



Director of  
Central  
Intelligence

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# Soviet Planning and Capability for Protracted Nuclear War

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum  
Volume I—The Interagency Memorandum

~~Top Secret~~

NI IIM 85-10013

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NI IIM 85-10013

SOVIET PLANNING AND CAPABILITY  
FOR PROTRACTED NUCLEAR WAR [redacted]

VOLUME I—THE INTERAGENCY  
MEMORANDUM

Information available as of 1 October 1985 was used in the preparation of this Memorandum, approved for publication on 30 December 1985 by the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council.

[redacted]

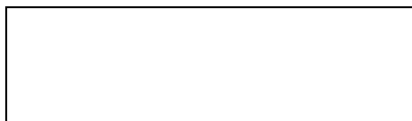
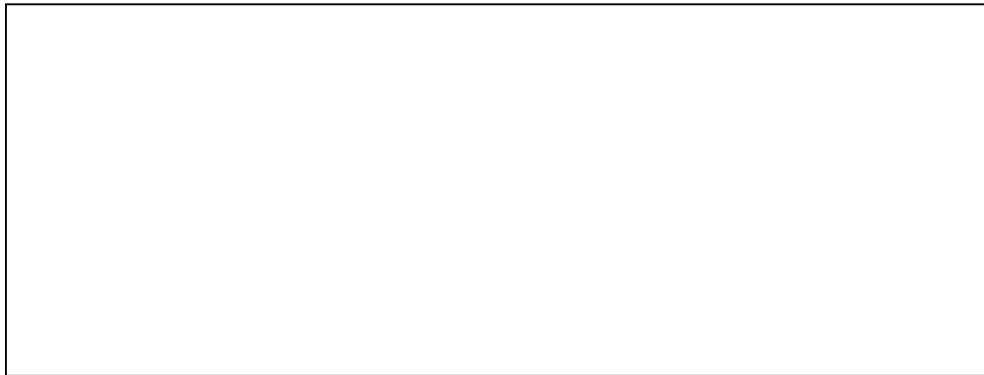
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### SCOPE NOTE

[redacted] this IIM summarizes information bearing on Soviet planning and capabilities for protracted nuclear war. It consists of two volumes. Volume I contains:

