

FILE MR Case No. 81-287Document No. 4

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum of Conversation

16 December 1958

SUBJECT: DCI Briefing of Senator Stuart Symington on Soviet
Ballistic Missile Programs and CapabilitiesPARTICIPANTS: Director of Central Intelligence
Senator Stuart Symington
Thomas G. Lanphier (present during times indicated)
Maj. Gen. James C. Walsh, Assistant Chief of Staff,
Intelligence, USAF
Col. Earl McFarland, Jr., USAF, Chairman, GMIC
Herbert Scoville, Jr., AD/SI
Howard Stoertz, Jr., ONE Staff

1. This briefing had been arranged pursuant to the President's request that the Director of Central Intelligence, together with appropriate Defense officials, give Senator Symington orally the conclusions of their detailed analysis of the information presented in the Senator's letter to the President dated 29 August 1958. An invitation to receive such a briefing had been transmitted to Senator Symington by letter of 10 December from Mr. Bryce Harlow, Deputy Assistant to the President. Since Senator Symington's letter to the President had dealt with both Soviet and US missile programs, the DCI, in consultation with Mr. Donald Quarles, Acting Secretary of Defense, had planned to brief the Senator on the Soviet missile program, and Defense had planned to brief him on US missile programs. The DCI and Mr. Quarles had agreed that the intelligence briefing should be in the DCI's office, that the Defense briefing should be immediately thereafter in the Pentagon, and that Gen. Walsh should attend both. The DCI's staff had made arrangements with the Senator's office regarding the time and place of the intelligence briefing.

2. Senator Symington brought Mr. Lanphier to the DCI's office, clearly expecting that he would be included in the briefing. The DCI indicated that he did not brief representatives of industry, that such briefing was within the jurisdiction of Defense rather than his own. After some discussion, in which the Senator cited Lanphier's previous

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work with him in Government and his present association with the Atlas program at Convair, it was agreed that Lanphier would not be present for the briefing. The Senator indicated, however, that he would see about having Lanphier appointed to a Senate committee staff, so that he could receive such a briefing.

3. The DCI then said Senator Symington was expected over at Defense after the intelligence briefing, but the Senator expressed complete ignorance of such an arrangement, as well as inability to fit it into his schedule for the day. Moreover, he had not interpreted Mr. Harlow's letter to mean that there would be two briefings, and said he was thoroughly familiar with US missile schedules anyway. Further discussion and a telephone call to Secretary Douglas established that while Secretary McElroy had told Senator Symington earlier in the fall that he wanted to talk with him about the letter to the President, and Defense had in fact planned to brief the Senator immediately following the DCI's briefing, Secretary Douglas' office had been unable to reach the Senator to set up a definite date. The Senator and the Secretary agreed to postpone the Defense briefing until after the holidays, at a time to be arranged.



4. During the above discussion, Lanphier and the Senator, taking off from the fact that separate briefings on the Soviet and US programs had been planned, laid great stress on the necessity of finding some one official who would give the Congress a comparative briefing on what we were doing and what the Russians were doing in weapon systems. The DCI agreed that comparative studies were important. He said he thought the Senator would find that at the NSC level and also in Defense a mechanism for comparative studies existed. The Senator continued to press for the identity of some single person, saying he wished the DCI would do it himself. The DCI, emphasizing that he was not competent on US weapons programs, pointed out that there would not likely be any one person who could cover all fields, and that it might take more than one person even in a single field. He reminded the Senator, however, that the record of testimony before Congress would show that high Defense officials regularly used the conclusions of the national intelligence estimates when discussing foreign capabilities. Senator Symington said he was going to make a speech about the necessity to have some one official responsible for briefing appropriate Congressional committees on the comparative positions of the US and the USSR in weapons programs.

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5. Mr. Lanphier left the room prior to the beginning of the DCI's briefing.

