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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

22 October 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Soviet Attitude on Discussion of Various Instruments of
Surprise Attack

1. This memorandum deals with two questions: (a) What US means of possible surprise attack are of greatest concern to the Soviet leaders?; and (b) What Soviet means of possible surprise attack would the Soviet delegation be most reluctant to discuss? These questions are closely related to issues discussed in the O/NE staff paper of 9 September "Probable Soviet Positions at a Technical Conference on Measures to Avert Surprise Attack" and the latter should be read in connection with the present memorandum.

2. The Soviets' willingness to discuss in detail various weapons systems will probably depend on how they weigh the following five considerations:

- (a) genuine concern over the threat from any US system;
- (b) extent to which a discussion of particular weapons systems would require Soviet disclosure of secret information or of weaknesses;

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- (c) whether discussion of various weapons systems might give the USSR clues as to US thinking on future weapons systems;
- (d) potentiality for propaganda exploitation of the US position at the conference and subsequently, and avoidance of matters which the US could exploit in propaganda;
- (e) relation to preferred Soviet surprise attack inspection systems i.e., an effort to stack the deck toward the kind of agreement they really want to achieve.

On the basis of these considerations, we make the following estimate of the Soviet attitude toward discussion of various instruments of possible surprise attack.

3. Long-Range Ground-Launched Missiles. The Soviet leaders probably believe that they have an advantage in long-range missile development and strength, and they will therefore be cautious about giving the US any opportunity to single out neutralization or limitation on missiles. They may, however, take a longer term view of the probable future US capability in intermediate and intercontinental missiles. In any case, they will probably agree to the discussion of control over missiles only if this subject is tied to long-range bombers and bases. They will probably expect us to raise the subject, and will seek to leave the initiative for introduction of technical specifications to us, so as not to disclose details of their own program which might assist us.

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4. Long-Range Aviation. The Soviets will emphasize controls and restrictions on long-range aviation in view of the heavy US reliance on this arm, and their relative lesser reliance upon it. They will probably stress the dangers of unintentional triggering of war by a beserk pilot, by accidental dropping of a bomb on foreign territory, by misjudging as an enemy act the accidental dropping of a bomb on one's own territory, to a penetration of his airspace or mass flights "toward" an enemy's territory, thus "compelling" that power to take countermeasures, etc. These arguments will be used to focus attention on limitations governing foreign basing and overflight of other countries, flight near or toward another power, and the like. They will also probably have an interest in exploring purely technical inspection-control measures to assist them in reaching a conclusion on what these would involve; the history of their own past disarmament proposals has reflected an evident wavering on this point, probably in part because they are uncertain just what it would involve in terms of inspection activities.

5. Tactical Aviation. The Soviets will probably tie controls over tactical aviation to zonal areas of inspection and limitation of forces. In general, as in most other cases, they will probably argue that it is not the tactical aviation or other system, but the nuclear munitions, which make controls so necessary. Hence, they will probably stress nuclear-free zones, especially in Central Europe, with control over tactical air (as

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well as ground) forces within such zones.

6. Ground Forces. The Soviet disarmament proposals of the last three years, insofar as they have dealt with measures to avert surprise attack, have stressed inspection of facilities for large-scale movement of ground forces: railway junctions, large ports, and motor highways. This insistence will probably be maintained, even though it is a vulnerable propaganda position to emphasize these to the exclusion of airfields and missile sites. One reason is that it accords with the Soviet view that large armies would be involved even in a general nuclear war. Also, it is consistent with the Soviet political line on disarmament thus far, that invasion across frontiers with large bodies of troops is a form of surprise attack requiring controls and weapons limitations. This stand supports their campaign for a nuclear-free, limited-forces, and inspected area in Central Europe -- which we believe to be one of the chief objectives of the Soviets in the forthcoming conference. The Soviets will probably be sensitive to any revelation of their ground force strength and deployment, and they will therefore seek to avoid other than technical inspection discussions.

