

~~TOP SECRET~~JSSC Memo 185-62
17 October 1962**MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF****Subject: Prospective Soviet Responses to
US Action (C)**

1. What would be the Soviet reaction if the United States were to take direct military action against Cuba?

2. The basic principles at issue here are two: (a) The relative strengths of the US and the USSR in general war; and (b) the involvement of the vital interests of the two great powers. The degree of involvement of vital interest is a direct measure of willingness or reluctance to engage in general war.

3. Within this context, the first question is whether or not the USSR would start a general war in defense of Cuba or in response to US action against Cuba.

a. As indicated in JCS 2304/58 the US vital interests are clearly involved in Cuba; the Soviet vital interests do not yet appear vitally involved. The loss of Cuba would not affect the basic military or political security of the USSR homeland or of the Sino-Soviet Bloc.

b. As indicated in JCS 1907/519, the United States has an advantage over the USSR in a general war. Since the United States would be alert to this prospect, the Soviets could not reasonably expect to catch the United States by surprise.

c. Therefore, since USSR vital interests do not appear to be involved, since the United States has the capability of destroying the Soviets, and since the Soviets could not upset this US advantage by a surprise attack in this situation, it is concluded that the Soviets would not resort to general war as a direct response to US armed action against Cuba.

4. The next question is what will the Soviets do? The obvious answer is that they will do as much as they think they can get away with short of general war. These Soviet

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responses could come in any one or in several of the following general areas: Cuba, Berlin, At Sea, Iran, Korea, Taiwan, Pacific Test Site, Southeast Asia, Turkey, Africa, and Europe. Each of these is discussed below, taking into account the vital interests of the two great powers, the capabilities (including accessibility) of the Soviets to take action, and the short or long term advantages that might accrue to the Soviets. These comments, while based upon the preceding factors of vital interests, capabilities, and advantages, are essentially the subjective judgments of the Council. Time has not permitted detailed expansion of the reasonings.

5. a. Cuba: The Soviets, short of general war, can not directly support Cuba except by sea. Action at sea is discussed separately.

b. Berlin: Direct military attack and seizure of Berlin would bring about full-scale US, and presumably NATO, response. The Russians must by now realize this, and would not take this action. All encroaching actions short of direct seizure can reasonably be expected; these include air, road, and rail blockades and all other types of harassment. The degree of Soviet response is difficult to foresee, but the main aim would be to establish the sovereignty of the GDR and cap the morale and viability of West Berlin.

c. At Sea: Action at sea would not necessarily bring about general war, could seriously upset both US and Western activities, and would indirectly serve to support Cuba. Russian action at sea, either locally in the Caribbean or throughout the Atlantic, and perhaps the Pacific, could reasonably be expected.

d. Iran: Neither US nor Soviet vital interests are involved; Iran offers long term advantages to the Soviets; and it is accessible and within Soviet capabilities. Iran is a likely area of reaction.

e. Korea: Could involve substantial US resources with relatively minor involvement of Soviet resources. Khrushchev might use this as an opportunity to partially resolve the China-Soviet difficulties by "unleashing" the Chinese; but the US involvement, the lack of clear long-term advantages, and the fact that Korea has already been worked over, all tend to indicate that Korea should be fairly low on the expectancy list.

f. Taiwan: This involves the US interests quite clearly, no direct Soviet advantage is clearly at stake, and the

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result of communist attack is not a foregone conclusion. Full scale attack on Taiwan does not seem probable although increase of Chicom pressure can be expected.

g. Pacific Test Site (Johnston Island): Possible ICBM accident in retaliation for loss of Soviet technicians in Cuba.

h. Southeast Asia: Since no vital interest of either side is involved, this is a possible reaction point. However, since our US reaction has already been triggered with US forces present, it is not high on the probability listing.

i. Turkey: As far as US deployed arms are concerned, Turkey is a natural quid-pro-quo. However, the Soviets must recognize that attack on Turkey would involve NATO, and this would increase the prospects of general war. It does not seem probable that the Soviets would attack Turkey.

j. Africa: Neither side has vital interests in Africa, long term advantages to the Soviets would be appealing. It is not directly accessible for Soviet military action, but increased political penetration efforts can be expected.

k. Europe: Soviet action against Europe other than Berlin would mean direct action against NATO and should not be expected for the same reasons that general war is not expected.

6. In summation the Council feels that Soviet military reaction would be confined to limited actions at sea, in Iran, and a possible ICBM accident on the Pacific Test Site. Berlin reaction would be short of direct military seizure.

J. S. MOLTNER
Major General, USAF

DAVID W. GRAY
Major General, USA

J. C. WYLIE
Rear Admiral, USN

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