6. The DCI began his briefing by stressing the seriousness with which the intelligence community viewed the Soviet missile capability, the high priority it had in intelligence, and the desire of the community to acquire and analyze additional information from any source. He described the membership of the USIB, and told about the recent re-examination of the Soviet ICBM program it had conducted with the aid of its Guided Missile Intelligence Committee and a panel of consultants from other areas of government and from industry. The Senator asked who the consultants were, to which the DCI responded that such consultation was on a confidential basis and he did not give out names, but that it included persons from industry as well as government officials.

7. The DCI said the re-analysis had reviewed the following major points raised in the Senator's letter:

- (a) the possibility of undetected Soviet firings to 3,500 n.m., in the light of an apparent recent lag in firings and the Senator's information that there had actually been evidence of 55 to 80 firings in contrast to the six reported by intelligence;
- (b) evidence on ballistic missile launching sites, in the light of the Senator's information that site construction in the USSR was advanced and widespread;
- (c) the reasonableness of the estimate on the Soviet capacity to acquire an operational capability with 500 ICBMs as early as 1961, in the light of the Senator's grave doubt that this was compatible with the small number of firings reported.

The DCI said he would address himself to each point the Senator had raised and also bring him up to date on our latest evidence and estimates.

8. The DCI identified the two ballistic missile test ranges believed to exist in the USSR, stating that their facilities were adequate to support even an expanded flight test program. He described present

intelligence coverage of these ranges as resting on a sophisticated, integrated collection system which we believe is efficient; he said we believe that no significant number of test firings to 3,500 n.m. have passed unnoticed. The DCI summarized the record of known Soviet firings:

- (a) since 1953, more than 400 to distances up to 700 n.m., of which about 40 since 1 August, when Symington last briefed (missiles with ranges up to 700 n.m. believed operational for several years);
- (b) total firings to about 1,000 n.m. now 17, of which six since 1 August (1,100 n.m. maximum range missile probably now operational);
- (c) total firings to 3,500 n.m. still six, with first in August 1957 and most recent in May 1958;
- (d) two apparently unsuccessful ICBM attempts, most recent in July 1958;
- (e) three Sputniks launched from Tyura Tam ICBM rangehead;
- (f) four attempts to launch space vehicles of unknown nature, which we do not believe were successful, most recent in December.



9. Senator Symington remarked that on the basis of these figures, it looked as if the Soviets were slackening up in their ICBM development. Scoville pointed out that with the probable testing of ICBM components at Kapustin Yar as background, the 3,500 n.m. tests seen at Tyura Tam may have derived enough information for the Soviets to go into production, that perhaps the Soviets were now using the data and that the next batch tested would be production missiles. The Senator said they hadn't fired enough to get the data, then reviewed some US firing totals, and repeated that if our evidence was right the Soviets had been way ahead of us but were slackening up. Walsh said maybe they had gone back to the drawing board to fix something.

10. The DCI said a thorough check by the intelligence community had not substantiated the Senator's report of 55 to 80 ICBM firings,

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that there was no delay in receiving information on a firing (though detailed analysis took some time), and that hence we were at a loss to understand how the Senator's figures could have come from intelligence sources. The Senator pointed out that the reports he had were from third parties.

11. The DCI said there was no evidence of firings from the launching areas in southern USSR into the Arctic, nor any evidence of firing ICBMs with live warheads, but there had been one low-yield nuclear explosion that was believed to be a warhead in a shorter-range ballistic missile. He stated his belief that there had been ICBM component testing among the many shorter-range firings at Kapustin Yar prior to August 1957, and that there was undoubtedly considerable static testing on which we would not expect evidence.

12. He then gave his estimate that the USSR would probably have a first operational capability with 10 prototype ICBMs at some time during 1959, noting that although there had not been as many firings as we had expected, the estimate took account of Soviet experience in the missile field and their demonstrated success in ballistic missile and earth satellite launchings. He said, however, that while we still believed that a limited operational capability in 1958 was a possibility, this was now considered extremely unlikely. He summarized the estimated characteristics of the Soviet ICBM, which remain unchanged.

