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8 September 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

SUBJECT: Soviet Mobilization Readiness

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1. On 8 September, the Defense Policy Panel of the House Armed Services Committee with Representative Les Aspin, (D., WI) presiding received a briefing on Soviet mobilization readiness and the ability of the US to monitor Soviet preparations to go to war. The briefing was held at the TS level with presenters including Doug MacEachin, Director of the Office of Soviet Analysis [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The briefing was held in Room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building and a transcript was taken. [REDACTED]

2. Members in attendance included:

Rep. Les Aspin, (D., WI)
Rep. John Spratt, (D., SC)
Rep. John Kasich, (R., OH)
Rep. Richard Ray, (D., GA)

3. Staffers present include:

Lou Finch Andrew Ellis
Clark Murdock John Tillson

4. Mr. MacEachin began his presentation, concentrating on the readiness of Warsaw Pact forces opposite the NATO central region. The Soviets refer to this area as the western theater of military operations and it contains the heaviest concentration of Warsaw Pact forces arrayed against NATO. The importance which the Soviets attach to their forward deployed forces in this theater is evident in their peacetime manning levels and the priority they are given for equipment modernization and support structure. These forces constitute the standard against which the Soviets rate the readiness of their other divisions. [REDACTED]

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5. In assessing the readiness of Soviet forces to go to war, Mr. MacEachin reminded his listeners that there are many dimensions of readiness. These include the physical dimension--how much equipment and manpower is actually in place--in contrast to those forces that must be mobilized to bring Pact forces to full wartime strength. The qualitative dimension must be factored in as well on how prepared are the forces to carry out what is planned for them. Mr. MacEachin was careful to point out to Committee members that differences exist within the Intelligence Community on issues such as how quickly the Soviets could complete their war preparations and the willingness of the Soviets to launch an offensive at less than full mobilization. [REDACTED]

6. Turning to forces in Eastern Europe, the wartime combat potential has increased markedly since the 1970s. These changes include both enlarging the force structure and introducing more weaponry. In East Germany, the typical Soviet maneuver division now has 25% more combat power than in 1975 and Soviet tactical air regiments are currently being equipped with the newest generation aircraft. In addition, the Soviets have augmented their forward based logistic stockpiles and the transport to move them. The end result is that the forces are less dependent on early resupply from USSR-based stocks. [REDACTED]

7. Another improvement has been the establishment of a regular peacetime force--of the command structure--the theater-level command--necessary to direct the full preparations of all forces in the Western theater of military operations. Establishing this command structure prior to the outbreak of hostilities and routinely exercising it as part of the peacetime force structure will facilitate the expeditious implementation of war preparations. (S NF)

8. Despite these improvements, the number of active duty Soviet troops stationed in the forward area have not substantially increased. They remain at 80 to 85% of their wartime strength. The logistical and support structure is at even lower level of peacetime manning. Community estimates indicate that there are presently 525,000 men assigned to Soviet ground and air forces based in Central Europe. An additional 170,000 troops--a major portion of which would be personnel for support components would be required to bring these forces to full wartime strength. [REDACTED]

9. Mr. MacEachin's major message to the Members was that the strengthening of forces does not automatically translate into increased readiness. Moreover, the number of men required to bring these forces to full readiness has also increased.

Any mobilization along the western theater of operations would also entail the dismantling of sectors of the civilian economy.

10. The Members followed the presentation with a number of questions. Chairman Aspin asked if 30 days was a reasonable estimate of the warning time we would have that the Soviets were launching an attack. Mr. MacEachin responded that the Soviets would certainly not be prepared to launch an attack in less than two weeks.

There was some detailed discussion of whether we use Soviet planning factors or our own in estimating their combat readiness.

11. Mr. Kasich, (R., OH) asked about the combat proficiency of the bloc forces as compared to the Soviet army. While our briefers indicated that some of the East European forces are better at reservist training than the Russians; on other dimensions the Russians lead followed by the East German and the Polish armies. Mr. Spratt, (D., SC) inquired about the impact of East Germans entering the conflict against the West Germans. Mr. MacEachin allowed that this clearly was a concern to the East German leadership and that as a result, East German forces were the most tightly integrated into the Soviet army. The formal briefing ended with the call for a vote, and with Chairman Aspin thanking the participants.

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