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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

25 January 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Allan Evans (OIR)
Colonel W. H. Hennig, USA (G-2)
Captain Allan L. Reed, USN (ONI)
Colonel Charles F. Gillis, USAF (AFOIN-2B2)
Captain Ray Malpass, USN (JIG)

SUBJECT : SNIE-11-54: Likelihood of General War with
the USSR through 1957

1. The NSC has requested the IAC to prepare an estimate of the likelihood of general war (including Soviet attacks on the continental US) during the period through 1957. The NSC on 25 January indicated that this estimate is needed for Planning Board consideration 11 February in preparation for Council action on the 17th. The Board proposes to recommend to the IAC that this request be met by drafting a very brief Special Estimate (SNIE-11-54).

2. In view of the short time allowed for IAC action, the Board has prepared the attached outline of main points for discussion with reference to the problem and suggests that they be used in lieu of formal terms of reference for this estimate. It is requested that your representative attend a meeting at 2:00 Wednesday, 27 January, to discuss these main points, to make oral contributions on as many points as possible where agency positions are already crystallized, and to indicate the points on which you feel written contributions must be prepared. The latest practicable deadline for such written contributions would be 12:00 Friday, 29 January.

3. The attached outline breaks the problem down into the main topics and arguments used in previous NIE's and SE's dealing with the problem of likelihood of general war. Wherever agreed IAC positions are available on these topics, the outline contains quotations of the relevant texts, with an indication as to whether the agreed estimate extends as far as 1957 or only for a shorter period. It is the Board's view that the present language of NIE-95 (which extends only as far as mid-1955) as described in Section II and Section III of the attached outline could be extended through 1957 unless the critical economic and military factors listed in Section IV of the attached outline show significant changes in the period 1955-1957. The Board invites special attention to these

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factors for the purposes of the discussion on 27 January and suggests the retention of agreed language wherever there has been no significant change.

4. It would therefore be appreciated if your representative would meet with us in Room 146 South Building at 2:00 Wednesday, 27 January.

Paul A. Borel

PAUL A. BOREL
Deputy Assistant Director
National Estimates

Distribution "B"

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25 January 1954

**SUBJECT: TERMS OF REFERENCE: SNIE-11-54: LIKELIHOOD OF
GENERAL WAR WITH THE USSR THROUGH 1957**

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the likelihood of general war (including Soviet attacks on the continental US) during the period through 1957.

Explanatory Note

The occasion for this estimate is the need of the NSC to validate for the period through 1957 the estimate presently appearing in its report on continental defense, which is based on current national intelligence estimates and is valid only through 1955. This paragraph now reads:

"Although the USSR has a growing capability to launch an aggressive attack on the United States, we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin will deliberately initiate general war during the period covered by current estimates (through mid-1955). However, it is possible that general war might result from miscalculations by either side as a result of a series of actions and counteractions not intended by either side to have that result. Moreover, despite Soviet "peace offensives" and similar moves, there is no substantial reason to believe that the USSR has altered its basic hostility to the free world and its ultimate objective of dominating the world. Accordingly, plans for improving at home the defenses of our vitals should proceed in a rapid and orderly fashion." (Para. 8, NSC 159/2)

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QUESTIONS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM

GENERAL

- I. We have consistently recognized that general war (including Soviet attacks on the continental US) might occur in one of the following ways:
- A. The USSR, taking the strategic offensive, deliberately and with premeditation, initiates general war, the Kremlin anticipating that it can decisively defeat the US and thereby achieve ultimate Communist objectives.
 - B. The USSR, acting on the strategic defensive, deliberately and with premeditation, initiates general war, the Kremlin:
 - 1. EITHER believing that the US planned to attack the USSR and hoping to gain the strategic advantages of surprise by attacking first;
 - 2. OR believing that the increasing military power of the US and/or the whole Western coalition constituted a grave threat to Soviet security or vital strategic interests.
 - C. The USSR or the US (and/or the other nations of the West) suddenly in the course of a series of actions

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and counteractions not intended by either side to result in general war, decides that some action taken by the other side constituted a grave threat to its security or vital strategic interests.

