

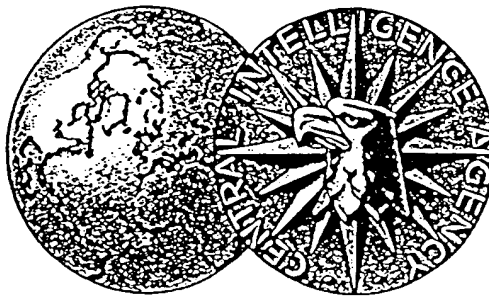
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FOR THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
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THE EFFECT OF THE SOVIET POSSESSION OF ATOMIC BOMBS ON THE SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES

Report by a Joint Ad Hoc Committee

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL



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THE EFFECT OF THE SOVIET POSSESSION OF ATOMIC BOMBS ON THE SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES

Report by a Joint Ad Hoc Committee *

THE PROBLEM

1. The problem is to estimate the effect of the Soviet possession of atomic bombs upon the security of the United States.
2. The possibility of US or Soviet development of hydrogen bombs has not been considered.

DISCUSSION

3. See Enclosure A.

CONCLUSION

4. The Soviet possession of atomic weapons has increased the military and political-subversive capabilities of the USSR and the possibility of war. Accordingly the security of the United States is in increasing jeopardy.

* Pursuant to the undertaking in the Foreword of ORE 91-49, this estimate has been prepared by a joint ad hoc committee representing CIA and the intelligence agencies of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. This estimate is limited in scope: it does not deal with all controversial aspects of ORE 91-49. Joint agreement existing with respect to this much of the subject, however, the committee (excepting the Navy representative) has recommended its publication without further delay pending further consideration of the broad aspects of the problem.

The intelligence agencies of the Departments of State, the Army, and the Air Force have concurred in this estimate. For the dissent of the Office of Naval Intelligence see Enclosure B. The date of the estimate is 26 May 1950.

ENCLOSURE A

THE EFFECT OF SOVIET MILITARY CAPABILITIES

1. Soviet possession of atomic weapons has increased the military capacity of the USSR relative to that of the United States and its allies.

2. The success of an atomic attack depends upon four basic elements: (a) adequate stockpile of atomic bombs; (b) adequate means of transport; (c) sound selection of targets; and (d) effectiveness of delivery.

a. The USSR will be able to develop an increasing stockpile of atomic bombs. The growth of the Soviet stockpile is estimated tentatively as follows:

Mid-1950	10- 20
Mid-1951	25- 45
Mid-1952	45- 90
Mid-1953	70-135

Beyond 1953 a well-founded estimate cannot be made, and even for mid-1953 there is a large degree of uncertainty. For planning purposes, however, an estimate for mid-1954 of 120-200 bombs is suggested on the basis that plant capacity may be increased by approximately 50 percent after 1952.

b. The USSR has and will continue to have means of transport—air, maritime, clandestine—capable of carrying its entire stockpile of atomic bombs.

c. It must be presumed that the USSR is capable of compiling an effective target list.

d. Soviet achievement of the fourth element—effectiveness of delivery—will depend primarily upon the defensive capabilities of the United States and its allies.

3. The USSR could inflict critical damage on the United States through atomic attack.

a. A Soviet capability for direct attack on the continental United States has existed since the USSR acquired long-range aircraft and long-range submarines. Addition of atomic bombs to Soviet armament gives the

USSR the additional capability of inflicting concentrated destruction in a single attack and of denying areas within the United States.

b. The maximum threat to the United State of Soviet possession of atomic bombs is the possibility that the USSR in a single surprise attack on the United States and its foreign installations could seriously limit the offensive capabilities of the United States, possibly to a critical degree.

c. The preparation of a single Soviet attack of this scope would obviously face serious difficulties, primarily (1) production of a sufficient number of atomic bombs to cover selected vital targets and yet allow for delivery losses, faulty functioning, and inaccurate aiming; and, to a lesser degree, (2) production of sufficient means of transport to ensure coverage of those targets, and (3) determination of those targets the destruction of which would most seriously limit the offensive capabilities of the United States. Each of these three difficulties, however, can be resolved in time by the USSR.

d. Since the USSR will have an increasing capacity to deliver bombs on target, if not prevented, the extent of destruction that the USSR could inflict on the United States will depend primarily on the defensive capabilities of the United States.

4. The USSR could more readily inflict critical damage on the North Atlantic Treaty allies of the United States through atomic attack.

