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# CIA Downgrades Estimate of Soviet SS-19... ... Saying Missile Too Inaccurate for First Strike

By Michael R. Gordon

Key U.S. intelligence officials have revised their estimate of the capabilities of the Soviet Union's SS-19 missile and no longer believe the intercontinental ballistic missile has the accuracy to threaten U.S. missile silos in a first strike, government officials said.

The new assessment is reflected in the latest National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) prepared by the National Intelligence Council, a panel of intelligence experts chaired by a deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency. But there is not unanimity on the SS-19's capabilities, according to a Pentagon official.

"The CIA has revised its estimate of the SS-19's accuracy; the DIA has not," the official said, referring to the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). While the CIA's view is reflected in the main text of the NIE, a footnote states the DIA's dissenting view, the official added.

The SS-19 figured prominently in public debate during the Carter Administration. In 1977, intelligence projections showed the missile's accuracy—as well as that of the SS-18—

was improving at a quicker rate than earlier forecast. "Analysis of intelligence data on new versions of the SS-18 and SS-19 missiles indicates that by the early 1980s, a substantial threat to our Minuteman will exist," said the Defense Department's fiscal 1980 report to Congress.

The view that the SS-19 was a "silo killer" encouraged the notion that the "window of vulnerability"—the time when U.S. land-based missiles would be vulnerable to Soviet attack—had opened earlier than expected.

In addition, those assessments of the SS-19 influenced the U.S. negotiating approach in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). In light of intelligence estimates, the Carter Administration in 1977 was amenable to a Soviet suggestion that the treaty set an over-all limit on multiple-warhead land-based missiles, including the SS-19. Previously, the Carter Administration had pushed to limit the multiple-warhead SS-18, the largest of the Soviet land-based missiles, according to Walter B. Slocombe, a Carter Administration Defense official.

At present, the Soviets have 308 SS-18 missiles, each of which can carry up to 10 warheads under the terms of the SALT II treaty, for a total of 3,080 warheads. There are 360 SS-19 missiles, each carrying 6 warheads, for a total of 2,160 warheads.

The view that the SS-19 is a silo

killer is still expressed in Pentagon publications. The Joint Chiefs of Staff fiscal 1986 military posture assessment states that "today, the most accurate versions of the SS-18 and SS-19 missiles are capable of destroying most time-urgent and hardened targets in an initial attack on the United States."

The new CIA reassessment, however, casts doubt on this view. "It is no longer a silo killer," said a State Department official familiar with the reassessment.

A Pentagon official said that "what the CIA basically says is that given the large increase in CEP it now associates with the SS-19, the individual probability of kill is low." "CEP" is a technical measure of missile accuracy that stands for "circle error probable" and refers to the radius of a circle within which 50 per cent of a missile's warheads can be expected to fall. The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies estimates that the CEP of the latest models of the SS-18 and the SS-19 is 300 meters.

In its reassessment, the CIA has increased its estimate of the SS-19's CEP by "better than a third" and now puts it in the range of 400 meters, the official said. That would mean that the SS-19 would not provide a high-confidence capability against a U.S. missile silo even if two SS-19 warheads from two separate missiles were aimed at the same U.S. missile silo.

"Even two gives you low confidence of killing a silo," the Pentagon official said. "You could use three or four and

