The euphoria in some quarters of the American strategic community following the SALT I accords was largely based upon the inference that Soviet agreement to a virtual ABM ban signified fundamental agreement on strategic nuclear doctrine. Many concluded that this provided a hopeful basis for further collaboration in strategic nuclear arms control. Subsequent disillusionment has been triggered by the slow pace of SALT II and the continuing Soviet strategic buildup. The result has been a growing pessimism that divergent strategic doctrines preclude significant strategic accommodation. One strain of determined optimism about SALT even argues that reconciliation of nuclear doctrine be placed first on the SALT agenda, as a necessary basis for substantive agreement. There are, however, structural and ideological barriers to any explicit reconciliation of nuclear doctrine. Barring the most-thorough-going transformation of the Soviet system, these appear insurmountable.

Until 1953, Soviet military thought, like all other significant aspects of Soviet life, was constrained by a primitive Stalinist orthodoxy. In military thought, this orthodoxy did not extend beyond the assertion of the decisiveness of Stalin's so-called permanently operating factors. These were: the stability of the rear; the morale of the armed forces; the quantity and quality of divisions; the equipment of the fighting forces; and the organizational abilities of the commanders. Coupled with the asserted superiority of the Soviet social order, based upon the Marxist-Leninist science of society, these factors amounted to a theological assertion that the Soviet Union would prevail in any future conflict. This recipe, expounded by the "greatest military genius of modern times," precluded the possibility that other factors, such as nuclear weapons or the element of surprise, could affect the outcome of war. Not only was this a prescription for avoiding reassessment of the lessons of the Great Patriotic War (in which the "surprise"

1. The dimensions of the buildup or continuing emphasis—civil defense, air defense, hard-target counterforce capability—lack only one element—ABM—of a comprehensive damage-limiting posture, a posture based upon a different view of deterrence and nuclear strategy than has shaped the U.S. strategic forces in the nuclear age.
2. See, for example, Alton Frye, "Strategic Restraint, Mutual and Assured," Foreign Policy, Summer 1977.
had resulted from Stalin's personal obduracy), but it prevented any serious attempt to evaluate the impact of nuclear weapons upon Soviet security.

Despite the homily that armies seem always to be preparing to fight the last war, the military is fundamentally a pragmatic and empirically-based profession, though to call it scientific might be to overstate the point. It is clear in retrospect that the Soviet military had chafed under the Stalinist orthodoxy because it was grossly at variance with the post-war world. They had, after all, endured the consequences of surprise in 1941 and could not easily swallow Stalin's assertion that the rapid German advance had been part of a carefully designed strategy to lure the enemy deep into Russia, as Kutuzov had done to Napoleon in 1812.¹ They were also well aware of the effects of thermonuclear weapons. Thus the debates over military doctrine which emerged soon after Stalin's death were inevitable. That they became public is perhaps related to the weakening of control at the top produced by the power-struggle between the Malenkov and Khrushchev factions. Reviewing these debates provides significant insight into the character of Soviet defense thinking in the nuclear age—an insight which has an important bearing on the contemporary U.S.-Soviet strategic dialogue.

In fact, a review of these debates and their outcomes compared to the parallel debates in the United States helps to explain why military doctrines, particularly nuclear doctrines, are unlikely to converge.

The Evolution of Soviet Nuclear Doctrine

The classic studies of the post-Stalin military debates were produced at The Rand Corporation nearly two decades ago by Herbert S. Dinerstein and Raymond L. Garthoff.⁵ The most prominent issues in the debates were the inevitability of war⁶ and the potential decisiveness of surprise attack. What can be inferred from the Rand reconstructions is that these issues were associated with two quite separate debates.

