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PROBABLE INTELLIGENCE WARNING  
OF SOVIET ATTACK ON THE US  
THROUGH MID-1958

*Submitted by the*

**DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, The Joint Staff, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the National Security Agency.*

*Concurred in by the*

**INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

*on 1 July 1955. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Director of Intelligence, USAF; the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff; and the Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the IAC. The Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of its jurisdiction.*

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## PROBABLE INTELLIGENCE WARNING OF SOVIET ATTACK ON THE US THROUGH MID-1958

### THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable degree of advance warning that could be provided by intelligence in the event of Soviet attacks on the United States and key US installations and forces overseas through mid-1958.<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION—THE NATURE OF WARNING

When discussing the advance warning of Soviet attack which intelligence may be able to provide, it is necessary to define various possible kinds of warning:

1. Warning of the increased likelihood of war, probably resulting either from Soviet actions or Soviet reactions to Western actions, but not necessarily involving any direct military aspect;
2. Warning of increasing Soviet military readiness to attack, but without definitive evidence of intent to attack or of the time of attack;
3. Warning of clear intent to attack;
4. Warning of clear intent to attack at or about a particular time.

It seems improbable that stage 4, or possibly even stage 3, would be reached conclusively except in the event of high level penetration of the Soviet command, which today seems unlikely, or in case of some exceptional intelligence bonus or breakthrough. While intelligence might be able to say that the USSR would be fully prepared to attack within, say 10 days, it would find it very difficult to say whether such preparations indicated a firm intent to attack, were primarily in anticipation of an expected US attack, were a deception maneuver, or were to prepare against any contingency. When we speak of degree of warning, therefore, it is important to bear in mind that both time and specificity are involved, and that the earlier the warning the less specific it is likely to be. This inverse relation between time and specificity is an inherent limitation of the warning function.

<sup>1</sup> Since the Soviet attack on the US would be tantamount to general war, this estimate also deals with the over-all warning which the US would be likely to receive of Soviet initiation of general

war. It does not consider the warning likely to be given by US or allied early-warning radar, nor the warning which could be obtained from a Soviet ultimatum, since such warning is outside the scope of the problem.

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The fact that warning is likely to be in some degree imprecise or contingent also gives increased importance to other considerations affecting the warning function. Both the nature and degree of warning which can be obtained will always be dependent on many complex factors, some of them unique to any given set of circumstances. Warning will depend first of all on maximum alertness and a maximum scale of continuous effort by intelligence. These would probably be maintained only in a period of rising tension and might be reduced, even unwittingly, if the tension ceased to rise, if there were intermittent periods of apparently declining danger, or if intelligence had previously given false warnings. The effectiveness of warning also depends on the continued credibility of intelligence warnings to responsible officials, for warning as a process is complete only when it is acted upon. The warning process is thus affected by the whole context of events in which it operates, including psychological factors and even pure chance. It cannot be regarded as a mechanical process which it is possible for intelligence to set up once and for all and which thereafter operates automatically.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. We believe that a Soviet initiation of general war by attacks on the US, its allies, or key overseas installations would almost certainly be preceded by heightened political tension. While such tension would in itself constitute warning that war was becoming more likely, the indications of Soviet preparations which would probably be obtained could be interpreted as evidence of preparations for defense or as part of a war of nerves. Therefore, Soviet behavior in a period of heightened political tension would not necessarily give specific warning of a Soviet intention to attack. Nevertheless, intelligence could probably give warning of the USSR's increasing war readiness and could probably chart the trend toward a period of maximum danger. (*Paras. 12-15, 18*)

2. It would also be possible for the Soviet leaders, after a period of prolonged tension in which they had brought both their political and military preparations to an advanced stage, to bring about an

amelioration of the crisis atmosphere as a deception move. Such a move, while involving sacrifice of some advantages, would almost certainly be made if the Soviet leaders considered that a maximum degree of surprise was essential to their strategic plans. Allied intelligence, however, might still be able to detect the continuation of specific military preparations which would be particularly significant as evidence of a Soviet intention to achieve surprise in launching general war. (*Paras. 16-17*)

3. If the USSR chose to initiate war with full-scale land, naval, and air attacks after a period of mobilization, there would be numerous indications of military, as well as of economic and political measures necessary to prepare such attacks. We believe that US intelligence might be able to give a generalized degree of warning as long as four or possibly even six months prior to D-Day, and that the minimum period would not be less than 30

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days. After D-30 the number of indications would probably be reduced due to Soviet security measures, although the latter would themselves provide warning. From D-10, and especially D-5, there would probably be certain indications of last-minute preparations, although processing and disseminating these on a timely basis would probably be difficult. As the time of attack drew near, indications of its approach would become increasingly specific. Based on observed Soviet military activities, warning could probably be given from a few hours to a few days in advance of the actual launching of the attack. (*Paras. 21-25*)

