

I. Macro Trends in Soviet Strategy 1965 - 1985

Interviews with former Soviet civilian and military participants in military and force-building policy debates during the period in question suggest several trends in the evolution of Soviet views on the strategic relationship with the U.S., Soviet nuclear and conventional military strategy, and on the factors shaping Soviet force development. Here are the highlights of this research:

The Strategic Relationship

Soviet strategists considered the nuclear balance to be unstable, because technological advances and increases in the size of the arsenal could significantly augment the power of one side relative to the other, thereby upsetting the balance. The Soviets assessed overall nuclear power (*iadernaia moshch'*) to be a function of yield, total number of weapons, and accuracy. Accuracy had a particularly decisive effect as a multiplier of the overall nuclear power of a missile. By the early 1980s, greater accuracy, in combination with other factors, increased the effective power of the U.S. nuclear arsenal by a factor of three, according to Soviet estimates.³ Such great fluctuations in the relative power of the two sides made the balance extremely unstable and induced both the United States and the USSR constantly to upgrade their nuclear forces.⁴

The Soviets felt that the only truly stable nuclear situation was one in which one side had clear superiority over the other. To be both secure and stable, the imbalance had to be in the Soviets' favor. Therefore, throughout this period the Soviets attempted to gain strategic superiority over the U.S., with the primary goal not of ensuring victory in a nuclear war (which the informed military leadership considered unattainable in any meaningful sense), but of enhancing their general security, to include the security of Soviet influence in Europe and around the globe. Despite achieving rough nuclear parity with the U.S. in the mid-1970s and some degree of superiority by the early 1980s, the Soviet leadership did not feel that their security had been enhanced, because they perceived U.S. intentions to be aggressive and did not believe the superpower nuclear

³ Interview with Dr. Vitalii Kataev, June 23, 1993, *Vol. II: Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence* (hereafter cited as *Vol. II*), p. 100. Dr. Kataev served as Senior Advisor to the Chairman of the Central Committee Defense Industry Department from 1967 to 1985.

⁴ Soviet interview subjects acknowledged that U.S. upgrades were largely qualitative while Soviet improvements were related to quantitative increases, some improvements in quality, and considerable improvements, by the late 1970s, and early 1980s, in protection of strategic systems.

balance to be stable. Despite the fact that the U.S. had repeatedly and publicly declared its nuclear strategy to be based on deterrence, virtually all interview subjects stressed that they perceived the U.S. to be preparing for a first strike. The indicators of this posture most frequently cited by the interviewees included: the development in the mid-1960s of the highly accurate, multiple-warhead MX missile⁵ followed in the late 1960s by the very accurate MIRVed⁶ warheads for existing and new delivery systems which put Soviet land-based ICBMs and control nodes at great risk; the relative vulnerability, by Soviet criteria, of U.S. missile silos and control centers to ground bursts; the large and varied arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons fielded by NATO forces in Europe; the consistent rejection by the U.S. of the doctrine of no first use of nuclear weapons; deployment in the early 1980s of Pershing II theater ballistic missiles, ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) and sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) capable of destroying command and control targets deep inside Soviet territory while providing very little warning time to the Soviet leadership. In addition, in PD-59 the Soviets saw a deliberate policy for launching a surprise decapitating first strike against the Soviet leadership. The Soviets found this policy, backed up in the early 1980s by the technical capability to execute it, extremely threatening, especially in light of the pervasive memory of the June 1941 surprise attack, an experience which colored all Soviet strategic planning throughout the Cold War period.

Strategy

The Soviet nuclear strategy relied heavily on deterrence. The Soviet concept of deterrence was based on the premise that an aggressor would receive crushing punishment in case of an actual or imminent nuclear attack in the form of strikes against strategic targets. These strikes would be preemptive, "retaliatory-meeting" (equivalent to the U.S. launch-on-warning posture) or purely retaliatory, and targeting both military and civilian installations. Unlike their U.S. counterparts, the Soviets did not develop an elaborate doctrine of deterrence enhanced by various strategies of nuclear use, selective targeting, planned and deliberate escalation, etc. However, the logic of deterrence

⁵ Dr. Kataev, when challenged that the U.S. MX program did not get under way until much later, in the 1970s, replied that the senior author was wrong. He argued that Soviet intelligence reporting indicated the use of the expression MX in U.S. research and development circles possibly as early as 1963. The acronym, according to Kataev, was associated with the U.S. decision to invest in accuracy and counterforce capability. This early association is clearly established in his mind.

