

S-E-C-R-E-T

27 October 1966

CITE : H.S.

Draft

I. THE THREAT

3. Conditions under which the Pact might undertake Attacks on NATO.

Note:

1. In considering the military conditions the Soviet leaders might desire if they contemplated attacks on NATO, it is important to recall several major findings of US national estimates on Soviet attitudes toward war with the Western Powers. Foremost among these is the judgment that deliberate Soviet attacks are extremely improbable. The reasons behind this judgment include the long-standing Soviet preference for pursuing their objectives by means short of direct military action, and, especially, the high probability that the Soviets are deterred from deliberate attacks by their estimate of Western, particularly US, military power and determination.

2. The general strategic situation will, of course, have a critical effect on this question. Considering the prospective development of all their military forces, it is probable that the Soviet leaders expect to achieve a substantial improvement in their strategic position vis a vis the US during the next several years,

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but do not expect to achieve such military capabilities as would make the deliberate initiation of general war a rational course of action. Under such circumstances, the Soviet leaders might come to feel that the USSR had gained greater freedom of action than it has had in the past, and to consider that their general purpose forces had increased relevance, particularly in non-nuclear contingencies. However, the Soviets probably do not expect to alter the relation of military power to a degree which would permit them to undertake substantially more aggressive courses of action. Moreover, non-military factors will continue to weigh heavily in Soviet decisions concerning acceptable risks and levels of tension.

3. While Soviet military theorists have now come to speak of the possibility of conventional conflict involving their own and Western forces, these references are <sup>couched</sup> ~~couched~~ in general terms. The most critical factors governing Soviet decisions in respect of limited war will probably be the circumstances prevailing at the time, and especially the USSR's estimate of the dangers of escalation. The Soviets probably will continue to recognize that any <sup>conventional</sup> ~~conventional~~ conflict with the West, particularly against NATO in Europe, would carry the grave risk of escalation to general nuclear war. For the same general reason, it is highly unlikely that the USSR would initiate the use of tactical nuclear weapons in a limited conflict with Western forces.

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4. If US were to reduce its forces in Europe the Soviets would re-evaluate prospects for political and military action there. They would probably recognize, however, that the drawdown of US forces did not mean an abandonment of US commitments in Europe and that a renewed challenge there would still provoke a major crisis, with a consequent reversal of European attitudes and a renewed buildup of the American military presence.

a. A Massive Nuclear Attack

In the unlikely event that the Soviet leaders contemplated initiating a massive nuclear strike against NATO, they would first have to believe that they could reduce the damage which they would receive in the ~~retaliatory~~<sup>retaliatory</sup> strike to acceptable proportions. It is highly unlikely that the Soviets can achieve the capability to limit the damage from a retaliatory strike to such a level in foreseeable future. However, if Soviet leaders ever become convinced that a massive nuclear attack by the West was imminent and inevitable, they might initiate a preemptive nuclear attack <sup>in an attempt to blunt the US blow,</sup> ~~regardless of the damage they would receive in retaliation.~~

b. A Massive Conventional Attack

If the Soviet leaders contemplated initiating a massive conventional attack on the NATO Central Region, they would seek to

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insure, through what they considered to be the proper combination of surprise and ~~mobilization~~ reinforcement, that they could overrun the opposing NATO conventional forces. More important, the Soviets would first need to be confident that the West was deterred to the extent that it would not retaliate by going over to general nuclear war. Indeed, they would have to have either complete confidence in their strategic deterrent or complete confidence in their strategic defenses, because they would be inviting a US first strike with strategic nuclear weapons.

c. Limited Nuclear Attack

If the Soviet leaders were to contemplate initiating a limited tactical nuclear attack on NATO, they would first have to be convinced that the West would not respond by escalating to general nuclear war. In addition they would have to believe that the USSR possessed a sufficient tactical nuclear advantage so that the war could be brought to successful conclusion without themselves being forced to higher levels of violence.

d. A Limited Conventional Attack

If the Soviet leaders contemplated initiating a limited conventional attack on NATO (for example, seizing Hamburg) they would first have to be convinced that the attack could be executed so quickly and that the objective of the attack would be so obviously

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limited that the West would accept the incursion as a fait accompli. To be successful, such an attack would have to rely heavily on surprise and overwhelming local tactical superiority. While such an attack is conceivable where the Soviets have a local tactical superiority the danger of further escalation of the conflict would probably outweigh any prospective gains.

e. Massive Mobilization

The Soviet leaders might feel that a large scale mobilization, and possibly reinforcement of their forces in Eastern Europe, would deter the West from carrying out some action (perhaps in some other geographic area) or would underscore Soviet determination over whatever issue was at question. In contemplating such a mobilization the Soviets would have to balance the prospective gains against the economic costs and the increased dangers of miscalculation leading to war.

f. Pressure Short of Military Action

The Soviets have in the past demonstrated their willingness to use threats and military pressures to achieve their purposes; Berlin in 1961 and Cuba in 1962 are the classic recent examples. The post-Khrushchev leadership has not as yet revealed an inclination to resort to such tactics, and, indeed, we do not believe that they will do so,

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at least in Europe, in the near future. But the Soviets still view military pressure as a suitable means for the achievement of foreign policy goals, and they will use such means again as their judgment of circumstances permits. The degree of risk they are likely to be willing to run will, of course, be influenced by their calculation of probable Western responses, and this, in turn, will be affected by their estimate of relative military strengths. The Soviets may someday be tempted, for example, to use their growing strategic strength to try to deter the West from effectively responding to military intimidation, as in Berlin. But, even in this event, we do not believe that they would be willing consciously to run substantially greater risks of confrontation with the US.