4. In order to gain some degree of surprise, the USSR might choose to initiate general war by attacks of less than full scale in Europe, the Middle East, or in the Far East directly or through the Chinese Communists, while simultaneously attacking the US and key overseas installations. The degree of prior Soviet preparations would vary greatly, depending on the location of the attack and the intensity and direction of the preceding political tensions. Even so, the minimum preparations which the USSR would have to take to put its forces in a state of readiness to attack, and to provide support after the attack began would probably require about 15 days. We believe that warning of the probability of attack could be given about one week in advance, but the period might vary from a few hours to as much as 10 days, depending on the seasonal pattern of Soviet military activity. (*Paras. 27-28*)

5. We have estimated in NIE 11-7-55 that by exercising its maximum capability the USSR could now launch about 950 bomb-

er aircraft against the US in an initial attack. However, virtually all of these aircraft would be medium bomber types (BULLS and BADGERS); a few would be heavy bombers (BISONS and BEARS). The great bulk would have to fly one-way missions. At present, Soviet preparatory activities for maximum scale attack would require at least several months, and probably considerably longer, and would probably become known to allied intelligence, especially if carried forward with great urgency. We believe that the indicators would probably assume a meaningful pattern in time for intelligence to give a generalized degree of warning 15-30 days prior to attack. US intelligence would also be likely to discover significant activities indicating the movement of the large numbers of aircraft to staging bases involved in such a maximum scale attack. We believe that intelligence could give specific advance warning of unusual and possibly threatening air activity on the order of 18-24 hours.<sup>2</sup> (*Paras. 35-38*)

6. We have estimated in NIE 11-7-55 that if the USSR attempted a surprise attack against the US in 1955, aircraft would probably be launched from 11 available staging bases in the Kola, Chukotski, and Kamchatka areas.<sup>3</sup> There is a lack of sufficient evidence to permit

<sup>2</sup> Here and in paragraphs 6, 8, and 9 warning given in hours is defined as the elapsed time between the receipt of information (by a US command or agency having authority to alert US defenses) which indicates threat of a possible imminent Soviet air attack, and the time such an attack would reach the existing continental early warning line (1955) and the proposed (DEW) line (1958).

<sup>3</sup> For a full discussion of these forward bases, see NIE 11-7-55, "Soviet Gross Capabilities for Attacks on the US and Key Overseas Installations and Forces through 1 July 1958."

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a firm assessment of the capabilities of the individual bases in these areas for staging bomber aircraft. However, we believe that by a major effort the USSR could launch some 450 aircraft on initial attack against the US. Preparations for such an attack would permit possible detection by allied intelligence and, if detected, would provide a generalized degree of warning of several days, and specific advance warning of unusual and possibly threatening air activity on the order of 18-24 hours. (Para. 42)

7. A reduced scale of attack, however, involving about 250 aircraft could be launched against the US and, accompanied by an extraordinary security effort, might be launched in 1955 with little or no specific advance warning to US intelligence. This estimate rests on the belief that the forward bases may now be capable of handling these aircraft or may become so without detectable preparations. (Para. 43)

8. By 1958 the bases, training, and equipment of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force could, by a major effort, be advanced to a point where only minimum preparations would be required prior to a maximum attack which could then number about 1,100 bomber aircraft. Provided that such a major effort has been made, movements in and out of the forward staging bases may also become routine. The likelihood that these movements would be discovered would not be much less than at present, but the difficulty of assessing them as warning indicators would thus be very much greater. Moreover, by 1958, the increased speeds of jet bombers will reduce the time required for movement to staging bases and the probable increased handling capabilities at

the bases will reduce time required for refueling and servicing. Consequently the specific advance warning of unusual and possibly threatening air activity which could be given, assuming that movement to the staging bases was discovered and correctly interpreted, would probably be on the order of 12-18 hours.<sup>4</sup> (Para. 39)

9. Both at present and in 1958, if the movement to staging bases was not discovered, warning could be obtained only if almost continuous reconnaissance of the staging areas was being maintained and aircraft were discovered after they had already reached these areas. However, reliance on this means alone might reduce the warning period to a few hours, or even virtually to zero, because of possible difficulties and delays in processing and interpreting the results of the reconnaissance. (Para. 40)

10. During the period of this estimate the USSR will have a progressively increasing capability for launching one-way attacks on the US from interior Soviet bases which would probably provide no specific advance warning to US intelligence.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there are two other ways by which the USSR might by 1958 (and possibly somewhat before that year) launch

<sup>4</sup>The Director of Intelligence, USAF, believes that movement in and out of forward staging bases may become routine by 1958 if currently indicated efforts to improve the bases, training, and equipment of the Long-Range Air Force continue. He also believes it unlikely that such movement would be discovered and correctly interpreted before its value as warning had passed. Moreover, the increased capability of the Soviet Union to launch heavy bombers from interior bases will further degrade this source of warning information.

<sup>5</sup>For full discussion of Soviet long-range capabilities, see NIE 11-7-55, "Soviet Gross Capabilities for Attacks on the US and Key Overseas Installations and Forces through 1 July 1958."