7. Missile-launching Submarines. It is difficult to estimate the Soviet position on this topic. They are believed to be developing a capability in weapons of this type. While this subject may not be

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introduced by them, they will presumably agree to discussions but try to limit them to controls at naval bases, and perhaps to agreements on non-navigation in certain areas near the other side's territory.

8. Other Naval Forces. It would be logical for the Soviets to seek controls over aircraft carriers, since they have none and we do. Again, suggested controls would probably take the form of limitations on deployment, and non-carrying of nuclear weapons to prevent such accidents as those discussed in connection with long-range aviation. They might advance the idea of similar limitations for other conventional or missile-launching surface vessels.

9. Earth Satellite Vehicles. It is possible that the Soviets will advance a new proposal for control over space vehicles overflying other countries in a formulation which would not limit missile test or other firings over home territory. There is no certainty of the Soviet estimate of the value to them of reconnaissance satellites, but there is evidence of their concern over US planned and possible use of such vehicles for reconnaissance and for bombardment. Aside from the fact that such a proposal would be good propaganda, if implemented it would deny the US future improvement in intelligence. On the other hand, while the Soviets would presumably gain much less from a reconnaissance vehicle, they would probably wish to avoid giving the US an opportunity to raise the possibility of a

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UN or internationally-run disarmament inspection satellite. Moreover, at present they are probably willing to contemplate only limited zones of inspection in Central Europe and possibly in the Far East. While some forms of inspection, such as aerial overflight, can be either universal or limited to special danger (or "pilot") zones, and might therefore be acceptable to the Soviets for discussion, an inspection system using satellite vehicles covering very broad areas might be considered to place pressure on them toward more comprehensive controls than they presently intend.

10. Other Means of Surprise Attack. As we have noted, the Soviets are likely to attempt to place particular stress on nuclear munitions and warheads of all kind as the principal danger in surprise attack. This will not, however, provide a basis for real conference discussion as the Soviets are aware.

11. While it is not likely that the Soviets will raise the question of intelligence and warning systems -- surely a key matter in detecting surprise -- it cannot be excluded that they may do so. Should they raise questions of electronic and other specialized collection techniques, they probably have materials which would support a new popular campaign against forms of activity previously little known to world publics. Also, in recent internal propaganda, the Soviets have raised the issues of

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alleged US interest in clandestine entry of small nuclear weapons, US use of balloons for reconnaissance, and foreign attache contacts with the civilian population for espionage purposes. One or more of these subjects might be raised, the last indicated perhaps in terms of defining severe limits on the role and movement of inspectors for any disarmament agreement.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES



SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director
National Estimates

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9 September 1958

PROBABLE SOVIET POSITIONS AT A TECHNICAL
CONFERENCE ON MEASURES TO AVERT SURPRISE ATTACK

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The Soviet approach to a technical conference on averting possibilities of surprise attack would, of course, reflect the general Soviet position on disarmament.* It would reflect the broad aim of enhancing Soviet security, both by reducing the likelihood of nuclear war, and by moving toward limitations on the most threatening aspects of Western military power. The negotiations at the conference of experts on nuclear test controls have shown that the Soviets may be willing to entertain certain military limitations for themselves and accept some inspection controls if they judge that from an agreement they will obtain a net gain to their security.

2. Four general Soviet diplomatic aims could be served in experts' talks: (a) keeping alive the disarmament issue, in a forum in which the appearance of Soviet initiative can be maximized; (b) preparing

* See SNIE 11-6-58: The Soviet Attitude Toward Disarmament, 24 June 1958, SECRET; especially the Conclusions and the Appendix, paras. 12-17 and 21-24.

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a specific issue generating pressure for a Summit meeting (perhaps along with the nuclear test issue); (c) possible start of a "rolling stone" effect which, again along with the nuclear test issue, may lead to sufficient popular pressure on Western governments to make them more pliable on some disarmament issues; and (d) a further step to tie "surprise attack" prevention measures ultimately to a ban on nuclear weapons, and in the interim to lesser geographical limitations and other inhibitions on use of nuclear weapons.

