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Reflections on the Soviet Strategic Missile Threat of 1960 (U)

(U) The debate in the presidential election last year concerning the relative strength of U.S. and Soviet military forces reminded me of a similar debate that took place twenty years earlier. In the 1960 campaign, one of the major issues raised by John Kennedy, the Democratic Party nominee, was that the Eisenhower Administration was responsible for the existence of a "missile gap" vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Specifically, the U.S. press had been carrying numerous pessimistic reports that credited the Soviets with hundreds of operational ICBM launchers, whereas the U.S. had none. My official involvement in these matters as an NSA employee is the subject of this article.

~~(SC)~~ When I came to work at NSA in 1951, Soviet development of strategic offensive missiles of relatively short range was under way, with German World War II V-2 technology as its starting point. By the mid-1950s a 650-nautical-mile MRBM, labeled by the West as the SS-3 SHYSTER (a road-transportable or semi-mobile system), was being deployed.

[redacted] information on its deployment was sketchy. During the Suez crisis of November 1956, when the U.K., France, and Israel attacked Egypt after Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, Soviet Premier Bulganin made an implied threat to the Anthony Eden government by posing the hypothetical question: how would you like it if a country with missiles able to reach your country were to treat you as you have treated Egypt? Never mind that the SS-3 could not reach England, nor that the SS-4, which could, had yet to be even test-fired. Years later, an RAF intelligence officer who flew in the first attack wave against Port Said, Egypt, told me that two of the four squadrons on Cyprus and Crete were im-

mediately recalled to England because of that threat. Evidently a missile gap of sorts existed in the U.K. as well at that time.

~~(SC)~~ After having been trained at NSA as a Russian linguist/analyst with the Soviet [redacted] as my target specialty, I spent a year at Syracuse University on an NSA Fellowship, to obtain a Master's Degree in Soviet area studies. When I returned to Washington in the summer of 1957, the Soviets test-fired their first 1000-nautical-mile MRBM (the SS-4), their first ICBM (the SS-6), and, of course, launched their first SPUTNIK. On October Revolution Day in November 1957, the Soviets paraded missiles for the first time. It was an ominous sight for most of us at that time. It was then that I became interested in the eventual deployment of these new missile systems. Thus, in November 1957, I was assigned as a senior analyst in the Soviet [redacted] Division in the Office of General Studies (GENS-11), responsible for monitoring the activities of [redacted]

[redacted] In December 1958, GENS created a separate division (GENS-64), under the leadership of Mr. Harry Donahue, [redacted]

[redacted] I was assigned as a section chief and, subsequently, as the division reporting officer.

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to have an organization of strategic bombers and missiles akin to the U.S. Strategic Air Command. On the other hand, there were [redacted] reports of missile construction at various locations in the western USSR which had no known Soviet aviation affiliation, and there was evidence suggesting that at least some strategic missile units were also subordinate at that time to the Soviet Ground Forces.

~~(SC)~~ In 1958, President Eisenhower publicly stressed his concept of "Open Skies" for national verification, to avoid surprise buildup and costly arms races.

[redacted]

The intelligence analysts were confronted with a paucity of hard information:

[redacted]

~~(C)~~ In January 1960 the Soviets announced the creation of a fifth branch of service, referred to in the West as the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF). A more accurate rendition would have been Strategic Missile Troops, but the original press translation continued to be generally used by the Intelligence Community. This new branch of service complemented the Soviet Ground Forces, Air Forces, Navy, and Air Defense of the Homeland. In May of that year Khrushchev announced that a Marshal Nedelin had been selected as Commander of the new SRF. Meanwhile, in the U.S., the publicity about an alleged missile gap was growing louder. The United States Air Force intelligence organization had taken the position that the Soviets had a very large number of ICBM sites operational and under construction, and the DCI's Board of National Estimates was then similarly

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(b) (1) Public statements by Premier Khrushchev served to fan the flames by implying that the U.S. perception was accurate. It then became a major presidential campaign issue, when Senator John Kennedy blamed the Eisenhower Administration for having allowed this missile gap to develop. Of course, Kennedy had been briefed by the Administration in his capacity as a presidential nominee.