The inevitability of war arose as a largely instrumental issue in the leader-

---

⁶ Lenin held that as Capitalism-Imperialism declined, the Capitalists would war against themselves and ultimately against Socialism. This would be the vehicle for the ultimate victory of the Socialist camp. Stalin's formulation remained consistent with this view. Dinerstein, op. cit., p. 66.
ship struggle between the Malenkov and Khrushchev factions. Soon after Stalin's death, Malenkov and his associates began to argue that war between the capitalists and the Soviet Union was no longer inevitable. This attempt at revising fundamental dogma was probably linked to Malenkov's effort to shift resources from military spending and the supporting heavy industry to consumer goods. However, it also provided Khrushchev with a convenient opportunity to attack Malenkov. Malenkov's argument was not only revisionist (and therefore dangerous in so pervasively doctrinaire a political system) but also associated with a threat to reduce allocations to the military. Thus, Khrushchev gained a significant bureaucratic ally.

The subsequent history of this struggle is well-known. By 1957 Malenkov and his associates were vanquished and Khrushchev was in full control. He then completed the shift toward the Malenkov position which he had already begun at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. By the 21st Party Congress in 1961 he had established Malenkov's proposition that war was no longer "fatalistically inevitable" as a tenet of official Soviet doctrine. It has not been repudiated to this day, though it is hardly mentioned by the Brezhnev regime.

Khrushchev also adopted the policy which Malenkov had associated with his view of the non-inevitability of war. He pressed for reallocation of resources from the defense to the domestic sectors, most prominently to agriculture. He advocated a one-third reduction in the Soviet armed forces and he reduced naval surface-ship construction. In general, he argued the obsolescence of many elements of traditional military capability, and the primacy of nuclear missile forces. More importantly for the argument that follows, Khrushchev premised his view of the Soviet deterrent posture upon a secure capability to retaliate.

The military, who had allied themselves with Khrushchev in opposition to Malenkov, may well have felt betrayed when faced with Khrushchev's attempts to cut defense spending and conventional forces in favor of the domestic sec-

8. Ibid., p. 221.
13. Ibid.
tors. They may even have felt perversely vindicated when the Cuban Missile Crisis demonstrated Soviet strategic and naval weaknesses. One might infer a residue of self-interested concern about the “vulnerability” of senior Soviet political leaders to the American ideas of finite deterrence; this might help explain the continuing intensity of some of the military literature on these subjects. For example:

The premise of Marxism-Leninism on war as a continuation of policy by military means remains true in an atmosphere of fundamental changes in military matters. The attempt of certain bourgeois ideologists to prove that nuclear missile weapons leave war outside the framework of policy and that nuclear war moves beyond the control of policy, ceases to be an instrument of policy and does not constitute its continuation is theoretically incorrect and politically reactionary.14 [Emphasis added]

This is as clear a statement as one is likely to find that the position adopted by Khrushchev (and widely held in the West) is not only wrong but revisionist according to Marxist strictures. That position is based upon the conclusion that nuclear war can escalate to levels of destruction beyond all sensible ends of policy. Thus, one reaches the basis for arguments that once such levels of destructiveness are available in both arsenals, deterrence is assured and there is little need for additional capabilities. In fact, the Soviet military seem to be trying to have it both ways, for it is commonly asserted that even very limited nuclear exchanges will inevitably escalate to all-out levels of destruction. Yet, Soviet doctrine continues to assert that massive strategic nuclear exchanges may be followed by a long and ultimately decisive “conventional” war. This leads directly to requirements not only for substantial strategic nuclear forces, but for large and diverse conventional capabilities to fight a war—a war seemingly unaffected by the exchange of thousands of nuclear weapons. The solution to this paradox may be found in considering the different audiences to which such arguments may be addressed, as well as the different purposes which they may be intended to serve.

The view set forth above can be read as intended for internal consumption (perhaps even for remaining strands of “radical or modern” thought within the armed forces themselves). It may be seen as shoring up the barriers against the kind of Malenkovian/Khrushchevian revisionism that has been associated with

attempts to cut Soviet defense budgets. The argument on the inevitability of escalation, on the other hand, is more plausibly interpreted as intending to strengthen deterrence by persuading Americans that there is nothing to be gained from limited nuclear strategies.

