

The Director of Central Intelligence  
Washington, D.C. 20505

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Arms Control Intelligence Staff

ACIS M377/89  
17 October 1989

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM:

[Redacted]

Chief, Multilateral Negotiations Group  
Arms Control Intelligence Staff

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SUBJECT: Correspondence Between Congressman Aspin  
and Secretary Cheney on Declassifying  
Information on Soviet Tank Production [Redacted]

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1. Action Requested: None. This is for your information.

2. The attached exchange of letters between Congressman Les Aspin and Secretary of Defense Cheney was passed to us so that CIA officers can comment on the factual portion of the Secretary's response to the Congressman. (I have already given copies to the appropriate people in the Office of Soviet Analysis and the Office of Imagery Analysis.) [Redacted]

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3. In brief, Congressman Aspin asked the Secretary to provide unclassified or declassified information so that the Congressman could discuss in some detail and confirm the Soviet claims that they have substantially cut tank production. (The Congressman refers to his request to the DCI for declassified information and to Mr. Kerr's refusal.) Secretary Cheney has also turned down the request for unclassified information, but he has also discussed the issue of Soviet tank production by using classified information.

[Redacted]

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Attachments

- cc: Deputy Director for Intelligence
- Director, Office of Soviet Analysis
- Director, Office of Imagery Analysis
- Director, National Photographic Interpretation Center
- Chief, Arms Control Intelligence Staff
- Director, Office of Congressional Affairs

[Redacted]

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C/ACIS [redacted] (17 Oct 89)

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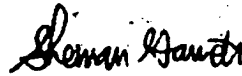
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**MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION**

**SUBJECT: SecDef Response to Aspin Letter (U)**

(A 7 ...)

(S) After yesterday's meeting, I spoke with Mr. Hadley. He laid out for me the kind of letter he wants, stressing in particular the broader context in which we ought to view the tank production figures. He also stated that he understood the difficulties of declassifying the information Aspin wants. I stressed there was an ENP draft; he said that he wanted me, in the absence of Matheny, to do the letter. Accordingly, I have drafted a response, based on our discussion yesterday and Jay's original memo. I expect the folks upstairs to reconcile the two drafts (for which I apologize to Jay). Please give me your comments ASAP, no later than 1300, 17 October 1989. Mr. Hadley has also asked that the letter be sent for review to the CIA.



**Sherman Garnett  
Deputy Director for  
European Security Negotiations**

**Attachments:  
Aspin Letter  
ESN Draft Response**

**Distribution:**

**Jay Savage, OSD/ISP/ENP, 1D469  
David Epstein, OSD/NA, 3A930**



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Honorable Les Aspin  
House of Representatives  
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Les:

(U) Thank you for your letter of October 11 regarding Soviet tank production, as well as for the advance copy of your Committee Delegation's report on its visit to East Germany and the Soviet Union last August. It is clear that you and your delegation were witnesses to a wide variety of military activities formerly closed to outside observers of any sort, let alone officials of the United States. I experienced similar frankness in my discussions with General Yazov. However, while such contacts are profoundly encouraging, it remains to be seen whether the changes they augur will be as sweeping or long-lasting as we all wish.

(S/NF) As part of your letter, you asked specifically whether DoD could confirm "that Soviet tank production had declined sharply to a level that, if continued, would be very close to what Marshal Akhromeyev projected, and was, in fact, at a somewhat lower rate than would be necessary to fulfill recent Soviet claims about tank production levels in the 1990s." I regret to say that I cannot provide such confirmation. In the first place, primary authority for declassification of specific figures and estimates resides with the President and the National Intelligence Board. In the second place, I could not support a projection of Soviet tank production rates that appears at variance with the facts as I know them.

(S/NF) As you are aware, the Soviets have five tank production facilities:

[redacted] The latter facility is largely an R&D center  
In 1988, the Intelligence Community estimated Soviet tank production at [redacted]

[redacted] This year's first quarter estimate remained on line with the production rate of 1988. However, in June, it was apparent that the production rate had fallen and that only [redacted] had been produced during the first half of 1989. Production rates have dropped further since June. DIA now estimates that 1989 tank production is consistent with Akhromeyev's claim of 1700. I presented my views on Akhromeyev's estimate during my television interview on August 25, 1989.