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an attack on the US in such a way that no specific warning would be likely before its actual launching:

a. Assuming that the USSR pressed ahead with development of its advance bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas, and with the general preparation of its Long-Range Air Force, "normal" flights of aircraft to and from these bases would almost certainly occur in increasing number as the development of the bases progressed. A pattern of activity would thus tend to be established. Under these circumstances, a considerable number of aircraft—roughly the number engaging in such "normal" activity—would almost certainly be able to take off from these bases (and those in the Leningrad area) for a surprise attack upon the US without any such unusual prior preparations or assembly as would particularly attract the attention of allied intelligence.

b. Assuming that the USSR acquires an inflight refueling capability (which it can do although there is no evidence at present that the Soviet Long-Range Air Force possesses such a capability) and develops it to the necessary degree, Soviet heavy bombers could also be launched on two-way missions from certain home bases without specific advance warning, and without staging at the advance bases.<sup>6</sup> (*Paras. 35, 45*)

11. If the USSR, concurrently with any of the scales of attack discussed above, undertook submarine operations against

<sup>6</sup> Only the BEAR (Turbo-prop), with its tentatively estimated characteristics, could reach all targets in the US. See NIE 11-7-55.

the US and key overseas installations, it would be necessary for the submarines so employed to proceed to wartime patrol stations shortly before the expected commencement of hostilities. The passage of these submarines might give up to two weeks warning of Soviet preparation for attack. If the USSR undertook concurrent raider operations with some of the major units of their surface fleet against allied lines of communication, the movement of these raiders might give up to 10 days warning of preparation for attack. (*Paras. 30-31*)

12. Soviet preparations to receive a retaliatory blow from allied air power could probably provide some indication of Soviet intent to attack. Minimum preparations would probably include the alerting of air defense forces and the civil defense organization, preparations of military units and installations for air defense, the dispatching of submarines accompanied by increased aerial reconnaissance to locate US carrier forces, and the evacuation of key personnel and possibly segments of population from potential target areas. If steps such as these were taken, they would probably provide a warning period of as much as a week to 10 days, and, taken in conjunction with other indicators, would greatly increase the definiteness of any warning US intelligence might be able to give. We believe that in elementary prudence the USSR would be unwilling to forego preparation to receive a retaliatory blow; therefore, some important indicators of this type would probably be obtained. (*Para. 46*)

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## DISCUSSION

I. WARNING FROM SOVIET BEHAVIOR  
IN VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

13. The various possible circumstances in which the USSR might decide to attack the US and enter upon general war would have a considerable bearing on the degree of warning which might be obtained.

*a.* There are three situations in which the USSR might deliberately decide to attack the US and key overseas installations, thus initiating general war. These situations would arise if the Soviet leaders came to believe: (1) that the USSR had acquired such military capabilities that it could be certain of success in a general war; (2) that the US and its allies were planning an attack on the USSR and that the USSR's only hope of survival lay in seizing the initiative; or (3) that an irreversible shift in the relative weight of military power was impending which would ultimately force the USSR to choose between certain defeat in war and sacrifice of its vital interests. We believe that the Soviet leaders are unlikely to come to any of these conclusions during the period of this estimate.

*b.* There remains the possibility that general war might occur after a series of actions and counteractions in some local crisis which neither the USSR nor the Western Allies originally intended to lead to general war. If the USSR believed that the issues at stake were vital to its security or that the loss of prestige involved in backing down would be equally dangerous to Soviet power, and if it believed that the US would not yield, then the USSR might decide that general war was the unavoidable consequence of the crisis and that it should seize the initiative. We believe that if the USSR decides to launch general war in the period through mid-1958, the decision is most likely to come as the consequence of such a situation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Soviet attitudes toward general war referred to in paragraph 13 are discussed more fully in NIE 11-3-55, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action Through 1960," dated 17 May 1955, Sections VI and VII.

14. *Likelihood of a Period of Tension.* In the situation described under *b.* above, a Soviet decision to attack the US would be preceded by a period of heightened tension. Moreover, even if the Soviet leaders reached any one of the three conclusions in *a.* above, they would probably do so because of an important shift in international alignments, or because of some equally open and marked alteration or impending alteration, of the relative weight of military power. Such developments would themselves be likely to produce heightened political tension. There are situations, however, in which a Soviet decision for war could be taken in the absence of political tension. For example, a Soviet decision motivated as under *a.* (1) above might be the result of some technical advance in Soviet military capabilities unknown to the Western Allies, or a Soviet decision motivated as under *a.* (3) above might be the result of some secret technical advance in Western military capabilities of which Soviet intelligence learned. We believe that such situations are unlikely to arise. Therefore, since an attack on the US, if it occurs, is most likely to arise from a series of actions and counteractions not originally intended to lead to general war (paragraph 13 *b.*), it would almost certainly be preceded by a period of heightened tension.