One should not necessarily conclude, however, that the predominant military motivation is merely pragmatic defense of their budgets. An important component may well be a sincere belief that the political leaders—who in the past have “misunderstood” the requirements of military security—may mistakenly risk that security. Thus the two views are easily able to coexist in the military mind.

This juxtaposition brings us to the debate among the professional military. It was concerned primarily with the potential decisiveness of surprise. By contrast to the debate reflecting the political struggle, this issue was not instrumental, but rather was substantively important in shaping the Soviet defense posture.

The Stalinist assertion of the dominance of the permanently operating factors ruled out the possibility that such so-called transitory factors as surprise could be decisive in war. Such a view obviously constrained practical efforts to improve the Soviet defense posture against surprise attack. Yet military planners were well-acquainted with the destructive effects of nuclear weapons and the prospects for long-range delivery systems. They could easily extrapolate the effects of a large-scale nuclear surprise attack, and no doubt found it difficult to reconcile such calculations with the Stalinist proposition that surprise attack—even with such weapons—remained a relatively insignificant and merely transitory factor.

This debate was short and its resolution conclusive. The potential decisiveness of surprise attack in the nuclear age was clearly established. As then-Marshall of tank forces Rotmistrov concluded:

[Surprise attack in the nuclear age could] . . . cause the rapid collapse of a government whose capacity to resist is low as a consequence of radical faults in its social and economic structure and also as a consequence of an unfavorable geographic position.16 [Emphasis added]

This quotation raises interesting questions in terms of the Aesopian communication that characterizes Soviet public discourse. They are worth pondering from today’s perspective. Although the debate was carried on in very general terms,

---

the problem which provoked it was the defense of the Soviet Union in the nuclear age. Thus one wonders what "government" Rotmistrov had in mind. It was the Soviet Union which was ringed by NATO bases deploying nuclear-armed aircraft (though he could also have been referring to small European countries within easy range of the Soviet Union). Certainly the geographic position of the United States remained the least "unfavorable." What were the "radical faults in social and economic structure"? Were they inadequate organization and regimentation of the population in an effective civil defense program,\(^\text{17}\) inadequate dispersal of industry, or allocation of resources to heavy industry and to military preparedness?

The issue of surprise attack, then, was clearly resolved. It could decide the outcome of war in the nuclear age. The military were now free to seek "real-world" solutions to the problem. Or were they? The admission that a confident solution might be impossible could pose a serious doctrinal problem for the Soviet Union. It would undermine the Marxian prediction of the inevitable victory of socialism. Thus, if too explicitly argued, it could be construed as a revision of a more fundamental kind. The Soviet political system was imposed and has been maintained by force; it has pursued its social goals by forcibly extracting enormous sacrifice from its people. It has done so on the utopian premise that it was consistent with and supportive of the inevitable course of history. It would therefore carry substantial risk to openly admit that the rationale for this history of suffering had been fundamentally mistaken, that in fact the ultimate victory of socialism could be prevented if only Soviet deterrence failed and the capitalist powers mounted a nuclear surprise attack.

From the start, the Soviet search for "real world" solutions to the security dilemma of the nuclear age was inhibited by this Marxist-Leninist doctrinal context. It is a context which makes very difficult any approach premised upon the admission that no confident defense can be erected, preserving at least the appearance of inevitable Soviet victory.

