

MEMORANDUM

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INFORMATION

January 23, 1978

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MEMORANDUM FOR: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

FROM: WILLIAM E. ODOM WEO

SUBJECT: Soviet Launch-On-Warning Capability

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An item in the INR Analysis yesterday appeared on this subject. (See Tab A) To prevent misunderstandings that it might create, here is a word of background.

[Redacted]

This upgrading of our estimate actually occurred last spring when I asked CIA to tell us about Soviet alert levels. I believe you forwarded the essence of that report to the President. The INR item reflects wider dissemination of this analysis.

As you know, ICBMs are the easiest strategic weapon to control, the most responsive, and the cheapest to maintain at the highest readiness level. The implications are interesting:

- The large Soviet buildup in land-based missiles is obviously the easiest way for the Soviets to gain a rapid response, or launch-on-warning capability.
- The lack of emphasis on SSBN readiness is easier to understand in this overall context. The same is true for Soviet long-range aviation.
- INR's conclusion that SSBNs and Long Range Aviation make up the Soviet reserve force is cogent at first glance.
- The least comforting implication is the readiness warning time we might have. I did not emphasize that in the report last spring. Perhaps it is worth calling to the President's attention on an appropriate occasion in the future.

There are implications here for SALT which I won't try to spell out, but which spring from the major asymmetries between our Triad and the Soviet strategic posture.

NSA, State Dept. reviews completed

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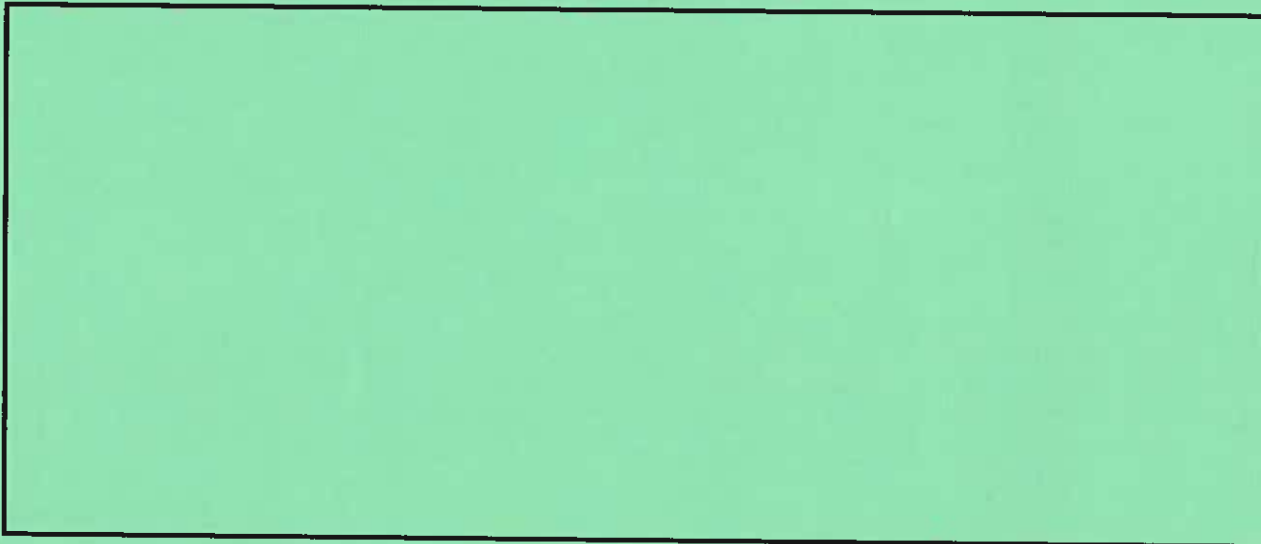
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

ANALYSIS

January 22, 1978

1. SOVIET LAUNCH-ON-WARNING CAPABILITY

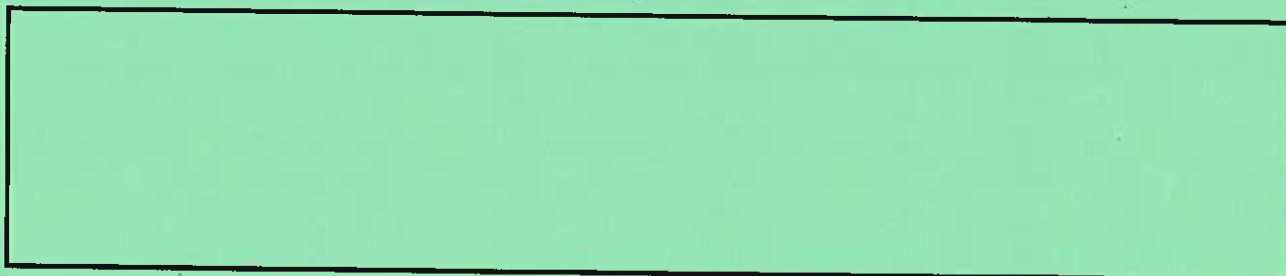
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This fast reaction ICBM capability has apparently led the Soviets to consider their ICBMs as their prime retaliatory force. This may explain, in part, the Soviet drive for such a large number of land-based ICBMs. This emphasis will continue into the 1980s; the intelligence community projects that over two-thirds of the warheads available to the USSR at that time will be deployed on ICBMs.

That Soviet bombers and SLBMs serve as a reserve second-strike force is suggested by their low level of day-to-day readiness. Strategic bombers are not dispersed or placed on alert status, and their airfields do not have high-speed taxiways. It would take the Soviets many hours to prepare these aircraft for combat. As for the SLBMs, no more than 15 percent normally are on patrol at any one time--two usually in the Atlantic, two in the Pacific, two in the Norwegian Sea, and one in the North Pacific.

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2. IRAQ'S CONTINUING MILITARY BUILDUP

By 1982, if present trends continue, Iraq's armed forces may surpass those of Syria, and possibly those of Egypt, in size and quality. In a new conflict with Israel, Iraq would then be capable of sending an expeditionary force three times as large as the one it sent in 1973.

* * * * *

Iraq's military buildup began in earnest after the October 1973 war, when Iraq had increased oil revenues in hand. Its leadership probably felt an increased urgency as the Iraqi expeditionary force to the Golan Heights had made a very disappointing showing. The collapse of the Kurdish rebellion in 1973 enabled Baghdad to focus more attention to the expansion and improvement of its military forces.

Iraq perceives Iran and Israel as the potential adversaries that warrant its building up of its forces. Iran is probably seen as the greater threat over the long run. Relations between Iran and Iraq have improved since 1975, but the Iraqis fear that latent border problems, the unsolved Kurdish issues, and competition for influence in the Persian Gulf may eventually lead the two countries into confrontation. And the Iraqis are aware, of course, of the tremendous expansion of Iran's armed forces in the past few years.

In the 1973 war, Iraq sent two armored divisions and about 50 aircraft to the Golan Heights. It could now dispatch four armored divisions and around 150 aircraft. By 1982, these figures will rise to six divisions and about 150-200 aircraft. These projected expeditionary forces amount to less than half of the Iraqi forces, and their absence would not seriously denude Iraqi forces in Kurdish areas or along the Iranian border.

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