15. *Reliability of Political Indicators in a Period of Tension.* While the existence of a prior period of tension would in itself constitute warning that war was becoming more likely, it would also greatly increase the difficulty of obtaining from Soviet political behavior a specific warning of attack. Most of the political actions taken by the USSR during a period of war preparation might not differ greatly from those undertaken as routine in any period of heightened political tension. These actions might include: diplomatic approaches to some states designed to influence them toward abandonment of their alliances with the US; massive "peace" propaganda directed at the populations of Western states and intended to undermine the will to resist or to destroy confidence in the motives

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and intentions of governments; explicit threats against would-be aggressors; new proposals to ban nuclear weapons; instructions to Communist parties to ready themselves for their sabotage and subversion missions; intensified propaganda directed to the Bloc populations to prepare them psychologically for "resistance to aggression." All such actions, however, could be interpreted as defensively motivated or as part of a war of nerves. Thus while they might provide warning of the increased likelihood of general war, they would not provide specific warning of attack.

16. *Reliability of Military Indicators in a Period of Tension.* The existence of a period of heightened tension would also make more difficult the determination from Soviet military preparations of a specific intent to attack. If in such a period the USSR undertook various military preparations, it would probably be as difficult to distinguish offensive from defensive intent as in the case of indicators from Soviet political behavior. In a protracted situation of this sort intelligence probably could only give warning of the USSR's increasing war readiness and chart the trend toward the period of maximum danger, but not warn of a Soviet intention to attack. The USSR might be carrying out military preparations not in order to initiate war but in readiness for instant retaliation to a US attack which it feared might be impending.

17. *Possibility of Soviet Deception.* It would also be possible for the Soviet leaders, after a period of prolonged tension in which they had brought both their political and military preparations to an advanced stage, to bring about an amelioration of the crisis atmosphere as a deception move. They could offer concessions as a basis for new negotiations, and simulate reduction of some of their military preparations, or even actually reduce them. If they considered surprise essential to their plans and believed that they still could achieve some degree of surprise in their initial attack, this would be a likely course for the Soviet leaders to pursue. However, such a course would involve sacrifice of some advantages. An initial surprise assault aimed at Western retaliatory power might include

air attacks on the territories of some states which the USSR might otherwise have hoped to neutralize politically. It would probably also involve the clear assumption of responsibility for initiating war by aggressive action, and thus might harden the will to resist in some Western countries. Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders would almost certainly accept these disadvantages and attempt deceptive political maneuvers if they considered that the maximum degree of surprise attainable was essential to their strategic plans.

18. Although a large degree of deception could be introduced into Soviet behavior, allied intelligence might still be able to detect the continuation of specific military preparations. Such indications could be interpreted as due to Soviet caution and mistrust, but they would also point to the possibility of a deception maneuver and they would be particularly significant as evidence of a Soviet intention to achieve surprise in launching general war.

19. *Summary.* We believe, therefore, that Soviet behavior in a period of heightened tensions would not necessarily give warning of attack. It would probably establish that Soviet readiness for general war was increasing; it would also establish that the likelihood of war was increasing but would not necessarily indicate that general war was probable. It would also lead to heightened activity and sensitivity on the part of allied intelligence. However, neither a belligerent and unyielding attitude nor a defensive and conciliatory one would be a sure guide to Soviet intentions.

## II. ALTERNATIVE SCALES OF SOVIET ATTACK

20. The probable degree of warning that the West would receive of Soviet attack would depend in large part upon the type of attack initiated. Many courses of action are open to the Soviet planners in the event they should decide to initiate a general war. At one end of the spectrum would be a massive multifront Soviet attack on the US and allied states, undertaken after a period of intensive mobilization. Such a plan of attack would sacrifice strategic surprise in favor of maxi-

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mum military preparation, although the USSR might still hope to achieve some degree of tactical surprise. At the other end of the spectrum would be a Soviet surprise attack, with no prior preparations of a nature that could be relied on to provide warning indicators. Such an attack would sacrifice weight for the advantages of surprise. This estimate does not attempt to forecast Soviet strategy or the probable scale of the initial attack. It only discusses the probable degree of warning which would be obtained if Soviet planners selected any one of the following alternatives for their initial attack:

a. Full-scale attack after a period of general mobilization;

b. Soviet campaign in Western Europe from existing deployments and simultaneous attacks on the US and key US overseas forces and installations;

c. Initial attacks only on the US and key US overseas forces and installations

(1) Maximum scale attack

(2) Surprise attack.

### III. WARNING OF FULL-SCALE SOVIET ATTACK

21. A full-scale attack employing all arms in strength at the outset of war would necessarily be preceded by a period of mobilization during which full war readiness, or a condition close to it, had been achieved. The range of activities necessary for such full mobilization of war potential in a highly industrialized state like the USSR is so extensive and involves so many measures affecting broad sections of the population that even a totalitarian government would find it impossible to conceal all of them. In the economic field, a complex redirection and intensification of productive effort would have to take place as materials, manpower, and facilities were transferred from consumption and investment goods industries to armament industries. These measures would probably be impossible without the use of public information media. In addition, manipulation of domestic opinion is so persistent a preoccupation of the Soviet government and its concern over popular morale under conditions of crisis is so intense that its vast propaganda apparatus

would certainly be openly committed to preparing the Soviet people to withstand the strains of general war.

