



**INTENTIONS AND  
CAPABILITIES:  
ESTIMATES ON  
SOVIET STRATEGIC  
FORCES, 1950-1983**



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## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	vii
Introduction: Producing National Intelligence Estimates	xi
NIE Designators and Format	xxi
<b>Part I: The Riddle Inside the Enigma: Understanding Soviet Strategic Policy in the 1950s</b>	
<b>The Soviet Union as a World Power</b>	1
<b>The "Bomber Gap," 1955-58</b>	5
1. NIE 11-56 <i>Soviet Gross Capabilities for Attack on the US and Key Overseas Installations and Forces Through Mid-1959</i>	9
2. SNIE 11-6-57 <i>Soviet Gross Capabilities for Attack on the Continental US in Mid-1960</i>	39
3. SNIE 11-7-58 <i>Strength and Composition of the Soviet Long Range Bomber Force</i>	47
<b>The "Missile Gap," 1957-61</b>	55
4. NIE 11-5-57 <i>Soviet Capabilities and Probable Programs in the Guided Missile Field</i>	59
5. SNIE 11-10-57 <i>The Soviet ICBM Program</i>	63
6. NIE 11-5-58 <i>Soviet Capabilities in Guided Missiles and Space Vehicles</i>	65
7. NIE 11-8-59 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack Through Mid-1964</i>	71
8. NIE 11-8-60 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Long Range Attack Through Mid-1965</i>	109
9. NIE 11-8-61 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Long Range Attack</i>	115
10. NIE 11-8/1-61 <i>Strength and Deployment of Soviet Long Range Ballistic Missile Forces</i>	121
<b>Part II: Soviet Strategic Force Development, 1960-72</b>	
<b>Soviet Force Requirements</b>	139
11. NIE 11-4-60 <i>Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1960-1965</i>	141
12. NIE 11-4-63 <i>Soviet Military Capabilities and Policies, 1962-1967</i>	147
13. NIE 11-4-64 <i>Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy</i>	157
14. NIE 11-4-65 <i>Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy</i>	163
15. NIE 11-4-68 <i>Main Issues in Soviet Military Policy</i>	173
16. NIE 11-8-62 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Long Range Attack</i>	181

17. NIE 11-8-64 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack</i>	191
18. M/H NIE 11-8-64 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack</i>	199
19. NIE 11-8-65 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack</i>	203
20. NIE 11-8-66 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack</i>	209
21. M/H NIE 11-8-66 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack</i>	221
<b>Soviet ICBM Accuracy and MIRVs</b>	223
22. NIE 11-8-67 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack</i>	225
23. NIE 11-8-68 <i>Soviet Strategic Attack Forces</i>	239
24. NIE 11-8-69 <i>Soviet Strategic Attack Forces</i>	253
25. NIE 11-8-70 <i>Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack</i>	263
26. NIE 11-8-71 <i>Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack</i>	275

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**Part III: Arms Control, Soviet Objectives, and Force Planning, 1968-83**

<b>Soviet Strategic Objectives and Force Planning</b>	287
27. NIE 11-4-72 <i>Issues and Options in Soviet Military Policy</i>	289
28. SNIE 11-4-73 <i>Soviet Strategic Arms Programs and Detente: What are They Up To?</i>	297
<b>Arms Control and Qualitative Competition</b>	309
29. NIE 11-8-72 <i>Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack</i>	311
30. NIE 11-8-73 <i>Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack</i>	323
31. NIE 11-3/8-74 <i>Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict</i>	329
<b>The A-Team/B-Team Experiment and Its Aftermath</b>	335
32. NIE 11-3/8-76 <i>Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s</i>	339
33. B-Team Report: <i>Soviet Strategic Objectives: An Alternative View</i>	365
34. NIE 11-4-77 <i>Soviet Strategic Objectives</i>	391
35. NIE 11-4-78 <i>Soviet Goals and Expectations in the Global Power Arena</i>	397
36. NIE 11-3/8-79 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the 1980s</i>	407
37. NIE 11-3/8-80 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through Late 1980s</i>	429
<b>Strategic Weapons in Context With Soviet Ambitions</b>	467
38. M/H NIE 11-4-78 <i>Soviet Goals and Expectations in the Global Power Arena</i>	469
39. NIE 11-4-82 <i>The Soviet Challenge to US Security Interests</i>	475
40. NIE 11-3/8-82 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict, 1981-1991</i>	483
41. NIE 11-3/8-83 <i>Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict, 1982-1992</i>	491

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**Part IV: Afterword**

**Intentions and Capabilities:  
Estimates on Soviet Strategic Forces,  
1950–1983**

**Foreword**

The documents in this volume—a selection of 41 National Intelligence Estimates<sup>1</sup> on Soviet strategic capabilities and intentions from the 1950s until 1983—pertain to the US Intelligence Community's performance of its most critical mission during the Cold War. Our purpose in producing the volume is simply to make more readily accessible to scholars, and to the public, records that shed light on the history of American intelligence and foreign policy as well as on the history of the USSR and Russia.

