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[1962 Report of
the Net Evaluation
Subcommittee]

VOLUME I
THE REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The President directed the Net Evaluation Subcommittee (NESC) to analyze the results of a nuclear exchange between the US and USSR based on the following assumption:

"A nuclear attack in mid-1965 by the USSR against the United States, following the outbreak of limited war in Southeast Asia, with the US forces in a high state of alert but with the Soviets seeking to achieve optimum surprise."

2. To this end, a scenario was developed which set forth a hypothetical sequence of military actions and reactions which led to a nuclear exchange involving the Soviet and US homelands. In particular, it established the disposition and alert status of US forces.

a. In the spring of 1965 the Communist government of North Vietnam, with the support of Communist Bloc leaders, decided to commit overtly their military forces on 1 May to seize complete control of South Vietnam and Laos. Communist China and the USSR, in view of possible US reactions, brought their forces to a heightened state of alert.

b. Within a matter of three days (4 May) after the overt nature of the Communist attack became apparent, initial units of US forces began to arrive in the Southeast Asian area. On 11 May, it became apparent to the US that the invasion could not be contained by action directed solely against the attacking forces, and therefore the US began an aerial campaign against military targets in North Vietnam.

The use of nuclear weapons was not authorized

3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8)

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c. At this point, the Chinese Communists, responding to North Vietnamese appeals for air support, began to commit their fighters against US aircraft over North Vietnam. During the following two weeks the area of aerial conflict continued to enlarge and by the end of the period Chinese Communist aircraft were attacking military targets throughout South Vietnam. They had also launched several attacks against the US carrier task force operating off the Vietnamese coast.

d. The President, advised that the [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] could only be contained by strikes against bases in [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] decided on 26 May that US forces should attack to destroy the [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] Because of possible Sino-Soviet reaction against US and Allied bases, all US forces were to be brought to a high state of alert.

e. The US forces launched [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] on 27 May. The advanced alert status of US forces, especially strategic systems, coincident with this attack caused the Soviet leaders to miscalculate US intentions. They concluded that the US was preparing for an all-out attack against the Soviet Union and Communist China. As a result, within 24 hours of the US strikes against [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] the Soviet leaders decided that they must launch a pre-emptive attack against the US as soon as possible. The date of their attack was established as 1 June 1965.

f. During the period of preparation, the Chinese Communist and US forces continued the air battle over [redacted] [redacted] 3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8) [redacted] The Soviet leaders hoped that the continuing conflict would cause the US to maldeploy, or even

to commit part of its strategic force prematurely to the battle in [3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8)] They initiated diplomatic action, ostensibly directed to ending the fighting in [3.3(b)(5), 3.3(b)(8)] [] as a means to camouflage their intentions.

3. In order to explore alternative results, the nuclear exchange between the Soviet Union and the US which resulted from the above series of events, was analyzed under two conditions of initiation. The hypothesized First General War was initiated by the Soviet Union as a result of their miscalculation of US intentions. The Second General War was initiated by a US pre-emptive strike, launched after the US had acquired conclusive intelligence of an impending Soviet attack.

4. In the First General War, the concept of controlled response was played, insofar as both sides attacked counter-force targets in the initial phase, and attacked urban-industrial targets only in a subsequent phase after attempts at negotiations were assumed to have failed. In the Second General War, the US pre-emptive attack was against counter-force targets, but the Soviets retaliated immediately with an attack against both military and urban-industrial targets. This nuclear exchange was completed by a US attack against Soviet urban-industrial targets.

5. Since the intelligence community in the Intelligence Assumptions for Planning ^{1/} gave an upper and lower figure for the Soviet ICBM force in 1965, both were used in each of the two wars analyzed. In addition, the possible effects of certain other potential variables, i.e., warning, command and control, operational factors, and the possibility of use

^{1/} Intelligence Assumptions for Planning, Soviet ICBM Sites, 1961-1967, 9 Nov 1961 (Top Secret, Limited Distribution).

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of other Soviet approaches, including clandestine operations and use of Biological Warfare (BW) and Chemical Warfare (CW) agents, were considered relative to the outcome of the war.

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IV. CONCLUSIONS

203. As a result of these analyses, the Committee was led to a number of conclusions. It should be noted, however, that determinations resulting from a gross aggregate machine calculated study are neither conclusive nor categorical, but rather are indications of the possible magnitude of effects. The following conclusions are the outcome of the Committee's analysis of these effects combined with military experience and judgment.

