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REPORT OF THE INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP  
ON SURPRISE ATTACK



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**REPORT OF THE INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP**  
**ON SURPRISE ATTACK**

**I. Assignment and Method of Approach**

The Interagency Working Group was instructed to study the problem of reducing the danger of surprise attack, with the objective of presenting an analysis which would facilitate further studies in preparation for discussions (not negotiations) between US and Soviet experts, which may open during the first week of October 1958.

Throughout its study, the Group has functioned as individuals. The views expressed are those of its individual members and not necessarily those of the agencies represented.

The Group had the benefit of discussions with several military leaders, namely Admiral Burke (USN), General Lemnitzer (USA), General Power (USAF), General Weyland (USAF), and Lt. General Lynn (USAF), and heard a presentation by Mr. Hitchcock, the Chairman of the Watch Committee. It based its report, in part, on a study of some technical aspects of surprise attack, by a Panel of the President's Science Advisory Committee appointed by Dr. J. R. Killian, Jr., which is attached as Appendix I. Also attached as appendices are: (II) Statement prepared by the State Department on political effects of surprise attack inspection agreements with USSR; (III) Statement prepared by CIA on intelligence value of such agreements; (IV) A CIA statement on authentication procedures to insure meaningful communications with inspectors that might be stationed in USSR. The Group also studied a Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the JCS (JCS-1731/237) dated 14 August 1957, with an appendix presenting an outline plan for implementation of an aerial and ground inspection. In this connection, the Group was briefed by Rear Admiral Dudley and his staff on the current studies being made for the JCS on this subject.

A realistic appraisal of the minimum time interval which must pass between the initiation of discussions by experts with USSR and the putting into effect of any agreement that may eventually be worked out, shows that late 1960 is the earliest possible date for the commencement of agreed inspection measures. Thus, the period 1960-63 is the earliest period with which an agreement must be concerned and to be useful it must look further into the future.

**II. The Report of the Panel of the President's Science Advisory Committee**

The Panel, appointed by Dr. Killian, undertook to study the effect of such factors as result from progress in weapons technology upon the significance of

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various types of possible agreements with USSR (Appendix I). The analysis of this Panel as to the major surprise attack capabilities of the US and USSR, and the possible ways of reducing the threat of surprise attack was focused primarily on the means of delivery of a massive thermonuclear attack, although it discussed briefly the problem of local or conventional attack. The report consists of the following sections:

- (I.) Framework of Analysis and Report
- (II.) Safeguards Against Large-Scale Surprise Attack by Conventional Manned Bombers
- (III.) Safeguards Against Large-Scale Surprise Attack by Ballistic Missiles
- (IV.) Safeguards Against Local Surprise Attack
- (V.) Communication Facilities for the Inspection System

Annex (A) - Probable Posture in Absence of Agreements.

Broadly speaking, the analysis leads the Panel to the view that agreements involving only observation and reporting provide very inadequate protection against massive surprise attack, particularly by missiles. Such observation may give some evidence of impending manned bomber attack and of other preparations for general war. It would be more useful, however, in avoiding accidental war, arising out of a misinterpretation of hostile intentions, and in safeguarding against local or conventional attack. There is no minimum level of observation required to have some value; even unlimited inspection, on the other hand, would not have decisive value.

Agreements involving operational limitations on bomber forces alone - (a highly unlikely supposition) - may be more effective in providing strong indications of possible impending attack, but will have disadvantage in that they will tend to reduce the efficiency of our airforce relative to that of the USSR.

With regard to missiles, agreements intended to lengthen artificially their reaction time in order to provide earlier warning suffer from two major disadvantages: an extreme complexity of monitoring agreements and advantages to the potential violator of the agreement. Agreements limiting the size of missile forces appear to be more promising for the reduction of danger from attack by making an attack less profitable; such agreements could not be adequately inspected unless there were effective unrestricted ground and aerial observation. Agreements eliminating missile forces may still further reduce the danger of attack if effectively monitored and if adequate retaliatory bomber forces are retained.

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As the Panel noted in its preface, it had insufficient time to study and report on several aspects of the problem of surprise attack, to wit:

- (a) Measures to reduce the danger of surprise attack through control of nuclear warheads.
- (b) Monitoring or restriction of naval forces.
- (c) Additional complications which are created by the forces and interests of allies of USA, as well as China and the Satellite States on the side of USSR.
- (d) Only selected types of agreements which appeared to be more readily monitored were considered; the inspection patterns were only indicated in broad outline.
- (e) The possibility of local restrictions on the readiness or level of conventional forces in local areas, e.g., the Middle East, where this might reduce the likelihood of aggression or preventive action.