The prerequisite for publishing these documents was declassifying them, a process that began when Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates in February 1992 made a public commitment that CIA would undertake a declassification review of all National Intelligence Estimates on the Soviet Union 10 years old or older. By 1993 CIA had released and transferred to the National Archives several hundred Estimates on the Soviet Union, largely dealing with nonstrategic matters, from which a sample was published that year as *Selected Estimates on the Soviet Union, 1950-1959*.

In November 1994, 80 additional Estimates, on Soviet strategic forces, were declassified (with some excisions). Ten of these Estimates were reproduced and distributed to those attending a conference on estimating Soviet military power that was held at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in December 1994, with CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) and Harvard University's Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History as cosponsors.

The current volume includes a much larger number of NIEs on Soviet strategic forces, but selecting which Estimates to include was nevertheless difficult. For the most part we have included those documents that exemplified intelligence thinking on the various elements of the topic rather than those that were for some reason unusual. To make the volume of manageable scope and size, only the shorter Estimates have been reproduced in their entirety; we have included the "Summaries" and "Key Judgments" of longer Estimates, along with extracts from their other sections. In every case, the Estimate in its declassified version has been transferred in its entirety to the National Archives. Readers interested in the full text of the documents may consult them there.

<sup>1</sup> "National intelligence" and "National Intelligence Estimates" generally are discussed in the "Introduction" and the section on "NIE Designators and Format."

The Center for the Study of Intelligence, directed by Dr. Brian Latell, has managed the process of declassifying and publishing the documents. CSI's Historical Review Group carried out the extensive consultation within the Agency and coordination with other elements of the Intelligence Community necessary to release the documents. Dr. Donald P. Steury of the History Staff, which is also part of CSI, compiled and edited this volume.

Intelligence Estimates on Soviet strategic forces drove the entire strategic analytical process within the American Intelligence Community and played a central role in the great strategic debates affecting US behavior throughout the Cold War. Controversy and analytical closure at the working level influenced debate and decisionmaking at the policy level regarding arms control, force structure, resource allocation, military procurement, and contingency planning for war. Some regarded the Estimates as a battleground, while others used the Estimates as a bible; few of those concerned with Soviet strategic matters ignored the Estimates. They provided a foundation for official US public statements on Soviet military power and indirectly had a significant impact on the American population's understanding of the Soviet strategic threat as well.

Despite many uncertainties regarding many specific issues, by the mid-1960s the intelligence community was rapidly improving its ability to provide in the Estimates a broad description of the Soviet forces at any given time, and a general explanation of how these forces operated and what they would look like a few years hence. Increased knowledge of what the Soviet forces consisted of afforded a markedly improved degree of "crisis stability." Growing confidence that intelligence monitoring—largely through technical means—would detect any major development program that could significantly expand Moscow's strategic capabilities made the arms competition more restrained and cheaper than it might have been. As a corollary, limiting and controlling the arms race became possible.

At the same time, the Estimates had a major impact on the development of US intelligence methodologies and capabilities in collection and analysis. By defining key data gaps and focusing attention on questions that needed to be answered, the Estimates gave impetus to many of the great intelligence breakthroughs of the era—in such areas as remote sensing, imagery, telemetry analysis, radar signature analysis, and sonar analysis.

A major reason for the impact and success of the strategic Estimates was their focus on current and near-term Soviet capabilities—where evidence was more solid—as well as on projections for the future—inherently a taller order. Because of space constraints, the portions of the Estimates excerpted for inclusion here tend to be more oriented toward the future, but

the Estimates in full text aggregated a massive amount of data on current capabilities. These descriptive sections constituted a critical contribution of the Estimates.