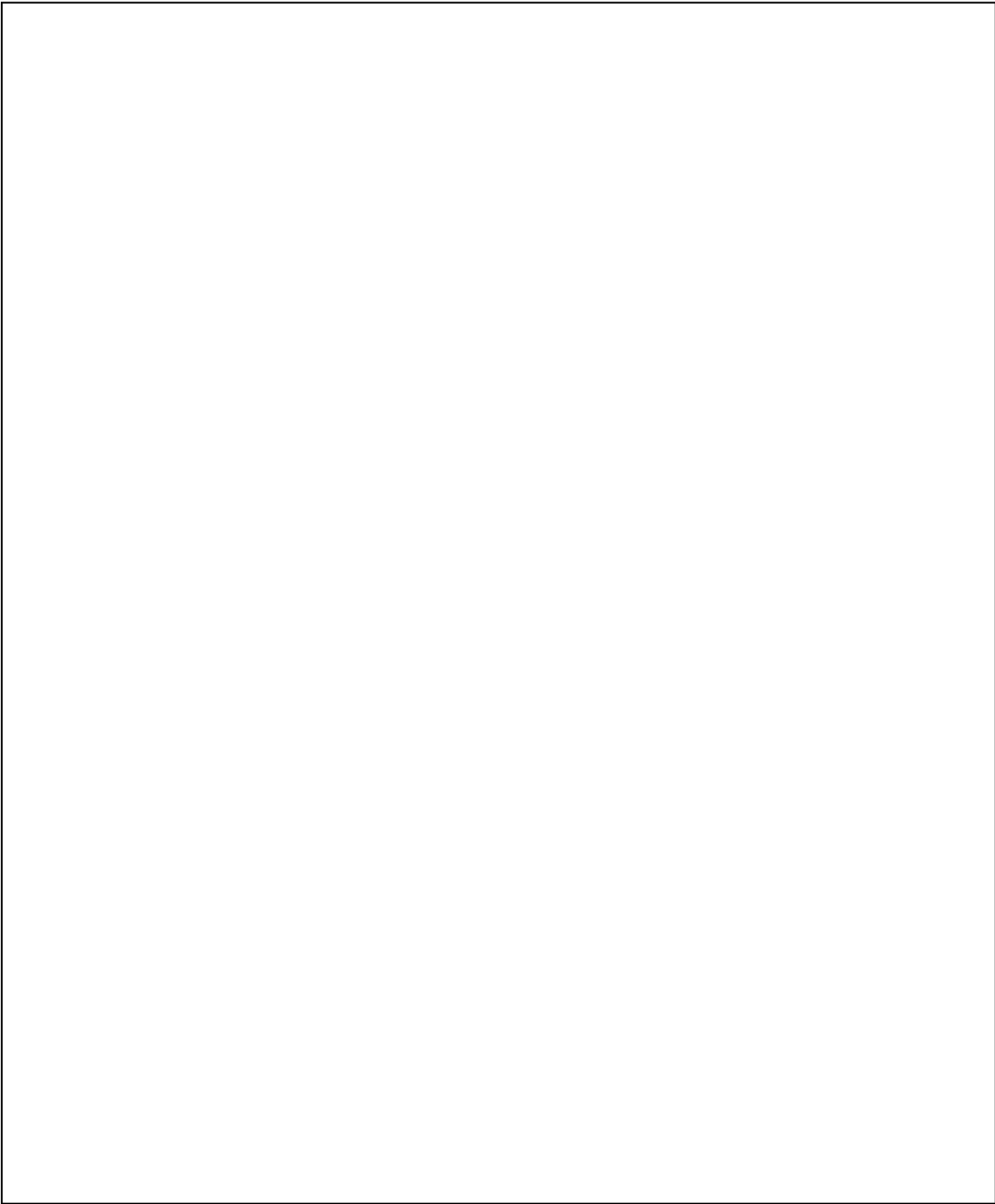
- Key Judgments and Implications.



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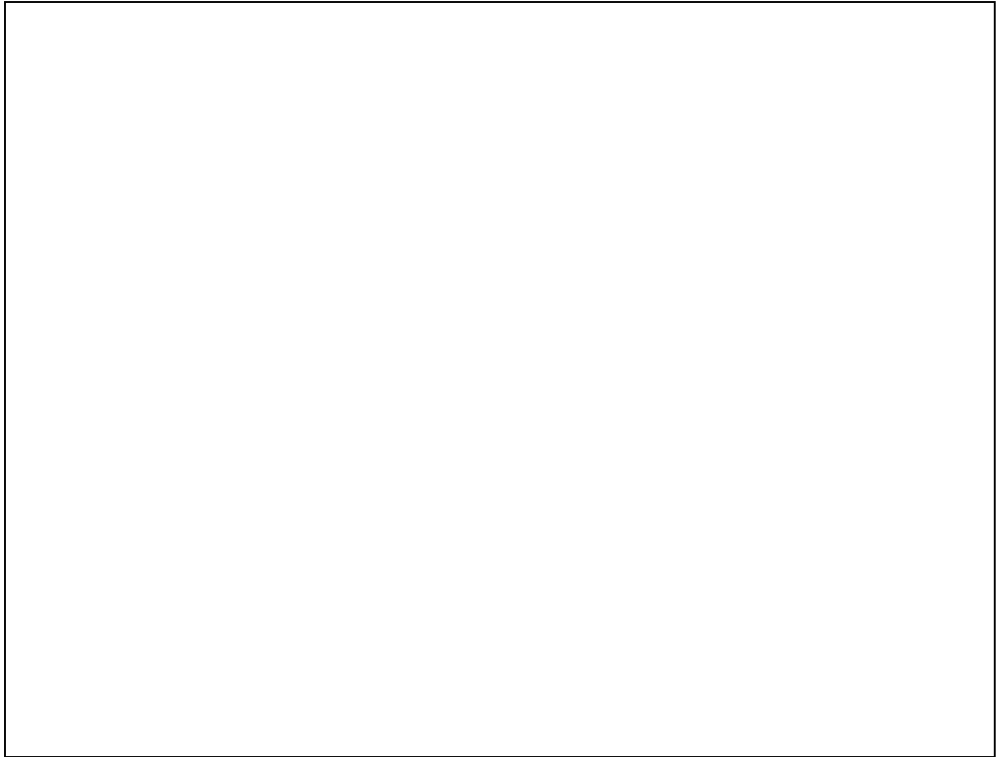
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[Redacted]