22. In the military field itself, the induction of additional military classes, formation of new units and fleshing-out of existing units to full strength, intensified and more realistic training, redeployment of combat groups to forward areas, and a variety of logistic measures would hardly escape entirely the observation of Western intelligence. In particular, it would be difficult for the USSR to hide large-scale troop movements in East Germany, or the other Satellites and forward deployment of its naval units. Withdrawal of a significant portion of civil aircraft from scheduled flights to augment the aircraft of the airborne forces or for other purposes might give additional warning of full-scale attack. At present numerous specific preparations for a full-scale air effort against the US would have to be made by the Soviet Long-Range Air Force, although by mid-1958 the extent and reliability of such indicators could be considerably reduced (see paragraph 37 below).

23. At present, if the USSR undertook to mobilize for a full-scale attack, US intelligence would probably receive numerous indications of large-scale Soviet mobilization during a period of about six months to about one month before D-Day, largely because the preparations likely to be undertaken during this period would be those least susceptible of concealment. However, if the decision to proceed to full mobilization came after a period of prolonged tension in which preparatory measures were initiated, or if by 1958 general Soviet war readiness should be substantially increased, then initial indicators might appear considerably later than six months prior to D-Day. In any event, from roughly D-30 to around D-10 days, we would be likely to get much less in the way of indications because the preparations in this period would be those which Soviet security is best equipped to conceal. Moreover, by about one month before D-Day the progressive tightening of Soviet security measures would probably have reached a high point. There would almost

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certainly be a reduction in information from sources within the Bloc; at the same time, however, the drying up of internal Bloc sources because of intensified security measures would in itself provide an indication of Soviet preparations. Then, in the period from D-10 and especially D-5 on, we could expect indications of last-minute preparations. At this time, however, there would be a serious problem of processing and disseminating such indications on a sufficiently timely basis.

24. We believe that allied intelligence would probably be able to sort the variety of indicators into a meaningful pattern at a relatively early stage of Soviet mobilization for a full-scale attack. US intelligence might become aware of this mobilization as long as four or possibly even six months prior to D-Day. The minimum period would probably not be less than 30 days. Even though intelligence was able to give only a generalized degree of warning, showing the progressive increase of Soviet war readiness, it would probably still be able to chart the trend of full-scale preparations, to anticipate their probable course to completion, and thus to designate the beginning of a period of maximum danger. It might even be able to identify features of Soviet full-scale mobilization which because of their uniqueness or extreme costliness could be interpreted specifically as evidence of an intention to attack.

25. As the time of attack drew near, indications of its possible approach would become increasingly specific. Based on observed Soviet military activities, warning could probably be given from a few hours to a few days in advance of the actual launching of the attack. This would be rendered very difficult, however, if Soviet forces, when their preparations for attack were known to be near completion, undertook air, naval, and ground reconnaissance, or attempted major feints. These activities might provide evidence of Soviet intention to attack, but would aggravate the difficulty of determining the time of such attack. It might also be recognized that, in theory at least, the USSR could always refrain from or delay attacking even after preparations were complete. Hence

the indications of military readiness, taken by themselves, would not necessarily provide conclusive evidence that attack was certain.

#### IV. PROBABLE DEGREES OF WARNING IN THE EVENT OF LESS THAN FULL-SCALE ATTACK

26. If the USSR were to sacrifice weight for the advantages of surprise, it would be forced, depending upon the degree of surprise it sought, to accept certain major limitations: (a) no large-scale mobilization of additional units; (b) no large-scale redeployment of Soviet air, naval, or ground forces, especially to forward areas; and (c) no unusual movement of Soviet air, naval, or ground forces in such areas as would be likely to indicate the imminence of attack. However, even if the USSR attempted to achieve the utmost surprise in launching general war, it would still probably consider a minimum number of prior preparations a matter of necessity and elementary prudence. Therefore, at least some of the general preparations discussed in Section III above would almost certainly have to be undertaken. Some of these preparations would be detected by allied intelligence, but it probably would be very difficult to ascertain any such clear pattern of preparations as would be discernible in event of mobilization for full-scale attack. Again, the degree of readiness already achieved by Soviet forces would affect the number of indicators obtained and the general political situation would affect the intensity of US intelligence effort and the ability of intelligence to interpret correctly such indicators as it did obtain. Consequently, we believe it possible that these preparations would not lead to a warning of attack, especially if they were carried out over a long period of time and with careful concealment.