Production of the strategic Estimates, usually on an annual basis, culminated an enormous collection, processing, and reporting enterprise that fed material and analysis to planners and policymakers day in and day out throughout the year. The regularity of the production schedule was a major strength of the strategic Estimates. The Estimate defined the problems that intelligence experts knew they would have to deal with over the coming year and influenced analytical and collection strategies.

Not all categories of Estimates enjoyed the reputation or served the function of the Soviet strategic Estimates. In most subject areas Estimates were produced only episodically. With their often long preparation times, Estimates were not always relevant to immediate policymaker concerns in the way that current intelligence publications were. Some consumers of intelligence, believing the community coordination of Estimates could result in “lowest common denominator” assessments, preferred to rely on what they saw as the sharper analysis contained in papers produced by individual intelligence agencies. Thus, the production of the Soviet strategic Estimate was a process without parallel in the work of the Intelligence Community—in terms of clarity and cohesion of mission, continuity of substantive focus, commitment of resources, consensus of priority requirements, and high-level support.

Dr. Steury’s introduction and commentary are intended less to evaluate how the judgments of the Estimates look in retrospect than to provide a general context that will assist readers themselves to follow and assess the evolution of intelligence thinking that went into this important body of Estimates over a period of several decades.

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## Introduction: Producing National Intelligence Estimates

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the Cold War American intelligence community was the degree to which it was organized for the systematic production of national estimative intelligence on topics of vital concern to policymakers.<sup>2</sup> Estimative intelligence may be defined as regular, detailed analyses of diverse aspects of the world situation, which include the policy objectives and likely actions of other nations, and their military capabilities and potential. In general, it was predictive in format. Indeed, what made this kind of intelligence “estimative” was the quality of the unknown. The use of the word “estimate” on or in an intelligence report was a signal that the report’s message was in some degree speculative, however well-founded that speculation might be in experience or knowledge. The appellation “national” indicated that the intelligence analysis in question was produced with the concurrence—or at least the informed dissent—of the government organizations that made up the US intelligence community: the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency (established in 1961), the military service intelligence organizations, and the intelligence arms of the Department of State and the Department of the Treasury, as well as of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Energy (until 1977, the Atomic Energy Commission).

The United States was hardly unique in its recognition of the importance of estimative intelligence, but it was the first nation to institutionalize it in a permanent bureaucracy. The perception of a need for some sort of national capability in this area emerged in the late 1940s, a product of the postwar US effort to create a security establishment that could adapt to the changing global strategic balance. To avoid another strategic surprise of the kind that brought the United States into World War II, a substantial body of government and academic opinion advocated the creation of a single, “national” intelligence agency to coordinate the activities of the traditional “departmental” intelligence organizations and to correlate and evaluate the intelligence analysis that they produced. Beyond the basic question of strategic warning, however, the requirement for national estimative intelligence stemmed from concerns that the strategic complexities of the modern industrial era demanded intelligence analysis with a level of synthesis that was beyond the existing capabilities of the US intelligence establishment.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of National Intelligence Estimates and the estimative intelligence process, see Harold P. Ford’s *Estimative Intelligence. The Purposes and Problems of National Intelligence Estimating*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993).

The problem was that the interrelated technological, industrial, and economic dimensions of 20th century warfare transcended the traditional avenues of intelligence inquiry. Postwar strategic thinkers were less concerned about a potential opponent's immediate military capabilities and intentions—the traditional purview of service intelligence organizations—than about sound analysis of a foreign power's "actual latent resources" and its ability to organize them.<sup>3</sup> As the recent experience of global war had amply demonstrated, a nation's strategic stature was determined less by the capabilities of its extant military establishment than by the strength of its fully mobilized war economy. This depended, to a large degree, upon quantifiable geopolitical factors—population, raw materials, and industrial plant—but also upon imprecise variables, such as a nation's social and political structure and the qualities of its national leadership. Strategic thinking of any depth and range thus derived as much from psychology, economics, and the social sciences as it did from the more usual considerations of military power and position.

The intelligence analysis that supported these broader strategic judgments attempted to draw political, military, economic, technological, and even psychological factors into some kind of coherent whole. Intelligence of this kind thus depended less on the ability to ferret out important nuggets of information than on understanding the frequently complex interrelationships between the various components of national power. At the same time, many of the topics under consideration—such as Soviet strategic nuclear forces—required a good deal of highly specialized knowledge. Thus, if synthetic in overall conception, intelligence Estimates frequently stood by themselves as comprehensive discussions of highly technical subjects. As such, and most especially in the case of those that dealt with any aspect of the Soviet military, the Estimates took on an encyclopedic function for those not intimately involved in the problem, providing an essential reference that described and evaluated current Soviet capabilities.

