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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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MEMORANDUM FOR: CIA Member, National Foreign Intelligence Board

SUBJECT : NIE 11-3/8-76: Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict Through the Mid-1980s

1. The subject estimate is on the NFIB schedule for 20 and 21 December. After hearing adversarial presentations, the NFIB will consider the Key Judgments and Volume I of the estimate.

2. On the whole, we are satisfied with the Key Judgments and Volume I. This estimate is characterized, however, by a plethora of dissenting positions on several contentious issues. The numerous Air Force footnotes are particularly egregious.

3. Unlike many previous years, there are no unresolved issues about the size and composition of future Soviet forces for intercontinental conflict in this estimate. For the most part, the contentious issues in this year's estimate concern Soviet strategic objectives, the status and future impact of specific Soviet weapons programs, the pace and potential of Soviet weapons research and development, and the implications of Soviet civil defense.

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4. The issue of Soviet strategic objectives is probably the most critical one in the estimate. We are in agreement with the main text which draws the distinction between ultimate goals and practical objectives. We believe that, while the Soviets may be optimistic about both the capabilities and the leverage which their current strategic forces give to them, they are aware that uncertainties about future US behavior, as well as their own future strategic capabilities relative to those of the US, preclude their setting as a practical policy objective the attainment of strategic superiority over the US in a specific period of time. State's dissent avers that the Soviets are mainly trying to keep pace in the qualitative competition with the US, whereas DIA and the three services believe that the Soviets regard their ultimate goal of dominance over the West as a realistic one, and that they expect to move closer to this goal over the next decade. The services believe that the ultimate goal serves as a practical guideline for Soviet strategic force development.

5. The Backfire issue was even more hard-fought this year than last. There are substantial disagreements over the capabilities of the aircraft and over Soviet intentions for its employment against the US. All except DIA, Army, and Air Force believe it unlikely that Backfire would be assigned to intercontinental missions. DIA, Army and Air Force contend the Backfire clearly has intercontinental capabilities and these should be the prime factor in assessing its missions. Air Force further believes that some portion of the Backfire force will be assigned missions against the continental US.

6. Soviet ABM efforts are the subject of two outstanding issues. The first is the nature of the [] new large radars at Pechora and Olenegorsk. CIA and State believe they are strictly early warning radars, whereas DIA, Army, and Air Force think it is too early to reach a judgment on this point. The second issue is the Soviet ABM research and development effort. []

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7. The disagreements over Soviet civil defense are the same ones expressed in the recent interagency study of that subject. The services believe the Soviet civil defense programs will have an adverse effect on the strategic balance; State interprets those programs as a prudent hedge against attack; our position is between those extremes.

8. The extremism of the Air Force's position in this estimate is best illustrated by General Keegan's dissents on the ABM treaty ("...one of the greatest deceptive coups in modern diplomatic history."--Vol. I, p. 10) and on the potential significance of Soviet development of particle beam weapons ("...the most important strategic undertaking since the development of the atomic bomb."--Vol. I, p. 78).

9. Other issues are listed in Attachment B.

10. We recommend that you concur in this estimate and that you resist any efforts which might be made by Air Force or others to change the main text or to strengthen the polemical tone of portions of the estimate.

11. This memorandum has been coordinated with [] (OWI) who concurs in its recommendations.

CIA Representative
NIE 11-3/8-76

Attachments:

- A. NIE 11-3/8-76:
Volume I
- B. Other Key Issues

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Other Key Issues in NIE 11-3/8-76,
Key Judgments and Volume I

1. Utility of Forces (Vol. I, pp. 2-4). Air Force alone believes that there is a "sizable asymmetry" in the current strategic balance--in favor of the USSR--which gives the Soviets a "growing ability to coerce at all levels of confrontation."

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2. SALT (Vol. I, pp. 7-10). The Air Force dissent argues that "the Soviets regard SALT as a means to achieve strategic superiority over the US."

3. Military Expenditures (Vol. I, pp. 11-13). Air Force criticizes the CIA cost estimates as being unrealistically low in the past, and believes that several percentage points could be added to the Agency's estimate of the portion of Soviet GNP devoted to defense spending. The Air Force justification for its position is in error when it rejects the findings that Soviet defense industries are "less efficient than formerly believed." Our determination that the ruble costs of Soviet programs were much higher than we previously thought by definition indicates that this is true. The Air Force is also in error in asserting that the costs of numerous development programs are omitted. Costs for all such programs are included conceptually in our estimates of Soviet RDT&E--one of the most rapidly growing elements of Soviet defense outlays.

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4. SS-X-16 Deployment (Vol. I, p. 26). Only Air Force believes that silo-based SS-X-16s are replacing SS-13s.

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p. 28
5. Capability to Refire ICBMs (Vol. I, p. 30). Air Force alone judges that the "cold launch" technique and other evidence indicate Soviet plans for refire for part of the SS-17 and SS-18 force.

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6. SS-NX-17 in Y-Class (Vol. I, p. 36). Navy holds open the possibility that the Soviets will retrofit the SS-NX-17 into about half of the Y-class submarines. All others doubt that the system will be extensively deployed.

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7. ABM Modification of SA-5 (Vol. I, p. 61). Air Force continues to believe the Soviets may have covertly provided an ABM capability for the SA-5.

8. Defenses Against Aircraft and Missiles at Low Altitude (Vol. I, pp. 64-76). There are a few relatively minor dissents in this section, including some of our own, but the main judgments are not new. The Air Force tends to rate future Soviet capabilities against cruise missiles as higher than does the rest of the community. CIA and the Air Force believe that the new Soviet strategic SAM system under development could not defend against low-altitude SRAMs, while DIA, Army, and NSA believe it may have some capability.

9. Concealment and Deception (Vol. I, pp. 93-95). Last year, CIA joined the State Department in the view that the risks of a large strategic concealment and deception program would deter the Soviets from undertaking it. This year's text accommodates our view by stating that the possibility of an extensive program could not be excluded if the Soviets thought they could accomplish it without our knowledge and could gain a significant advantage thereby. - You may want to join State again this year.

10. Prospects for an Effective 2-RV Attack-- The "Fratricide" Question (Vol. I, pp. 104-105). The Air Force believes that the Soviets would conclude that 2-RV attacks by different missiles to compound damage are not operationally feasible because of nuclear environment and attack timing considerations. All other agencies conclude that "fratricide" effects and attack timing should be treated in the same manner as other uncertainties such as accuracy and warhead yield.

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11. Residual Forces (Vol. I, pp. 109-113).
The Air Force believes that the kind of hypothetical nuclear exchange considered in this section (a surprise counterforce attack by ICBMs only) "can be misleading and does not belong" in an NIE. We believe the analysis and its assumptions, however, are sufficiently spelled out so as to avoid misunderstanding, and are critically important in assessing trends in Soviet capabilities.

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