⁶ MIRV—Multiple Independently Targeted Reentry Vehicles.

exerted a profound influence over Soviet leaders, who intuitively acted to avoid nuclear war and to prevent the U.S. from using any nuclear weapons against Soviet forces and territory.

From the Soviet perspective, the concepts of deterrence and warfighting were not mutually exclusive, as the authors of the Team B report observed.⁷ However, the Soviets did not subscribe to the concept of nuclear warfighting, as conceived by U.S. strategists. They neither embraced nor ever really accepted the possibility of fighting a limited nuclear war (confined to Europe, for example), or of managing a nuclear war by climbing a ladder of escalation, so they did not build weapons specifically for these purposes. Nor did the Soviets build weapons principally with the aim of maintaining a stable strategic balance, because they considered the strategic competition to be inherently unstable and dynamic. They did, however, build weapons that credibly could and would be used in the event nuclear war actually were to occur. In this sense, the ability to fight a war was an integral part of the Soviet deterrence strategy, despite the fact that the leadership was not sanguine about the possibility of a meaningful victory, nor even of the survival of a Soviet state. In a sense, the Soviets relied even more heavily on the logic of pure deterrence than did the U.S., because they did not seriously explore options for intermediate levels of nuclear warfare outside of the theater of strategic military operations (*Teatr Voennykh Deistvii* - TVD) and instead relied purely on the *threat* of massive retaliation. As several of the Soviet interview subjects confided, in practice, the decision to retaliate would not have been made automatically. Their responses made it clear, for example, that if the U.S. launched a limited intercontinental strike against one or several marginal installations on Soviet territory, the Soviet response would have been determined *ad hoc* by the top leadership.

While the Soviets rejected limited nuclear use and escalation strategies and relied instead on the threat of massive nuclear use, their operational military were still faced with the task of finding a concrete operational solution to the problem of winning a general war in Europe. Throughout the period in question, the Soviet military's confidence in the utility of nuclear weapons for securing this objective declined steadily. By the late 1970s, this

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. *Intelligence Community Experiment in Competitive Analysis: Soviet Strategic Objectives. An Alternative View: Report of Team "B."* December 1976 (hereafter *Report of Team B*), p. 2. Team "B" was formed by the U.S. Director of Central Intelligence specifically to evaluate the charge that National Intelligence Estimates of military intentions and capabilities of the Soviet Union were too lax or generous in their judgments of Soviet forces and objectives. As acknowledged in the introduction of the report, the team, headed by Professor Richard Pipes of Harvard University, was comprised of members chosen specifically for their reputations of taking "a more somber view" of the Soviet strategic threat than did key members of the U.S. intelligence community.

gradual change in mind-set found doctrinal reflection in the "New Periodization of War," a shift in military doctrine which emphasized a prolonged conventional phase in a European conflict. At the same time, the Soviets assumed that the war in Europe could not be kept conventional for long and expected NATO to initiate nuclear use on the battlefield after initial losses. This set of circumstances drove the most creative of the General Staff military strategists to develop the conceptual framework that would enable the Soviets to win in Europe. One element of the emerging strategy was the development of new operational concepts, such as the Operational Maneuver Group (OMG) and a preemptive conventional air operation in the context of a significantly enhanced theater-level strategic operation. Another essential element consisted of using the Soviet threat of launching the SS-20s based in the European Soviet Union as a nuclear shield behind which the Warsaw Pact forces could hope to achieve a quick victory using only conventional forces. By giving the Soviets, in effect, escalation dominance in Europe, this nuclear umbrella was expected to serve as a highly effective deterrent against NATO's initiation of nuclear use.⁸ Relying on this strategy, by the mid-1980s, the Soviet General Staff considered it possible that Warsaw Pact forces could reach the English Channel quickly, while avoiding a massive theater nuclear war.⁹

