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NIE 11-4-66
16 June 1966

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 11-4-66

Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

16 JUNE 1966

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MAIN TRENDS IN SOVIET MILITARY POLICY

THE PROBLEM

To review significant developments in Soviet military thinking, policy, and programs, and to estimate main trends in Soviet military policies over the next five years or so.

SCOPE

This estimate assesses broad trends in Soviet military policy and doctrine. It does not attempt to recapitulate existing NIEs on Soviet strategic attack, strategic air and missile defense, and general purpose forces. Our most recent detailed estimates on the size, composition, and capabilities of these principal components and the supporting elements of the Soviet military forces are as follows:

NIE 11-8-65: "Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack," dated 7 October 1965, TOP SECRET, RESTRICTED DATA (LIMITED DISTRIBUTION).

NIE 11-14-65: "Capabilities of Soviet General Purpose Forces," dated 21 October 1965, SECRET.

NIE 11-3-65: "Soviet Strategic Air and Missile Defense," dated 18 November 1965, TOP SECRET.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A. There has been no basic change in established Soviet military doctrine or force structure, but recent trends point to adjustments in Soviet defense policy. The present political leaders seem more attentive than was Khrushchev to professional military advice, and they have been willing to authorize increases in both defense expendi-

tures and military manpower. Current military writings reveal a search for ways to broaden the options available to the USSR in the application of its military power. (*Paras. 1-5*)

B. The Soviets retain their belief in the primacy of strategic attack and defense forces, both for deterrence and for foreign policy support. In addition, however, they now show increasing interest in improving the capabilities of their general purpose forces to meet contingencies short of general nuclear war. We believe this interest is in part responsive to past developments in US and NATO capabilities and to US advocacy of flexible response. Additional factors include the tensions arising from the Vietnam war and the resulting US military buildup, as well as Chinese hostility towards the USSR. (*Paras. 6, 7, 12-14*)

C. A sharp increase in Soviet defense expenditures is evidently to occur this year. We attribute it primarily to planned expansion in military R and D and to the cost of long lead-time deployment programs for strategic systems which were authorized in previous years. It probably also stems in part from some recent increase in operating costs, including military manpower. The Soviet leaders have probably authorized further growth in military and space expenditures during the 1966-1970 Five Year Plan period. We believe, however, that in the interests of their ambitious economic programs they will seek to limit the growth in defense spending to no more than the average rate of growth in GNP. (*Paras. 3, 4, 17-22*)

D. The Soviet leaders probably expect to achieve a substantial improvement in their strategic position vis-a-vis the US during the next several years. Chief among their current strategic attack programs is the rapid deployment of ICBMs in dispersed and hardened silos, which will add substantially to the survivability and retaliatory capability of the force. Major current air and missile defense programs include improved means of warning and control, better defenses against aircraft and aerodynamic missiles, and what we believe to be ABM defenses under construction. Through these and other programs, we think the Soviets are working to alleviate their present strategic inferiority, and to gain greater assurance of deterring the US in the various crises and confrontations they must allow for

as they contemplate possible developments in the world situation.¹ (Paras. 26, 30, 31, 36)

E. The past restructuring of Soviet theater forces for general nuclear war has resulted in certain characteristics which could be serious handicaps in non-nuclear warfare, particularly if at all prolonged. We estimate that the Soviets will undertake gradual improvements in their general purpose forces which will make them somewhat better suited than at present for conventional operations. Ground units will probably be provided with greater tactical mobility and improved combat and logistic support, becoming more quickly responsive and better able to engage in sustained combat. The Soviets will also maintain a large and versatile tactical air component. They will continue to expand their naval presence in the open oceans, and will acquire greater capabilities to move unopposed military forces to distant areas. The Soviets may regard improved general purpose forces as having increased relevance as their strategic capabilities grow, but we do not think they expect alterations in the strategic situation so great as to permit them to undertake substantially more aggressive courses of action.² (Paras. 32-35, 37)