II. STANDING ESTIMATES THROUGH MID-1955 (NIE-95, "Probable Soviet Bloc Courses of Action through Mid-1955", 22 September 1953)

- A. We have said that we believe it unlikely that the Kremlin will conclude that Soviet Bloc forces had a decisive superiority justifying the deliberate initiation of general war in expectation of early victory. (I A above; NIE-95, paras. 15 and 16)
- B. We also have said that the Kremlin is unlikely to conclude that war was imminent regardless of Soviet intentions or that the Western coalition was increasing its military power to the point of constituting a grave threat to Soviet security or positions vital to Soviet security. (I B above; NIE-95, paras. 15 and 17)
- C. We also have said we believe that the Kremlin will try to avoid courses of action which in its judgment might involve substantial risk of general war (I C above; NIE-95, paras. 16 and 19) although we have explained that a series of actions and counteractions, initiated by either side, could nevertheless lead to general war even though not intended by either side to have that effect.

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DISCUSSION

III. Estimates made in NIE-95 are mainly based on the following considerations. Pertinent estimates which cover the period through 1957 are quoted.

A. Kremlin Outlook and Objectives

1. In line with Communist doctrine "Communist rulers remain profoundly convinced that permanent hostility exists between the Communist and free worlds. Their basic objectives, therefore, continue to be an expansion of their own sphere of power and the eventual domination of the non-Communist world." (NIE-95, para. 13)
2. The Kremlin also probably believes that (a) "the struggle will continue through a whole historical epoch, with historical forces working inevitably to favor the increase of Communist and the decline of 'capitalist' power", and (b) "the form of the global conflict is not necessarily military, except possibly in the final and cataclysmic stage..." (NIE-95, para. 14)

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B. Political Vulnerability of the West

1. The Kremlin probably estimates that opportunities will continue to exist during this period for furthering its objectives short of war, i. e., primarily by exploitation of world political and social trends tending to weaken the West. (See NIE-65, "Soviet Bloc Capabilities through 1957", paras. 66 and 67; SE-46, "Probable Long Term Development of the Soviet Bloc and Western Power Positions", paras. 19 through 28)
2. Primary targets probably are:
 - a. the Western military coalition particularly vulnerable to "relaxation of tension" tactics;
 - b. underdeveloped areas of the Middle and Far East and Africa undergoing rapid political and social change, the course of which is strongly influenced by anti-Western sentiment.

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C. Dangers to the USSR of the World Military Balance of Power

"We believe that during the period of this estimate the Communist rulers will continue to consider general war a hazardous gamble, involving at a minimum the certainty of widespread destruction in the USSR and at the same time carrying with it the risk that the Soviet system itself would be destroyed. They know that the US has superior strategic air power and naval capabilities, a larger atomic stockpile, and greater industrial potential, although they probably estimate that the USSR is making substantial progress toward reducing its disadvantages in these respects." (NIE-95, para. 16, minus last sentence)

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IV. CRITICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE KREMLIN ESTIMATE OF THE WORLD MILITARY BALANCE

A. Soviet Bloc Economic Base

1. Over-all superiority of Western economic strength and war potential. "Despite Soviet achievements during the postwar years, the output of the USSR will remain much lower than that of the US, and the output of the entire Bloc will remain much lower than that of the NATO states. We estimate that the Soviet gross national production was about one-quarter to one-third that of the US in 1952, and that the gross national product of the entire Bloc was about one-third that of the NATO states. These disparities in ratio terms will probably be reduced slightly during the period of this estimate, although the disparities in absolute terms will be widened somewhat. Bloc output in the basic industries — energy, minerals, metals, and chemicals — will remain substantially below that of the NATO states. (NIE-65, para. 28) "However, comparisons in terms of total output of all types of goods and services are somewhat misleading as indicators of relative capacity to produce military

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equipment in peacetime. Since the end of World War II, the USSR has diverted a much larger proportion of its gross national product to military purposes than has any Western state. We estimate that about one-sixth of the Soviet gross national product is now devoted to military outlays, and that the proportion will remain at least as high through the period of this estimate. (NIE-65, para. 29)

"While Bloc GNP will probably increase at a higher rate than that of the Western Powers and the ratio of Western superiority will therefore decrease, the GNP of the West is already so much greater than that of the Bloc that the absolute gap between the two will widen despite the lower rate of Western growth. Thus the West will remain for the indefinite future greatly superior to the Soviet Bloc in total economic strength." (SE-46, para. 9)