Analysis on this level would be a complex task under any circumstances, given the potential vastness of the subject matter, but it was made more so by the paucity of the available evidence—particularly in the case of the Soviet Union. It was in the nature of intelligence to depend upon sources of information that were scanty, inconclusive, or simply misleading, and it was part of the peculiar nature of the intelligence producer's relationship with the policymaking consumer that a dearth of usable evidence gave rise to the greatest demand for comprehensive analysis of the subject at hand. The requirement for estimative intelligence analysis thus dictated that the most far-reaching judgments often had to be made about areas that were not fully

<sup>3</sup> Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 48-50.



understood. Not surprisingly, these were also the areas in which there was the greatest potential for disagreement and in which a conclusion was most likely to be disputed. The “higher combined calculations” that went into this kind of analysis nevertheless supported judgments that might directly influence policy on a national or a regional level.<sup>4</sup> To be credible, Estimates therefore had to be authoritative, not only to policymaking intelligence consumers, but also to the intelligence-producing organizations.

In the convergent demands for synthesis, comprehension, and analytical credibility are to be found the origins of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), the genre of intelligence analysis that—at least in theory—served as the capstone of the US intelligence pyramid. NIEs drew fully upon sources and analytical resources available from the many intelligence organizations in the US Government. They thus were truly national documents that reflected the considered judgment of the organizations that made up the intelligence community.

Although the concept of national estimative intelligence was fully developed at the end of World War II, the machinery for NIE production did not really take shape until 1950, as part of a substantial reorganization instigated by the incoming Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith.<sup>5</sup> The Office of National Estimates (ONE) produced its first NIE in 1950 and remained the primary locus of estimative intelligence until the creation of the National Intelligence Officer system in 1973.<sup>6</sup> Originally subordinated directly to the DCI, in 1952 ONE was moved into the analytical arm of the CIA, the Directorate for Intelligence. It remained a national intelligence-producing organization, however, and was returned to the DCI’s direct control in 1966.

Supervising the estimative process was the US Intelligence Board (USIB), chaired by the DCI and composed of the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (DDCI) and the heads of the agencies that made up the intelligence

<sup>4</sup> George S. Pettee. *The Future of American Secret Intelligence* (Washington, DC: 1946): p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> In the Central Intelligence Group (1946) and the early CIA (which succeeded CIG in 1947), estimative intelligence was written by the Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE). Landmark ORE Estimates include: ORE-1 *Soviet Foreign and Military Policy* (23 July 1946), ORE-1/1 *Revised Soviet Tactics in International Affairs* (6 January 1947), ORE 22-48 *Possibility of Direct Soviet Action During 1948* (2 April 1948), ORE 22-48 (Addendum) *Possibility of Direct Soviet Action During 1948-49* (16 September 1949). These and many other ORE intelligence reports have been declassified and transferred to the National Archives.

<sup>6</sup> See pp. xvii.

community.<sup>7</sup> Among other responsibilities external to the actual production of intelligence Estimates, the role of the USIB was to plot out an annual program of Estimates production, to review draft Estimates for quality, to guarantee that the Estimates adequately represented the agreed opinion of the intelligence community, and to identify crisis situations requiring immediate attention. The authority to decide what general topics the Estimates should address was vested in the National Security Council (NSC), which communicated its requirements to the USIB, which consulted with the NSC in drafting the schedule of Estimates. The NIEs themselves were nonetheless written under the authority of the Director of Central Intelligence. By statute, the Estimates were his and he alone was responsible for the judgments that they contained.<sup>8</sup> This purely personal authority derived from his titular position as the head of the US intelligence community and was distinct from the authority he derived from being the head of the Central Intelligence Agency. The extent to which the DCI chose to play an active role in the process varied considerably, but a more interventionist role for the DCI in the Estimates was legitimized by his greater personal responsibility for them than for other CIA analytical products, which in most cases DCIs have not reviewed before publication.<sup>9</sup>

