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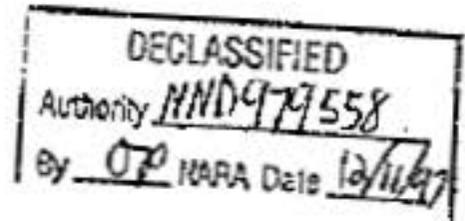
To: G/PM - Mr. Seymour Weiss

From: S/AL - Llewellyn E. Thompson

Subject: Implications of a Major Soviet Conventional Attack in Central Europe.

I appreciate your thoughtful memorandum of December twenty-third and in reply and in order to clarify my own thinking, I have the following comments:

1. The contingency we are discussing -- namely, a clear Soviet attack in Central Europe using all conventional forces readily available in that area -- is, to my mind, so remote that it is scarcely worth considering. If the Soviets did intend a major aggression of this sort, I think they would be clever enough to insure that it did in fact grow out of an ambiguous situation. It would, for example, be easy for them to provoke us into the implementation of some of our contingency plans for Berlin access which would give them an excuse to escalate on a large conventional scale. It was partly because of the advantage to them in handling the matter in this way that I was so categorical about my interpretation of what a massive surprise attack would mean. Even allowing for a situation which was deliberately made to look ambiguous but in which we were convinced that the Soviet objective was to overrun at least West Germany if not most of Europe, it seems to me worth analyzing what our strategy should be.
2. In the first place, it seems clear that the Soviets would not embark upon such an operation



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unless they thought they could win. The present correlation of our forces is such that I do not see how they could make such a calculation unless they assumed we would refrain from using both our strategic and tactical nuclear forces. If our strategic forces are employed, they would certainly know that they would lose even though we might also lose.

The key point would seem to me to be what would be the effect of our large-scale use of tactical nucs? Although the Soviets have recently begun to talk of limited war possibilities, they have consistently maintained that any nuclear war is a strategic war and they must assume that we take them at their word. In these circumstances, for them to launch a major conventional attack would mean that they assumed we would accept defeat rather than go to the large-scale use of tactical nucs. The only other plausible assumption it seems to me is that they would accept defeat on the battlefield and refrain from a tactical nuclear response.

I agree that at the start of such hostilities the Soviets would probably declare that they would not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but my guess would be that they would also state that if we used tactical nucs, they would incinerate all of West Germany. I very much doubt if the Soviet military would allow the Soviet Government to accept defeat because of our use of tactical nucs, and, at this stage, they would go to strategic weapons. Despite the enormous losses from a strategic exchange, the advantage and damage limiting effect of a first strike over a second is so great that in the circumstance posited; namely, that the Soviets were going for broke, I think we should consider following the use of tactical nucs almost immediately with a

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first strike against their strategic capability. I admit that there may be some circumstances in which this might not be true, particularly if we were uncertain about Soviet motives, but that is not the case I was discussing. I do not profess to be competent in the field of strategy, but where I do believe I have some competence and where I think I disagree with some of your thinking and that of the Pentagon is in reading Soviet behavior and their distorted view of the free world. I am inclined to think my whole argument is somewhat academic since I believe they think we would use our strategic capability rather than accept defeat, and therefore that they would almost simultaneously launch their first strike unless we had given them some reason to think we were prepared to be thrown out of Europe.

3. One factor which seems to me of great importance and in which I sympathize with the French is that any NATO plan is bound to be known to the Soviets and if there is doubt in their minds about our willingness to use tactical nuclear weapons, they may be tempted to adventures. I would, of course, agree with McNamara that it makes no sense to pin down our conventional air capability because of its dual role, and I should think that the substitution of Pershing for QRA aircraft makes sense.

In general, I should think our disposition should be such as to enable us to determine that the Soviets were going for a major attack without involving our tactical nuclear capability, and I would, therefore, agree with what appears to be McNamara's plan of phasing out short-range nuclear weapons, but once it were clear that the Soviets were making a grab for Europe, I would strongly favor gaining the advantage of a first strike if that option were open to us.

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4. Considering these options and the really terrible costs involved, I certainly agree that we should have as strong a conventional capability in Europe as we can persuade our Allies to support. I think we might have some discussion first among ourselves and then with DOD on McNamara's implied threat to reduce United States forces unless his strategy is accepted by our Allies. If we can negotiate a mutual reduction with the Soviets, this is one thing, but I doubt if McNamara's threat of a unilateral reduction will stand analysis even from a strictly United States point of view.

Amb. LThompson:mac
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