~~(SC)~~ Also in January 1960, the Director of Central Intelligence directed the Chairman of his (b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

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organize an ad hoc study group to review all of the USAF evidence of the missile gap. GMAIC was an interagency working group having an NSA member, M (b) (3) - P.L. 86-36, but its organization at that time was toward the technical aspects of Soviet missile activity as reflected primarily in missile test-range activity. Therefore, a new group needed to be formed under GMAIC aegis. A chairman was selected from Army Intelligence ranks, Major James Clark, and other members included the Army (Major Daniel Graham), Navy (Commander Eric Ischinger), Air Force (Major Robert Willis), CIA [redacted] and NSA (Mr. (b) (3) - P.L. 86-36 from GENS-64). This group first met in February 1960 and concluded in a brief report published in April that Tyuratam was the only operational Soviet ICBM site. Colonel Clark briefed the DCI, Mr. Allen Dulles, on the group's findings, which, of course, contradicted the existing estimate (NIE 11-8-59), which projected 35 ICBMs on launchers in mid-1960 and 140-200 in mid-1961. A decision was then made to form a permanent Deployment Working Group of GMAIC to examine in an exhaustive manner all Soviet locations suspected by U.S. Air Force Intelligence to be ICBM sites. Major Robert Willis, USAF, was selected to be the chairman, and other members were Mr. William Baker and Major Almon Roth (Army), Lieutenant Thomas Dykers (Navy), Major Cornelius McMillan (Air Force), and [redacted] (CIA). I was selected as the NSA member.

~~(SC)~~ A crisis atmosphere was created in May of that year when U-2 pilot Gary Powers was shot down over the Soviet Union. One month earlier,

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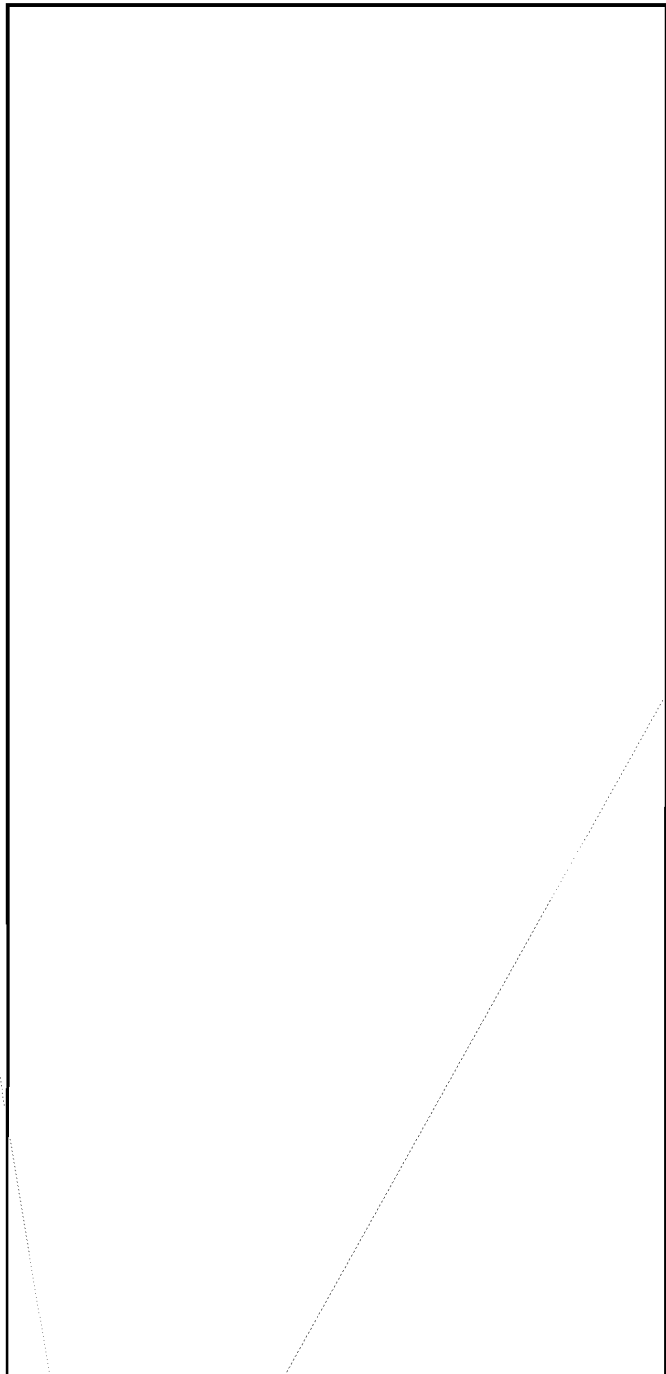
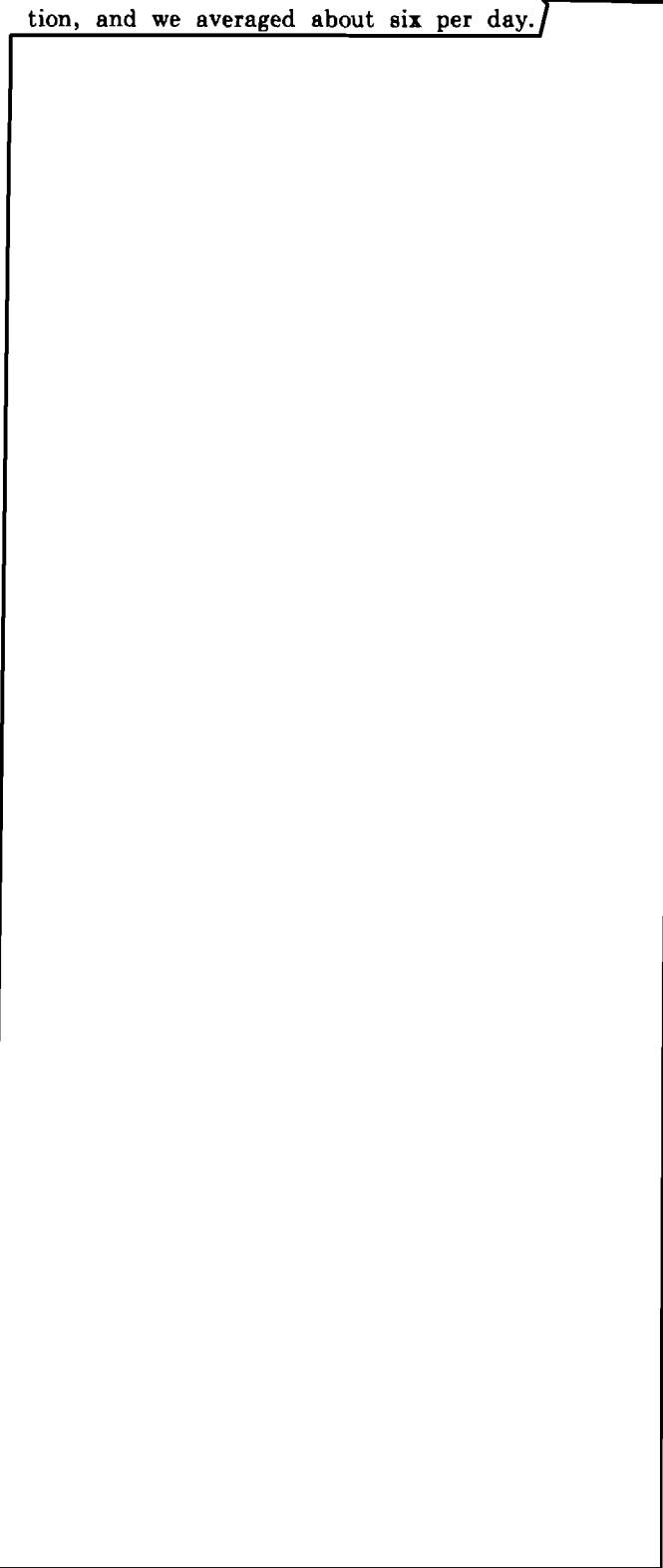
mission failed with the crash of the Gary Powers' U-2 on May Day 1960, and this potentially valuable source was lost.

