

This past summer Professor Albert Wohlstetter published an article in Foreign Policy to the effect that official intelligence, as reflected in Defense Posture Statements, tended during the 1960's to underestimate the future deployment of Soviet ICBM and SLBM forces. I have undertaken to research appropriate NIEs going back to 1960 to determine whether or not the same criticism could be directed at the official judgments of the corporate body whose task it is to communicate the views of the US Intelligence Community, the USIB, as set forth in NIEs.

In pursuing this task, I have researched the history of estimates on ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers. I have also sought to lay out the estimative history as regards anticipated qualitative improvements in weapon systems and their predicted IOCs.

And now I have some good news and some bad news.
First, the bad news:

Having done the required research, I find that Dr. Wohlstetter is essentially correct in the case of ICBMs. There are some minor differences between what the Intelligence Community said and the data Wohlstetter used, but not enough to make a case against Wohlstetter's findings.

In reading the past NIE's, I hoped to find some rationale for this repeated underestimation. I found that in many years the Community expressed the view that the Soviets would not deploy as many ICBMs as the US for fear of touching off a new round of deployment in the US that would leave them even worse off than they were. Clearly this was not the case. In other years, however, no solid rationale was presented for the projected numbers. I had felt, when I embarked on this venture, that I would find that we had credited the Soviets with rapid technological advances that would have improved the quality of their weapon systems, and that those improvements would tend to limit the numbers that need be deployed (e.g., MIRVs, high accuracies, etc.). This was not the case. Our judgments on when the Soviets were likely to introduce certain qualitative improvements into their systems fit pretty well with what has happened.

Having been directly involved in the production of the 11-8 series of NIEs for some 10 years, three as the DIA rep and seven as the ONE staff man, I would now like to express some personal views.

I suspect, but obviously cannot document the fact, that part of the reason for the repeated underestimation of the growth of Soviet ICBM forces was a subconscious (or maybe

even conscious) overreaction by the Intelligence Community to the gross overestimation of Soviet ICBM growth during the days of the "missile gap." The Intelligence Community took quite a public flailing for that error in judgment.

I also feel that part of the problem was a lack of appreciation on the part of the Intelligence Community of how deeply Khrushchev, and probably others in the Soviet hierarchy at the time, felt about the "facing down" they took as a result of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. At that time the Soviets had less than 50 ICBM launchers operational and we knew it. Whether or not President Kennedy communicated this to Khrushchev or not, I don't know. In any event, the Soviets knew they were dealing from a position of weakness and probably at least suspected that we were aware of their lack of ICBM strength. The chronology of the growth of their ICBM force fits very neatly with a decision that might have been taken shortly after the pull out from Cuba to expand their ICBM force at a rapid rate and probably to a size never originally intended. Deployment of the SS-9 and SS-11s really started to take off four years after the crisis.

In the case of heavy bombers, Wohlstetter is again correct. From 1960 through 1971 the NIEs always phased out

the Bison and Bear bombers at a faster rate than actually occurred. There has, in fact, been no reduction in the heavy bomber force for the past six years. I still think that the NIE judgments were logical, albeit erroneous. Why the Soviets would go to the expense of retaining such a small, obsolete fleet of heavy bombers defies well-reasoned explanation.

Now for the good news:

In the case of Soviet submarine launched ballistic missiles, Wohlstetter is wrong. The NIE history on those systems is mixed. In 1961 through 1963 the NIEs overestimated. The spread of 160 to 250 projected in the 1964 NIE for the year 1970 was exceeded, but only in that one year. From 1964 to 1968 the actual count generally fell within the postulated spreads and from NIE 11-8-68 on, the actual count always fell within the projections. (I feel it only fair to point out that the only year Wohlstetter used in his allegations about numbers of SLBMs was the 1964 projection, and that isn't cricket.)

Well, that's the story and welcome to it for whatever use it may be. The USIB repeatedly erred in two out of three areas and, in this game, two out of three ain't good. But, after all, the USIB is comprised of men (for the most

part, honest men) and men are not infallible--particularly when trying to anticipate the actions of so enigmatic an entity as Soviet leadership several years into the future.

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Remarks:

Would appreciate any thoughts on what I could add or what to do with this now that it's done.

Concur with ~~the~~ [redacted] comments. Also: needs expansion (e.g. more on Missile Cap, more on W. Helstetter's conclusions). And then coordinate with [initials] Stertz & Ermarth.

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Supporting graphs for Review of Wohlstetter article

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