### III. Areas for Further Technical Study

- (1) The implications of various types of agreements analyzed by the Panel need to be considered in further detail and an effort made to determine whether other types of agreements, not considered by the Panel, may be more advantageous to USA.
- (2) Although our inability to determine precisely the size of the existing nuclear stockpile of USSR makes control of nuclear weapons questionable, this problem cannot be neglected.
- (3) The problem of naval forces is a very important one, particularly because of eventual perfection of missile launching submarines; it deserves detailed study and the defining of positions.
- (4) Similarly, the problem of nations allied to USA and USSR needs to be studied in detail to define sound positions for the team going to the discussions.
- (5) The absence of detailed inspection schemes in the Panel's report is partially compensated for by the information presented in the JCS Memorandum which shows the magnitude of the task involved. This Memorandum

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is being revised now to anticipate the "missile age" and the new version will be of special value.

(6) The Panel noted that while it has assumed so-called "inspection with free access to all locations", actually it may be necessary to exclude certain areas that were agreed upon by both sides, e.g., code rooms to take an extreme example. This is a very sensitive problem. The danger of disclosing too much information to the inspection teams must be balanced against the possibility of concealment of offensive military hardware in dangerous quantities. Thus, the concept of "free access" is a relative one and requires a careful analysis for the guidance of the team to be engaged in discussions with USSR.

(7) The Group believes that possibilities for local restrictions or limitations of conventional arms in such unstable areas as the Middle East deserve much more thorough study than the Panel was able to devote to them, although this is clearly of much lower priority in preparing for the October discussions.



### III. Conclusions of the Interagency Working Group

#### A. Objectives in Surprise Attack Agreements

The element of surprise is present in all offensive military operations from a border raid to a devastating thermonuclear attack. The problem of surprise attack has acquired major importance for USA because of the availability in large numbers of thermonuclear weapons with unparalleled power of destruction and of rapid advances in long-range means of delivery, e.g., jet aircraft and ballistic missiles.

Therefore the present Group identifies the problem of surprise attack primarily with the problem of reduction of the danger of an initial massive thermonuclear attack.

On the basis of the Panel's report and other information, the Group has drawn certain broad conclusions.

(1) The problem of a massive thermonuclear attack in the 1960's must be considered from the point of view of a combined bomber and missile force. An agreement involving bomber forces alone is disadvantageous to USA and will not reduce the danger of a massive surprise attack.

(2) Progress in weapons technology is making inspection schemes, apart from agreements on force limitations, less and

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less promising in reducing the danger of a massive surprise attack. Not only is warning time diminishing and becoming less susceptible of extension by an inspection system alone, but the strategic indicators of enemy intent that will be available in the missile age will be increasingly ambiguous.

(3) The objective in the design of any agreement for restrictions on forces then, is not so much to increase the warning time, as it is to render a massive surprise attack prospectively as unrewarding as possible.

(4) The stability, i. e. freedom from the threat of a surprise attack, which is achievable by agreements involving limitations on forces, depends not only on inspection of one's potential enemy and limitations on his forces, but also very heavily on the vulnerability of one's own retaliatory forces. Even with agreements of this type it remains a matter of extreme importance that the vulnerability of such forces be reduced to acceptable levels in order to safeguard their effectiveness as retaliatory forces.

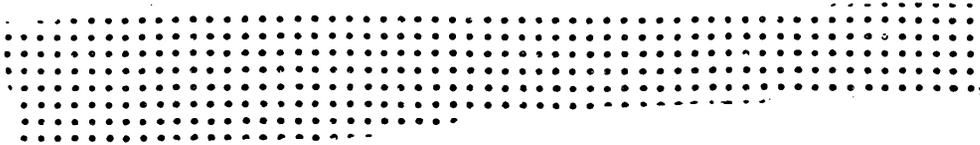
(5) Short of effective measures leading to extensive disarmament, including abolition of nuclear weapons, no means for prevention of massive thermonuclear attack will exist. However, as noted above, the danger of such attack possibly may be reduced.

In their considerations both the Group and the Panel assumed that any agreements with the USSR regarding surprise attack will have adequate provisions for monitoring. If this is the case, certain consequences of any agreements must be taken into consideration when appraising their value to USA. On the positive side the following may be mentioned:

- (a) The danger of accidental war may be reduced, since each side would have wider knowledge on which to base a judgment as to whether a given action by the other portended attack. For example, the reaction to a thermonuclear explosion of unknown origin (e. g., an armed missile launched by mistake) would be less likely to lead to prompt massive counterattack.
- (b) The Iron Curtain may be partially opened because of freer interchange of personnel accompanying inspection measures.
- (c) Mutual confidence may be improved by a reduction of tensions.