13. Later the Senator went over the data given above, checking it against the letter he had sent to the President. He was informed that he had reported the intelligence community's views essentially correctly. He picked up the point that he had not previously been told about the apparently unsuccessful ICBM attempts, although they had occurred prior to August 1958. It was established that the intelligence estimate of when the Soviets could probably achieve an operational capability with 500 ICBMs was 1961 or 1962, rather than as early as 1960. Stoertz stated, in response to the Senator's question, that the possibility of an operational capability in 1958 had been downgraded largely but not exclusively because of the small number of firings.

14. Senator Symington's view was that the intelligence picture was incredible. In view of his experience in and contacts with industry, he felt that the Soviets couldn't be making ICBMs if they weren't firing

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them. Considering the estimated cutback in bomber production in conjunction with our figures on ICBM firings, it sounded as if Khrushchev was violating Teddy Roosevelt's principle of speaking softly but carrying a big stick, since he has virtually given the US an ultimatum but at the same time is reducing his armament. He said he thought the Soviets would do everything they could to hide their firings, especially since the stories on the Turkish radar had broken. The DCI said that Khrushchev's statements would make one think Khrushchev would want to have us know something about his capability, rather than hide it. The Senator said the slackening of ICBM testing and cutback in bomber production was a wonderful thing to believe if it was more important for the US to balance the budget than to have national defense.



15. The DCI's briefing then turned to Soviet missile production and deployment, on which he said our evidence was unsatisfactory. He said he would push the collection of more evidence with all possible ingenuity. He estimated that operational facilities for medium-range missiles probably now exist, and that some ICBM facilities should be in various stages of construction. But as of the present, the evidence gave us no clear reading on Soviet operational sites for missiles, nor on the extent to which, for example, fixed as against mobile launching facilities are being prepared. While we have some hints in the form of construction activity which may relate to missile sites, the DCI said we could not confirm the advanced and widespread construction mentioned in the Senator's letter, nor could he confirm the existence of sites in the specific areas named in the letter. He said he would assume they had bases opposite Turkey, but he didn't know about the Baltic since it would be a pretty exposed location. Walsh referred to installations in the Baltic, some of which existed as early as 1944 but which may have been converted to missile use.

16. Senator Symington, referring to the reports he had previously received about Baltic sites, said this was a place where the Russians ought to have them to back up their threats against London in 1956 and to use if necessary. He added that the vulnerability of sites depended on their hardness, and that with the initiative the Soviets didn't have to worry much about retaliation anyway. The DCI said he assumed, and had testified to the Johnson Committee a year ago, that the areas in

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question were threatened by Soviet missiles, but that he just couldn't confirm the specific location of sites. He said we were now getting some evidence of the deployment to East Germany of Soviet units equipped with mobile 100 n.m. ballistic missiles. Stoertz added later that mobile launching facilities were a strong possibility for longer range missiles as well, and that it might be some time before intelligence was able to find them. In response to the Senator's expression of desire to learn where his letter to the President was wrong, the DCI said he wasn't saying who was right or wrong, but was giving the Senator the intelligence we had.

17. On production programs, the DCI reviewed the fragments we had recently received, including information on ballistic missile plants, Khrushchev's statement that production of ICBMs had been successfully set up, and claims by members of the Soviet delegation to the Geneva conference on surprise attack that the USSR already has operational ICBMs. He emphasized that there was a good deal more to a missile program than just test firing - that absence of firings did not mean inactivity in the program - and that our estimate of an emerging Soviet operational capability with ICBMs took account of other things, such as Soviet emphasis on reliability and simplicity as well as maximum use of proven components. He then summarized our estimate that the USSR could probably achieve a capability with 500 ICBMs in three years after first operational capability (i.e., probably 1962), or with extreme priority and success in as little as two years (1961). He explained that 500 was chosen by us as a yardstick, and was not an estimate of how many the USSR would actually build. He added that his panel of consultants considered this estimate reasonable in the light of the data available.

18. Senator Symington reiterated that his own contacts in industry would say that the test data and the estimate were incompatible, that the intelligence picture of the Soviet program was contrary to the way it was done anywhere else in the world. Scoville said that periods of firing followed by a number of months without firing had been noted in the Soviet 1,000 n.m. program as well, but he and the DCI both admitted to puzzlement and concern about the 3,500 n.m. firing pattern. Walsh again emphasized the depth of Soviet ballistic missile experience, but said he would expect 20 to 50 ICBM test firings before they became operational. The Senator again said it didn't make sense to estimate so much production in a short time with so little testing.