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## KEY JUDGMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Soviet military strategy calls for attaining the USSR's military and political objectives as quickly as possible in a major East-West conflict. Soviet planners, however, expect that a war with NATO would continue after large-scale nuclear strikes and that, consequently, they must be prepared to execute the poststrike operations necessary to occupy Western Europe and neutralize US nuclear attack capabilities. Such a conflict, in the Soviet view, could last days, weeks, or even months beyond the initial large-scale nuclear attacks. [redacted]

Soviet planners believe that the concluding phase would be fought mainly by general purpose forces. They consider that:

— Most nuclear forces would be used or destroyed in the first days of nuclear combat.

— Withheld ICBMs, [redacted] reserved for only the most important targets, would be used over the days and weeks following the initial massive nuclear strikes to help attain strategic objectives. Because of their survivability, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) probably would be withheld in considerably higher numbers, [redacted]

— Soviet intercontinental nuclear strikes during the concluding phase would be designed to preclude further US involvement in the conflict on the European Continent, where follow-on operations are expected to be concentrated. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] This increased emphasis on operations following the major initial strikes is probably tied to a trend toward greater appreciation [redacted] of the complexities of this environment. [redacted] have underscored the difficulties of waging a war with NATO,



[redacted] as

a result of NATO's use of radioelectronic warfare and direct nuclear attack. [redacted]

### Capabilities

Soviet military capabilities have utility for protracted nuclear war even though that may not have been the main reason for their development. Specifically, Moscow's protracted war capabilities have been enhanced by measures such as:

- Development of large SLBM and mobile IRBM forces, and the ongoing deployment of mobile ICBM forces as well, which inherently enhance survivability.
- Development of a submarine-launched, nuclear-armed cruise missile, whose small size enables it to be launched from a standard-size torpedo tube—a capability that could facilitate rearming of surviving Soviet submarines.
- The Soviets' highly redundant command, control, and communications system, which is probably sufficiently survivable to ensure at least minimal control over strategic forces after an enemy attack.
- The USSR's civil defense program, which with a few hours' warning, probably would ensure the survival of a large percentage of Soviet leaders.
- Deep underground facilities, such as Sharapovo and Chekhov, which provide Moscow's top military-political leadership with substantial protection against even direct nuclear attack. [redacted]

Further, the Soviets also:

- Expect some decentralization of control of battlefield nuclear weapons after the initial massed strike.
- Plan to disperse reserve missiles, warheads, and missile propellant from rear depots before escalation to use of nuclear weapons.
- Have stockpiled and pre-positioned communications equipment for use in the poststrike period.
- Plan to withhold some operational ICBMs and IRBMs from the initial strikes, as well as a considerably higher proportion of

[redacted]

[redacted]

SLBMs. (We doubt that there are any plans for stockpiling and using obsolescent missiles retired from the active forces.)

[redacted]

On the other hand, some measures—such as missile reload of SSBNs and survivable poststrike reconnaissance—have apparently been developed only to a limited extent. The Soviets also do not appear to have established alternative means of transporting missiles the long distance that would be required—such as by road or air—despite the potential vulnerability of the Soviet rail network in wartime. Moreover, taking into account the problems the Soviets are likely to face in a postattack environment and the apparently limited extent of preparations they have undertaken to cope with these difficulties, we estimate they probably would be able to reload and refire from ICBM silos over a period of weeks or months only a small portion of the reserve ICBMs they maintain in peacetime.<sup>1</sup> [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] the greatest emphasis in both Soviet doctrine and deployments is on the opening phases of warfare, which are considered critical to the war's outcome. Although they have developed various capabilities that are critical to protracted warfare operations, the Soviets have not pursued comprehensive, high-priority, integrated programs *specifically designed for extended operations*. The Soviets apparently lack detailed strike planning for the final phase because of the uncertainty associated with the earlier periods of combat. Their writings call for the advanced preparation of detailed operational plans only for the initial periods of conflict and warn that the first massed nuclear strike would so drastically change the situation that any prestrike planning for follow-on operations would need extensive revision. The effect of this preoccupation with the opening period of war, however, is mitigated somewhat because much of what is designed for the continuity of operating in the initial nuclear phases would be beneficial to protracted operations. [redacted]

