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The President

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Soviet Capabilities for Concealing Strategic Weapon Programs

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The Central Intelligence Agency and the Intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, AEC, and NSA.

Concurring:

Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
Director, Defense Intelligence Agency
The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB
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SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR CONCEALING STRATEGIC WEAPON PROGRAMS

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet capabilities for secretly developing and deploying strategic weapon systems and to examine factors bearing on Soviet intentions in this regard, over the next few years.

SCOPE NOTE

In this estimate, we assume that Western collection efforts will continue at approximately their present levels. Soviet capabilities for concealing strength under terms of an inspection agreement have not been considered, since these capabilities would have to be assessed in detail in relation to each of the many possible forms which such an inspection agreement might take. We have, however, considered in general the effect which arms control might have upon Soviet concealment.

In this estimate "concealment" is defined as an effort designed to limit Western knowledge of Soviet military programs. Its usual aim is to induce an *underestimate* of Soviet capabilities. It would also hamper targeting and reduce Western ability to develop countermeasures to Soviet weapons systems.

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THE ESTIMATE

1. By definition, if the USSR should achieve complete and successful concealment of weapons systems, the fact would be unknown to US intelligence unless and until the Soviets chose to reveal it. It cannot, of course, be conclusively proven that successful concealment of this sort has not happened. It must be acknowledged at the outset that successful concealment is and will remain a possibility.

2. The Soviets have instituted concealment measures in all phases of their strategic weapons programs. The extent of these efforts and their success have varied from program to program and even within programs. In general, however, the Soviets have been most successful in denying information on strategic weapons programs in the research and development phase. They have been less successful as a program progresses to systems testing, and have not, we believe, been able to conceal any large-scale deployment programs.

3. To some extent, these concealment efforts of the Soviets represent an extension of the devotion to secrecy that permeates their society. This factor alone would account for the rigorous physical security measures protecting strategic weapons facilities from observation by nearby inhabitants, as well as by clandestine agents or attaches.

4. Such concealment efforts as the Soviets have undertaken appear to have been directed toward hiding precise locations in operational deployment of a system and denying information on its characteristics. They clearly know of some of the various advanced intelligence collection methods employed by the US and almost certainly suspect the existence of others. But complicating Soviet concealment efforts is the variety of collection programs employed by the West which, in the process of all source analysis, results in a total body of intelligence greater than the sum of its parts. Thus, to be effective, a Soviet effort completely to conceal a strategic weapon program would require a complex and generally costly variety of safeguards. We believe that they now have insufficient incentive to undertake such an effort.

5. On the other hand, it is unlikely that Soviet efforts to conceal certain aspects of their strategic weapons programs will diminish, and they may increase. We cannot predict the extent to which contemplated improvements in US collection capabilities may be offset by an intensification of Soviet concealment efforts. But even if the Soviets undertake no additional measures, we consider it unlikely that our ability to detect, identify, and assess a new weapon system in the pre-testing stage of development will improve. For the foreseeable future, new Soviet weapon systems are likely to have been under development for several years before they are detected in testing or in deployment, and the increasingly complex technology of modern weapons will probably lengthen further the time between initial research and deployment.

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6. We believe that the Soviets have, or could develop, greater capabilities for concealment than they have practiced, and it is possible that their policy will change. If they should come to believe that the credibility of their deterrent is well-established, they may increase concealment activity in order to improve their retaliatory capabilities. While it is difficult to foresee technological breakthroughs, we consider it improbable that they could successfully conceal the deployment of strategic weapons in such numbers as to alter significantly the present strategic relationship.

7. The preceding paragraphs have discussed Soviet concealment primarily in the context of past and present conditions, that is, without an arms control agreement. In general, we do not foresee that an arms control agreement would significantly affect either US intelligence capabilities or Soviet concealment capabilities except as specific provisions might facilitate or discourage particular modes of intelligence collection or inspection. The effectiveness of any specific provisions of the agreement would depend on their content and the machinery for enforcing them, and cannot be estimated in the abstract. Certain general considerations can, however, be set forth.

8. The conclusion of an arms control agreement would probably signify that the Soviets had decided to accept, at least for a time, the strategic balance envisaged in the agreement. However, the Soviets might conclude such an agreement in hopes of freezing US strategic forces while secretly trying to build up their own. In the first case, they might subsequently decide that, because of international developments or for other reasons, they required substantially larger forces. In such circumstances they might choose to abrogate an agreement openly rather than to attempt to evade its provisions; they took a similar action during the Berlin crisis of 1961 when they ended the moratorium on nuclear testing. If they decided to abrogate, they would almost certainly make secret preparations for a resumption of the arms competition in advance of the announcement.

9. Nevertheless, under certain arms control agreements, the Soviets might see concealment as offering a strategic advantage which was worth the risk. If, for example, the US and the Soviet Union should be limited by an agreement to small numbers of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, possession of even a few additional vehicles could significantly change the strategic equation. Depending on the provisions of the agreement, and the rules for policing it, they might assess the risk of detection as small, but they could hardly dismiss it as non-existent. And they would have to consider that if the concealed forces were detected, the arms control agreements would be abrogated in circumstances politically disadvantageous to them, and the West would make strenuous efforts to redress any real or presumed disparity.

10. If the Soviets should employ concealment to violate the arms control treaty, we believe that their aim would be to change the strategic balance. Any smaller stakes would hardly justify the risks. Such an effort would imply

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a Soviet decision to accept the complexity and cost of an all out concealment effort, thus degrading the reliance we could have in our detection capabilities. Even in the face of determined Soviet concealment efforts, there is a good chance that violations involving large scale testing or deployment would be detected, but this cannot be guaranteed. In view of our limited capabilities to detect the early phases of weapons programs, we cannot assure detection sufficiently timely to preclude attainment by the Soviets of a significant lead in acquiring an increased strategic capability.

11. Our capabilities for detecting smaller accretions to Soviet strategic strength are much less certain, especially in an arms control environment, and, depending upon the terms of any arms control agreement, even small accretions could be significant. Some such accretions might be detected but we cannot give assurance that any would be.

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