THE EFFECT ON SOVIET POLITICAL-SUBVERSIVE CAPABILITIES

5. Soviet possession of atomic weapons increases the possibility that the USSR will be able to weaken seriously the power position of the United States without resorting to direct military action.

a. Soviet possession of atomic weapons in itself does not increase the instruments already

available to the USSR for the extension of its political control by means short of an all-out military conflict. But Soviet capabilities of extending political control will be enhanced to the extent that Soviet possession of atomic weapons weakens the will of non-Communists to take adequate and timely counter-measures, and strengthens the determination and self-confidence of the Soviet Union.

b. Soviet efforts to confuse and divide public opinion in non-Communist countries will benefit from Soviet possession of atomic weapons. Moscow's current campaign to prohibit the use of atomic weapons and to attach a moral and legal stigma to their use is enhanced by the fact that the USSR can pose as willing to accept the same restrictions that it demands of other countries. By exploiting the universal fear of war as a means of attracting foreign support for Soviet policy, the USSR may be able to influence popular opinion in some countries to induce the local government to adopt a position less favorable to the security interests of the United States.

c. Fear of a growing disparity between US and Soviet military power, and fear of atomic war in any case, may influence the present allies of the United States to refrain from joining this country in taking a more positive political position against the USSR.

d. Segments of American public opinion also may conceivably become less willing to support more positive US counter-measures against the USSR.

e. The USSR, accordingly, will be in a position to exploit non-Communist hesitation and reluctance to resort to strong counter-measures. These conditions would facilitate the piecemeal extension of Soviet political control over so much of Eurasia as virtually to isolate the United States without resort to direct military action.

EFFECT ON THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR

6. The possibility of direct military conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States is increased as a result of Soviet possession of atomic weapons.

a. The basic objective of Soviet policy is clearly the attainment of a Communist world

under Soviet domination. In pursuit of this objective the USSR regards the United States as its major opponent and will wage against it a relentless, unceasing struggle in which any weapon or tactic is admissible which promises success in terms of this over-all Soviet objective.

b. With the continued development of the Soviet atomic stockpile and Soviet defense capabilities against atomic attack, the United States superiority in total numbers of atomic bombs will no longer in itself be a strong deterrent to war.

c. With its doctrinaire concepts of capitalist behavior and its hypersensitivity over security, the USSR may interpret as potentially aggressive future steps which the United States and its allies may take to improve their defensive position against the threat inherent in Soviet military power. Similarly, Western efforts to increase military preparedness in response to Soviet moves in the "cold war" could create a situation in which the USSR might estimate that the Western Powers were determined to prevent any further spread of Communism by military action against the USSR. It is always possible, therefore, that the USSR would initiate war if it should estimate that a Western attack was impending.

d. As the Soviet military potential increases relative to that of the United States and its allies, the USSR will doubtless be willing to take greater risks than before in pursuit of its aims. Although the USSR undoubtedly calculates the capacity and determination of the non-Communist powers to take counter-measures, the Kremlin nevertheless may miscalculate the cumulative risk involved in its various aggressions. Accordingly it may undertake an action which in itself appears unlikely to lead to war, but which, when added to all previous Soviet aggressions, might become an issue out of proportion to its actual merits and thus precipitate war.

e. If, after Soviet attainment of a large atomic stockpile, US defensive and retaliatory capabilities were to remain so limited as to permit a Soviet belief that the USSR could make a decisive attack on the United States with relative impunity, there would be grave danger of such an attack.

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ENCLOSURE B

DISSENT BY THE OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE

1. ONI dissents from ORE 32-50 because it believes that this estimate is too narrow and limited in its approach to a problem which "... obviously involves considerations of extremely broad scope and implications, . . ."* and thus is subject to serious misinterpretation. ORE 32-50 purports to discuss Soviet possession of the atomic bomb in relation to its effect on Soviet political-subversive capabilities and military capabilities, and it concludes that there has been an increase in these capabilities, a consequent increase in the possibility of war and an increasing jeopardy to the security of the U.S. A discussion so narrow in scope and so limited with respect to the factors discussed does not, indeed cannot, indicate how much increase has occurred nor what basic situation existed from which the indeterminate increase can be measured. The reader is actually led to infer that the only factor under Soviet control which would influence a decision to attempt a surprise and crippling atomic attack on the U.S., is possession of what they estimate to be a requisite number of atomic bombs to accomplish the task. It is inconceivable that the Soviets could arrive at such a decision without regard to political or economic factors and all the other military factors, offensive and defensive.

2. The security of the U.S. is affected by Soviet objectives and intentions as well as ca-

* Quoted from CIA memorandum #29694 dated 29 September 1949 to IAC agencies requesting an ad hoc committee on recent atomic developments.

pabilities, since it is the combination of these factors that produces the end product, probable courses of action. Soviet objectives and intentions stem principally from political, ideological and economic factors, historical experience and aspirations. Only when weighed together in the light of objectives and intentions will total capabilities—political, subversive, economic and military—combine to produce the probable course of action which must be correctly estimated in order that proper steps may be taken to insure the security of the U.S. While many considerations affecting the Soviet objectives and intentions are "controversial", these considerations are, in this case, the vital issues in the problem. Their omission from the estimate is a fatal error.

3. ONI believes that our bases for estimating Soviet objectives and intentions are at least as well founded as our bases for estimating their capabilities. They are, therefore, entitled to a full consideration in the estimate, particularly in view of the uncertainty which must be expressed regarding quantities, dates of availability, and characteristics of Soviet atomic bombs.

4. The position set forth above is the one ONI has maintained throughout the committee's consideration of this problem. ONI disapproves of the publishing of this paper because it believes that the limited discussion, by avoiding the vital issues, does not adequately support the conclusion, does not answer the problem, and could be misleading.

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