[redacted]

There is an alternative view that the main text overstates the difficulties the Soviets would have in reconstituting their current silo-based ICBM force in nuclear conflict, given the extensive preparations

<sup>1</sup> According to the Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, [redacted]

[redacted] cannot be taken as evidence that ICBM refire figures in Soviet war plans. The holder of this view also believes that it is unlikely SLBM reload figures in Soviet war plans even in a small way. In addition, the holder of this view believes the Soviets do not plan to rely on reload and refire of SS-20s to meet their strategic objectives, and do not intend to engage in large-scale SS-20 reload and refire. [redacted]

this view holds they have made, and that consequently they would be able to refire a large portion of their reserve ICBMs. The holder of this view also believes the Soviets plan for US attempts to degrade their reconnaissance capability and have prepared accordingly, thus ensuring a significant measure of reconnaissance capability, even in the most unfavorable scenarios. [redacted]

The holder of this view further believes that, given the planning and extensive measures that the Soviets have taken to enhance leadership survivability, communications redundancy, and, in this view, strategic missile systems' employment flexibility and sustainability, the cumulative effect of these and other developments suggests that the Soviets in fact have a more viable capability for conducting protracted nuclear war than is allowed in the main text.<sup>2</sup> [redacted]

### Implications

The Soviets assign enormous importance to ensuring continuous, centralized command and control, believing that enduring control itself could help determine the outcome of a war with NATO. They also regard it as a key to continued poststrike effectiveness and probably as an area in which they hold an advantage over NATO—one authoritative source stated that NATO lags "an epoch behind" in command and control matters. The Soviets probably see their huge effort to ensure the survival of the leadership and of its communications to the operating forces in particular as also conferring important advantages in the final phase. [redacted]

Many of the Soviets' preparations for prestrike operations and for operating following the initial major strikes also would benefit the USSR in an extended final phase and give Moscow some capabilities for waging protracted nuclear war. Moreover, the conditioning of Soviet officers into expecting a continuation of operations after the major strikes probably contributes to Moscow's overall capabilities for this period. [redacted]

In sum, although the Soviets would prefer to accomplish their political-military objectives quickly and thus avoid a protracted nuclear war, they nonetheless see the need to plan for it. They probably believe their protracted war capabilities could enhance their prospects relative to NATO in emerging in a superior position from a nuclear war, but there is evidence that they are not confident of their ability to reconstitute their forces and their economy and social order after the major nuclear attacks. Indeed, Moscow continues to regard the concluding phase as one of great uncertainty. Although Soviet preparations for

<sup>2</sup> The holder of this view is the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency. [redacted]

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war survival and recovery are unmatched by any parallel effort in the West, it is unlikely that these preparations, by themselves, would be the determining factor in influencing the USSR to escalate a war with NATO. Established Soviet nuclear war-fighting strategy probably will continue to guide Moscow's force acquisition and planning process. This concept will continue to emphasize the desirability of quick conflict resolution and the decisiveness of the early phases of warfare while recognizing the possibilities for protracted war. The Soviets probably will continue to place high priority on destroying the US National Command Authority at the outset of a general nuclear war—a policy that, in their view, could bring the war to an early conclusion. Indeed, successful implementation of Soviet planning for the initial nuclear operations could make a protracted final phase unnecessary. Consequently, while Soviet military requirements probably will continue to focus most heavily on the need to prepare for conventional operations, the transition to use of nuclear arms, and the initial major nuclear operations, prudent military planning on the part of the Soviets and their uncertainty regarding initial strategic nuclear force operations dictate that they prepare also for the contingency of an extended nuclear phase.

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