F. Soviet military policy will continue to be heavily influenced by external developments. In recent years Soviet forces in the Sino-Soviet border area have been strengthened in minor ways, and we expect a gradual increase in Soviet military strength confronting China. In Eastern Europe the USSR continues to develop the forces of its Warsaw Pact allies, despite their increasing tendency to assert their independence. The USSR is thus far disposed toward caution with respect to the present weakening of NATO, perhaps because of concern over the possible loosening of constraints on a revival of independent German power. But the Soviets weigh the adequacy of their military programs primarily against US capabilities, and they

¹ Colonel Harry O. Pattenon, for the Assistant Chief of Staff Intelligence, USAF, would add the following sentence to this paragraph:

The intensity with which the USSR is pursuing a massive military research and development program—the specific content and progress of which are not clearly known to the US—could portend far more than an intent merely to strengthen Soviet deterrent posture and could well be aimed at attainment of a strategic military position which the US would recognize as providing the USSR with a credible first strike damage limiting capability as well as an assured destruction force.

² Colonel Harry O. Pattenon, for the Assistant Chief of Staff Intelligence, USAF, believes the Soviet longer term goal is a combination of capabilities which would yield a credible first strike capability against US forces and thus permit substantially more aggressive courses of action.

will continue to be sensitive to major new developments in US military policy and forces. (*Paras. 8-11, 14*)

G. Within the USSR, a high level of effort in military R and D will almost certainly be continued, despite resource allocation problems. The Soviets probably regard such an effort as imperative in order to prevent the US from gaining a technological advantage and also to gain, if possible, some advantage for themselves, but in deciding to deploy any new weapon system they would have to weigh the prospective gain against the economic costs and the capabilities of the US to counter it. (*Paras. 15, 23*)

H. We do not expect that Soviet military forces will come to be structured according to some quite new and clear-cut strategic doctrine. This will almost certainly be prevented by such factors as the momentum of existing programs, the multiplicity of claims on resources, and the differing views of various groups as to priorities. (*Para. 5*)

DISCUSSION

I. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

1. Since Khrushchev's fall from power there has been no basic change in established Soviet military doctrine or in the Soviet force structure, but a combination of recent developments has altered the circumstances in which Soviet military policy is formed. Khrushchev's departure has removed a strong leader who on several important occasions was able to impose his will on the military establishment, especially in his efforts to hold down defense spending. The new leadership seems generally more attentive to professional advice in all fields, and in military matters the collective may be constrained by the reluctance of individual members to oppose such advice without broad support from their colleagues. At the same time, developments in US forces, international tensions arising from the Vietnamese war, and the hostility of China towards the USSR have provided the advocates of a greater defense effort with new arguments. These developments, however, have not removed all restraints on military spending or given the marshals a free hand in military policymaking.

2. Among the military, discussion continues regarding the fundamental premises and practical implications of the existing force structure. No Soviet military writer questions the preeminent importance of strategic attack and strategic defense forces, but there has been increasingly open criticism of Khrushchev's discrimination against the general purpose forces as having created an undesirable imbalance in Soviet military capabilities. Some important military leaders have apparently begun to appreciate that a nuclear stalemate between the US and the USSR requires consideration of the possibility of a conventional conflict between nuclear powers, a contingency hitherto dismissed as certain to escalate immediately into general nuclear war. Some writers have even suggested the possibility of limited nuclear warfare. In sum, the growing nuclear deterrent power of both the US and USSR is causing a reappraisal of the role of Soviet general purpose forces, and the current trend of the discussion indicates an increasing sense of a need to find ways to broaden the options available to the USSR in the application of its military power. Although the established military doctrine and the actual force structure continue to emphasize the requirements of nuclear warfare, we believe that this trend in Soviet military thinking presages greater attention to improving and diversifying the capabilities of the general purpose forces.

