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Summary of Conclusions

Four principal questions relating to Soviet nuclear war doctrine are treated in this paper. The conclusions of the paper on these and a number of subordinate questions are summarized below.

1. *What purposes do the Soviets see their nuclear forces as serving?*

The main objectives underlying Soviet strategic policy may be described in broad terms as similar to those of a decade ago: to protect the security of the homeland, to deter nuclear war but to wage war successfully should deterrence fail, to project an image of military strength commensurate with the position of a great world power, and to support foreign policy aims if only by checking strategic forces of potential opponents.

-- *What is the relative weight of such factors as deterrence, considerations of prestige or influence, and use of nuclear weapons in war?*

It is difficult to separate these factors and assign each an exact ranking of significance. The pattern of development, deployment, and operation of the strategic forces, however, suggests how the Soviets view the utility of these forces. (1) Deterrence is a key objective. The major effort has been on programs which assure the ability of these forces to absorb a US strike and still return a devastating blow. (2) The Soviets nevertheless plan for the possibility that deterrence may fail, although they do not contemplate launching a sudden first strike on the US or expect one on themselves. (3) Their strategic buildup over the past decade shows that they are unwilling to remain in a position of marked strategic inferiority relative to the US. They apparently consider that their larger policy aims would be prejudiced by such a position.

-- *What is the implication of the Soviets' forgoing an ABM defense as a result of the ABM Treaty?*

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Soviet agreement to this treaty probably reflects a desire to limit competition in an area where the US had significant technical advantages and stood to lengthen its lead. In this regard, the Soviets would believe that they gave up little and gained substantial benefits.

The ABM Treaty, however, introduces a new consideration into Soviet planning for aerospace defense: the potential effectiveness of the extensive Soviet air defense network is undermined in the absence of a complementary ABM defense. If the treaty remains in effect over the long term, Soviet air defenses will be susceptible to disruption by a precursor missile attack. This consideration may affect future air defense system procurement. It may have already done so, in view of the absence of new strategic air defense weapons systems at test ranges for the past several years, although the evidence is inconclusive at this point.

A second implication of the treaty is that the USSR has limited the use of active defenses to deter or counter third-country missile attacks outside of Moscow and has chosen to rely primarily on the deterring influence of a superior offensive arsenal.

2. *How do the Soviets decide how much is enough?*

The ultimate objectives and intentions underlying Soviet strategic arms programs will continue to be a subject of uncertainty, given a dynamic strategic environment characterized by continuing competition on both sides, each attempting to prevent the other from achieving a measurable advantage, and in the absence of arms control agreements sufficiently comprehensive to restrain that competition.

Soviet spokesmen have often stated in recent years that the USSR's basic aim is to maintain a condition of "equal security" in relation to the US. This concept is not capable of precise definition. Possession by the Soviets of an assured deterrent

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capability, even though clearly recognized by the US, is evidently not "enough" if the deterrent forces stand in marked quantitative inferiority to those of the US. Similarly, the lag behind the US in significant qualitative aspects of strategic weaponry, such as MIRV technology, is probably also unacceptable.

Even if the intention is only to strive to maintain a relationship of rough strategic equality with the US, Soviet arms programs are bound to be vigorous and demanding. This is in part because of existing asymmetries, which may appear to the Soviets to justify certain quantitative advantages for the USSR, for example in land-based ICBMs, to maintain "equal security." Ongoing US development and deployment programs are probably also seen as requirements for offsetting action by the USSR. The Soviets would like to have a margin of strategic advantage over the US in some form, but we do not know what particular weapon programs the Soviets would consider most likely to afford them a useful advantage over the US or how they might assess the risks and costs of such programs in view of possible US reactions.

-- Is there any doctrinal or conceptual limit on force size or composition? Or are the limitations the result of such practical considerations as cost, technology, and estimates of US reaction?

There is a growing body of evidence that Soviet decisions on force goals involve a complex interplay of many factors beyond rational and objective considerations of strategic needs. The political leadership has the final say on those matters it considers, but it operates in the presence of other influences, including competing policy positions, special interest groups, Kremlin politics, bureaucratic pressures, and technological and economic constraints. Decisions are worked out on an incremental basis, and choices are susceptible to change from one year to the next. The decisionmaking process itself is veiled in secrecy, and evidence is often lacking on the substance and influence of positions taken by key institutions and individuals.

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Consequently we do not know precisely what conceptual criteria may govern Soviet force size and composition. It is possible, however, to circumscribe in a rough way the range of choices available in the light of major factors that the Soviets must take into account in planning for the future of their strategic forces. These factors include the provisions of strategic arms limitation agreements and the manner in which these agreements alter or appear to alter the strategic, political, and economic conditions confronting the USSR; the leadership's sense of stability or change in its strategic relationship with the US, including interaction in research and development; the pace and scope of technological change; economic capabilities; and the Chinese military threat.

-- *What is the impact of SALT on Soviet strategic doctrine?*

The ABM Treaty reflects a change from Soviet doctrine emphasizing active air and missile defenses against all threats. Otherwise, there is no evidence available at present to indicate whether or how the strategic arms limitation agreements have affected Soviet strategic doctrine.