The Soviet solution, therefore, had to be premised upon the assertion that even were a surprise attack to be mounted, Soviet military forces could still ensure victory. The obvious answer was to assert the capability to strike preemptively,

---

\(^{17}\) It is worth noting that this was also a period of concern and debate over civil defense in the American defense community. See, for example, Klaus Knorr, "Passive Air Defense for the United States," in William W. Kaufmann, ed., Military Policy and National Security, 1956; Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age (the so-called Gaither Report), 1957, declassified 1973.
and blunt the Imperialist attack. It was in fact the conclusion of many in the West that a preemptive first-strike capability was what the Soviets were after.18

The Soviet assertion that in countering a surprise attack, the Soviet armed forces will "... repel the attack successfully ... deal the enemy counterblows, or even preemptive surprise blows of terrible destructive force ..."19 has continued to be characteristic of the military literature on nuclear war. This assertion, however, creates difficulty with the other frequent assertion that the Soviet Union will not initiate war—that it will limit itself to preemptive rather than preventive attack.20

Defense Management and Military Solutions

Though in important respects pragmatic or empirical, the military profession is also characteristically conservative. This is a characteristic that might provoke deep suspicion of the idea that military security may be found in acknowledging the vulnerability of one's society to the principal adversary, and vice versa. The logical corollary is still worse. It is the idea that military security may be maintained by agreeing to cooperate with the adversary in maintaining that condition. This is not the idea of deterrence, per se, for deterrence is a well-established concept in military thought. Historically, however, it has not been distinguished from defense. In the new doctrine emerging in the United States, (with which Khrushchev so dangerously flirted), security was not maintained by automatically seeking military/technical solutions to an adversary's threatening capabilities, but rather by maintaining solely punitive capabilities. In the traditional military view, if the enemy develops a capability to attack one's homeland with long-range forces, there is no doubt about the proper response: it is to devise ways to defend that homeland. Depending upon the nature of the technical problem, there is no principled distinction among active defense, passive defense, and preemptively offensive capabilities. The distinctions are entirely pragmatic. If the problem is difficult and no single measure stands out in its effectiveness, then all are pursued.

It is important to understand the implications of this approach because of the

20. Bernard Brodie, among others, discussed this issue with great insight. See particularly chapter 7, of Strategy in the Missile Age, 1959. The Soviets themselves were not insensitive to the difficulty, as Dinerstein's analysis makes clear; see chapter 6, particularly p. 188.
current role of the Soviet military in all areas of national security management, especially as compared with the United States. Both defense establishments may be seen as organizational pyramids, functionally differentiated and performing all the tasks necessary to the management of the national security apparatus. In the Soviet Union, however, all aspects of this activity—from intelligence and analysis to the production and deployment of weapon systems—are almost entirely in the hands of the professional military. \(^{21}\) Does this mean that major issues of resource allocation among defense and other sectors—or even within the defense establishment—are decided solely by the military? This is unlikely. What it does suggest is that they frame the defense problem and specify the range within which military solutions are to be sought. To argue that security in the nuclear age is to be found in agreeing to a posture of mutual vulnerability, therefore, is not only doctrinally risky, but at radical variance with all of the traditions and professional instincts of the Soviet defense establishment. This is the basis for the central difference between the American and Soviet approaches to the problem of military security in the nuclear age.

But what is the role of ideology in the Soviet military? If the profession of arms is fundamentally a pragmatic business, it is likely to be as resistant to cumbersome Marxist-Leninist ideological impositions as it was to Stalinist dogma. Here lies the crux of the matter.

In a highly arbitrary yet fundamentally ideological political system, perhaps the most dangerous error is the ideological one. The accusation of doctrinal deviation is more powerful than the accusation of stupidity or mistaken judgement. Whether or not one believes literally in relevant tenets of Marxism-Leninism, it is prudent in policy debate to avoid positions which can be attacked as doctrinally wrong. It is this phenomenon which inhibits Soviet public behavior rather than any literal belief in the doctrinal orthodoxy. The inhibiting effect is indirect but hardly inconsiderable.