3. We interpret Soviet announcements with reference to the 1966 budget and the 1966-1970 Five Year Plan as public signals of a determination to strengthen Soviet military power. We calculate that Soviet military expenditures continued to rise slightly in calendar 1965 and that they will increase more sharply in 1966.* These increases are attributable primarily to substantial growth in expenditures

*For a more detailed discussion see paras. 17-22.

for military R and D and for the deployment of long lead-time weapons systems (e.g., ICBM and ABM systems), but they also include an increase in the operating costs of Soviet forces attributable in part to some increase in military manpower.

4. In December 1964 (NIE 11-14-64, paras. 15-21) we estimated the total military personnel strength of the Soviet armed forces to be 2.8 to 2.9 million men. We now estimate the present strength to be 3.0 to 3.2 million men.⁴ Neither estimate is based on direct and conclusive evidence; each must be regarded as a calculated approximation. We are confident that some increase has occurred during the interval, but are not able to measure it in precise terms.

5. We believe that these recent developments, taken together, point toward further adjustments in Soviet defense policy. We do not mean by this that we expect any drastic near-term changes, or that henceforth Soviet military forces will be structured according to some quite new and clear-cut strategic doctrine. This will almost certainly be prevented by such factors as the momentum of existing programs, the multiplicity of claims on resources, and the differing views of various groups as to priorities. Rather, we expect a variety of piecemeal efforts to improve Soviet capabilities to meet non-nuclear as well as nuclear contingencies.

II. MAJOR EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON MILITARY POLICY

US Military Capabilities

6. US capabilities, as assessed by the USSR, are a key consideration in the formulation of Soviet military policy. In our view, the Soviet objective has been both to establish a credible deterrent in the face of growing US strategic attack capabilities and to maintain and strengthen the military buttress of Soviet foreign policy. A major element of their policy for many years has been to build strategic attack and defense capabilities so as to achieve forces which could pose a direct threat to the US and its allies and could defend the Soviet homeland against Western nuclear attack. To this end, the Soviets have built a variety of forces to hold Western Europe hostage for US good behavior. They have undertaken a strategic defense effort several times greater than that of the US. They have developed an intercontinental attack force, first with bombers, then with ICBMs in soft sites. They are now deploying hardened and dispersed ICBMs at a rapid pace in the evident expectation that these systems, supplemented by missile submarines, will ensure a significant retaliatory capability.

7. With respect to general purpose forces, the USSR and its allies retain a formidable capability for combat in Central Europe, but Soviet military writers have shown concern about the capabilities of NATO to wage conventional as well as nuclear warfare. The past restructuring of Soviet theater forces for

⁴These figures do not include an uncertain number of civilians (500,000-1,000,000) employed in the military establishment and some 225,000 men in militarized security forces not subordinate to the Ministry of Defense.

operations in general nuclear war has resulted in force characteristics which could be serious handicaps in non-nuclear operations, particularly if at all prolonged. Combat and service support elements are insufficient for large-scale conventional operations. We believe that current concern over these sorts of deficiencies is in part responsive to the US advocacy of a strategy of flexible response. At the same time, the US buildup caused by the war in Vietnam, even though it presents no direct threat to the USSR, has served to reinforce those in the Soviet military establishment who, even under Khrushchev, had urged the importance of maintaining large general purpose forces, though for quite different reasons.

8. Consideration of present and prospective US military capabilities will continue to be a key factor in the development of Soviet military policy. This does not mean that the Soviets will attempt to match the US program for program. Rather, the Soviet effort will be designed to counter US capabilities and if possible to gain a strategic advantage, taking into account relevant geographical, economic, technological, and political considerations. We expect that the traditional Soviet concern with defense of the homeland and the associated pre-occupation with contiguous as opposed to more distant areas will continue to weigh heavily in Soviet strategic planning, and this may lead Soviet planners to decisions different from those which US planners would have made in like circumstances. Nevertheless, we believe that Soviet doctrine, force structure, and weapons programs will continue to be sensitive to major new developments in US military policy and capabilities.