3. *How would the Soviets envision using nuclear weapons?*

-- *Do they see using them at all? For initiation, retaliation, preemption?*

There is good evidence that the Soviets do not consider a sudden first strike to be a workable strategy. The Soviets have not deployed counterforce weapons in sufficient numbers to make a first-strike damage limiting strategy feasible. At the same time, the Soviets evidently do not anticipate a sudden first strike by the US. Their propaganda continues to cite the threat of a US surprise attack, but the observed day-to-day readiness posture of their strategic forces indicates that the Soviets do not, in fact, expect such an attack.

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Excluding a sudden first-strike strategy, the Soviet leadership has considered three strategic options: preemption, launch-on-warning, and retaliation.

Preemption is often presented in Soviet military writings as a desirable strategic option, but these discussions fail to address such factors as the US early warning systems and massive retaliatory capabilities. Given the immense risks involved, the Soviets probably would not attempt to translate this theoretical concept into a practical option.

Launch-on-warning evidently has been considered as a strategic option, but it is rarely mentioned by the Soviets. The concept may be seen as having a certain psychological value in reinforcing deterrence, but as a policy it would present command and control problems. The Soviet leadership is unlikely to delegate the authority to launch a nuclear attack or to accept the unpredictable risks of accidental or unauthorized launch inherent in such a policy.

Retaliation is the oldest declared Soviet strategy and the one most frequently advocated by the top party and government officials. None of the Soviet statements about preemption and launch-on-warning have come from the upper levels of the civilian leadership. The Soviet strategic buildup over the past decade has made retaliation a thoroughly credible doctrine. The assumptions underlying the leadership's view of retaliation, as reflected in the Soviet position at SALT, are that the US and USSR possess more than enough nuclear weapons to bring about a world-wide catastrophe, that the side attacked first would retain a retaliatory force capable of annihilating the attackers's homeland, and that a war between the US and USSR would be disastrous for both.

-- Do the Soviets see using nuclear weapons for devastation in retaliation or for military effect? What military effects would be valued most?

Both counterforce and countervalue targets are incorporated in Soviet planning. The basic targets

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are identified as missile launch sites, nuclear weapons production and storage facilities, other military installations, systems for controlling and supporting strategic forces, and military-industrial and administrative centers. Explicit references to the destruction of enemy population, as such, are notably omitted from available Soviet listings of strategic targets. The list obviously implies, however, the direct targeting of major American cities and therefore massive civilian fatalities.

-- Do the Soviets envision use of nuclear weapons all at once or in some escalatory fashion? Is there any evidence of Soviet thinking about war bargaining, i.e. efforts to use nuclear weapons to create circumstances for bargaining, de-escalation?

In the context of intercontinental warfare, there is no indication in available materials that the Soviets accept the feasibility of limited strategic nuclear warfare or war bargaining. At least in public they have consistently rejected the possibility that either the US or the USSR would be able to exercise restraint, once nuclear weapons had been employed against its homeland. Despite these disclaimers, the Soviet strategic arsenal could support a strategy of controlled strategic attack, raising the possibility that such a contingency may be included in Soviet targeting and attack planning.

In the context of warfare in Europe, Soviet doctrine on escalation has been modified since the mid-Sixties. An earlier position that any war involving NATO and the Warsaw Pact would automatically escalate to theater-wide nuclear war has been altered to allow for an initial conventional phase. Soviet writings and Warsaw Pact exercises have paid increasing attention to the importance of having armed forces equipped and trained for conventional as well as nuclear tactical warfare. Current Pact planning for a war in Europe recognizes the possibility of both a conventional or nonnuclear phase and a nuclear strike phase. Pact planners apparently believe that successful conventional operations by the Pact would force NATO to resort to nuclear weapons, and they emphasize the importance of the timing of their initial use.

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Soviet military writers have given little attention to the concept of controlled nuclear war in Europe. They emphasize the decisiveness of an initial nuclear attack and the need for effective coordination. The first salvo of intermediate- and medium-range ballistic missiles by the Strategic Rocket Forces evidently would be the signal for nuclear strikes by other Warsaw Pact forces.

For the Soviet political leadership, a broader range of options is likely to exist than is evident in Pact exercises and documents. Authorization for the scale of fighting to be pursued, the use of nuclear weapons, and the scope of permitted nuclear operations would rest with the political leaders. Under actual combat conditions they could decide to employ nuclear forces in a more carefully controlled manner than indicated in military writings and exercises.

4. *How do the Soviets see the relation between their intercontinental and theater forces?*

-- Is there any way of judging which the Soviets might believe more likely to be used? Is there any evidence of Soviet views as to coupling or decoupling?

We do not have good evidence on how the Soviets view the possibility of an intercontinental exchange between the US and the USSR if theater nuclear warfare erupts in Europe. The Soviets would presumably prefer to avoid a level of combat that would involve massive strikes on their own country. Their willingness to escalate to global nuclear warfare might depend largely on what they expected the US response would be to events in Europe.

Until the mid-Sixties Soviet declaratory doctrine held that a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact would automatically escalate to theater-wide nuclear war in Europe and possibly to global nuclear war. Some Soviet military writers have continued to express skepticism that a European conflict could be kept limited. At the same time, other Soviet military writings have

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paid increased attention to the possibilities of limiting a war in Europe. In view of the modification of their doctrine on escalation, Soviet planners may have become more willing to consider decoupling a war in Europe from a direct US-USSR intercontinental confrontation.

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