and economic difficulties among and within the nations of the free world, and that meanwhile the Soviet bloc, firmly under Kremlin control, can continue to improve its relative power position.

21. On balance we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin will *deliberately initiate* general war during 1952. We believe that the Kremlin prefers to pursue its objectives through methods short of deliberate resort to war with the US and its allies, and, moreover, probably estimates that possibilities for progress through such methods will continue to exist through 1952. We believe that in these circumstances the Kremlin is likely to be deterred from a deliberate resort to war with the US and its allies in 1952 by the certainty of extensive destruction in the USSR as well as by the risk that the Soviet system might be destroyed.

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