(U) The Deployment Working Group met almost daily in the late summer and early fall on one of the top floors of the Stewart Building in Washington, D.C., the predecessor of the present National Photographic Interpretation Center. The chairman of GMAIC assigned a personal representative (b) (3) - P.L. 86-36 to supervise and support the activities of our working group. Colonel McFarland had known him in the Air Force and had borrowed him from the HRB

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Singer Corporation. (b)(3)-P.L. 86-36 later to become a senior manager at NSA.

~~(S)~~ Our method of operation was to review in detail all available evidence on each suspect location, and we averaged about six per day.



~~(S)~~ We finished our initial report just before the presidential election, and it was a major input to the NIE process. I was not personally involved in NIE 11-8 that year, but do recall that the overall Community assessment that there was no missile gap could have been provided to John Kennedy around inauguration time. When he informed the American public shortly thereafter that there was no missile gap after all, he received the inevitable criticism for having made it an issue in the first place. Of course,

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he had been merely reflecting the Intelligence Community estimates as they existed at the time.

~~(C)~~ The GMAIC Missile Deployment Working Group continued in existence for many years as the number of Soviet strategic missile sites expanded.

[Redacted]

We played a key role during the Cuban missile crisis of late 1962 as U-2 photography was brought to our group for assessment. During 1963, our chairman, Bob Wills, moved on to a new assignment and was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Raymond McCrory, USA,

[Redacted]

Of course, the Army member of the earlier ad hoc working group, Dan Graham, was to become Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

(U) I do not profess to draw firm conclusions from this experience to apply to the present

period. Concerns are now being expressed about a "civil-defense gap" and other gaps, and these may very well exist. In my judgment, members of the Deployment Working Group of GMAIC were able to put aside agency parochial positions and work as an Intelligence Community body. In so doing, the Group reached judgments which were persuasive and generally accepted, and the Community and country were well served. To the extent such groups can so operate, the more likely that present intelligence questions will be answered.

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