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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON, D.C.



8 Oct 1974

DDI-2940-74

Mr. William E. Colby
Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, DC 20505

Dear Bill

The Air Force is most pleased with your even-handed and objective approach to the estimates of BACKFIRE capabilities and intended use.

My objective during the past two and one-half years has been to bring about a wider recognition of the engineering studies dealing with BACKFIRE's performance capabilities. That has now been achieved.

Intended use is another matter. The Air Force position has been that design capabilities and previous experience patterns will drive the question. BACKFIRE will likely be used - as have its predecessor bomber aircraft - in a variety of missions and roles, of which the intercontinental is but one. The Soviets urgently need replacement or augmentation of the BADGER, BLINDER, BEAR, and BISON bombers. They require a new tanker which from all indications to date will likely be the IL-76, and they need an export bomber.

My judgment is that the BACKFIRE in time will likely meet many of the above needs.

Low-level, peripheral, anti-naval, intercontinental, reconnaissance, and electronic warfare missions will probably be of primary importance.

I suspect that the anticipated production run is probably understated by a factor of one or two - unless the bomber develops some undesirable quirks.

Of continuing concern to me - and I am certain to you - is the amount of "push" effort which is required to get a simple matter of capability analysis reflected in an NIE. It has taken three years of intensive initiative effort, considerable analysis, and a costly number of man years to make the community see the light. Of equal concern to me is the type of contract effort to study the BACKFIRE system which was assigned [redacted]. Had that effort gone unchallenged, an extremely misleading assessment of the BACKFIRE would have been promulgated. In fact, [redacted] initial analysis was quite unprofessional, replete with error, and apparently based on less than adequate input data.

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USAF review(s) completed.

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My experience with Soviet ICBM/MIRV accuracy predictions during the past two years has been equally unsettling. Again, considerable "push" has been required to make the estimators understand the full range of problems associated with CEP calculations. Today, we have a much better understanding of where the Soviets stand accuracy-wise relative to our limited ability to make finite determinations of accuracy.

The current drafting effort on NIE 11-3/8-74 has been going on for many weeks and it has been uphill all the way on the portion drafted by State. Had my people agreed with their draft - I suspect the final product would have been rather far removed from reality. The writing, analysis, and cliché-abounding "cut and paste" text left much to be desired. A working knowledge of Soviet strategic literature and policy documents was certainly not in evidence during the first difficult few weeks of drafting.

Having been deeply impressed by Kohler's and Goure's recent book on The Role of Nuclear Forces in Current Strategy - certainly the most authoritative and thoroughly documented work of its kind available - we invited the authors to meet with the State drafters. Regrettably, scholarship gave way to polemics and the meeting achieved very little; however, much to my distress, I learned from the authors that a CIA representative had earlier recommended against publication of what is now recognized as the best study of its kind ever written.

While I have major reservations about the latest NIE 11-3/8-74 draft, it does finally represent a much-improved product.

I think there is much that is still fundamentally wrong with the estimative process - especially with perceptions of Soviet policy, strategic objectives, and intent.

Fortunately, many of your estimators are easier to deal with, more open, and less polemical about their traditional commitment to an "institutionalized" point of view. You are directly responsible for that, and rest assured that most of us are extremely grateful.

But it does take altogether too much effort - at my level at least - to keep the estimative juggernaut closer to the mark of reality. If Wohlstetter is right - and I believe he is -we are not getting better fast enough - in spite of the significant "attitudinal" changes you have brought about.

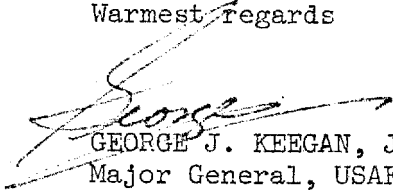
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Needless to say, we will keep on trying; however, the wherewithal at the Service level is fast shrinking.

Again, my deepest thanks for your most even-handed approach to BACKFIRE and ICBM accuracy.

Warmest regards


GEORGE J. KEEGAN, JR
Major General, USAF
ACS/Intelligence

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