Within the Office of National Estimates, responsibility for drafting and coordinating the final intelligence product lay with the Board of National Estimates.<sup>10</sup> The composition of the Board varied, but it was distinguished as much by members with a broad general knowledge of world affairs as by those with prior accomplishments in intelligence. Generally, there were from 10 to 15 senior officers on the Board. A substantial percentage had academic backgrounds, most notably the founding Director of National Estimates, the Harvard historian William L. Langer, as well as his deputy and successor, Sherman Kent, a Yale historian who had come to intelligence from a career teaching modern European history. Indeed, more than anything else, academic credentials were the hallmark of service on the Board of National Estimates.<sup>11</sup>

The Board's function was principally synthetic: it produced the Estimates from contributions solicited from among the organizations within the

<sup>7</sup> The name of this body changed several times: from 1946 to 1947 the intelligence analysis and production responsibilities of the USIB were vested in an Intelligence Advisory Board (IAB), with the same membership as the USIB. In 1947 this was renamed the Intelligence Advisory Committee (IAC), which became the USIB in 1958.

<sup>8</sup> In the early years of the Estimates process the DCI personally signed each Estimate.

<sup>9</sup> In this regard, probably the most "activist" DCI was Adm. Stansfield Turner, who personally wrote the "Key Judgments" to two major NIEs, 11-3/8-79 and 11-3/8-80, excerpts from which are included in this collection.

<sup>10</sup> "Coordination" was the name given to the process whereby the member agencies of the intelligence community reviewed and commented on NIE drafts.

<sup>11</sup> Both Langer and Kent had prior intelligence experience in the Research and Analysis Branch of the World War II Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

intelligence community, according to their areas of expertise. An assortment of standing interagency committees also contributed to the process, such as the Guided Missile Intelligence Committee (GMIC), which was formed in 1956 and renamed the Guided Missile and Astronautics Intelligence Committee (GMAIC) in 1958, and the Scientific Intelligence Committee (SIC), created in 1949.<sup>12</sup> The Board thought independently, however, and its responsibility was to produce a reasoned judgment on the subject at hand from the available evidence. Not surprisingly, this often led the Board into disagreement with other agencies in the intelligence community—all of whom had access to pretty much the same information as the Board. When disagreements occurred, the Board would attempt to produce a final synthesis that all parties could agree upon. Minor disagreements—and a surprising percentage of major ones—usually could be worked out informally, but frequently conflicts could not be resolved, resulting in one or more of the agencies registering a formal dissent to some or all of an NIE. In this case, the dissenting agency was identified and its objections to the NIE were explained in a footnote or sometimes within the text of the NIE itself.<sup>13</sup> The coordination process occurred in a series of meetings in which the several organizations would be represented by intelligence officers delegated for that purpose. The officially designated representatives generally were field-grade officers (majors and colonels or naval commanders and, occasionally, captains) or their equivalent in civilian ranks, but the representative might in turn ask a subordinate to attend—a specialist whose area was being discussed, for example.

The final draft of an Estimate—with dissents—was subject to approval by the US Intelligence Board, which also was responsible for disseminating the final product to the appropriate recipients. Regardless of the substance of the disagreement, the official judgment of the DCI prevailed in the text. The footnotes to an NIE, however, were as much a part of the final community judgment as the main text and were an important means of informing the policymaker of the full range of opinion on a given topic.

Another independent level of review existed in the President's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities (PBCFIA). Created by President Eisenhower in 1956, the PBCFIA was a part-time civilian watchdog committee that monitored the intelligence process as a whole, reviewed

<sup>12</sup> In addition, because they were producers of specialized kinds of intelligence critical to the assessment of Soviet strategic capabilities, some organizations (such as NSA and the CIA's National Photographic Interpretation Center [NPIC]) played larger roles in the process than might be immediately apparent in the text of the Estimates.

<sup>13</sup> The identity of the dissenting intelligence organization was generally personified as the view of its chief, who assumed personal responsibility for the content of the dissent, just as the DCI assumed personal responsibility for the NIE as a whole. Such a dissent might read: "The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believes." In some Estimates the responsible officer or official was identified by name as well as title.

published Estimates, and made recommendations directly to the President. In 1962, after the Bay of Pigs invasion, President Kennedy reorganized the PBCFIA and renamed it the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). In the mid-1970s, highly critical of the NIEs' treatment of Soviet strategic objectives, as well as some aspects of Soviet weapons and forces development, the PFIAB recommended the A-Team/B-Team experiment.<sup>14</sup> Although President Carter abolished the PFIAB in 1977, President Reagan revived it in 1982 on the recommendation of his Director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey.