27. If the USSR decided to attack the US and key overseas installations without full prior mobilization for general war, and hence without full-scale attacks in other areas, two general alternatives would be open:

a. It could combine its attack against the US and key overseas installations with a surprise ground campaign in Europe, the Middle

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East, and in the Far East directly or through the Chinese Communists without prior reinforcement of its forces.<sup>8</sup>

b. It could undertake initially air, and possibly other forms of attack, against the US and key overseas installations, but delay its ground campaigns and discernible preparations for other military operations until after these initial attacks had been launched.

#### V. SOVIET CAMPAIGN IN MAJOR AREAS AND SIMULTANEOUS ATTACKS ON THE US AND KEY OVERSEAS INSTALLATIONS

28. If the USSR chose to initiate general war by an attack with the forces currently stationed in Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East, together with attacks on the US and key overseas installations, the degree of its over-all prior preparations would vary greatly, depending on the location of the attack and the intensity and duration of the preceding political tensions. If, as we think likely, there had been a long period of crisis, the USSR might have already achieved a considerable degree of military and economic mobilization for war, and its foreign and domestic political preparation might be well advanced. Moreover, during the period 1955-1958, measures may be taken ostensibly or actually in response to external developments, e.g., West German rearmament, which would greatly improve Soviet readiness for attack. Therefore, the indicators derived from such activities, though warning of the increased readiness for war and likelihood of war, would probably be of limited significance for warning of this type of attack. Even so, the minimum local preparations which the USSR would still have to take for an attack with forces in place would provide some degree of warning.

<sup>8</sup> The USSR could of course strengthen this ground attack by some degree of prior reinforcement. For the purpose of this estimate, however, we take the above case as the limiting one: i.e., any prior reinforcement would tend to provide additional indicators and hence additional warning.

29. In Europe, for example, some time would be required to assemble major elements in forward positions, although this would vary seasonally. The longest period required would be between May and August when units are split between home stations and field training areas; a lesser period would be required between November and March when units are consolidated at home stations; the minimum period required would be in April when units are moving to training areas and in September-October when units are either engaged in large-scale maneuvers or are being moved back to home stations. Other minimum preparations would include the release from stocks of transport, munitions, and supplies in quantities well in excess of those used even on full-scale maneuvers. In addition, some two weeks before the attack it would probably be necessary to begin the movement of large numbers of locomotives and rolling stock from East Germany to the Soviet border in order to prepare for resupply and reinforcement operations to support and expand the offensive. Altogether, the USSR would probably be engaged in these preparations over a period of about 15 days and US intelligence would probably begin to acquire some indicators at an early stage, although varying with the season of the year. We believe that warning of the probability of attack could be given about one week in advance. However, in the absence of other indicators and with Soviet actions appearing to be part of a normal pattern, the warning could vary as follows:

- a. from a few hours to a few days in April and in September-October;
- b. from two to five days in November-March;
- c. from five to 10 days in May-August.

30. If the USSR undertook concurrent submarine operations against the US and key overseas installations, it would be necessary for the submarines so employed to proceed to wartime patrol stations shortly before the expected commencement of hostilities. The passage of these submarines might give up to two weeks warning of Soviet preparation for attack.

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31. If the USSR undertook concurrent raider operations with some of the major units of their surface fleet against allied lines of communication, it would be necessary for the units so employed to proceed to their assigned areas of operations shortly before the expected commencement of hostilities. The movement of these raiders might give up to 10 days warning of preparation for attack.

32. In addition, any unusual and unexplainable deviation from the normal operating pattern of the Soviet Bloc merchant marine could be a supporting indicator of Soviet preparations to attack.

33. The extent to which the preparations going on simultaneously for air attack on the US and key overseas installations and forces would tend to confirm and/or advance the warning would depend somewhat upon the planned scale of these attacks, as discussed below.

#### VI. INITIAL AIR ATTACKS ON THE US AND KEY US OVERSEAS FORCES AND INSTALLATIONS

34. For the purposes of this estimate it is necessary to consider two types of air attack on the US and key overseas installations: (a) a maximum effort using as many aircraft as possible, and (b) an attack designed to achieve a high degree of surprise. The USSR could undertake these air attacks on the US and key overseas installations and forces simultaneously with a full-scale attack in Eurasia or with the less than full-scale attacks discussed in paragraphs 26-32. Alternatively, the USSR could initiate general war with such air attacks only, while delaying discernible preparations for other military operations in order to increase the likelihood of surprise against the US. In this case, the very disparity between preparations for long-range air operations and those for other general war campaigns could be a highly significant indicator of the probable nature of the initial Soviet attack.