(S/NF) However, according to DIA estimates, if production were to continue in 1990 at the lower rate of the end of the year, it would result in an annual Soviet production of between 1300 and 1500 tanks, not the 850 of some Soviet statements. In my meeting with General Yazov, he indicated that Soviet tank production could fall to about 800 in the course of the next five years. Whether they reach this target is still a matter for the future. In my view, whatever the production figures for the next few years, there are several important factors that put even a significant decline in Soviet production into a more sober perspective:

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Declassify on: OADR

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*[Handwritten scribbles and markings]*

-- First, at the present time, there has been no change in the Soviet production capacity, just the annual output. No facilities have been shut down; no production lines have been transformed to civilian needs. The capacity for surging back to the old rates remains. ~~BE~~ the Soviets want to reduce their production rates to levels such as the Soviet CFE negotiator cites (and to reap significant benefits to the civilian economy), they will probably have to take a facility out of tank production and redirect its output to something else. However, such a transformation is a slow process, more likely to appear, if at all, as part of the thirteenth Five Year Plan in 1991.

-- Second, the production rates for main battle tanks, armored combat vehicles and artillery and mortars since 1985 have been of such a magnitude that they can afford significant reductions for years to come without harm to their military capabilities. From 1985-1989, the Soviet Union has increased its productions of these systems 500, 1050 and 50% respectively. I recognize that ongoing efforts at political and economic reform in the Soviet Union aimed at defusing the current crisis dictate some military cutbacks. However, I believe these are easier for the military to accept given the build-up that has preceded these production cuts.

-- Finally, we do not yet understand the full import of the restructuring of the Soviet military. However, these parallel changes in Soviet military doctrine, force structure, training and equipment will ultimately determine whether the Soviets are creating the "leaner and meaner" military many fear or are engaged in a redefinition of military means and aims that significantly alters Soviet capabilities in Europe. The Soviet CFE proposal implies a willingness to live with somewhere close to 14,000 tanks in the Atlantic-to-the-Urals region after a CFE treaty is implemented. Production rates at even their current reduced levels would lead to full replacement in 9-10 years. We also do not know to what extent the Soviets have shifted emphasis from new production to retrofitting old systems with significant improvements of armor, power and armament.

(S/NF) In the great fog of change, it is difficult to know with certainty how the landscape appears. We estimate as best we can. In my talks with Marshal Akhromeyev and General Yazov, both indicated to me that our previous estimates for 1988 production of tanks were "very close."

I would be happy to provide you with a DIA briefing on the methodology we currently employ in tracking tank production in the Soviet Union.

(S) The foregoing letter has made plain some of my concerns, both with the tendency to overestimate the extent of a slackening in military effort in the USSR and the need to place ongoing changes in the broader context of past performance and future uncertainties. I hope this letter has provided you with some insight into my thinking on this issue. I would like to close by thanking you again for the advanced copy of your report, which should provide insights that will help me to prepare for my own trip to the Soviet Union in the future.

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Honorable Richard B. Cheney

Page Two

11 October 1989

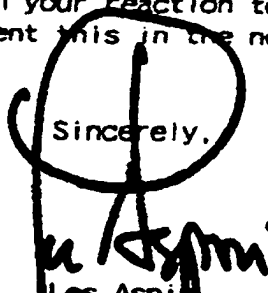
Unfortunately, my request was denied. While confirming that Soviet production has indeed dropped in the manner described above, Richard Kerr, as Acting Director of Central Intelligence, decided that the Intelligence Community in principle preferred not to provide official confirmation. In fact, Mr. Kerr suggested that since you had addressed this issue publicly that we use the formulation that you used in your television appearance of August 25, 1989.

However, I would like to address the issue in somewhat more detail, in particular indicating that Soviet tank production had declined sharply to a level that, if continued, would be very close to what Marshal Akhromeyev projected, and was, in fact, at a somewhat lower rate than would be necessary to fulfill recent Soviet claims about tank production levels in 1990. Consequently, I would like your permission to state publicly that Department of Defense sources confirm the previous statement.

I hope that you will give my request serious consideration. I believe that the direct exchanges between the committee and Soviet officials, especially our new relationship with the newly formed Defense and State Security Committee, have been fruitful and served our national interests. I believe that a statement along the lines I have described would reinforce the importance of these direct contacts and maintain the momentum we have established.

I hope that we will have chance to chat about our Soviet contacts some time soon. I would like to hear how your visit with General Yazov went and I would be interested in your reaction to our report. I expect that conference issues will prevent this in the near future, but we should take the time to do it.

Sincerely,

  
Les Aspin  
Chairman

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Attachment

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