NATO and the Warsaw Pact

9. Originally the Warsaw Pact was an imitative Soviet response to NATO. At that time the East European member governments were completely subservient to the USSR, but their armed forces were hardly reliable or militarily effective from the Soviet point of view.

10. Paradoxically, while the East European Communist states have been showing an increasing tendency to assert their national independence, the USSR has been showing an increasing tendency to rely upon the East European armed forces to perform important military tasks in the event of war in Europe and has been contributing to the improvement of their military effectiveness by providing more advanced weapons and training.⁵ This trend may reflect a Soviet need to placate East European nationalism and a desire to develop the Warsaw Pact as a political as well as military bond. It may also reflect a Soviet desire to counter past improvements in the NATO general purpose forces in Central Europe, especially those of West Germany. The trend is most marked with respect to Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, which have most to fear from a revival of German nationalism. If present trends toward autonomy continue, the Warsaw Pact will evolve toward a conventional military alliance, and

⁵ An NIE on the Soviet view of the reliability of the East European armed forces in certain contingencies is scheduled for completion in July.

the range of contingencies in which the USSR can rely on effective support from its East European allies will narrow.

11. The disruption of NATO has long been a prime Soviet political objective. The disruptive effect of the imminent French withdrawal from military participation in NATO must be gratifying to the USSR, but as yet it has had no apparent effect on Soviet military policy. The Soviets are apparently concerned lest the weakening of NATO loosen constraints on the revival of independent German power, and are thereby disposed toward caution.

Tensions in the Far East

12. Increasing tensions in the Far East also give Soviet planners occasion to reconsider military policy. The war in Vietnam presents to the USSR a particularly difficult political dilemma with military implications: how to render military aid to an embattled fraternal state, as is politically imperative in the context of the Sino-Soviet struggle for Communist leadership, without becoming involved in a direct military confrontation with the US. This problem is aggravated by the need to consider the difficulties and dangers which the USSR would face if the war should develop into a direct conflict between the US and China. Finally, the USSR's own political conflict with China and the developing Chinese nuclear capability give reason for worry about the future. We believe that these considerations are a factor in the increasing Soviet interest in improving and diversifying the capabilities of general purpose forces, and that over the period of this estimate they may lead to some readjustment of Soviet forces.

13. If Sino-US hostilities were to break out, the USSR would probably seek to avoid any military action which, in its view, involved substantial risk of precipitating a US-Soviet conflict, but it might feel constrained to offer the Chinese such military assistance as an augmentation of Chinese air defense capabilities. At the same time, the USSR would seek to convince the world of an imminent danger of nuclear general war. In this, the object of Soviet policy would be to limit the Sino-US conflict and to end it as quickly as possible by political means. However, if the war continued and the existence of a Communist regime in China were jeopardized, the USSR would be under heavy pressure to become more directly involved in the conflict.

14. Quite apart from apprehensions regarding involvement in a Sino-US conflict, the Soviets have reason for concern regarding the security of the long Sino-Soviet border. In recent years Soviet forces in the border area have been strengthened in minor ways. We expect this trend to continue and gradually to add up to an appreciable increase in Soviet military strength confronting China.

III. INTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING POLICY

Professional Military Influence

15. The Soviet military establishment remains under the firm control of the party and state. We do not foresee the development of a powerful direct military influence on internal politics or foreign policy. Barring the rise of another

dominant political leader in the Khrushchev tradition, however, we believe that professional military advice will continue to exert a strong influence on Soviet military policy.

16. Within the next five years or so the present aging military chiefs will inevitably be replaced.⁶ We believe that the influence of their prospective replacements is already felt in the inner circle of the General Staff and is probably a factor in the present interest in providing a broader range of military options. In general, we would expect these new military leaders to be somewhat more flexible and less fettered by past doctrine than the present marshals, but any prediction of how this new group will behave when they attain top responsibility would be uncertain at best.

The Resource Allocation Issue⁷

17. The growth of the Soviet economy has slowed in recent years. The drain on the economy caused by defense expenditures cannot be determined with precision, but the demands of modern military and space programs upon high quality human and material resources have clearly contributed to this slowdown.

