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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

SOVIET BLOC CAPABILITIES, THROUGH MID-1953

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SOVIET BLOC CAPABILITIES, THROUGH MID-1953

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet Bloc¹ capabilities for political and military warfare, through mid-1953.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Bloc continues to possess a significant quantitative superiority over the Western Powers in forces in being and in conventional ground and air armament.
2. The Soviet economy is much better prepared now to support a major war effort than it was in 1940.
3. The principal emphasis of the recent Bloc military program has apparently been upon enlarging the atomic stockpile and upon improving Bloc defenses, particularly against air attack. We believe that this emphasis will continue throughout the period of this estimate. We also believe that the Bloc military forces will not increase greatly in size, although they will improve in combat effectiveness.
4. It is unlikely that the USSR will be able to develop and produce a thermonuclear weapon by mid-1953.
5. The Soviet forces now stationed in Eastern Europe are in an advanced state of readiness for war and can attack with little or no warning.
6. We estimate that the Bloc has the capability to undertake concurrent large-scale operations in continental Europe, the Middle East, and mainland Asia. The Bloc could rapidly reinforce with Chinese Communist and Soviet forces the Communist forces now in Korea, and at the same time undertake an invasion of Japan by Soviet forces.
7. The USSR has the capability of undertaking sustained air offensives against the UK, most of continental Europe, most of the Middle East, and Japan, with the intensity of individual offensives varying according to the number of offensives undertaken simultaneously. It is also capable of undertaking the delivery of its full stockpile of atomic weapons against targets in these areas and against targets in the US and its overseas bases.
8. The Bloc air defense organization has the capability for vigorous opposition to an air offensive against the principal Soviet centers. However, despite marked improvements in the Bloc air defense system (especially in the USSR, Eastern

¹ The Soviet Bloc consists of the USSR, the European Satellites, Communist China, Outer Mongolia, North Korea, and Viet Minh. The Kremlin also controls the International Communist movement outside the Bloc countries.

Germany, Poland, and Manchuria), deficiencies will remain throughout the period of this estimate.

9. The USSR has the capability to undertake offensive submarine patrols and mining operations along most of the world's strategically vital sea lanes. The USSR has the capability to undertake short-haul amphibious operations in the seas adjacent to its own coasts.

10. The Communists almost certainly will not be capable of overthrowing any non-Communist government either by constitutional process or by revolution, except possibly in Iran.

11. Bloc capabilities for political warfare will continue to constitute a serious

danger for the non-Communist world throughout the period of this estimate. The Communist Parties in the non-Communist world—with an estimated membership of 3,750,000—are tightly organized for action and form a worldwide network under Kremlin direction. Through this organization, the Kremlin is able to conduct undermining attacks on established regimes, to exploit national rivalries, to utilize minority groups and political factions, and to capitalize on economic, political, and military difficulties. The organizational effectiveness of the Parties makes them far more formidable than their numerical size alone indicates.

DISCUSSION

Factors Affecting Bloc Capabilities

12. The Soviet regime is securely entrenched in power, and there is no apparent prospect of its control being threatened or shaken.

13. Soviet control over the Satellites will almost certainly remain virtually complete. It ensures the subservience and reliability of the governments, and continued economic and military contributions to the USSR from the Satellite area.

14. The Chinese Communist regime has firm control over mainland China, and there is little likelihood of its control being threatened or shaken by domestic forces within the period of this estimate. We believe that Communist China accepts Moscow leadership in the international Communist movement but retains some capability for independent action and a capability to exert influence upon the shaping of Communist policy in the Far East. The character of the current Sino-Soviet relationships will probably remain relatively constant throughout the period of this estimate.

15. The USSR is engaged in a large-scale research and development program. This includes both pure and applied research, with an emphasis upon applied research in fields of military application, especially atomic energy, electronics, jet aircraft, guided missiles, and submarines. In all of these fields, Soviet scientists and technicians have demonstrated a high level of proficiency.

