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MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, WATCH COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: Evaluation of [] regarding Soviet Bloc Exercises in Preparation to Strike the "First Blow," and other Matters

Members of the Watch Committee have studied this report and generally evaluate it as follows:

This report is not evaluated as a specific indication of Soviet Intent to launch a pre-emptive attack over the Berlin situation.

The report is considered to be probably true as far as it reflects discussions and documents to which the source has had access, but we note that these discussions have probably been limited to high military circles and are not believed to reflect the political factors or the basic strategic concepts of the people around Khrushchev who will be involved in the real decisions. It should also be noted that it actually predicts only that a decision may be made in the near future, "if the situation warrants," whether or not the USSR should launch pre-emptive hostilities in connection with the signing of a German peace treaty.

[]
JAMES J. HITCHOCK
Director

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DETAILED EVALUATION

1. It is recognized that striking the first blow is a long-standing tenet in Soviet military doctrine and that it would be quite reasonable for the Soviets to hold combined exercises of the Warsaw Pact forces in an effort to increase their readiness. Combined exercises are regarded as part of a reasonable contingency plan, rather than as a clear indication of a decision to "strike first," which would have benefits in both exercising military capabilities and in raising psychological pressures for negotiation. We believe that the Soviets still aim to obtain as much as they can without fighting, although they are continuing to take steps to enhance their military posture.

2.

This activity is a normal precursor of large-scale maneuvers which are held in the fall and have been expected to occur again this October. We have an unconfirmed report of orders to the East German railroads to place a large amount of rolling stock in readiness for military use by 29 September, a move which would logically precede a combined exercise involving forces from outside East Germany.

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3. It is noted that a "first blow" is to be decided "if the general situation warrants," by the Central Committee at the Party Congress which begins on 17 October and is not in any case to be implemented until after the signing of a German Peace Treaty. The signing of the treaty only after the Congress generally squares with current expectations, but it seems highly unlikely that a firm decision to launch a pre-emptive attack would be taken prior to evaluating Western response to the treaty action. The USSR clearly does not believe that the signing of a treaty per se would be regarded by the West as casus belli. Moreover, it is doubtful that the whole 122-man Central Committee would be brought into a decision to attack the West. The question may be discussed before the Central Committee for the sake of political coordination, but the real decision is more likely to be made by the 14-man Presidium or by Khrushchev and his closest associates alone.

4. With regard to the Civil Defense directive of 18 August, a move to spur on civil defense preparations is entirely plausible in the light of current conditions and preparations in military forces.

Marshal Chulikov, reported to head the new civil defense

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logical that the military could have pleaded the necessity of operational tests of weapons they might need to use, but it is quite certain that the decision was made by Khrushchev himself, not forced on him by the military, as he has recently claimed to Premier Spaak.

6. The items of information in this report are not necessarily related to one another The first paragraph appears to reflect discussions among senior military officers and probably does not take into account thinking in the political context or at the national decision-making level. The second paragraph indicates that the source has seen the directive discussed but probably did not have a chance to make notes. The third paragraph reflects only one factor in the Soviet decision to resume testing, although that may well be the view of officers to whom the source has had access.