204. Counterforce Strategy. There are many problems attendant to the implementation of a counterforce strategy which must be faced up to prior to making that decision. With the force structures and conditions of alert postulated, Soviet leaders cannot hope to achieve decisive destruction of US strategic nuclear forces. This derives from the comparison of the large numbers of relatively invulnerable US missile systems, with a smaller, more invulnerable Soviet missile force. However, if the Soviet leaders were convinced that a US counterforce attack was imminent, they might well employ such a tactic in a pre-emptive strike in an effort to mitigate the weight of the US attack. They would hope to save their cities by quickly obtaining a cease-fire.

205. On the other hand, the US, again due to the preponderance of its relatively survivable force, has considerable flexibility in choice of strategy. Thus it can employ a counterforce strategy either in initiation or in retaliation. However, with regard to the use of the counterforce strategy in a pre-emptive attack, the Committee concluded that while appealing, it is a highly difficult form of attack to plan and to carry out, with high assurance of achieving great destruction to the enemy's

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strategic forces. In particular, there must be precise knowledge of the size and deployment of the enemy's forces. There must also be a capability to destroy these forces either before their launch or before they can impact.

206. Furthermore, should the US ever contemplate a pre-emptive counterforce attack, serious consideration must be given to the possibility that the Soviet retaliation would not be counterforce. For example, in the study, the Soviets responded with a heavy urban-industrial/military attack. Had they sued for peace, immediately after the launch of their missiles, stating that they had misinterpreted US intentions and that they were recalling their bomber forces, the US would have found itself at that time in a disadvantageous position. Though superior militarily, it would have lost 45 percent of industry and suffered almost 55 million casualties. The Soviets, even though admitting defeat, would have lost only six percent of their industrial capability and suffered only five and one-half million casualties. Under these circumstances it would appear that the US could not have accepted such overtures for peace, but would have had to launch a composite attack against the Soviet Union, even though this might have placed in jeopardy additional US lives and property.

207. To have any hope of success in limiting a nuclear war, the credibility of a counterforce strike must not be eroded by effects that could cause the enemy to misconstrue the designed purpose. Civilian casualties must be held to a minimum by programming weapons so as to minimize fallout. This is a difficult problem to deal with. In this study, despite considerable care in targeting, for example, ground burst warheads were used to attack a few

hardened nuclear storage sites, and because of wind direction, resulted in heavy fallout on Moscow.

208. Decision Time. Timing of a decision as to the US response to a Soviet attack can be delayed for a period without seriously affecting the outcome of the war. US hardened missiles appear to have the capability to ride out a Soviet attack and US alert aircraft are airborne on warning. However, to achieve maximum effectiveness of the US counterforce attack to be delivered by missiles and US theater forces, it must impact on Soviet military targets as soon as possible. The timing of decision as to subsequent attacks becomes critical in a short period of time, if the maximum capability of airborne US aircraft is to be realized. For theater fighter-bombers this could be about one hour; for SAC bombers this would be several hours.

209. Reserve Forces. The retention of a reserve of survivable weapon systems sufficient to implement an urban-industrial/military attack is required under all conditions to ensure that the US is never placed in a position of military inferiority in a nuclear war. For example, if the Soviets were to strike SAC bases in a surprise attack, using SLBMs, then destroy BMEWS, and shortly thereafter launch ICBMs against urban-industrial targets, the US might have assessed this as a counterforce attack on the basis of the observed results of the SLBM attack. A US counterforce retaliation could then find the US with the majority of its bombers destroyed, most of its missiles fired, and many of its cities and industries in ruins. The Soviet Bloc, by comparison, would have experienced relatively little damage to its population and economy.

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210. Furthermore, essential to the effective employment of a reserve force is the capability to rapidly assess damage and to locate new targets, the destruction of which are essential to conclude the war.

211. Composition of Theater Forces. Should the US seek a strategy which allows a pause for negotiations between the counterforce attack and an urban-industrial attack, the composition of the theater forces should be changed. At the present time the majority of theater nuclear forces are exceedingly vulnerable. They must be employed on outbreak of hostilities or be lost on the ground. If they are released for an attack at the time of a US missile launch, in some cases they will not arrive at their targets for two or more hours; whereas the total missile attack would have been down on the enemy in less than an hour. In these circumstances, the pause between the counterforce phase of the attack and the urban-industrial phase has not been realized. Accepting the fact that such forces are essential for political, as well as military reasons, the need is for forces which are survivable and can be protected until such time as they are brought into action.

212. Net Evaluation. In summation, it appears to the Committee that under the conditions of alert and with the US and Soviet forces as given in this study, the net balance following a general war in 1965 would favor the US.

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