16. The gross national product of the Bloc has been increasing in the past few years. Any calculation of its magnitude is necessarily subject to considerable error, and no meaningful comparison can be made with prewar years for the Bloc as a whole. However, we estimate that the Bloc's national product in 1951 was roughly 15 percent higher than in 1949.

a. The economy of the USSR had recovered its prewar level of total production by 1948 and had surpassed that level by an estimated 20-30 percent in 1951. We estimate that the Soviet national product is increasing at an annual rate of 6 to 7 percent.

b. The combined production of the Satellites constitutes approximately one-quarter of the Bloc's national product. We believe that the Satellite national product has increased since 1949, but we are unable to estimate the amount of the increase.

c. The national product of Communist China is extremely difficult to estimate, but we believe that it represents less than 15 percent of the Bloc total. Communist China's national product is probably increasing at an annual rate of 3 to 5 percent, but its output of capital goods will continue to be a very small part of the Bloc total.

17. The output of the Soviet economy does not approach that of the US economy, nor does the output of the Bloc economy as a whole compare with that of the NATO states. USSR gross national product in 1951 was about one-quarter that of the US, and the combined gross national product of the entire Bloc was about 30 percent that of the NATO countries.

18. However, comparisons in terms of total output of all types of goods and services are misleading as indications of relative capacity to produce military equipment in peacetime. The traditional living standards and the controls prevailing within the Bloc enable the Bloc states to assign a much smaller proportion of total output to civilian consumption, particularly of scarce materials and goods, than is feasible in Western countries. Moreover, these living standards and controls also enable the Bloc to assign a higher proportion of its military outlay to production of actual military end-items than is feasible in the West.

19. Since the end of World War II, the Bloc as a whole has devoted a much larger proportion of its gross national product to military purposes than the West. We believe that the USSR now devotes about one-fifth of its national product to military expenditures. We estimate that the quantity of resources which the USSR will devote to military production in 1952 will equal the amount assigned in 1944.

20. The Soviet economy is much better prepared now to support a major war effort than

it was in 1940. Under continued cold war conditions, the Bloc clearly has the capability of expanding its industrial base and of increasing military production. The Soviet economy is organized with a view to possible hostilities in the near future as well as in the more remote future. These two objectives compete to some extent in the allocation of resources.

21. The Kremlin places a high priority upon stockpiling reserves, not only of military end-items but of food, capital equipment, and materials needed for maintaining the economy under wartime conditions or other emergencies.

22. The Bloc could increase its exports to the non-Communist world within the period of this estimate. We estimate that even a slight increase of trade with the non-Communist world would constitute an important political warfare weapon.

Bloc Military Strength

23. The Bloc continues to possess a significant quantitative superiority over the Western Powers in forces in being and in conventional ground and air armament. We estimate that the Bloc armed forces² now have:

a. Approximately 8,750,000 men, of which about 4,450,000 are Soviet; 1,550,000 Satellite; 2,350,000 Chinese Communist; 290,000 North Korean; and 130,000 Viet Minh. (For more complete information on the number of regular forces and of security forces maintained by each Bloc state, see Appendix B.)

b. An actual strength of approximately 21,000 aircraft, including about 6,700 jet fighters and 900 piston medium bombers; an authorized strength of about 25,000 aircraft, including about 8,400 jet fighters and 1,150 piston medium bombers.

c. A total of at least 164 major surface vessels and 361 submarines, including 103 long-range types.

d. A stockpile of 50 atomic weapons (30-100 kiloton yield). (This estimate applies to

²For comment on the nature of the evidence available for estimates of Bloc armed force strength, see note at the end of this estimate.

mid-1952, not the date of publication for this report. The actual figure may be from half to twice as many as this estimate.)

e. Large stocks of conventional weapons and equipment.

24. We estimate that the Bloc armed forces by mid-1953 will probably have:

a. Approximately 9,000,000 men, of which about 4,500,000 will be Soviet; 1,750,000 Satellite; 2,350,000 Chinese Communist; 290,000 North Korean; and 130,000 Viet Minh. (For more complete information on the number of regular forces and of security forces which we estimate will probably be maintained by each Bloc state, see Appendix B.)

b. An authorized strength of over 25,000 aircraft, including about 10,150 jet fighters, 1,200 medium piston bombers, and possibly a few jet medium bombers.³

c. A total of approximately 205 major surface vessels and 408 submarines, of which 122 will be long-range types.

d. A stockpile of 100 atomic weapons (30-100 kiloton yield). (The actual figure may be from half to twice as many as this estimate.)