In theory, the authority to produce National Intelligence Estimates was delegated to the Board of National Estimates as a collectivity; in practice, the responsibility for drafting the Estimates devolved onto individual members, who soon developed their own areas of expertise. Moreover, the Board was supported by a staff in ONE and in the component offices of the CIA's analytical arm, the Directorate for Intelligence (DI). The DI offices were founded to provide specialized intelligence analysis and to produce basic or geographic intelligence and current intelligence reports on a daily basis. Perhaps inevitably, the line that separated ONE's responsibilities from the other Offices in the DI blurred, and they frequently found themselves in competition. ONE nevertheless remained exclusively responsible for the production of national estimative intelligence.<sup>15</sup>

The existence within CIA of a formal structure to produce estimative intelligence, and participation of so much CIA analytical talent in the preparation of the Estimates, usually guaranteed the Agency a kind of hegemony over the process, despite the involvement of other US intelligence organizations. The fact that the main text of an Estimate almost invariably reflected the DCI's (or ONE's) position meant that, in case of disagreement, the other intelligence organizations always were implicitly cast as dissenters from that position. Equally important, it placed a premium upon the adjudicating role played by the Board of National Estimates. Even when qualified by the alternative viewpoints of the other intelligence organizations in the community, it was the Board's judgment that stood highest in the main text of an

<sup>14</sup> See Part III, pp. 335-391.

<sup>15</sup> Apart from ONE, in the 1950s and most of the 1960s the analytical offices in the CIA were primarily the Office of Research and Reports (ORR), which reported on the Soviet military economy, and, initially, the Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI), which was responsible for analysis of foreign weapons systems. From 1963 to 1973, apart from air and ballistic missile defenses and nuclear concerns, most of OSI's analytical functions were vested in the Office of Weapons Intelligence (OWI). Ballistic missiles and space systems were handled by the Foreign Missile and Space Analysis Center (FMSAC). OSI, OWI, and FMSAC were in the Directorate of Science and Technology (DS&T) in this period. In 1973 the FMSAC and OSI's remaining defensive systems functions were absorbed by OWI. In 1976 the two offices were transferred to the Directorate of Intelligence and in 1980 amalgamated in the Office of Scientific and Weapons Research (OSWR).

Estimate and by which its value and analytical quality generally were measured.

By the mid-1960s the Board's reputation as a producer of authoritative intelligence was slipping. Some high-level policymakers regarded the NIEs as too pontifical, with insufficient supporting argumentation and evidence. Beginning with their failure to predict the Soviet deployment of offensive missiles in Cuba, the Board and the Office of National Estimates found themselves challenged in a series of confrontations with the intelligence community and the foreign policy establishment as a whole. Perhaps the most important of these controversies in the field of Soviet strategic forces was the estimates of Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) deployments and the growing schism in the intelligence community over Soviet strategic objectives.

In 1973, DCI William Colby replaced the Office of National Estimates with the National Intelligence Officer system, made up of intelligence professionals with individual expertise in specific fields, to advise the DCI and serve as a permanent staff for NIE production. Each National Intelligence Officer (NIO) was responsible for intelligence community relations in a specific substantive area, as well as for supervising the production of NIEs and meeting the needs of intelligence consumers in that area. The NIEs themselves were drafted by intelligence community analysts seconded to the NIO for that purpose. Often these were intelligence officers from CIA, but many of them came from other agencies and departments in the intelligence community.

Colby's actions were intended to involve agencies of the intelligence community in the NIE process from the very beginning. Although agencies in the intelligence community had previously been asked to coordinate the draft of an NIE only after it had been written, under the new system they were part of the drafting process itself.

As created, the National Intelligence Officers reported to the DCI through a Deputy to the DCI for National Intelligence. When, in 1977, this deputy became simultaneously the Director of the new National Foreign Assessment Center, or NFAC (which replaced the Directorate for Intelligence), the NIOs were subordinated administratively to that Directorate. In 1979 the NIOs were resubordinated directly to the DCI, this time in the newly created National Intelligence Council. The US Intelligence Board retained its NIE review functions until 1976, when it was subsumed by the new National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB).