18. Our analysis indicates that during the period 1958-1965 the Soviet gross national product (GNP) increased by about one-third (only half the increase of the preceding eight-year period). We estimate that during the same period total Soviet defense and space expenditures increased about 20 percent (i.e., at a lower rate than the growth of GNP), but, within this total, expenditures for defense research and development and for space programs more than doubled.⁸ The difficulty of holding down defense expenditures in a period of rapidly advancing technology and attendant increasing weapon systems costs is well illustrated by the strenuous efforts Khrushchev had to make in order to limit the constant tendency of military expenditures to increase.

19. We calculate that in 1965 total defense expenditures were about 18 billion rubles, approximately nine percent of GNP.⁹ Of this total, about 60 percent was for the operational strategic attack, strategic defense, and general purpose forces, about 25 percent was for the defense R and D and space programs, and about 15 percent was for command and general support. The large growth in expenditures for strategic forces and for R and D in recent years was achieved

⁶The average age of the active Soviet marshals is now over 65.

⁷The calculations upon which the following discussion is based are of course subject to considerable uncertainties. In general, we are more confident of those relating to past performances than of those relating to the present and the future. Nevertheless, we believe these calculations adequate to support general observations regarding the trend in Soviet defense expenditures and the resultant resource allocation problem.

⁸We are unable to distinguish between Soviet expenditures for defense R and D and for space programs.

⁹This level of expenditures represents only a slight increase over 1964. Our present estimate for 1964, 17.7 billion rubles, is about 0.6 billion rubles higher than our previous estimate for that year. The change is largely attributable to an upward revision of our estimate of the number of civilians employed in the Soviet defense establishment.

in part by holding down expenditures for the general purpose forces, but nevertheless the general purpose forces absorbed about one-third of total defense expenditures in 1965.

20. On the basis of present indications we calculate that total Soviet defense expenditures in 1966 may be as much as 20 billion rubles. Even if the total amount is less than that, the rate of growth will clearly exceed that of the last several years.

21. A rate of growth in Soviet military expenditures as large as that estimated for 1966 cannot be long sustained without creating critical economic problems. The current Soviet Five Year Plan (1966-1970) contemplates an economic expansion equivalent to an annual average rate of growth in GNP of 6.5-7 percent. For various reasons, including the present diversion of scarce high quality human and material resources from productive use to military programs, we believe that the actual rate of economic growth is more likely to average four-five percent. If that should prove to be the case, and if military programs are based on the assumption of a seven percent rate of economic growth, they would absorb an even greater share of resources than had been anticipated.

22. In these circumstances the new Soviet leadership would have to face up to the same problem which confronted Khrushchev: how to control defense expenditures in the interest of economic growth. The leadership could of course yield to the argument of military necessity, maintain the planned rate of growth in military expenditures, and accept the economic consequences. We believe, however, that the leadership would be likely to seek to limit the rate of growth in defense expenditures to no more than the average rate of growth of GNP, if necessary by curtailing or stretching out military and space programs, thus exacerbating the competition between military claimants. In any case, the competition between civilian and military claims will be a continuing issue in the USSR, and present decisions will be subject to revision in the light of economic performance and changing defense requirements.

Military Research and Development

23. A high level of effort in Soviet defense research and development will almost certainly be continued. The Soviets probably regard such an effort as imperative in order to prevent the US from gaining a technological advantage that would impair the credibility of the Soviet deterrent and also to gain, if possible, some advantage for themselves. Most Soviet research and development is directed toward the qualitative improvement of existing types of weapon systems, but they are also investigating a broad range of advanced technologies having potential military applications. The Soviet leaders would certainly seek to exploit any significant technological advance for political or military advantage, but in deciding to deploy any new weapon system they would have to weigh the prospective gain against the economic costs and the capabilities of the US to counter it.

