

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

19 October 1962

SUBJECT: SNIE 11-18-62: SOVIET REACTIONS TO CERTAIN US COURSES  
OF ACTION ON CUBA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable Soviet reactions to certain US courses  
of action with respect to Cuba.

THE ESTIMATE

1. A major Soviet objective in their military buildup in  
Cuba is to demonstrate that the world balance of forces has  
shifted so far in their favor that the US can no longer prevent  
the advance of Soviet offensive power even into its own hemisphere.  
In this connection they assume, of course, that these deployments  
sooner or later will become publicly known.

2. It is possible that the USSR is installing these missiles primarily in order to use them in bargaining for US concessions elsewhere. We think this unlikely, however. The public withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba would create serious problems in the USSR's relations with Castro; it would cast doubt on the firmness of the Soviet intention to protect the Castro regime and perhaps on their commitments elsewhere.

3. If the US accepts the strategic missile buildup in Cuba, the Soviets would continue the buildup of strategic weapons in Cuba. We have no basis for estimating the force level which they would wish to reach, but it seems clear already that they intend to go beyond a token capability. They would probably expect their missile forces in Cuba to make some contribution to their total strategic capability vis-a-vis the US. We consider in Annex B the possible effects of a missile buildup in Cuba upon the overall relationship of strategic military power.

4. US acceptance of the strategic missile buildup would provide strong encouragement to Communists, pro-Communists, and the more anti-American sectors of opinion in Latin America and elsewhere. Conversely, anti-Communists and those who relate their own interests

to those of the US would be strongly discouraged. It seems clear that, especially over the long run, there would be a loss of confidence in US power and determination and a serious decline of US influence generally.

#### EFFECT OF WARNING

5. If the US confronts Khrushchev with its knowledge of the MRBM deployment and presses for a withdrawal, we do not believe the Soviets would halt the deployment. Instead, they would propose negotiations on the general question of foreign bases, claiming equal right to establish Soviet bases and assuring the US of tight control over the missiles. They would probably link Cuba with the Berlin situation and emphasize their patience and preference for negotiations, implying that Berlin was held hostage to US actions in Cuba.

6. There is some slight chance that a warning to Castro might make a difference, since the Soviets could regard this as a chance to stand aside, but it also would give time for offers to negotiate, continued buildup, and counterpressures, and we think the result in the end would be the same.

7. Any warning would of course degrade the element of surprise in a subsequent US attack.

#### EFFECT OF BLOCKADE

8. While the effectiveness of Castro's military machine might be impaired by a total US blockade, Castro would be certain to tighten internal security and would take ruthless action against any attempts at revolt. There is no reason to believe that a blockade of itself would bring down the Castro regime. The Soviets would almost certainly exert strong direct pressures elsewhere to end the blockade. The attitudes of other states toward a blockade action are not considered in this paper. It is obvious that the Soviets would heavily exploit all adverse reactions.

#### SOVIET REACTION TO USE OF MILITARY FORCE<sup>1/</sup>

9. If the US takes direct military action against Cuba, the Soviets would be placed automatically under great pressure to respond in ways which, if they could not save Cuba, would inflict

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<sup>1/</sup> For a further comment on differences between reaction to a blockade and to US measures of force against Cuba, see Annex A.

an offsetting injury to US interests. This would be true whether the action was limited to an effort to neutralize the strategic missiles, or these missiles plus airfields, surface-to-air missile sites, or cruise missile sites, or in fact an outright invasion designed to destroy the Castro regime.

10. In reaction to any of the various forms of US action, the Soviets would be alarmed and agitated, since they have to date estimated that the US would not take military action in the face of Soviet warnings of the danger of nuclear war. They would recognize that US military action posed a major challenge to the prestige of the USSR. We must of course recognize the possibility that the Soviets, under pressure to respond, would again miscalculate and respond in a way which, through a series of actions and reactions, could escalate to general war.

11. On the other hand, the Soviets have no public treaty with Cuba and have not acknowledged that Soviet bases are on the island. This situation provides them with a pretext for treating US military action against Cuba as an affair which does not directly involve them, and thereby avoiding the risks of a strong response. We do not believe that the USSR would attack the US, either from

Soviet bases or with its missiles in Cuba, even if the latter were operational and not put out of action before they could be readied for firing.

12. Since the USSR would not dare to resort to general war and could not hope to prevail locally, the Soviets would almost certainly consider retaliatory actions outside Cuba. The timing and selection of such moves would depend heavily upon the immediate context of events and the USSR's appreciation of US attitudes. The most likely location for broad retaliation outside Cuba appears to be Berlin. They might react here with major harassments, interruptions of access to the city or even a blockade, with or without the signing of a separate peace treaty.