35. *Maximum Air Attack.* We have estimated in NIE 11-7-55 that by exercising its maximum capability the USSR could now launch

about 950 long-range aircraft against the US in an initial attack.<sup>9</sup> By mid-1958 the maximum number launched could be increased to about 1,100. However, we believe extensive prior preparations would be required, particularly in the early part of the period covered by this estimate. These would almost certainly include improving airfields, maintenance and fuel storage facilities in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas, bringing personnel and equipment to full strength in long-range air units, probably intensified training of air personnel, increased frequency of long-distance training missions, and raising levels of maintenance, and possibly training in inflight refueling techniques. The critical indicators would be those relating to increased levels of activity at staging bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas, since in 1958 as well as at present these bases would be essential to maximum attacks on the US. By 1958, however, the degree of Soviet dependence upon these forward areas, and thus their significance as a warning indicator, would decline if the USSR, as part of a maximum scale attack, chose to launch some or all of its heavy bombers directly from interior bases or either one- or two-way missions or combinations thereof. Except for the BEAR (turbo-prop), even Soviet heavy bombers employing inflight refueling would still require advanced bases for making two-way attacks on the most distant US targets.

36. At present, Soviet preparatory activities for maximum scale attack would require at least several months, and probably considerably longer, and would probably become known to allied intelligence, especially if carried forward with great urgency. We believe that the indicators associated with preparation of the advance bases, taken together with others pointing to the increased readiness of

<sup>9</sup>The great bulk of these aircraft would have to fly one-way missions, but the problem of *advance warning* by intelligence, as distinguished from *tactical warning* by early warning radar, would not be significantly different if the USSR, in order to permit two-way missions by more of the strike aircraft, chose to include some proportion of tankers, if available, in the total number of planes launched.

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the Long-Range Air Force, would probably assume a meaningful pattern in time for intelligence to give a generalized degree of warning 15-30 days prior to attack. Nevertheless, this would be warning only of increased readiness and not of intent to attack.

37. If such preparations proceeded gradually over the next few years, they would have even less significance for warning, since they could well be part of a normal build-up of the USSR's long-range air capability. Thus, by 1958, the bases, training, and equipment of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force could be advanced to a point where only minimum preparations would be required prior to an attack. There would then need to be little in the way of movement of personnel and equipment, logistic activity, or training flights which would depart from a normal pattern of activity. Under these circumstances, indicators of the preparations taking place in the Soviet Long-Range Air Force might be few, and warning would depend almost entirely on indicators received during the staging of aircraft.

38. At present, US intelligence would be likely to discover significant activities indicating the movement of the large numbers of aircraft to staging bases involved in a maximum scale attack. Considering also the amount of time that the aircraft would require to reach such bases, together with the time required for refueling and servicing at the bases, we believe that intelligence could give specific advance warning<sup>10</sup> of unusual and possibly threatening air activity on the order of 18-24 hours before the attacking aircraft reached the early warning radar screen. It would always be possible, of course, for such a movement to be a practice maneuver or a feint, and therefore warning of actual intent to attack could not be given with complete certainty.

<sup>10</sup> Here and in paragraphs 39, 40, 42, and 44 warning given in hour terms is defined as the elapsed time between the receipt of information by a US command or agency having authority to alert US defense which indicates an imminent threat of Soviet air attack, and the time such an attack would reach the existing continental early warning line (1955) and the proposed (DEW) line (1958).

39. Developments are taking place in the Soviet Long-Range Air Force which probably will decrease the possibility of detection, and increase the difficulty of interpreting indicators in terms of intent to attack. By 1958, movements in and out of forward staging bases may become routine, provided that during the interim a major effort had been undertaken to improve base facilities and training, logistics, and equipment of the Long-Range Air Force. The likelihood that these movements would be discovered would not be much less than at present, but the difficulty of assessing them as warning indicators would be very much greater. In addition, by 1958 the increased speeds of jet bombers will reduce the time required for movements to staging bases, and the probable increased handling capabilities at the bases will reduce time required for refueling and servicing. Consequently, the specific advance warning of unusual and possibly threatening air activity which could be given, assuming that movement to the staging bases was discovered and correctly interpreted, would probably be on the order of 12-18 hours.<sup>11</sup>

40. Both at present and in 1958, if the movement to staging bases was not discovered, warning could be obtained only if almost continuous reconnaissance of the staging areas was being maintained and aircraft were discovered after they had already reached these areas. However, reliance on this means alone might reduce the specific advance warning period to a few hours, or even virtually to zero, because of possible difficulties and delays in processing and interpreting the results of reconnaissance. Moreover, by 1958 the probable growth in Soviet air defenses would make such reconnaissance considerably more difficult.

<sup>11</sup> The Director of Intelligence, USAF, believes that movement in and out of forward staging bases may become routine by 1958 if currently indicated efforts to improve the bases, training, and equipment of the Long-Range Air Force continue. He also believes it unlikely that such movement would be discovered and correctly interpreted before its value as warning had passed. Moreover, the increased capability of the Soviet Union to launch heavy bombers from interior bases will further degrade this source of warning information.

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41. The additional preparations which would be necessary to attack US overseas installations would not increase the likelihood of specific advance warning.<sup>12</sup> In the event of a maximum scale attack, the long-range air arm would already be in a high state of readiness. The readying of the jet light bomber units which could also be used for attacks in Western Europe, the UK, and some parts of the Middle East and Far East could be accomplished without serious additional risk of detection unless very large numbers had to be deployed to forward bases. If guided missiles were employed, no warning of their use would be obtained, apart from the generalized warning which might have been derived from prior preparations for hostilities.