3. Measures to avert surprise attack are by their nature so encompassing as in effect to embrace the entire disarmament field. Inspection (observation) is insufficient to provide wholly adequate safeguards, at least in respect to certain weapons systems; limitations on numbers and deployment of at least some weapons almost certainly would become involved. The Soviets will have recognized the difficulty of keeping these issues within a technical framework, as well as the inherent tendency of the subject to lead to proposals for a more comprehensive system of control than they are now prepared to contemplate. Probably no reliable forecast of their conduct in these talks can be inferred from their relatively businesslike approach to the nuclear test talks. In the latter the subject was narrow and was related to an objective they had long pursued, limitations on nuclear weapons. Moreover, there was no disclosure of military information involved, nor of

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any significant information on detection techniques not already know to the other side. Discussion of methods of insuring against surprise attack will open up the whole range of disarmament questions proper, including disclosure of military information. When this happens the Soviets will probably try to limit discussion to disarmament measures they have pushed in the past. It is possible that in anticipation of this outcome they will enter the talks with the frank intention to give them a political turn from the outset, or will at some stage provoke a breakdown in a propaganda context favorable to themselves.

4. The Soviet approach will be framed within a number of important constraints: (a) as is evident from various Soviet statements and behavior, they do not now have confidence that any form or extent of inspection would assure prevention of surprise attack, nor have they decided that such a result would be in their interest; (b) the deeply ingrained aversion to inspection activities by foreigners in the USSR, while perhaps modified, has not been dispelled; (c) the Soviets would be reluctant to lose the relative advantage they now possess in terms of military information about the potential enemy; (d) the Soviets are not prepared to neutralize such military advantages as they might believe they now have (e.g., in the long-range missile and satellite vehicle field). Within these limits, the Soviets retain a considerable latitude for diplomatic and technical discussions.

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II. LIKELY SOVIET PROPOSALS AND POSITIONS

Areas of Observation and Control

5. These constraints, as well as the record of past Soviet proposals, indicate that the Soviet delegation would be likely to stress a zonal approach to a control system, and would try to avoid discussion of any comprehensive system applicable to the whole of Soviet and US territory. In particular, as already forecast in Khrushchev's note of July 2, 1958, they will almost certainly revive their proposal for a 1600km. zone of inspection and control in Central Europe. This proposal will probably constitute their initial negotiating position, to which they may add other zones and features as the needs of the negotiation require. For example, their proposal for a zone covering equal areas of the eastern USSR and the Western US might be advanced again if the US presented its proposal for an Arctic zone. But they will probably not be willing to widen zones of inspection beyond what they have already proposed, except under pressure, and perhaps not then.

6. In response to the US position that the experts discuss zones for "illustrative purposes only, but without prejudging in any way the boundaries within which such measures would be applied," the Soviets will probably argue that the requirements for various zones would be

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different and that the most convenient and suitable "illustrative" zone would be that covered by their proposal for Central Europe. They might calculate that if and when an inspection system covering that area had been agreed by the experts, the West would be in a weak position to refuse its acceptance at a later political negotiation. They will recall that they enjoyed some propaganda success in Western Europe in 1957 with their exploitation of the disengagement theme; consideration of a European zone ties in readily with this.

7. To objections that a Central European zone would provide no assurances against the most likely form of surprise attack, i. e., the use of long-range missiles and aircraft, the Soviets would probably argue the following advantages: (a) reduction of tensions in an area where major combat forces of the two sides are deployed and where there is always the possibility of accidental encounters; (b) the system would be easiest for both sides to install in this area and that therefore it is the most suitable as a pilot zone to test procedures and techniques; and, (c) other zones involve technical questions or raise issues of confidence which cannot be resolved at this time. To sustain this line of argument they would rely heavily on the implication that they were showing themselves willing to take the first practical steps whereas the Western Powers insistence upon a broader and impractical system really meant that they wanted no progress at all.

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8. Previous Soviet proposals for a zone in Central Europe have included provisions for a reduction of forces in the area and limitations on the weapons which can be stationed there. In particular, they will attempt to obtain a prohibition on stationing of nuclear weapons in the area -- not only to effect a retraction of US power and to prevent West German acquisition of such weapons, but also to support the argument that if inspection were extended to cover the US and the USSR it should be accompanied by a general ban on nuclear weapons.