2. Strategic vulnerability of the Soviet economy. "Despite the growth of new centers of industry in the USSR, the older industrial regions (including the Urals) will still provide the bulk of Soviet industrial production. Programs to disperse Soviet industry and to create

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self-contained regional complexes will continue, but the production of many basic materials and of most equipment will remain geographically concentrated. (NIE-65, para. 32)

"By 1957, the Bloc economy will have achieved a higher level of self-sufficiency than at present, although certain imported items will remain of substantial importance to Bloc industrial and military production. These items include electronic tube components, certain chemicals, certain types of machinery and equipment with their spare parts, and probably also tin, natural rubber, copper, zinc, and cork. If these items of import should cease to be available, bottlenecks would appear in the Bloc productive system, and for a limited period of time adverse repercussions would spread through the economy." (NIE-65, para. 34)

"...The Bloc armed forces will continue to be hampered by ... the complicated logistics arising from the size of Bloc territory and the relatively inadequate road and rail network and merchant fleet." (NIE-65, para. 53)

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B. Scientific Resources and Weapons Development

1. Over-all superiority of Western scientific assets.

"The scientific assets of the US (the number and quality of trained personnel, facilities, equipment, and financial support) are greater than those of the USSR, and the assets of the West as a whole are far greater than those of the Bloc. However, the USSR is expending great effort to reduce this disparity, and it will probably continue to devote a higher proportion of its scientific and technical assets to military purposes than the US. Therefore, the difference between Soviet and US scientific capabilities in this period may not be so significant as the over-all superiority of the US in scientific assets would suggest. (NIE-65, para. 37)

"The over-all scientific assets of the West (numbers and quality of trained personnel, facilities, and equipment) are now far greater than those of the Soviet Bloc, and almost certainly will remain greater over the next fifteen years. However, the USSR is expending great efforts to reduce this disparity, and is likely to narrow the gap between it and the West, even though the

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Western Powers probably will produce more basic scientific advances, and will continue, in general, to be better able to translate prototypes into quantity production of high quality. Moreover, the Bloc may concentrate excessively on the solution of short-term military and economic problems, thus narrowing the range of fundamental research and diminishing the probability of basic scientific advances." (SE-46, para. 11)

2. Unlikelihood that during the period of this estimate Soviet science will develop any radically new weapon significantly altering the world power balance.

C. Military Considerations

Specific military factors which would probably lead the Kremlin to avoid total war include:

1. The relatively small stock of atomic bombs, i.e., mid-1953 about 120 (possible range 80-240); mid-1957 about 500 (possible range 335-1,000). (NIE-65, para. 50) "... the continuing superiority of the West over the Bloc in atomic capabilities will nevertheless represent a considerable advantage, because of developing tactical

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uses of atomic weapons. It is likely that the West will, during the period of this estimate, remain superior to the Soviet Bloc in capabilities for tactical use of atomic weapons, whether in general or in local war." (SE-46, para. 16)

2. Comparatively underdeveloped defense system against Western atomic attack. "...The Bloc armed forces will continue to be hampered by ... deficiencies in experience, training, and equipment for ... air defense ..." (NIE-65, para. 53)
3. Continued inability to effectively attack the US in order to: (a) eliminate the major threat of atomic attack; (b) prevent the mobilization of US industrial and military potential.

"The USSR now has the capability to undertake concurrent air operations against the US, the UK, continental Europe, the Middle East, Japan, and the off-shore island chain of Asia. However, operations against the US would be much more difficult than those against the other areas. The USSR has the capability to reach all parts of the US and to attempt the delivery of its full stockpile of atomic weapons. However, even a

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stripped-down TU-4 could reach only the extreme northwestern corner on two-way missions without aerial refueling. Even with aerial refueling and other range extension techniques, attack upon the strategic northeastern industrial area and upon most of the principal strategic bases almost certainly would involve the expenditure of the attacking aircraft and most of the crews on one-way missions. Until it has a heavy bomber available for operational use, the USSR will not have the capability to reach most of the strategically important areas in the US on two-way missions. A heavy bomber based upon a type which has been seen in flight may be in production and may be available for operational use within the period of this estimate." (NIE-65, para. 56)

4. Probable continued presence of significant NATO forces in Europe and the equipment of these forces with tactical atomic weapons which could be used directly against the Soviet armed forces.

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