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Will - Not Weapons Is Best Force

A Central Intelligence Agency study seems to conclude the greatest risk of nuclear war in the years ahead may come from U.S. actions which convince Soviet leaders we lack determination in a crisis.

The study, by Willard Matthias of the CIA Board of National Estimates, says:

"While it is most unlikely that Soviet leaders will choose to carry out actions they know to carry a high risk of general war such knowledge is not easy to come by . . .

"In this age of mobile striking forces and hardened missile sites, it does not appear possible to build a nuclear force capable of destroying an enemy's capabilities and simultaneously protecting oneself . . .

"Even extremely large numbers of high-cost weapons would provide no assurance of victory or even survival. Thus, if there is any valid and rational concept today upon which to develop or measure a strategic military force, it is that of deterrence.

"But one cannot find any rule for determining that a stated level of force will deter and that another will not." Deterrence depends, says Matthias, in very considerable measure on how the enemy sizes up the determination and will of his opponent.

The Matthias study gives an example—how the United States, by seeming to be afraid of confrontation, set the stage for the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

Says this CIA paper:

"In the international atmosphere of early 1962, when the Cuban move was planned, the Soviet leaders were still riding high and the United States probably appeared to them to be uncertain and cautious.

"The United States had chosen not to run the political risks necessary to save the Bay of Pigs expedition. The United States had accepted the erection of the Berlin Wall with little more than verbal pyrotechnics. And the United States had accepted the neutralist solution in Laos.

"Formal U.S. statements regarding Cuba conveyed an air of studied uncertainty.

"In military planning, despite substantially increased programs of missile deployment, the United States was advocating a greater conventional capability and a counter-insurgency program.

"Thus, it probably appeared to the Soviets that the diplomatic and military stance of the United States was that of a power seeking to avoid confrontation and fearful of its consequences, and therefore a power which could be subjected to a series of setbacks without high risk of forceful resistance."

The U.S. show of determination in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 convinced Soviet leaders we did mean business, Matthias says. He thinks that will stand the United States in good stead for a little while.

But he says there will be other times and other places in which Soviet leaders could again read a lack of will power in U.S. actions. This could lead to trouble.

This study has the "general approval" of the CIA Board of National Estimates, "though no attempt has been made to reach complete agreement on every point."