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OER Review of "The Soviet Bloc Armed Forces and The Cuban Crisis"

This memorandum is OER's response to the CIA Watch Committee Member's 8 August memorandum which directed a review of the NIC Working Paper.

1. OER does not concur in the referenced NIC paper which appears to conclude that:

a. The Soviet Union considered the deployment of strategic missiles to Cuba as a venture involving a high degree of risk.

b. As a result, the USSR had months in which to gradually prepare for the possibility of a military confrontation with the United States and that this was expected to occur, coincident with the initial arrival in Cuba of USSR equipment in September 1962.

c. Accordingly, Soviet forces were brought to a high degree of combat readiness by September and placed in an "alert" condition by 11 September.

d. After 20 September Soviet forces relaxed their alert condition somewhat until the President's 22 October speech. Thereafter, a very high state of readiness was achieved and maintained for some weeks.

2. The NIC paper further implies that the Soviet Union was willing to confront the US militarily when the deployment of strategic missiles in Cuba was discovered. This position cannot be logically supported if one holds, as is almost universally done, that the Soviets were trying to partially correct a grave imbalance in long-range strike capabilities in order to

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give them a better bargaining position at a later date. Their actions after 22 October indicated clearly that they fully realized the only effective response they could make to US military pressure in the Caribbean was a nuclear one. Understanding their military position in Cuba and the limitation of their nuclear strike capability vis-a-vis the US, they obviously took great care to ensure that the situation would not escalate into a thermonuclear war.

3. ORR believes that the USSR did not consider its deployment of military forces in Cuba to involve a high degree of risk. This view is supported by a detailed examination of the Soviet venture in Cuba which indicated conclusively that the Soviets considered their risk to be low. The timing, procedures and interrelationships involved in the deployment of offensive and defensive weapons to Cuba strongly support the conclusion that the USSR completely misjudged the possibility of a military confrontation and attached little significance to the precise point in time at which the US was likely to discover the deployment of strategic weapons in Cuba. The facts and logic behind these strongly held conclusions are presented in detail in ORR Project

An earlier version of this draft was made available to the NIC and the project is now in the process of being coordinated within the DDJ.

4. Since the Soviets did not consider their risk to be high, the probability of a "peak" in September, regardless of published statements, must therefore be based on another rationale and supported by evidence independent of the Soviet build-up in Cuba. In reviewing indicators for evidence of a "peak" condition in the Soviet armed forces following the President's speech of 22 October, we find some suggestions that certain portions of their forces were placed in a heightened readiness posture, but no acceptable body of evidence to suggest that in either September or October the Soviet military forces were in toto placed in a posture which would imply the probability of imminent hostilities. It should, in addition, be noted that the activity observed among Soviet forces during September had terminated by approximately the 20th, or about the time that MRBM's were first being deployed to Cuban MRBM sites.

5. ORR strongly disputes two specific and significant points made in the HIC paper.

a. Despite unusual movement on the part of some FVO and tactical aircraft after the President's speech, a high state of readiness in the FVG was not evident after either 11 September or 22 October. Many factors which should have been present and discernible if a high state of readiness did exist were not noted.

... considering the status of this system during September and October does not indicate that it was placed in a position which could be described as "peak" of effectiveness or "highest state of readiness" at any point during the period.

b. A significant state of readiness in the Soviet civil defense system and perhaps in one or more of the European satellites is also considered highly unlikely.

(2) A considerable body of evidence outlines many measures to be taken in civil defense in the event of a threatening situation.

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There is no direct evidence to suggest that such measures were taken either in preparation for the capabilities in this system in September or to achieve a high state of readiness following the 23 October speech by the President.

This entire body of information suggests that the principal concern of the Soviet and other Bloc governments during the crisis was to limit civil defense preparation in order to avoid panicking the populace or provoking a US action.

ORR also takes exception to the several pages of the referenced paper which attempt to define the phrase "highest combat readiness."

What the paper has done is to intermingle known facts concerning unit readiness conditions (largely a function of system equipment reaction time) and Soviet statements which pertain to the readiness status of their armed forces in general. These are two different subjects.

Finally, many factors possibly connected with a given statement (such as pure propaganda motives) are ignored.

8. In the broad field of general economic activity and administration--which admittedly may not be the best indicator in the USSR for signs of military "peaking", we continue to be virtually without evidence of abnormalities during the venture.

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Broadly speaking, the GOVERNMENT OF THE SOVIET economy during this period continued to be concerned primarily with the reorganization then being developed. There is no suggestion of urgent attempts to resolve numerous supply, planning and other managerial problems which the Soviet Union presumably would have resolved had it been preparing for the possibility of a military confrontation at a determinable future date. Moreover, the continued concern with efficiency would have given way to concern with maintaining and strengthening central direction under conditions of concern for imminent hostilities.

OSI concedes that these areas may not provide good indicators by which to ascertain an attempt to prepare a force-in-being for action in the near future.

There is no evidence to suggest that between mid-1960 and mid-1962, the Soviets timed the production or deployment of major weapons systems in order to maximize force levels by the fall of 1962.

9. In summation, we find no persuasive set of indicators from which one can conclude that the Soviet Forces were brought gradually to an alert status.

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"Sparked" in Sept:

Evidence of an October alert, based upon the circumstances and measures taken to improve the posture of defensive forces, is more positive. Nevertheless, the announced October alert provided few indicators of the condition and it seems likely that the Soviets were trying to avoid an aggressive posture.

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