\(^{21}\) The Western consensus on this point is strong. See for example Horelick, op. cit., p. 81; John Erickson, “Soviet Military Capabilities,” Current History, October 1976, p. 97; Thomas W. Wolfe, Military Power and Soviet Policy, Rand Paper P-5388, March 1975, pp. 15-18; William R. Van Cleave, “Soviet Doctrine and Strategy,” in Lawrence L. Whetton, ed., The Future of Soviet Military Power, 1976; etc. This is a consensus supported by remarks at a seminar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 15, 1977, by Dr. Mikhail Milstein, (Lt. Gen-retired), of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada. Richard Pipes, however, implies some difference of view. “...Soviet military planning is carried out under the close supervision of the country’s highest political body, the Politburo.” If my inference is correct, it would be interesting to see the evidence for this assertion. See Pipes, “Why the Soviet Union Thinks it could Fight and Win a Nuclear War,” Commentary, July 1977, p. 27.
In the case of military doctrine, however, this effect may be less than in other areas of political life, and not only because of the pragmatic nature of the profession. The military is among the more autonomous of occupations despite the system of political controls created to ensure their reliability. The military promote their own, probably up to quite senior levels, largely on the basis of traditional military criteria. It is in the military more than in any other pursuit in Soviet society that we find the most reliable, functioning system of promotion and tenure rules. Thus, the explanation for the Soviet solution to the problem of security in the nuclear age derives more from the fact that it is a solution devised by the military profession, and not that it was devised by the Soviet military profession.

The thoughtful military planner recognizes not only the extreme importance of his task, but also its pervasive uncertainty. No matter how carefully analyzed the problem and how well-designed the armed forces, the imponderables of warfare—morale, leadership, and chance—may determine the outcome of battle. And it is the task of the peacetime military planner to predict the outcome of hypothetical wars. These conditions imply that the professional military cannot be satisfied short of unambiguous superiority over any combination of enemies. The notion of sufficiency or parity, on the other hand, is not merely an American invention. It is more importantly a civilian invention.

Khrushchev’s position on the primacy of strategic forces (thus the possibility of reductions in conventional forces) was not widely shared in the military. The absence of severe resource constraints on military spending since 1964 largely precludes this point of view as a rationale in intra-military resource allocation debates. In fact, it seems likely that a bargain was struck in 1964 between the military and the Brezhnev faction which has permitted, among other things, across-the-board Soviet military growth ever since. It appears to have established both an unprecedented degree of independence for the military in the management of their own affairs and a significantly more prominent voice in the shaping of foreign policy.

---

22. In professional military circles, this issue arose in a debate about whether the next war would be a short decisive nuclear war or whether it could also be long and conventional. The answer, of course, would shape the force structure and the result was a predictably military compromise. It could be either. Thus a requirement for both kinds of forces. See, for example, Sokolovsky, op. cit., pp. 194-204.

23. At least one scholar discerns a growing visibility to the military establishment in all spheres of Soviet life, though he seems to conclude that rather than a potential problem for the party or the political leadership, this is the result of a choice explicitly made by that political
In this light, the Soviet military buildup of the Brezhnev period appears natural. It is the fulfillment of the military planner's dream, the opportunity to hedge against virtually any important uncertainty. If it cannot yet confidently be ruled out that the West could successfully mount a surprise attack, then one continues to pursue all plausible measures to preclude it (i.e., civil defense, air defense, vigorous ABM R&D, and hard-target counterforce capabilities—though these latter are probably as much the descendent of technological necessities as of any conscious choice to build big missiles). If there is still insufficient confidence in the state's security, then one must be prepared to fight conventionally after the strategic nuclear exchanges in order to occupy a relatively intact Europe or to defend against an opportunist China. The best overall deterrent, furthermore, is a sufficiently impressive across-the-board military capability to intimidate any possible combination of enemies.

It takes only a small leap of imagination—putting oneself in the shoes of the Soviet military planner—to produce a long list of worrisome contingencies, and thus requirements for military forces. Perhaps the worst case from his perspective is the two-front war against the Chinese hordes to the east and the capitalist industrialist machine to the west. With decisive escalation deemed too risky in either case, recourse to strategic nuclear forces is deterred. Such a scenario may help explain the very large investment in war production capabilities in recent years.

