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8 March 1950

Mr. Daniel Cox Fahey, Jr.
National Security Resources Board
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Mr. Fahey:

In your letter of 3 March, 1950, you request my estimate of the possibility of all-out war between the United States and the USSR before 1957.

In view of the ultimate objective of Soviet policy -- a Communist world order under Soviet domination -- and of the existing international situation, there is a present danger of war which cannot be ignored. In present or comparable circumstances a deliberate, unprovoked Soviet attack on the United States is improbable, as is any Soviet military aggression deemed to incur serious risk of war with the United States. There is, however, a continuing danger of war through miscalculation, nor can the possibility of deliberate attack be prudently excluded for consideration.

The development of this situation is primarily dependent on two factors: (1) the prospective development of Soviet capabilities, with particular reference to a capability of large-scale atomic attack; and (2) concurrent developments with respect to the political and military posture of the United States and its allies.

The first factor is calculable in broad terms. Midway in the period under consideration the USSR will be capable of delivering a crippling attack on the United States, if US defenses have been neglected or if surprise can be achieved. This qualified capability would not of itself render probable an unprovoked attack. The most ruthless and aggressive dictatorship would want reasonable certainty, not only of ultimate success, but also of relative impunity, before deliberately initiating atomic warfare. A substantial Soviet atomic capability, however, would increase the possibility of deliberate attack. By encouraging Soviet political aggression, it would also increase the danger of war through miscalculation.

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The second factor is less calculable. The achievement of a strong Western political military posture would tend to deter Soviet aggression, but the certain prospect of that achievement could conceivably provoke a preventive Soviet attack.

In summation:

(1) A deliberate, unprovoked Soviet attack before 1957 cannot be predicted as probable.

(2) There is, however, a continuing danger of war with the USSR.

(3) This danger will probably increase progressively during the period under consideration.

This estimate is based on all intelligence information available to the departments and agencies of the government. For want of time, however, it has not been coordinated with the departmental intelligence agencies. As you know, a relevant formal estimate is now in process of coordination, but is unlikely to become available at an early date.

Sincerely,

/s/ R. H. Hillenkoetter
R. H. HILLENKOETTER
Rear Admiral, USN
Director of Central Intelligence

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