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24. The USSR has orbited reconnaissance and communications satellites and is probably developing other military support systems. Throughout the period of the estimate, new military space applications will be introduced as Soviet technology advances and as requirements for such systems are developed. We believe that the Soviets will experiment with a variety of space systems which could be used for military purposes, that they will employ those systems which can be economically and militarily justified, and that some military role for man in space may emerge by the end of the period, particularly as the ability to operate manned space stations grows.¹⁰

IV. PROBABLE TRENDS IN FORCE POSTURE

25. We can make estimates of Soviet force posture now and for the next few years with relative confidence; those for the period five to ten years in the future must be highly tentative. The Soviet planners themselves may not yet have set clear force goals for the period beyond 1970. Even if they have, it seems certain that such decisions will be modified repeatedly in response to changes in military technology, in the balance of Soviet forces, in US forces, in resource availability, and in the general Soviet view of world affairs.

Strategic Attack Forces

26. We believe that for at least the next several years the Soviets have settled on ICBMs as the main component of their intercontinental attack capability. Apparently recognizing the vulnerability of their operational force, the Soviets are now deploying ICBMs in dispersed and hardened silos, at a rapid pace. This important program will add substantially to the survivability and retaliatory capability of the strategic attack forces by 1967, greatly increasing the number of aiming points, most of which will be hardened. After 1970 the Soviets may also introduce a mobile ICBM system as a further means of achieving survivability for a portion of their force. We believe that they will continue to emphasize qualitative improvements in their ICBM forces. Within the next five years they could begin incorporating multiple warheads or penetration aids into their larger ICBMs.

27. The Soviet MR/IRBM force continues to remain virtually static in both level and structure. During the past year the Soviets displayed two new mobile missile systems which probably have at least medium range capabilities. The deployment of such new mobile systems may become the preferred Soviet solution to the problem of concealing the size and location of their MR/IRBM forces and thereby protecting them from nuclear attack.

28. The Soviets will retain a manned bomber force, but we believe that its importance will continue to diminish in comparison to the strategic missile forces they are now building. The Soviets probably will permit their heavy

¹⁰For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see NIE 11-8-65, "Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack," TOP SECRET, RESTRICTED DATA (LIMITED DISTRIBUTION), and the forthcoming NIE 11-8-66, now scheduled for September 1966.

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bomber forces to decline gradually through attrition over the next five years; they are likely to retain a modernized medium bomber force of somewhat smaller than present size.¹¹

29. The Soviet missile submarine force continues to grow with the construction of cruise missile submarines. The cruise missile submarine force was initially designed to counter naval task forces, but, as the number of such submarines increases, some are likely to be targeted against land targets. The construction of ballistic missile submarines stopped in 1963. The capabilities of the existing Soviet ballistic missile submarines are limited by the small number of missiles carried and by other technical characteristics, but they are increasingly used on patrol in the northwest Atlantic and northeast Pacific. We believe that the Soviets will construct an improved class of ballistic missile submarine carrying a larger number of missiles, but as yet we have no firm evidence of it. In any case, missile submarines will continue to be an important element in the Soviet nuclear retaliatory capability.

Strategic Defensive Forces

30. The Soviets continue to commit considerably more resources to air and missile defense than does the US. Their preoccupation with defense evidently led the Soviets to begin deploying, at Leningrad, an early ABM system which was later cancelled. For the last four years the Soviets have been building what we believe are ABM defenses around Moscow. These defenses could probably achieve an initial operational capability as early as 1967, but we think that it would take another year or so to complete all of the units now under construction. We do not yet know the performance characteristics of this system or how it will function. We believe that by 1975 the Soviets could deploy ABM defenses for some 20 to 30 areas containing a quarter of the Soviet population and more than half of Soviet industry. However, a Soviet decision to continue the deployment of ABM defenses to other cities is bound to rest on a complex set of factors such as the capabilities of their ABM system against future developments in penetration aids, US reactions to the Moscow deployment, and the costs of additional deployment in relation to the protection it is likely to provide.