In general, the NIE process was more noteworthy for its flexibility than its efficiency. Substantial duplication of effort among the various agencies that made up the intelligence community provided a safeguard against serious analytical errors, but made for a cumbersome coordination process. The actual roles played by each of the intelligence organizations evolved considerably over time. Although the CIA had been established as a "national" intelligence organization with the responsibility for synthesizing intelligence from many sources into a broader "policy-relevant" form, in practice, it soon began to challenge many of the conclusions reached by INR and the military intelligence organizations, initially on economic grounds. This tendency grew more pronounced during the 1950s, eventually leading to the creation of a more broadly based independent analytical capability within the DI, especially after the establishment of the Office of Weapons Intelligence (1962) and the Office of Strategic Research (1967), which brought CIA intelligence analysis into direct competition with that produced by the Defense Intelligence Agency and the service intelligence organizations.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, the place occupied by national intelligence estimating at the pinnacle of the intelligence process virtually guaranteed that the Estimates were prepared in an atmosphere charged with political energy. In retrospect, this seems to have been largely unavoidable. NIEs existed at the intersection of analysis, strategy, politics, and (perhaps, most important) military procurement. At this level a single fact or piece of intelligence could have profound implications for the bureaucratic and resource interests of some institution of the federal polity, an importance quite independent of its substantive significance for American policy as a whole. This basic truth could not but influence the production of estimative intelligence, and it contributed significantly to many of the controversies that dominated ONE's history.

Nowhere was the tension and complexity of the estimative process more pronounced than in strategic forces analysis. Drawing upon economic, scientific, political, and military sources of intelligence, the strategic forces

<sup>16</sup> In 1967 the Office of Strategic Research (OSR) and the Office of Economic Research (OER) were formed out of the old Office of Research and Reports (see p. xvi, ff). OSR was an effort to broaden the CIA's military economic functions into a true strategic synthesis that included analysis of the doctrine and employment of military forces as well as their production and cost. OER took over ORR's purely economic functions. In 1973 the two new offices were joined by a new Office of Political Research (OPR).

This organization persisted until 1981, when the National Foreign Assessment Center (NFAC) was again reorganized, with regional offices replacing the old functional offices. A new Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA) absorbed the "Soviet" responsibilities of OSR, OER, and the Office of Political Analysis (the former OPR), along with the responsibility for military analysis of the other nations in the Soviet Bloc. Other regional offices were created to cover the rest of the globe. The Office of Science and Weapons Research (organized in 1980) remained a functional component. Early in 1982 NFAC was renamed the Directorate of Intelligence.

NIEs demanded a depth and breadth of analysis beyond the capacity of any single intelligence organization as traditionally conceived. NIEs dealing with strategic forces went beyond the analysis of Soviet *capabilities* (itself no simple task) to attempt to understand the full range of *intentions* that underlie Soviet strategic policy. Moreover, in that they dealt with the specter of nuclear war, the strategic forces NIEs were a subject of sweeping concern, not only to the intelligence community, but to the national security establishment as a whole. Finally, the continuing nuclear arms race meant that the conclusions reached by the strategic forces NIEs were of direct importance to immediate questions of weapons procurement, as well as to substantial issues of long-range research and development.

Because of its pivotal nature, the estimative machinery devoted to Soviet strategic forces quickly acquired an atypical permanency. Generally an annual event, the actual production of a strategic forces NIE usually took only a few months, but it benefited from an intensive research and analysis effort that lasted the entire year. Much of this effort—which included the dedicated use of a significant portion of the collection assets available to the US intelligence community—was driven solely by the requirement to produce the annual Estimate on Soviet strategic forces. The resultant continuity and sheer intellectual concentration contributed significantly to the sophistication, depth, and intensity of the analysis that went into the Estimates. The analytical corpus that emerged from this process is unique in the history of intelligence.<sup>17</sup>

The selections that follow this introduction represent only a portion of the combined output of thousands of analysts over a period of some 33 years. Many of the Estimates were pioneering efforts in their development and use of methodologies and sources. All are the result of a learning process that was under way even as they were being written. None should be taken as definitive; rather, each is a signpost that pointed the way to a broader understanding of the subject at hand.

<sup>17</sup> The Estimates on "Soviet strategic forces" should be considered to include the following for the period under discussion (1950-83): NIE 11-4 (Soviet military policy), 11-3 (strategic defensive forces), 11-8 (strategic offensive forces), and 11-3/8 (11-3 and 11-8 combined). NIEs on other topics were produced periodically rather than annually, generally as needed, and did not require the volume of continuous effort devoted to Soviet strategic forces.