Factors in Force-Building and Strategic Decision Making

The interviews strongly confirm recent research indicating that military acquisition was dominated by the producers, rather than by the MoD customers. While it has been commonly assumed by Western observers that the military, as the consumer of defense-industrial products, was the senior partner in the relationship with industry, the opposite was true. The uniformed military had never been a traditional part of the Soviet ruling elite. While the professional military enjoyed almost mythic popular prestige as a legacy of its victory in the Great Patriotic War, it was an instrument of the Communist Party leadership, which, according to Leninist principles and Soviet practice, was made up of professional party cadres. These professionals often attempted to exploit the mystique of

⁸ As explained by various Soviet sources but especially by Gen.-Lt. Gelii V. Batenin, August 6, 1993, *Vol. II*, p. 8, the SS-20 was seen by the General Staff as the factor that could neutralize the NATO TVD nuclear threat in Europe thereby allowing the Soviets to exercise their advantages in conventional forces, *should there be a war*. The existence of the SS-20, he implied, did increase the appetite of some officers for warfare. Some Soviet planners believed that Soviet advances vis-à-vis NATO in conventional forces peaked in 1987, when ironically, the SS-20 was given up in the INF agreement. Gen.-Lt. Batenin worked for the Marshal of the Soviet Union Sergei F. Akhromeev in various roles when the latter was chief of the General Staff Main Operations Directorate and then as First Deputy Chief of the General Staff under Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov.

⁹ Appendix A: A Chronology of Soviet Strategy, reconstructs, based on the literature and on the interviews conducted during this research, the general evolution of Soviet strategy from the end of World War II to the end of 1991.

the uniform to enhance their own prestige. Both Brezhnev and Ustinov, for example, held the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union, despite the fact that both were essentially administrators throughout their careers.

During the course of the period under study, relative power and influence within the state military and force-building policy apparatus shifted away from the uniformed military further in favor of the civilian defense-industrial establishment, which mushroomed under Brezhnev. The following factors may in part explain this trend:

- The power of industrial institutions within the state apparatus was greatly strengthened by the restructuring of the defense-industrial bureaucracy beginning in 1965. Specialized ministries involved in defense production proliferated. These 8 to 10 (depending on the time) industrial ministries came to monopolize information and expertise. Each technically coequal to the MoD, these numerous, large ministries increased the representation of the industrialists in the Defense Council. Also as a result of the restructuring, the main design bureaus lost some of the flexibility, autonomy, and control over funding that they enjoyed during World War II and into the 1950s and became less responsive to the demands of the military consumers.
- Brezhnev himself came from the ranks of the defense industrialists and therefore tended to promote his industrialist cronies to important state positions. Among his high ranking protégés were: Minister of Defense (MoD) Dmitrii Ustinov; Minister of General Machine Building S. A. Afanas'ev; and L. V. Smirnov, the director of the Iuzhnoe missile plant in Dnepropetrovsk, whom Brezhnev promoted to head the VPK and to serve as deputy head of the Council of Ministers.
- In 1976 Dmitrii Ustinov, the single most influential military industrialist in Soviet post-war history, was appointed to head the Ministry of Defense. According to one very senior General Staff officer, with this appointment, the military realized they "had been taken over by the enemy."¹⁰

¹⁰ Interview with Gen. Makhmut A. Gareev, June 20, 1993, *Vol II*, p. 75. Gen. Gareev served as Chief of the Tactical Training Directorate of the General Staff, 1974-77; Deputy Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff for Training and Readiness, 1977-84; and Deputy Chief of the General Staff for Scientific Work and Operational Readiness, 1984-89.

