

56-13

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TOP SECRET

IV. CONCLUSIONS

1. Soviet Strength.

The Soviet bloc will still maintain a considerable lead in conventional military power over the West in mid-1953. Unless marked progress in NATO development of new weapons should revolutionize the military situation, the USSR and its Satellites will probably still be able to carry out almost all of the offensive operations of which they are presently considered capable.

2. Western Strength.

On the other hand, assuming a continued high level of US and NATO rearmament, the Western powers will narrow somewhat by mid-1953 the present gap between NATO and Soviet strength-in-being.

a. Except in case of a marked decline in US aid or a radical shift in Soviet policies, a substantial improvement in Western European military strength and morale seems likely by mid-1953. Further progress toward achieving MDP goals, continued expansion of the European economy, a more unified and efficient NATO and continental effort, and the probable integration of West Germany into the Atlantic Community will be contributory factors. Nevertheless, such obstacles as economic stresses and social discontent, political weakness, and resistance to

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TOP SECRET

further sacrifices will prevent full attainment of present MDDP goals and will continue to hamper achievement of US objectives.

b. In the Far East, the growing strength of Communist China may, to some extent, be offset by the revival of a pro-Western Japan. There will, however, be a continuing danger in both the Near and Far East of serious deterioration of the Western position, most likely either through further manifestations of violent nationalism, as in Iran, or through continued Chinese Communist penetration, as in Southeast Asia.

3. Alternatives Open to the USSR.

Faced with the situation in which its still substantial military lead is being threatened by Western military programs, the USSR may:

a. Continue its present aggressive cold war policies.

b. Seek, through a tactic of apparent conciliation, to lull the West into a sense of false security and undermine its defensive effort. The success of such a policy would, however, be limited, in the absence of more basic concessions than we consider the Kremlin is likely to grant.

c. Consider the rising curve of Western strength, and particularly incipient German and Japanese rearmament, so serious a threat as to require a resort to force at the time when Soviet comparative strength is greatest, i.e., before mid-1953. The risk of such action

- 2 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

will be far more acute during the next two years than at any time since World War II, since the USSR will recognize that its military superiority is progressively declining vis-a-vis the Western powers, of whose ultimately hostile intentions it is probably firmly convinced.

Whether it adopted course (a) or (c), there is a significant possibility that the USSR would undertake further local military aggression during this period, particularly in the Far East or Yugoslavia, to weaken the Western power position or to improve the strategic position of the USSR.

4. Probable Outcome.

We are unable to estimate which of the above major alternative courses of action will be followed by the USSR during the period under review. Very tentatively, however, we consider that their relative probability may be that indicated by the order of their listing in paragraph 3.

These courses of action are not, of course, necessarily mutually exclusive. The USSR might, for example, continue to wage an aggressive cold war for a while longer, and then conclude that this course was yielding diminishing returns, and seek to secure a relaxation of tensions through a tactic of apparent conciliation. Finding that it could not thus substantially retard the West's military programs without genuine concessions, it might then resort to force to prevent the completion of these programs. Or -- less deliberately -- it might, in the vigorous prosecution of the cold war, inadvertently place itself in a position from which it

TOP SECRET

could not escape war without a significant if local retreat, and decide, against the background of a belief in the unavoidability of early East-West hostilities, not to accept that retreat.

In any event, the USSR's choices will presumably be heavily influenced by its own estimate of present and future Western and Soviet capabilities. It may very well be deterred from deliberately initiating general war during the period covered by this paper by its estimate of US capabilities in the field of unconventional weapons and by a confident appraisal of its ability to weaken the West further by means short of war.

5. Threat to U.S. Security.

We believe, in view of the estimates cited above, that:

a. On the basis of presently projected US security programs, the power position of the US and its allies vis-a-vis the Soviet orbit should be somewhat improved by mid-1953. It cannot be overemphasized, however, how much even this improvement, which will not be decisive, will depend upon the pace of US rearmament and a continued high level of external US aid and leadership, if not a substantial increase in US aid.

b. Probable continued, aggressive Communist cold war pressures during the next two years may cause the West to suffer some significant local losses, particularly in the Far East, and may hamper the growth of Western strength and consolidation. These losses, however, may

- 4 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

well be outweighed, as in the past three years, by the over-all stimulus to Western countermeasures and increased free world awareness of the Soviet threat resulting from Soviet behavior. A Soviet effort during this period to cause a general relaxation of tensions would probably attain only limited results unless it were supported by concessions of a greater scope than we estimate would probably be forthcoming from the USSR.

c. Despite, and to some extent because of, the prospective improvement in the over-all Western power position over the next two years, the threat of Soviet preventive military action during this period will be great. There will also be serious risk of further overt Communist local aggression, which might either seriously weaken the Western power position or lead by accident or miscalculation to general war. This substantial possibility of general war will continue through mid-1953 to have far more critical implications for US security than any prospective improvement in the over-all power balance of the Western Powers vis-a-vis the Soviet bloc. This period of acute danger will, as indicated in NSC 114, last until the US and its allies achieve an adequate position of strength.

TOP SECRET