31. While the USSR has achieved a formidable capability against aircraft attacking at medium and high altitudes, its air defense system is still susceptible to penetration by stand-off weapons and low-altitude tactics. The Soviets probably foresee a quantitative reduction in the US bomber force over the next ten years, but a sharp qualitative improvement as new US systems are introduced.

¹¹ Colonel Harry O. Patteson, for the Assistant Chief of Staff Intelligence, USAF, would delete the last sentence and substitute the following:

The Soviets will maintain their heavy bomber force at close to its present strength by a combination of efforts to extend the life of current bombers, by continued production, and by likely introduction of a follow-on bomber. While the number of medium bombers may decline somewhat, the USSR will continue to modernize the force and probably will introduce a follow-on medium bomber in the early 1970's.

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To meet this challenge, they are improving their warning and control systems, continuing the deployment of new high-performance, all-weather interceptor aircraft, and deploying a new defensive system in the northwestern USSR. We are as yet unable to determine with confidence whether this new system is designed to be a SAM, ABM, or dual-purpose system. We believe that it is capable of functioning as a SAM system with a range several times that of the SA-2, and that it also incorporates a limited capability as an ABM system. In any case, we believe that its main utility is likely to be as a long range SAM.¹² Whatever the function of this new system, we believe that the SA-2, probably will continue as the principal SAM system. In addition, we expect a new SAM system for low-altitude defense to be introduced within the next five years.

General Purpose Forces

32. We foresee a gradual transition to improved types of Soviet motorized rifle, tank, and airborne divisions significantly stronger in personnel and in combat and logistic support. Greater tactical mobility and flexibility will probably be provided by the more routine availability of helicopters. These changes will improve the capabilities of these divisions for sustained combat in any circumstances, and will make them more quickly responsive to contingencies other than general nuclear war. They imply some reduction in the number of divisions unless the over-all personnel strength of the ground forces is increased. The competition for resources considered in paragraph 22 would tend to limit any increase in the size of the ground forces, and over the longer term may result in some reduction. For the near term, however, we think that the Soviets have probably determined to maintain their forces at about the present level.

33. The USSR will continue to maintain Tactical Aviation as a versatile force capable of both air defense and ground attack missions. Continuing modernization is bringing new-generation fighter bombers and all-weather fighters into service, but about half of the aircraft of Soviet Tactical Aviation are still older models. A significant development over the past year has been the assignment of newer model fighters to the Far East Military District, a development which may signal the beginning of a move to improve substantially the fighting effectiveness of theater forces in that area. The current Soviet interest in improving general purpose forces is likely to cause some postponement in the decline in numbers of aircraft in Tactical Aviation which we formerly estimated. The Soviets could accomplish this in part by delaying the phase-out of older aircraft.

¹² Lieutenant General Joseph F. Carroll, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, Major General John J. Davis, Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, and Major General Jack E. Thomas, Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, agree that the many uncertainties stemming from analysis of available evidence do not permit a confident judgment as to the designed capabilities of the new defensive systems being deployed in northwestern USSR. On balance, however, considering all the evidence, they believe it is more likely that the systems being deployed at these sites are primarily for defense against ballistic missiles, with an additional capability to defend against high flying, supersonic aerodynamic vehicles.

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34. Since 1963 there has been a major effort to improve the operational capabilities of the Soviet Navy, particularly for operations outside local waters. The USSR has maintained a fairly constant rate of submarine construction and has also undertaken construction of missile armed surface ships. We expect operational and material improvements in Soviet ASW forces, but we believe that the capability of the Soviet Navy to conduct open ocean ASW will remain severely limited for the next several years.

35. Present Soviet capabilities for airborne and amphibious assault remain tied to support of Eurasian operations, and the new naval infantry is evidently being trained and equipped to fight on the flanks of larger land formations. The expansion of the Soviet merchant fleet and the development of very large transport aircraft will improve the Soviet capability to move military forces to distant areas. However, the Soviets do not as yet appear to be developing the sea and air combat escort capabilities which would make possible long-range military sea and airlift against the opposition of a major military power.

