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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

6 May 1957

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Intelligence Appraisal of the Soviet Aerial Inspection Proposal
of 26 April

PROBLEM

In connection with the preparation of instructions for the Stassen delegation in London, the Board has been asked for its views on the following: a) an appraisal of the intelligence significance of aerial inspection of Soviet territory as offered in the Soviet memorandum of 26 April; b) suggestions as to what areas of aerial inspection would be more equitable from an intelligence viewpoint.

1. The Soviet aerial inspection proposal of 26 April 1957 would provide access to Soviet territory east of the 108th degree of E. longitude, roughly the region east of Lake Baikal, and west of the 25th degree of E. longitude, roughly the small strip of European border region west of a line drawn through Vilna. The intelligence value of aerial inspection in these areas can be appraised from two points of view: a) To what extent would it limit Soviet capabilities for surprise attack on the continental US? b) What would it add to intelligence coverage of the USSR in a general sense?

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Effect on Capabilities for Surprise Attack

2. Coverage of the small strip of territory on the western border of the USSR would be of little or no significance for intelligence bearing on Soviet capabilities for surprise attack. Access to the territory east of Lake Baikal, however, would provide surveillance of areas which, given the present capabilities of Soviet long-range aviation, are probably essential for effective surprise attack on the continental US. The northeastern USSR is the area closest to the US and in view of the range of present Soviet aircraft is the logical staging area for approaches to the western half of the continental US, where many strategic targets are located. Denial of the northeastern territory for launching of aerial attack on the US would also narrow the funnel of approach to the continental US and thus tend to simplify the US air defense problem.

3. Whether aerial inspection would in fact deny the area for launching of aerial attack on the US is another question. This would depend on the conditions and frequency of access and these are not specified in the current Soviet proposal. A relatively small part of Soviet long-range aviation is permanently stationed in the area and it would always be possible to move these forces into or out of the area at short notice. To provide effective surveillance against possible concentrations for attack it would probably be necessary to have assured access at all times and to exercise this right frequently.

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4. The minimum value which access to the area would have would be in providing US intelligence with knowledge, now available in only very scanty form, of the facilities for attack -- airfields and supporting installations -- which are being developed. [Since the northeastern USSR will remain for some time, with the delivery vehicles now in prospect, at least important and possibly essential for effective attack on the US,] this would be an important intelligence gain. Whether or not, in addition, aerial surveillance would make surprise attack from this area impossible would depend, as explained in Para. 3, on the particular conditions under which the system of aerial inspection operated.

General Intelligence Coverage

5. A rough measure of the interest intelligence has in the areas the Soviet proposal would open up can be obtained by comparing it with lists of intelligence targets now in use. Of 228 important targets on the current list, 4 are in the western area and 72 in the eastern area. Among these latter are long-range aviation bases, naval and submarine bases, shipyards, transportation and industrial centers of the Soviet Far East. On the other hand, the eastern area includes only 3 of 35 targets on the current highest priority list, to which targets are assigned on the basis of their association with Soviet long-range aviation, guided missile and nuclear energy programs. The Western area has none of these highest priority targets.

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6. The 76 targets mentioned above which are in the affected area are of a kind which could be exploited effectively by aerial photography. There would also be some carryover from targets in the observed area to those in the closed area in the sense that knowledge about the former would in parallel cases help to complete fragmentary information about the latter.

More "Equitable" Areas

7. Clearly, the USSR has proposed an area in the USSR which in terms of bomber bases and other military installations, nuclear material production sites, and industrial concentrations is not equivalent to that proposed for the US. Areas of inspection in the USSR which would include more targets of this kind could be drawn in various ways. For example, most of the known long-range bomber bases would be covered if the Western USSR up to longitude 36 degrees E. were included. Potential staging bases in the Arctic littoral would be covered by inclusion of the area north of latitude 64 degrees N. Known fissionable material production facilities could be covered by access to the central area of the USSR between the Urals and the Venisei River. Known guided missile activity is located in the area north of the Caspian and Aral Seas and east of Stalingrad.

8. Because of the very different geographical distribution of critical facilities in the US and USSR, it is doubtful whether, from a practical negotiating point of view, partial areas could be chosen in each country which could be agreed as "equitable". The most effective negotiating position might be that only complete coverage on both sides would be really equitable.

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