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TS #141586
29 #1

16 May 1957

Para 4 Approved Rth

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR/INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Desirability of Interim Revision of Estimate on Soviet Heavy Bomber Strength

REFERENCE: OSI/ORR/OCI Memorandum for the Record dated 30 April 1957, and attached note by the DDI

1. Members of the Board and Staff have reviewed the referenced memorandum and are in general agreement with its substantive conclusions. We note, however, that the figures given for heavy bomber strength in operational units are based on observed deliveries and should be considered as minimums (see page 5, first paragraph). We note also that since completion of the referenced memorandum there has been some evidence, as yet inconclusive, that the monthly BISON production rate at Plant 23 is at last increasing (see page 1, conclusion b).

2. Based on the available evidence, we believe that at present there are probably 35-45 BISONs and 30-40 BEARs in Soviet operational units, as compared to the 11-4-56 projection of about 90 BISONs and 130 BEARs by mid-1957; consequently, that in the past year the Soviet heavy bomber program has again lagged behind our estimates. We agree that Soviet performance to date calls into question our estimate that there would probably be about 800 heavy bombers in operational units by mid-1960. Moreover, evidence of a continuing high rate of BADGER production raises the possibility that within a year or so there will be considerably more than 700 jet medium bombers in operational units, and consequently that the composition of Soviet Long Range Aviation may be quite different from that which we have estimated.

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3. The accumulation of evidence to date is not sufficient to permit a resolution of the new problems raised by these developments. Recent collection suggests that over the next several months evidence may accumulate, especially with respect to bomber production, which would place us in a much better position to answer the questions raised. Therefore, while a current estimate of something less than 50 BISONs and 50 BEARs in operational units could probably be coordinated now as an interim correction to the old estimate, we believe that the more important question of the future composition of Soviet Long Range Aviation could be answered at the earliest only after several more months of collecting evidence and analyzing trends. Moreover, we doubt the advisability of revising and publishing one portion of the estimate of future Soviet strength out of context with the other military forecasts normally included in the 11-4 paper, such as the submarine and guided missile estimates.

4. Recognizing the critical and contentious nature of the Long Range Aviation estimate, the Board proposes an alternative approach to the problem, designed to produce a better overall military estimate in this year's 11-4 paper. Under this approach, we would call for contributions to the Long Range Aviation and other key military sections of 11-4 about a month earlier than we had planned or as soon as the services have made their quarterly revisions as of 1 July 1957. (At present the only firm air force figures are as of 1 April.) Based on past experience, we could expect to receive these contributions by about the end of July. We would then schedule the necessary discussions and briefings on critical points ahead of the normal IAC representatives' meetings on 11-4, so as to devote more attention to these points without delaying the completion of the estimate. If you approve this approach, the Board will submit an advanced schedule to the IAC representatives at an early date.

*Need to have
comment on what
DCI by mid Dec.*

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES.

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SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director
National Estimates

cys to: AD/RR
AD/SI

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