25. It is unlikely that the USSR will be able to develop and produce a thermonuclear weapon by mid-1953.

26. The over-all effectiveness of Bloc ground, naval, and air forces will increase by mid-1953 because of progressive modernization and standardization of weapons and equipment, the intensive training program, the growth of the Soviet atomic stockpile, and the increased combat efficiency of the Satellite armies.

27. The armed forces of the USSR and Communist China have remained relatively constant in size throughout the past two years, while those of the Satellites have grown rapidly. Recent Bloc military effort has apparently placed principal emphasis upon

³The estimate on jet medium bomber production is based upon the Soviet technical capability to develop and produce such aircraft. There is no intelligence available to indicate that such aircraft are now in production.

enlarging the atomic stockpile and upon improving Bloc defenses, particularly against air attack. The Bloc has also emphasized improvement of the quality of existing units and developing and marshaling the military strength of the Satellites.

28. The USSR maintains a large air defense system which not only includes the forces assigned to the Soviet air defense organization (PVO-Strany) but also has available to it the active air defense resources of the Army, tactical air forces, and Navy not otherwise committed, as well as the passive defense resources of the police and civilian organizations. The European Satellite and Communist Chinese air defenses add to and are integrated with the Soviet system. Despite significant improvements in the air defense system, there will probably continue to be insufficient numbers of trained and experienced pilots and operators, modern radar, heavy AA guns, and fighters designed specifically for all-weather interception to provide defense for all important areas. We estimate that by mid-1953 the numerical strength of the air defense forces will not change, although the effectiveness of the air defenses will improve through re-equipment and training.

Bloc Military Capabilities

29. We estimate that the Bloc has the capability to undertake concurrent large-scale operations in continental Europe, the Middle East, and mainland Asia. The Bloc could rapidly reinforce with Chinese Communist and Soviet forces the Communist forces now in Korea, and at the same time undertake an invasion of Japan by Soviet forces.

30. The Soviet forces now stationed in Eastern Europe are in an advanced state of readiness for war and can attack with little or no warning. However, the Bloc forces in Eastern Europe would almost certainly require substantial reinforcements in Soviet ground and air forces before they could sustain major offensive operations.

31. The USSR has the capability of undertaking sustained air offensives against the UK, most of continental Europe, most of the

Middle East, and Japan, with the intensity of individual offensives varying according to the number of offensives undertaken simultaneously. It is also capable of undertaking the delivery of its full stockpile of atomic weapons against targets in these areas and against targets in the US and its overseas bases.

32. The Bloc air defense organization has the capability for vigorous opposition to an air offensive against the principal Soviet centers. However, despite marked improvements in the Bloc air defense system (especially in the USSR, Eastern Germany, Poland, and Manchuria), deficiencies will remain throughout the period of this estimate.

33. The Bloc has the capability to launch short-haul amphibious and airborne operations in the Baltic and Black Seas, along the northern coast of Norway, and in the northern Japan Sea, and to launch limited amphibious and airborne operations against Western Alaska.

34. The Soviet submarine force has the capability to undertake offensive patrols and mining operations along most of the world's strategically vital sea lanes and, possibly, simultaneously to launch guided missile attacks against targets on both the Atlantic and Pacific seaboard of the US. The Soviet Navy, including its air arm, has the capability to lay extensive mine fields to protect Soviet, Satellite, and Chinese Communist harbors and sea routes, to mine the waters and harbors of the Baltic, Black, North, and Japan Seas, and to harass sea routes in these areas.

35. The Chinese Communist and North Korean capabilities in Korea have increased substantially since the beginning of the armistice negotiations. If the present scale of operations continues, we believe that these capabilities will gradually improve during the period of this estimate. Communist ground forces in Korea have a high offensive potential and are capable of launching a major attack with little warning.⁴

⁴For more complete information on this subject, see NIE-55/1: "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea" (30 July 1952).