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19. Senator Symington also said he believed the Russians are flying a nuclear-powered bomber, in part because of a statement made in 1953 by former Secretary of Defense Wilson, to the effect that while he thought development of such an aircraft was useless, the Russians were working on it.

20. Lanphier re-entered after the DCI had concluded his briefing.

21. Lanphier said his original report had been based on information floating around in the intelligence hierarchy. After some discussion, during which Scoville assured him that nobody in his shop thought the Soviets had fired 55 ICBM tests, Lanphier said he assumed the numbers of firings he had reported were extreme, and that he had quoted them to get the DCI to take a look at the intelligence system.



22. Lanphier made a lengthy statement giving his view of the lack of effective contact between intelligence and industry. His main point was that, while the US had been able to win World War II by mobilizing after it began, an all-out nuclear war between the US and Russia would make the whole world the loser, and that therefore the US had to keep such a lead as to prevent the Russians from making the mistake of starting one. In order to maintain superiority in weapon systems, US designers and manufacturers had to be kept well informed about Soviet progress, so that they could develop the necessary weapons and counter-weapons for operational use when needed, in spite of the long lead-times required for modern weapon systems development. He felt the US had fallen a generation behind in the ballistic missile field, asserted that nobody in authority had wanted the Atlas soon enough, and said we had to arm ourselves appropriately and on time in order to maintain the necessary deterrent. The situation required that not only the Administration and Congress, but also a third element (industry) be brought into the picture, to help determine which weapon systems are appropriate on the basis of timely intelligence.

23. This had not been done, said Lanphier. Only within the last month had the Air Force set up the first formal relationship to make intelligence available. The DCI repeated that briefing industry was within the competence of Defense, but pointed out that Lanphier and the Senator didn't know about all our consultant relationships with industry, which had existed a long time. Lanphier and Senator Symington again

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said there were people in industry who felt our estimate didn't make sense - Lanphier saying that some CIA people had been told this at Convair recently.

24. McFarland and Scoville emphasized that while there were a number of details about the estimates that they could not be confident about, they had least doubt about the number of firings. The Senator felt that even on the basis of our estimate, the US wasn't doing enough, and Lanphier supported this by saying the US was deluding itself by pretending that the slow-reaction Atlases we would have at Camp Cook in 1959 were really operational weapons.

25. Senator Symington returned to the matter of comparative estimates of US and Soviet progress, referring to NSC-100 (which he said he and Lanphier had written) as the first and only NSC paper he knew of comparing weapon systems progress in the two countries for the President. In the Senator's opinion, there must be one responsible source who would brief the President and Congress. The lack of a clear picture would be the death of the country if the existing system couldn't be fixed. The service chiefs couldn't give a clear picture because they are always caught in the squeeze between what they think they need and the budget ceiling. They can't give an honest answer when Congress asks if they think their programs are adequate to US security. The DCI said he felt that with a clear intelligence picture of the Russian situation, the Congress ought to be able to judge pretty well itself. Senator Symington said the existing system made a stooge out of Congress.

26. In the concluding conversation, Senator Symington repeated many of his points. He and Lanphier emphasized that the intelligence figures on tests couldn't be right if the production estimate was right. The Senator thought intelligence was in for a surprise on the position the Soviets have today as against what we think they have. The Soviets were not going to give up their missile lead, but the intelligence story on testing made it look as if they were. He said he knew the US was not doing enough in national defense, but implied that he couldn't get anybody to agree with him about the state of our defenses. The existing system in the government had to be modified so that someone would drive in with what the Russians were doing against us and at the same time come up and ask for what we should have.

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27. The Senator again said he was going to have to make a speech about the problem. The DCI said he would report to the President about their conversation. Senator Symington said he also would do so.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, possibly reading "C. S.", with a long horizontal line extending to the left from the bottom of the signature.

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