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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Secretary McNamara's Report to the President on Soviet Air Show

1. These comments are preliminary and have not been coordinated. The Secretary's report was also described as preliminary.

2. I agree with the general tone of the Secretary's report, which is one of interest but not alarm. He says, "certain qualitative progress shown was beyond that estimated by the US", and further "intelligence estimates had not anticipated this continued improvement [in Soviet manned aircraft systems] to the extent shown." I would have said that the show confirmed our expectation of continued intensive R&D in aircraft, that unexpected developments were displayed in a few instances, but by and large this does not change the judgment that the Soviets will retain a mix of aircraft and missiles with primary emphasis on the latter.

3. The Secretary called attention to the propaganda motivation of the air show. I would have added the cautionary note that aircraft displayed in previous shows have not always been selected for production and operational use.

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4. With respect to the bombers, I agree with the Secretary's comment on the apparent high quality of the BLINDER, his reference to the Soviet emphasis on air-to-surface missiles, and the possibility of a longer range air-to-surface missile for medium bombers than previously estimated. My tentative belief is that we should, like the Secretary, estimate a larger future buildup in BLINDERS and some what greater Soviet use of air-to-surface missiles.

5. The Secretary refers briefly to the BOUNDER prototype, without emphasizing it. I agree with this treatment, and would have added that major improvements in power-plant appear necessary to make it a satisfactory intercontinental bomber. I would continue to estimate that it is possible that such a new heavy bomber will become operational in small numbers within the next few years.

6. With respect to fighters, I do not agree that the performance displayed exceeds estimated speeds and altitudes projected in current estimates. I would not have said that fighter developments had been estimated, "as being curtailed in favor of missiles." We have said, however, that while new fighters were probably being developed the total numbers of fighters were declining as missiles were introduced for air defense. Much evidence supports this judgment.

7. The Secretary correctly states that "supersonic light bombers and attack aircraft displayed had not been estimated."

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One of these may actually be a prototype long range interceptor. These developments may prove to be the most significant aspects of the air show, since the range and endurance of the possible long range interceptor appears much greater than anything the Soviets have previously attempted in this field, and the possible attack aircraft is the first indication of Soviet attempts to modernize their inventory of ground support aircraft.

8. We plan to incorporate implications of the air show into the annexes of NIE 11-4-61, scheduled for completion in mid-August. My tentative belief is that this estimate should project Soviet retention and improvement of a larger force of manned aircraft in the next few years, but that it should continue to lay stress on the growth of missile capabilities in all fields.

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