- In contrast to his predecessor, Brezhnev was indecisive and given to appeasement. Khrushchev would often cancel systems in early development stages and would sometimes eliminate or reduce entire classes of weapons, as he did with artillery and surface ships in 1959 and 1960. Brezhnev, on the other hand, led by consensus and tended to avoid decisions and policy changes that would alienate one group and advance the interests of another. This led to situations where the USSR was developing 12 ICBM programs simultaneously¹¹ or continuing to produce obsolete or low quality versions of a tank at the same time that more modern, effective variants were coming on line. Production lines were kept open to satisfy the producers without consideration either of the economic consequences or of the true needs of the military customer.

- Military technology, particularly missile and strategic weapons technology, was rapidly evolving and becoming increasingly complex, requiring greater specialization, technical knowledge and new ways of thinking about strategic and operational use. The uniformed military was often slow to grasp the significance of new technological developments. For example, debates in Soviet theoretical books and journals indicate that as late as the early 1970s, some Soviet military commanders continued to think of nuclear weapons as a kind of super-artillery whose role was to support the infantry and tanks. Especially during Grechko's tenure as Minister of Defense (1967-1976), the findings of competent specialists within the MoD often were ignored or suppressed by the generals, who not infrequently lacked the education and intellectual faculties to understand the analysis and appreciate fully the implications of the military-technical revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. In contrast, industrialists and designers who produced the new weaponry often monopolized information and expertise. Many of these military-industrial experts and specialists were concentrated in the design bureaus and NPOs within the Ministry of General Machine Building.

These new findings concerning the role of the industrial sector in Soviet defense procurements have important implications for revising our understanding of Soviet strategic intentions during the Cold War. Much of the U.S. assessment of Soviet "grand strategy" and plans for general war was drawn from observation of military hardware

¹¹ Interview with Gen.-Lt. Nikolai V. Kravets, June 22, 1993, *Vol. II*, p. 109. Gen.-Lt. Kravets served for 30 years in the Strategic Rocket Forces, where he worked on force design, systems acquisition, testing and evaluation.

development and deployments. This method of analysis assumes implicitly that the uniformed military played the lead role in determining force requirements, while the Soviet industrial sector, like its American counterpart, played a secondary role in the process and acted primarily as an obliging supplier. This often unexamined assumption led U.S. analysts to attribute greater significance to the great variety and absolute number of weapons systems in the Soviet arsenal and to exaggerate the aggressive intentions of the Soviets.

The interviews suggest that the arms buildup on the Soviet side was stimulated by both external and internal factors. Qualitative technological advances and R&D efforts were largely conditioned by competition with the U.S. and, in the eyes of the Soviets, were reactive and imitative in most instances. The Soviets responded to U.S. development of MIRVs with rapid development of their own MIRV systems in the early 1970s. Against the objections of the MoD, they developed the Buran shuttle as a response to the U.S. Space Shuttle on the assumption that it was a military system. By contrast, the quantitative arms buildup was driven primarily by the internal dynamics and needs of the vast, civilian-dominated defense-industrial establishment, where stability and continuity of production were imperative. In many cases technological advances were achieved *despite* the tendency of the defense-industrial establishment to resist any changes which threatened to disrupt this continuity. The bureaucracies of the defense industrial ministries were generally reluctant to introduce innovations into industrial production and thereby disrupt established manufacturing processes and risk political fallout from failure.

Personalities were as important, if not more important, than institutional or bureaucratic competition in determining Soviet military and force-building policy and clearly played a more immediate and decisive role than did expert analysis. The character of the relationship between the uniformed military and the defense industrialists was often determined by the personal relationships between the leading representatives of the two camps. For instance, when Ustinov became the MoD, his relationship with Chief of the General Staff Marshal Ogarkov drove the relationship between the military and industry, degenerating from one of mutual respect in 1977 to outright confrontation by 1984. Individuals such as MoD Andrei Grechko, described by many interview subjects as a saber-waving horse soldier of limited intellect, had great discretion to accept or suppress the analysis and recommendations of technically competent researchers, analysts, and advisors. In the case of Grechko, he seemed to have overruled much of the considered

advice he received between 1967 and 1975 with respect to the nuclear force posture and the strategy it implied. He chose reliance on large numbers and first-strike over survivability and investment in accuracy despite strong private counsel and public pronouncements to the contrary.