**Civilian Strategists and Strategies**

The conclusion of the Soviet military debate—that surprise attack could be decisive—was almost, but not quite, the same formulation as that reached in the United States. American strategic thinkers agreed that surprise attack could be decisive in the nuclear age. Thus the task of military policy was to make surprise attack infeasible. American strategists concentrated on a particular kind of surprise attack, the so-called first-strike disarming attack in which the victim's capabilities for a substantial retaliatory strike would be destroyed. This emphasis arose from the fact that American strategists went a logical step further than their Soviet counterparts; this step may have been foreclosed to the Soviets by leadership. See William E. Odom, "Who Controls Whom in Moscow," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1975, and his "Militarization of Society," *Problems of Communism*, Sept.-Oct. 1976. Pipes, *op. cit.*, p. 29 would take Odom's judgment much further.
the strictures of Marxism-Leninism, and perhaps by the traditions of military problem-solving.

The Americans agreed that surprise attack could be decisive because the great destructiveness of thermonuclear weapons—combined with great numbers and modern, long-range delivery systems—produced a variety of attacks against which defense was at best problematic. The Soviet formulation and military posture has been based upon the opposite premise: that a defense must be erected, no matter what the cost. This was the step which separated the problem of defense from that of deterrence, making it clear that for most kinds of superpower warfare the central issue was one of deterrence. In all likelihood, this step had to be imposed by civilian strategists; it is the point of departure from the traditional military perspective on deterrence and defense. How was deterrence to be created and maintained in an age in which there is no longer a defense? Deterrence would henceforth be based primarily upon large and secure punitive capabilities.

The American formulation of the surprise attack problem was crucially different from the Soviet formulation. For the Soviet military thinkers, surprise attack with nuclear weapons could be decisive because it could destroy the ability of the government to function and of their military forces to defend their state. For the American strategists, surprise attack could be decisive if it could eliminate the enemy’s punitive capabilities.

American strategic thought thus shifted from preoccupation with “military solutions” (i.e., attempts to counter in a technical-military fashion any capabilities the adversary deployed which could conceivably be seen as threatening), to the unique civilian invention of deterrence as the peacetime manipulation of largely punitive threats. This is almost entirely unconnected to the problem of defending against nuclear attack.

The result of the American approach is obvious. If the problem of surprise attack has to do primarily with a fairly narrow band of capabilities threatening the adversary’s second-strike forces, then we have, prima facie, a basis for limited superpower cooperation toward enhancing the security of both. They could cooperate, explicitly or tacitly, in managing force postures so as to minimize the threats posed to their respective second-strike capabilities. The United States has of course always adjusted its own forces to prevent the emergence of threats to its punitive capabilities. This is the basis of the American definition of stability, a definition not acknowledged by the Soviets.

The three principles of American doctrine have been: the maintenance of se-
cure second-strike forces; limited war forces, to extend and enhance deterrence; and, the avoidance of threats to Soviet second-strike forces. The implications for force postures and defense budgets have been intensely debated, but the principles have generally been accepted. Whereas the American answer to the military security problem has entailed an explicit distinction between deterrence and defense, the Soviet answer has not. The idea of preempting an American surprise attack is inherently a defensive idea predicated upon the traditional military solution. It continues to treat deterrence as a direct function of aggregate military capability.

The implicit scenario for the Soviets requires successful anticipation of an imminent U.S. “surprise attack.” Thus, the strategic forces of the United States, assuming sufficient warning of the impending American attack, would be largely destroyed by a preemptive strike. Those U.S. forces which survived Soviet preemption and were actually launched would be met by the massive Soviet air defenses, and greatly degraded. Those, finally, which succeeded in delivering their weapons to their targets would have attacked a population effectively organized and, to the degree feasible, protected by a vigorous civil defense program and an economy and political control structure also organized to cope with such an attack. Combining such across-the-board capabilities with a strong emphasis upon offensive action wherever possible, has been the Soviet solution to the problem of military security in the nuclear age.