42. *Surprise Air Attack.* However much the Soviet planners desired to achieve surprise in their initial air attacks on the US and key overseas installations, they would still wish to achieve the optimum weight of attack consistent with surprise. We have estimated in NIE 11-7-55 that if the USSR attempted a surprise attack against the US in mid-1955, aircraft would probably be launched from the 11 available staging bases in the Kola, Chukotski, and Kamchatka areas. There is a lack of sufficient evidence to permit a firm assessment of the capabilities of the individual bases in these areas for staging bomber aircraft. However, we believe by a major effort the USSR could launch some 450 aircraft on initial attacks against the US. Preparations for such an attack would permit possible detection by allied intelligence and, if detect-

<sup>12</sup> Although variations in the relative priority as to timing and weight of attack between the US and overseas installations would not affect the *advance warning* obtained by intelligence, they would be of great significance for the *tactical warning* derived from radar due to the varying times at which aircraft bound for targets at different distances would be picked up. For example, if the USSR chose to make attacks on overseas installations before launching attacks on the US itself, those attacks would alert the continental US defense system, although the overseas installations might obtain only radar warning of the attack. They would probably have been alerted, to some extent, however, by generalized warning derived from general preparations for hostilities.

ed, would provide a generalized degree of warning of several days, and specific advance warning of unusual and possibly threatening air activity on the order of 18-24 hours.

43. A reduced scale of attack, however, involving about 250 aircraft could be launched against the US, and accompanied by an extraordinary security effort, might be launched in mid-1955 with little or no specific advance warning to US intelligence. This estimate rests on the belief that the forward bases may now be capable of handling these aircraft or may become so without detectable preparations.

44. As estimated in paragraphs 37 and 38, by 1958 the USSR could, provided forward base construction, training, and equipment of the Soviet Long-Range Air Force were sufficiently developed, launch its maximum air attack of about 1,100 aircraft against the US under such conditions that the period of specific advance warning of unusual and possibly threatening air activity would probably be on the order of 12-18 hours, and might be considerably less if the movement to staging bases was not discovered. Thus in 1958 the maximum Soviet air attack, provided no other warning of Soviet intent to go to war had been received, could achieve a high degree of surprise.

45. During the period of this estimate the USSR will have a progressively increasing capability of launching one-way attacks on the US from interior Soviet bases which would probably provide no specific advance warning to US intelligence.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, there are two other ways in which the USSR might by 1958 (and possibly somewhat before that year) launch an attack on the US in such a way that no specific warning would be likely before its actual launching:

a. Assuming that the USSR pressed ahead with development of its advance bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, and Kola areas, and with the general preparation of its Long-Range Air Force, "normal" flights of aircraft to and from these bases would almost certainly occur in increasing number as the develop-

<sup>13</sup> For full discussion of Soviet long-range capabilities, see NIE 11-7-55.

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ment of the bases progressed. A pattern of activity would tend to be established. Under these circumstances, a considerable number of aircraft — roughly the number engaging in such “normal” activity — would almost certainly be able to take off from these bases (and from those in the Leningrad area) for a surprise attack upon the US without any such unusual prior preparations or assembly as would particularly attract the attention of allied intelligence.

b. Assuming that the USSR acquires an in-flight refueling capability (which it can do although there is no evidence at present that the Soviet Long-Range Air Force possesses such a capability) and develops it to the necessary degree, Soviet heavy bombers could also be launched on two-way missions from certain home bases without specific advance warning, and without staging at the advance bases.<sup>14</sup>

#### VII. WARNING FROM SOVIET PREPARATIONS TO RECEIVE RETALIATORY ATTACKS

46. An important element not included in the foregoing examination is that of Soviet defensive preparations to receive a retaliatory blow

<sup>14</sup>Only the BEAR (Turbo-prop), with its tentatively estimated characteristics, could reach all targets in the US. See NIE 11-7-55.

from allied power. Minimum preparations would probably include the alerting of air defense forces and the civil defense organization, preparations of military units and installations for air defense, the dispatching of submarines accompanied by increased aerial reconnaissance to locate US carrier forces, and the evacuation of key personnel and possibly segments of population from potential target areas. If steps such as these were not taken, they would constitute serious limitations on the USSR's ability to withstand a retaliatory blow. If they were taken, they would probably provide a warning period of as much as a week to 10 days, and, taken in conjunction with other indicators, would greatly increase the definiteness of any warning US intelligence might be able to give. The risk which the USSR would be willing to accept as a result of neglecting some or all of this type of defensive preparation would depend in part on the degree of success which the Soviet leaders expected their own initial attack to achieve. We believe that in elementary prudence they would be unwilling to forego preparation to receive a retaliatory blow; therefore, some important indicators of this type would probably be obtained.

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