13. We believe that whatever course of retaliation the USSR elected, the Soviet leaders would not deliberately initiate general war or take military measures, which in their calculation, would run the gravest risks of general war.

## ANNEX A

### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOVIET RESPONSES TO A BLOCKADE AND US MEASURES OF FORCE AGAINST CUBA

1. Under blockade the Soviets would concentrate on political exploitation, especially in the UN. They might risk violent encounters in attempts to penetrate the blockade, but they would not resort to major force in the area of Cuba or forceful retaliation elsewhere, at least initially. If US enforcement of the blockade involved use of force by the US, the Soviets might respond on an equivalent level, but would seek to avoid escalation.

2. In the case of US use of force against Cuban territory, the likelihood of a Soviet response by force, either locally or for retaliation elsewhere, would be greater. (We are unable to estimate the precise degree of likelihood, but we do not wish to minimize the possibility of some Soviet response outside Cuba, particularly in areas such as Berlin where the Communists are capable of acting regardless of what happens in Cuba. We believe that the Soviets are somewhat less likely to retaliate with military force in areas outside of Cuba in response to a speedy and effective all-out invasion than to other forms of US military action.)

3. In essence, the blockade situation places the Soviets under no immediate pressure to choose a response with force. They can thus hope to use political means to compel the US to desist, and reserve a resort to force until the US has actually used force. They would certainly estimate that the generally adverse reactions, even on the part of US allies, to the US blockade would offer an excellent opportunity to bring enormous pressures on the US to desist. They could heighten these pressures by threatening retaliation in Berlin or actually undertaking major harassments there, and would probably do so at some stage. Thus we believe a rapid occupation of Cuba would be more likely to make the Soviets pause in opening new theaters of conflict than limited action or action which drags out.



## ANNEX B

### MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE OF BALLISTIC MISSILES IN CUBA

1. Cuban-based MRBMs and IRBMs equipped with nuclear warheads would augment the present limited Soviet ICBM capability against the US by virtue of their ability to strike at similar types of targets with warheads of generally similar yields.

The accuracies of the MRBMs and IRBMs are believed to be somewhat better than those of ICBMs at present. System reliabilities, while varying with the several systems, are generally comparable.

2. The Soviets could increase their gross capability to deliver nuclear warheads against the US more rapidly by installing additional missiles in Cuba than by building up their ICBM force. MRBMs are available to the USSR in quantity and a substantial force could be built up in Cuba without significantly reducing the weight of bomber and missile attack that the USSR could direct against Europe. Mobile units in Cuba could probably be brought to operational readiness within

a matter of days, and fixed sites would probably be ready in a matter of weeks.

3. Considering these factors and the evidence now available, we believe that a force of some 20 MRBM/IRBM launchers could be operational in Cuba in a few weeks, and that it would be entirely feasible for the USSR to have a force two or three times this size in Cuba within a few months. This can be compared with our estimate that about 60-65 ICBM launchers are operational in the USSR at present, and that some 125-175 will be operational in mid-1963.<sup>2/</sup> In terms of salvo capability, considering average estimated reliability factors, a 20-launcher MRBM/IRBM force in Cuba would theoretically be able to deliver 14-15 nuclear warheads on targets in the US in a first strike, a 40-launcher force could deliver 27-30, and a 60-launcher force 41-45.

4. For a pre-emptive or first strike, Cuban-based missiles would possess an advantage over Soviet-based ICBMs in that they would approach the US with a shorter time-of-flight, and from a

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<sup>2/</sup> Dissenting estimates on Soviet ICBM force levels are recorded in NIE 11-8-62, "Soviet Capabilities for Long Range Attack," dated 6 July 1962.

direction not now covered by US EMEWS capabilities. For retaliatory or second-strike purposes, Soviet MRBM/IRBM systems in Cuba would have diminished utility because of their soft configurations, their reaction times, and the probability that virtually all could be detected and targeted. A single overseas base area such as Cuba does not provide the Soviets with strategic dispersal comparable to that provided by the worldwide deployment of US forces. Moreover, Cuban bases could be eliminated by short-range US weapons, without any reduction in the nuclear delivery forces programed against the USSR itself.

5. In the near future, therefore, Soviet gross capabilities for initial attack on US military and civilian targets can be increased considerably by Cuban-based missiles. However, the deployment of these missiles in Cuba will probably not, in the Soviet judgment, insure destruction of the US second strike capability to a degree which would eliminate an unacceptably heavy retaliatory attack on the USSR. If the missile buildup in Cuba continues, the Soviet capability to blunt a retaliatory attack will be progressively enhanced.