4.

THE POSSIBILITY OF DIRECT SOVIET MILITARY ACTION DURING 1949

Report of a Joint Ad Hoc Committee *

THE PROBLEM

1. We have been directed to estimate the likelihood of a Soviet resort to direct military action during 1949.

DISCUSSION

2. Our conclusions are based on considerations discussed in the Enclosure.

CONCLUSIONS

3. The USSR has an overwhelming preponderance of immediately available military power on the Eurasian continent and a consequent capability of resorting to direct military action at any time. The principal deterrent to such action is the superior war-making potential of the United States.

4. There is no conclusive factual evidence of Soviet preparation for direct military aggression during 1949.

5. A deliberate Soviet resort to direct military action against the West during 1949 is improbable. Moreover, the USSR is likely to exercise some care to avoid an unintended outbreak of hostilities with the United States.

6. As part of its efforts to counteract the Atlantic Pact and US military aid program, however, the USSR will seek to intensify and exploit the universal fear of a new war. In this it will pay special attention to Scandinavia, Yugoslavia, and Iran. It is unlikely, however, to resort to even localized direct military action.

7. The fact remains that international tension has increased during 1948. It will probably increase further during 1949. In these circumstances, the danger of an unintended outbreak of hostilities through miscalculation on either side must be considered to have increased.**

---

* This estimate was prepared by a Joint Ad Hoc Committee composed of designated representatives of the CIA and of the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. It has been concurred in by the Directors of those agencies, except as indicated in the footnote below. The date of the estimate is 21 April 1949.

** The Director of Intelligence, Department of the Army, believes that the last sentence of paragraph 7 implies a greater possibility of war in 1949 than, in fact, exists; and that it should read "In these circumstances, the small but continuing danger of an unintended outbreak of hostilities through miscalculation on either side must be considered."

4. (continued)

ENCLOSURE

1. As of 30 March 1948, we estimated that the preponderance of available evidence and of considerations derived from the "logic of the situation" supported the conclusion that the USSR would not resort to direct military action during 1948. Our present task is to prepare a corresponding estimate with respect to the possibility of Soviet military action during 1949.

2. The USSR continues to enjoy an overwhelming preponderance of immediately available military power on the Eurasian continent. During the past year it has maintained, and possibly accelerated, its efforts to enhance its military capabilities through both the intensive development of basic war industries and the qualitative improvement of its military forces. There has recently been a significant increase in Soviet troop strength in Germany through the arrival of recruits from the 1928 class. It is not yet apparent whether this increase is temporary or permanent. In general, however, Soviet military preparations appear to be precautionary or long-term. There is no factual evidence of Soviet preparation for aggressive military action during 1949.

3. In the absence of conclusive factual evidence, our estimate must depend on our appreciation of the fundamental objectives and strategy of the USSR. This appreciation, set forth in ORE 60-48, ORE 41-49, and elsewhere, need not be repeated here at length. The pertinent conclusion is that the USSR would be unlikely to resort to direct military action unless convinced that a military attack by the West on the USSR was in active preparation and impossible to forestall by non-military means.

4. Our estimate of 30 March 1948 (ORE 22-48) has been borne out by the event. We may be permitted, then, to assume that the situation as it existed a year ago was not such as would cause the USSR to resort to direct military action. Consequently we limit our present consideration to developments since that date which might cause the USSR to resort to such action. These developments are:

a. An increasingly evident US determination to resist further Soviet encroachment in Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East, and to encourage, organize, and support local resistance in those areas. In the context of Soviet thought, this development must appear to be essentially hostile and preparatory to eventual US aggression, though not indicative of immediate attack. The USSR is particularly sensitive to the extension of US influence from Western Europe and the Mediterranean into Scandinavia on the one hand, the Balkans and Iran on the other.

b. A gradual increase in the will and ability of Western Europe to resist Soviet political aggression, and a corresponding decline in Communist political and revolutionary capabilities in that area.

c. Increasing rigidity in the partition of Germany and the development of an extremely taut situation at Berlin; in particular, the success of the airlift in defeating the blockade as a means of coercion with respect to Berlin, progress toward the establishment of Western Germany as a political and economic entity within the Western European community, and deterioration of the Soviet position in Eastern Germany and in Germany as a whole.

4. (continued)

d. The persistence of individualism and nationalism in Eastern Europe, despite further forcible consolidation of the Soviet position in that area (excepting Yugoslavia)

e. Tito's successful defiance of the Kremlin, a matter of greatest significance in the development of international Communism and Soviet hegemony.

f. Failure of the situation in the Near and Middle East to develop as advantageously, from the Soviet point of view, as might have been expected, and the current trend toward adjustment and stabilization in the internal conflicts within that region

Communist successes in China and prospects in Southeast Asia are matters manifestly unlikely to cause the USSR to resort to direct military action.