36. Since the beginning of the Korean war, the Communist Air Force in China, which is believed to be made up of Chinese Communist, North Korean, and Soviet elements, has been built to an impressive size. The jet fighter units in the Korea-Manchuria-North China area are believed to be progressively improving. However, the capabilities of the CAF in China are, and will remain during the period of this estimate, largely limited to the air defense of North China, Manchuria, and North Korea under conditions of good visibility and to limited attacks against UN forces in Korea and adjacent waters. We believe the CAF in China will continue to expand gradually during the period of this estimate but will remain entirely dependent upon the USSR for aircraft and equipment, spare parts, and technical supervision, and almost entirely dependent upon the USSR for aviation fuels and lubricants. Unless some type of light jet bombardment aircraft is introduced, the offensive capabilities of this air force will remain extremely limited. Redeployment from the Manchuria area would be necessary for sustained air operations against Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

37. During the period of this estimate, Soviet and/or Chinese Communist forces in Asia will almost certainly continue to have the capability of conducting the following operations concurrently:

a. Overrunning Hong Kong, Macao, Indochina, Burma, and Thailand if opposed only by the forces concurrently in these areas.⁵

b. Rapidly reinforcing with Chinese Communist and Soviet forces the Communist forces now in Korea, and at the same time of undertaking an invasion of Japan by Soviet forces.

c. Attacking Western shipping in the Pacific by submarines and mines and by conducting air attacks and surface raids against Western bases and shipping in the western and northern Pacific.

⁵A Chinese Communist invasion of Taiwan would almost certainly fail if US naval and air forces remain available to defend Taiwan.

Elements of Bloc Political Warfare Strength

38. Political warfare plays an unusually important role for Communists, who consider military warfare only an extension of political warfare in their persistent campaign to undermine the strength of the non-Communist world. Bloc political warfare techniques include political and economic pressure, diplomatic action in the UN and elsewhere, propaganda and front activities, the action of Communist Parties and Communist Party controlled trade unions outside the Bloc, sabotage, exploitation of subversive and revolutionary movements and of civil wars, and psychological warfare.
39. The principal sources of strength upon which Bloc political warfare capabilities are based consist of the Bloc's military capabilities; the size, power, and centralized leadership of the Bloc; Communist doctrine; and the Communist international movement.
40. We estimate that there are now 20,000,000 Communist Party members in the world, organized into 72 national parties. Most Party members live within the Bloc, but about 3,750,000 are scattered throughout the non-Communist world. These figures do not include the membership of the front organizations, trade unions, etc., which the national Communist Parties influence or control. The discipline and fervor of the Parties make them far more effective than their size alone indicates.
41. To serve the interests of the Bloc, the national Communist Parties in non-Communist countries seek to exploit economic, social, and nationalist grievances, to infiltrate government agencies and institutions, to provide espionage agents and saboteurs, to disseminate Bloc propaganda, to mobilize mass support for Bloc policies, to create pressure groups to influence local policy to the advantage of the Bloc, and to infiltrate and control trade unions and national labor organizations. They have shown particular skill in creating and controlling front organizations.

Bloc Political Warfare Capabilities

42. Bloc political warfare capabilities will continue to constitute a serious danger throughout the period of this estimate. The Communists and their allies will retain the capability to conduct undermining attacks on established regimes, to exploit national rivalries, to utilize minority groups and splinter political parties, and to capitalize upon economic, political, and military difficulties.
43. We estimate that during the period of this estimate the Bloc will not have the capability of establishing a Communist government through constitutional process or by revolution, except possibly in Iran.
44. Throughout Western Europe, the Communist Parties since 1946 have suffered severe losses both in membership and prestige. However, the hard core of the Party has been preserved everywhere, and in most countries the Party continues to influence large numbers of non-Communists.
45. The capability of Western European Communists to conduct strikes for political purposes has been sharply reduced. Nevertheless, the Communists retain limited capabilities to interfere with defense production.
46. In the event of general war, the Communist Parties would constitute a threat in Western Europe, especially in France and Italy, where large Communist Parties and Communist trade union strength are reinforced by well-trained Communist quasi-military organizations. Communist capabilities for espionage, industrial sabotage, terrorism, and attacks against transportation and communications facilities and military installations would be substantial.
47. We believe that Bloc political warfare capabilities in the Middle East and Africa will remain low throughout the period of this estimate, except in Iran. The Bloc has taken little positive action in this area, and most of the existing Communist Parties have been forced underground. However, continued deterioration of the Western position would increase the vulnerability of the area to Bloc political warfare.