V. IMPLICATIONS WITH RESPECT TO GENERAL POLICY

General War Deterrence

36. Considering the prospective development of all their military forces, we think the Soviet leaders expect to achieve a substantial improvement in their strategic position vis-a-vis the US during the next several years. We do not believe that they would expect to achieve such military capabilities as would make the deliberate initiation of general war a rational course of action. Rather, we think they are working to alleviate their present strategic inferiority and to gain greater assurance of deterring the US in the various crises and confrontations they must allow for as they contemplate possible future developments in the world situation.¹³

37. Assuming continued development of their strategic capabilities along present lines, the Soviet leaders might come to feel that the USSR had gained greater freedom of action than it has had in the recent past. In these circumstances, improvement in the capabilities of Soviet general purpose forces for non-nuclear contingencies would have increased relevance. But we do not believe that the Soviets expect to alter the relations of military power to a degree which would permit them to undertake substantially more aggressive courses of action. Moreover, we believe that non-military factors will continue to weigh heavily in their decisions concerning acceptable risks and levels of tension.

Attitude Towards Limited War

38. The improvements in the Soviet general purpose forces which we have estimated above will make them somewhat better suited than at present to conduct conventional operations. This is not to imply that the Soviet leaders have decided to prepare for a deliberate conventional assault on Europe under

¹³ See USAF footnote to Conclusion D.

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the umbrella of nuclear stalemate. Their estimate of Western capabilities and determination will almost certainly continue to deter them from such a course. Though the Soviets want to build more flexibility into their forces and to be able to respond to a number of contingencies, we estimate that they will continue to pursue their aims by means short of open warfare against the West.

39. While Soviet military theorists have now come to speak of the possibility of conventional conflict involving their own and Western forces, these references are couched in general terms. Considering the timing of this renewed interest in conventional warfare, we believe that it is in large part a Soviet reaction to the US posture of flexible response. Regardless of what Soviet military writers say in the abstract, we think the most critical factors governing Soviet decisions in respect of limited war will be the circumstances prevailing at the time, and especially the USSR's estimate of the dangers of escalation. We believe the Soviets will continue to recognize that any such conflict with the West, particularly against NATO in Europe, would carry the grave risk of escalation to general nuclear war. Should the Soviets nevertheless become involved in such a conflict, we think they would seek to limit its scope and duration and would vigorously attempt through political means to resolve the issue.

40. For the same general reasons, we consider it highly unlikely that the USSR would initiate the use of tactical nuclear weapons in a limited conflict with Western forces. If the Western powers were to do so, we believe that the Soviets would probably not escalate to general war, but that they would be likely to retaliate in kind while seeking to bring the conflict to a quick end through political means. Nevertheless, in such a rapidly moving situation the chance of miscalculation by either side would be great.

Wars of National Liberation

41. "Wars of national liberation" continue to be regarded by the Soviets as "just," relatively safe, and often providing them with opportunities to extend their influence. However, Soviet support for such local struggles need not and often does not go beyond political support. The USSR has provided military assistance in selected cases, such as Vietnam, but always in ways which limited the Soviet commitment. In view of the Sino-Soviet split, the encouragement of these wars, particularly where China may become the chief beneficiary, may not always be in the Soviet national interest. We believe that the USSR is becoming increasingly selective in supporting "wars of national liberation," and that it will continue to exhibit great caution when a direct confrontation with the US is possible.

Arms Control Possibilities

42. In the present and prospective balance of military power, mutual arms limitations probably will seem attractive to some elements in Moscow. Arms control measures could be viewed both as a means of reducing the economic

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burden of the Soviet military establishment and as a possible way of improving the USSR's relative military position. However, progress in this field has come to a virtual standstill. There are a variety of reasons for this, including the war in Vietnam and Soviet insistence that a non-proliferation agreement bar West German participation in any new Western nuclear sharing arrangement. In any case, progress toward international arms limitation agreements is likely to be slow.

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