## NIE Designators and Format

In general, the intelligence community identified each NIE by a three-part numerical code, indicating, first, the geographic subject area, second, the topic of the Estimate, and third, the year in which the Estimate was produced. Estimates concerning the Soviet Union were given the geographic designation "11."<sup>18</sup> Estimates on broad general topics were not identified by a topic code. Hence, NIE 11-56 may be identified as an Estimate concerning the Soviet Union generally, produced in 1956. Other, more specific subject areas are identified as follows:

- 11-1 Space.
- 11-2 Atomic Energy.
- 11-3 (Strategic) Air Defense.
- 11-4 Main Trends in Military Policy.
- 11-5 Economics.
- 11-6 Peripheral Nuclear Forces (only used briefly).
- 11-7 Politics.
- 11-8 Strategic (Intercontinental) Attack.
- 11-14 General Purpose Forces.
- 11-15 Naval Forces.

In 1974 the NIE 11-3 series was combined with the 11-8 series to form the 11-3/8 series (NIE 11-3/8-74, *Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict*), which considered Soviet capabilities to wage intercontinental war as an organic whole, comprising both offensive and defensive elements.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> This system took some time to evolve. Until 1957 NIEs were identified by their place in the sequence of Estimates produced on a geographic area in a given year with no indication of subject. Thus, 11-4-54 would be the fourth Estimate on the Soviet Union produced in 1954—it might have been on any subject dealing with the Soviet Union—but 11-4-60 could only be an Estimate on Soviet military policy produced in 1960.

<sup>19</sup> The title assigned to an Estimate often varied from year to year. Although, in general, they all conveyed the same information and meaning, occasionally the change in title implied a shift in the intellectual climate in which the Estimates were produced. For example, compare NIE 11-4-77 *Soviet Strategic Objectives* with NIE 11-4-78 *Soviet Goals and Expectations in the Global Power Arena* and NIE 11-4-82 *The Soviet Challenge to US Security Interests*.



Thus, with some exceptions, the Estimates dealing with Soviet strategic forces were the 11-4, 11-3, and 11-8 series (from 1974 the NIE 11-3/8 series). Estimates dealing solely with Soviet strategic *defensive* forces have not been included in this collection, although some discussion of this topic may be found in the 11-3/8 series and 11-4 series Estimates. Other NIE series that are not included in this collection (such as 11-15, the Soviet naval series, or 11-14, mainly on Warsaw Pact ground and air forces) often touched upon matters relating to strategic forces, but that was not their principal topic.

Although there was no formal requirement to produce NIEs on an annual basis, by the mid-1960s some NIEs—including those dealing with Soviet strategic forces—were in practice published every year. By and large, problems in writing or producing strategic forces Estimates caused any delays or omissions in the series. NIEs in such other areas as the Soviet economy were generally produced periodically rather than annually. All NIEs were subject to periodic updates, generally issued as a “Memorandum to Holders” (M/H). These memoranda might be a paragraph, a new table, or even a good-sized paper in themselves. In addition, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) might be issued in a crisis, a rapidly developing situation, or on some highly topical subject. Generally shorter than an NIE, SNIEs used the same coding system, although with greater variation because of their highly topical nature.

NIE organization followed a fairly consistent, if general, pattern: a “Summary” (often containing a “Problem Statement”), followed by a more detailed “Discussion,” frequently followed by a set of annexes containing technical data and orders of battle. Arguably the most important part of the Estimate, the “Summary” at first was relatively short (11 to 12 pages) and, hence, the part of the Estimate that policymakers were most likely to read.

Many NIEs, and strategic forces NIEs in particular, quickly outgrew this fairly simple format. Beginning in 1973, the “Summary” was replaced by a 10-to-12-page set of “Key Judgments” that distilled the major conclusions of the Estimate without attempting to summarize the text as a whole.<sup>20</sup> The “Key Judgments” were bound together in one volume with a much longer “Summary,” the two now often approaching a total of about 100 pages. The highly detailed discussion section was relegated to a second volume, while the annexes, which also had greatly increased in length and complexity, were placed in a third volume. The Estimate as a whole now frequently would total 200 to 300 pages in length.

<sup>20</sup> At first glance, the difference between a 10-to-12-page “Summary” and a set of “Key Judgments” of similar length may not be immediately apparent—often because in practice there was none. This was not always so, however, as is evident by comparing the “Summary Conclusions” attached to NIE 11-8-70 with the “Key Judgments” in NIE 11-3/8-79 (both reproduced in this volume).