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- (d) Information on USSR will be improved due to legitimate activities of inspection teams which include USA personnel.



On the negative side agreements with USSR may work to the disadvantage of USA in the following respects:

- (a) The false sense of security induced in USA by the existence of any agreement, no matter how well formulated, may result in lax enforcement of the inspection and a failure to provide for adequate defenses.
- (b) A similar false sense of security on the part of our allies may lead to a dangerous weakening of alliances such as NATO.
- (c) A poorly designed inspection system may fail to detect secret USSR forces because of inadequate inspection procedures or because of the assignment of inspection duties to neutrals who may prove unequal to the task.
- (d) Technological breakthroughs, not anticipated in the writing of the agreement, if utilized by USSR, may create unanticipated dangers.
- (e) Opportunities for sabotage and subversive activities by USSR agents may be offered by the presence of USSR nationals on inspection duty in USA.



The relative importance of these and other factors have not been evaluated by the Group as a whole: Further comments on the subject will be found in Appendices II, III and IV.

B. Comments Relating to the Conduct of the October Meeting.

1. The United States has defined the subject of the October meeting to be "a study of the technical aspects of safeguards against the possibility of surprise attack." In negotiations and correspondence with the Soviet Union, surprise attack measures have generally been considered by the United States to comprise only some forms of inspection rather than also including substantial arms control measures of the sort discussed in Appendix I.



2. Our analysis of the Appendices leads us to the view that a major reduction of the threat of massive surprise attack cannot be achieved by observation and reporting alone. Limitations on the disposition and readiness of forces, or on size and types of forces, appear to be necessary to create more effective safeguards against the possibility of massive surprise attack. It is unlikely that the October talks can deal effectively with the threat of surprise attack unless they are extended beyond discussion of inspection and related limited measures. Soviet proposals in this area have emphasized arms limitations more than inspection. They include, for example, limits on bomber operations, abandonment of U.S. overseas bases, denuclearization and limitation of forces in a Central European zone (Rapacki Plan), and reduction or abolition of long-range or intermediate-range missiles.

3. The October talks will be restricted to study and discussion by experts, and will not be a negotiation. Avoidance of negotiation will be particularly important if limitations on forces are discussed. However, if the discussions are to be meaningful, a consideration of some of the problems analyzed in Appendix I may be desirable. We might seek to discuss in general terms with the Soviet Union the means of surprise attack. Such an exploration would be consistent with the U.S. proposal that the talks "concentrate on the . . . . objects of control." An exchange on this subject might have intelligence value for the United States. It could also throw light on the Soviet assessment of the present and future military situation and on Soviet attitudes toward the possibility of stabilizing the present military situation.

4. Appendix I to this report identifies and discusses various possibilities for limitations on forces to reduce the threat of surprise attack. As already stated, these possibilities deserve further intensive study of their acceptability, as part of continuing U. S. review of arms control policy. Such further study is also essential as part of the preparations for the October meeting, in order that (a) the threat of surprise attack can be discussed against the background of clear policy as to the measures which are acceptable to the United States, and (b) Soviet proposals of the kind which have been advanced in the past can be dealt with in this context.

5. To engage in a discussion of this nature will require a carefully defined procedure for the protection and disclosure of classified information.

6. It may be desirable to give advance notice to the Soviet Union of the manner in which we will be prepared to approach the discussions and the range of subjects we will be willing to talk about. There is precedent to show the value of this technique in the informal agenda which the U. S. Ambassador gave to the Soviet Foreign Office prior to the present Geneva talks on nuclear test detection and which may have contributed to the fruitfulness of these technical talks. Specifically, it may be desirable to inform the USSR that USA experts will be prepared to discuss only such measures for the reduction of threat of a surprise attack as can and will be monitored.



7. Observation and reporting measures, unlimited and limited, whether functionally or geographically, may in themselves be appropriate subjects for discussion. There are strong indications that the United States may gain more than the Soviet Union from any balanced inspection arrangement providing access to each other's territories.

8.

9. We note that the October talks would, according to the U. S. note of July 31, deal with inspection zones for illustrative purposes Only. Our analysis indicates that zones of inspection have very limited value for warning against

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massive surprise attack. Zones may perhaps have some value, however, in safeguarding against local attack, in evaluating inspection techniques, and in building confidence. It will still be essential to guard against false confidence arising from an unjustified belief in the resulting degree of security.



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Report of Interagency Working Group on surprise attack detailed. Department Of Defense, 15 Aug. 1958. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349319470/USDD?u=wash74137&sid=bookmark-USDD&xid=df7365ca&pg=1](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CK2349319470/USDD?u=wash74137&sid=bookmark-USDD&xid=df7365ca&pg=1). Accessed 6 July 2021.