48. The Bloc agent in Iran, the Tudeh Party, with an estimated strength of 15,000 members and 30,000 fellow travellers, has demonstrated great cohesion and considerable organized strength during the recent political crisis. It has achieved some limited penetration of the Iranian armed forces and a somewhat greater penetration of the bureaucracy. While the odds now are against the Tudeh's gaining control of Iran during the period of this estimate, these odds may shift rapidly, particularly if the National Front is split as a result of the rivalry among its leaders.

49. Communism does not now pose a major immediate threat to India, although the Indian Communist Party and allied parties received 6 million votes (of 102 million) in the 1952 elections. The India Communist Party still has only about 50,000 members, but it has small vocal groups in several state legislatures and the national legislature. We believe that there is very little likelihood that the Indian Communists can make sufficient progress within the period of this estimate seriously to contest the dominant position of the Congress Party. If the Communist Party should again emphasize the role of violence, its popular support would probably diminish and the government would almost certainly revive its earlier repressive measures.

50. Although the Japanese Communist Party now has only about 100,000 members (about half of whom are underground), it is well-organized and well-disciplined, and has significant capabilities for espionage and sabotage. Communist influence in Japanese labor organizations, various front organizations,

and among students and the intellectuals provides the Party with important instruments for disseminating propaganda and for exploiting economic unrest and resentment against the US. However, the Party lacks the capability for seizing control of the government during the period of this estimate, and almost certainly will be unable significantly to impair Japanese cooperation with the West.

51. Bloc political warfare capabilities vary throughout Southeast Asia. They are greatest in Indochina. The Viet Minh is a powerful instrument of terror and control, and it retains considerable nationalist appeal. The Viet Minh forces, with Communist Chinese advice and military assistance, maintain heavy military pressure upon the French and the Associated States. We believe that the Viet Minh will retain these capabilities throughout the period of this estimate.

52. We estimate that during the period of this estimate the Communists will not be able to establish a Communist government anywhere in Latin America either by constitutional process or by revolution. In Guatemala, the only country in Latin America where Communists have power within the government, they are likely to maintain and may even increase their influence. In all major Latin American countries, the Communists will retain a substantial capability for sabotage, for spreading Bloc propaganda, and for stimulating anti-American sentiment in nationalist, intellectual, and organized labor groups.

NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE FOR ESTIMATES OF BLOC ARMED STRENGTH

The estimates of Bloc armed strength are based on information available as of 1 October 1952.

- a. G-2 comment on the nature of the evidence available for estimates of Bloc ground force strength:

The estimates of strength of the Soviet and Satellite ground forces are believed to be of a fairly high order of reliability. These estimates are median figures; the strength of these ground forces varies during the year as classes are inducted and discharged. The Soviet, Satellite, North Korean, and Viet Minh division figures are of a high order of reliability. Intelligence on the strength of the ground forces of Communist China is fragile.

- b. AFOIN comment on the nature of the evidence available for estimates of Bloc air force strength:

Estimates of Soviet air strength are derived from intelligence which is considered of acceptable reliability, but collection coverage is incomplete. [Estimates of over-all size and composition of Soviet Air Forces are derived from identification of individual units and estimated Table of Organization and Equipment strengths authorized for the various types of air regiments.] Current estimates of jet fighter and medium bomber strength are considered reasonably valid. While aircraft count data are limited, they support an estimate that the current average levels of actual strength for the various types of aircraft amount to the following percentages of authorized TO and E strength: for jet fighters, 80-85 percent; for piston medium bombers, 75-80 percent; and for all other types of aircraft, 90-95 percent.

- c. ONI comment on the nature of the evidence available for estimates of Bloc naval strength:

Evidence confirming the existence of the major surface vessels is firm and accurate. Identification of individual ships as to name and pennant number has been supported by evidence from a number of sources. Reliable evidence confirms the existence of 86 percent of the submarines and supports the existence of the remainder. Evidence regarding the naval construction program is considered firm and accurate.

X This paper is a summary estimate. For more detailed information concerning Bloc capabilities, see the Appendixes, which are published separately. For Table of Contents of Appendixes, see next page.

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