9. In general, the Soviet approach is likely to insist that assurance against surprise attack is inseparable from the reduction of forces and the elimination of certain weapons. They will probably take the view that no system can be effective if it is limited to observation of the forces presently or prospectively in being. Khrushchev's letter of 2 July states that control measures should be "combined with definite disarmament steps." But the Soviets are likely to stand on the force reduction proposals they have previously made. They will also against press a ban on the use of nuclear weapons as the most essential step, and will insist on US withdrawal from overseas bases as a necessary part of any comprehensive system.

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Objects of Inspection

10. The point of departure for the Soviet position will probably be their old proposals listing railway junctions, big ports, and motor highways as the primary objects of inspection. This is consonant with their insistence on a zone in Central Europe and with their belief, or pretended belief, that the form of surprise attack against which assurance is needed is invasion across frontiers with large bodies of troops.

11. The Soviets' position on the inclusion of airfields has been contradictory. In general, in the past year, they have expressed a willingness to include these only at a later stage in disarmament (sometimes specified as after a ban on nuclear weapons). In his October 1957 interview with Reston, Khrushchev justified the removal of airfields from the list of observation posts because "it is useless to create control posts to watch obsolete aircraft." This is at variance with later proposals (and other comments by Khrushchev) which have stated that airfields could be inspected but only at a later stage, presumably because they are more, rather than less important than, for example, rail junctions. The note of 2 July contains no reference to airfields. Probably the Soviet position will be that these can be included only after a trial system of other objects have been shown to be effective, confidence has been established, and then only in conjunction with

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force reductions and a nuclear weapons ban. There is nothing in their previous positions to prevent their entering a discussion of the purely technical question of the airfield as an object of inspection, however, and they will probably consent to do this at some stage.

12. The Soviets doubtless assume that the US may raise the question of control over long-range missile sites. Here again they will probably argue that these could be included only at a final stage when confidence in the system is fully established. They will also insist that these can be considered only in conjunction with US overseas airbases and naval forces. They might argue that the nature of these weapons is such that mere observation and inspection cannot prevent their use for surprise attack. More importantly, they would probably counter that the crucial problem was not the delivery system but the nuclear warheads, and thus link the problem of missiles to their demand for the abolition of the nuclear weapons as such.

Means and Methods of Inspection

13. It is unlikely that the Soviets will enter the talks with any fully developed proposals regarding the techniques, means, and methods to be employed. They probably do not yet believe that the prospects for such a system coming into existence are very real, and have probably not decided that the whole alteration of the military-political strategic

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picture which would result from a comprehensive and effective system would be in their interest. With respect to technical details therefore they will prefer to play a waiting game, seeking a maximum disclosure of US ideas in order to obtain a clearer picture of what concessions would be involved in any system applied within the USSR. In pushing for consideration of a zone in Europe, however, they may have some specific proposals to offer with respect to objects and methods of control there.

14. By the note of July 2 they are committed to "aerial surveys in areas that are of major importance from the viewpoint of preventing a surprise attack." They have also previously agreed to "some" aerial inspection within their proposed European zone. They will probably not initiate proposals for a wider application of this technique and will seek to limit its consideration as much as possible. Insofar as their opposition is supported by purely technical arguments, they may argue (a) that aerial inspection is ineffective alone and has only a marginal usefulness as a supplement to ground observation; (b) that processing of aerial photos over extensive areas is too large and slow a task to be practical; and (c) that the cost of aerial inspection would be prohibitive.

15. The Soviet position will also be concerned to minimize as much as possible the need for mobility on the part of ground observers. They will probably argue for the adequacy of fixed posts, but will not oppose

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the principle of mobility outright. They will seek to keep any formula on this subject as vague and limiting as possible.

16. With respect to communications, numbers and kinds of personnel, and other technical questions the Soviets are unlikely to make any extensive proposals of their own. They will be interested primarily in probing US thinking, and in limiting the scale of the proposals introduced for discussion.

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