5. The rulers of the USSR are presumably realistic enough to perceive that these developments do not constitute a danger of immediate attack. They will appreciate, however, that the opportunity for Soviet expansion westward by non-military means has ended for the time being, and they will be apprehensive lest a continuation of the present trend result eventually in a corresponding stabilization of the situation in the Near East, a further deterioration of the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, and an ultimate danger of US attack upon the USSR. In these circumstances the USSR must give serious consideration to the advisability of resort to preventive war while it still enjoys a preponderance of immediately available military power on the Eurasian continent.

6. The deterrents to such a decision are the realization that it would precipitate an immediate decisive conflict with the United States, a present lack of adequate defense against atomic attack and of means for a decisive military attack on the United States, respect for the present general superiority of US war industrial potential in terms of a long struggle, and reasonable hope of improving the position of the USSR in these respects with the passage of time. Philosophically prepared to take the long view in the absence of an immediate threat and confident that future crises of capitalism will produce new opportunities for Soviet aggrandizement by non-military means, the Kremlin would have reason to avoid a premature showdown while assiduously developing its capabilities for eventual defense or aggression.

7. On balance we conclude that the USSR is unlikely to resort to preventive war during 1949 at least. Its most probable course of action will be to continue its preparations for eventual war while seeking to arrest or retard the indicated adverse trend of developments (para. 4) by political and psychological countereffforts in forms currently familiar. In following this course the USSR will seek to intensify and exploit the universal fear of a new war. It will pay special attention to Scandinavia, Yugoslavia, and Iran. It is unlikely, however, to resort to even localized direct military action, except possibly with respect to Finland and Yugoslavia. In any such action taken, it will probably exercise care to avoid direct collision with the United States.

8. US and Soviet forces are in actual contact only in Germany and Austria. The fact that in the course of a year of acute tension the USSR has carefully avoided any action there calculated to precipitate armed hostilities establishes a presumption that the USSR would not resort to direct military action merely to break the deadlock at Berlin or to secure a satisfactory solution of the German problem. On the contrary, present indications are that the USSR may soon discard coercion, as repre-

4. (continued)

sented by the blockade of Berlin, for the time being, in order to seek a more satisfactory situation through political negotiation.

9. The vulnerability of Finland to Soviet pressure and the gravity with which the USSR views Norwegian adherence to the Atlantic Pact requires specific consideration of that case. Threatening gestures toward Finland and Scandinavia might be expected to discourage any possible Finnish hope of rescue from the West, to confirm Swedish adherence to neutrality, and to inhibit Norwegian implementation of the Pact. A Soviet military occupation of Finland, however, might have exactly the opposite effect, driving Sweden into the arms of the West and stimulating Norwegian demands for direct military support. For these reasons, increasing intimidation is to be expected, but direct military action is unlikely.

10. Similarly, threatening Soviet gestures might be more effective than direct action in inhibiting Yugoslav rapprochement with the West. Basically, however, the continuing existence of the Tito regime is intolerable from the Soviet point of view and real efforts to liquidate it must be expected. Any attempt to do so by force of arms would probably take the form of insurrection within Yugoslavia with covert Satellite support, as in the case of Greece. Direct Soviet military intervention would be unlikely unless it became the only means of preventing the military alignment of Yugoslavia with the West. Even in that case, Soviet intervention would not be intended to precipitate a general war and could do so only if the West chose to take armed counteraction.

11. Soviet sensitivity with respect to Iran requires specific consideration of that situation also. In terms of the internal factors involved, the situation in Iran is more stable than it was a year ago. There has been, however, an intensification of Soviet pressure upon Iran and there remain opportunities for indirect Soviet intervention through indigenous "liberation" movements, as with respect to Azerbaijan and the Kurdish tribes. The immediate Soviet purpose appears to be to prevent Iranian adherence to a Near Eastern pact analogous to the Atlantic Pact and acceptance of substantial US military aid. Although the USSR has been at some pains to build up a legalistic basis for direct intervention with reference to the Treaty of 1921, this appears to be part of the war of nerves. Direct Soviet military action in Iran during 1949 is considered unlikely.

12. Accepting our estimate of Soviet intentions, the fact remains that international tension has increased during 1948 and will probably increase further during 1949. Both sides are actively preparing for eventual war. In these circumstances there is increasing danger of an undesired outbreak of hostilities through miscalculation by either side. Such miscalculation could occur in underestimating the determination of the opposing side or in exaggerating its aggressive intentions. Both miscalculations would be present in a situation in which one side took a position from which it could not withdraw in the face of an unexpectedly alarmed and forceful reaction on the part of the other.