Concern that such a posture was in fact feasible was more appropriate in a period when the strategic delivery capabilities resided exclusively in aircraft. There was a real prospect of preemptive capability against soft, slow bomber forces deployed on small numbers of airfields—particularly if they were in Europe.

24. Both sides maintain a variety of limited war forces. It is the difference in rationales which is suggestive. For the Soviets, such forces are obviously needed to fight the possible long war, occupy territory, and defend against similar capabilities possessed by the adversary. For the U.S. the rationale is almost always that such forces enhance the credibility of an extended deterrent, first, and only secondarily, that they might be needed to fight the Soviets at various limited war levels.
25. Van Cleave, for example, agrees, but seems to prefer the Soviet view on this point. Op. cit., p. 48.
26. One of the lessons the Soviet military appears to have drawn from World War II, and perhaps from Soviet and Russian history more broadly, is the importance, whenever attacked, of going over to the offensive as rapidly and decisively as possible. See, for example, A. A. Sidorenko, The Offensive, Moscow 1970. Translated and published under the auspices of the U.S. Air Force, 1974.
or elsewhere on the Soviet periphery. Extensive air defenses could be expected to substantially degrade surviving bomber forces attempting to retaliate, and the still-limited nuclear weapon stockpiles of the 1950s made such a doctrine far more plausible than is possible today.

It is likely that the early Soviet deployment of medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles targeted against the NATO bases on which U.S. strategic forces were only recently deployed was the outgrowth of this kind of perspective. Unfortunately, the American strategic forces were in the process of being withdrawn to the continental United States, as increasing range in follow-on aircraft permitted. This, in turn, helped to stimulate increased Soviet efforts to deploy intercontinental-range ballistic missiles. The deployment of MRBMs and IRBMs proceeded, since NATO bases continued to deploy nuclear capable aircraft.

Conditions are, of course, far different today. Given the dominance of ballistic missile delivery systems of virtually constant readiness (a large proportion of which remain highly survivable aboard ballistic missile submarines), and the absence of effective anti-ballistic missile systems, a large nuclear attack cannot be effectively blunted. The American strategic literature recognized this prospect clearly by the end of the 1950s. Yet Soviet doctrinal literature on nuclear war still does not concede this point, for to do so could create both the ideological problem for Marxism-Leninism referred to above, and risk another Khrushchevian attempt to cut the defense budget. It would be similarly difficult to agree in SALT with the American formulation of the surprise attack problem. This would mean implicitly agreeing that there is no defense against strategic nuclear attack, that such an attack could in fact halt or reverse the "inevitable" course of history, and that the only solution lies in the essentially "non-military" approach devised by the Americans—the relationship of mutual assured destruction (MAD). Such a position means that once the security of second-strike forces is assured—and this might be achieved cooperatively—there is a prima facie basis for arguing that little if anything more is necessary in the way of military

27. Another of the architects of American strategic thought in the nuclear age, Albert Wohlstetter, was the central figure in the pathbreaking "Basing Study" which raised the question of the survivability of U.S. retaliatory forces to projected Soviet surprise attack capabilities (Wohlstetter, et al., Selection and Use of Strategic Air Bases, Rand Corporation, R-266, Santa Monica, CA: April 1954). His subsequent and seminal Foreign Affairs article ("The Delicate Balance of Terror," January 1959) was among the earliest detailed expositions of the logic of deterrence via assured second-strike capabilities.
28. I am indebted for this insight to the anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this essay.
forces. This argument supports a policy of "sufficiency"—uniquely a product of civilian defense strategists or political leaders. The Soviet formulation, by contrast, is a prescription for relatively unrestrained defense spending following the traditional military approach to national defense.

It is unnecessary to impute purely budget-protecting motives to those who resist the American deterrence model whether they are Soviet soldiers or American "hawks." Rather, one might impute a belief that such a posture is simply too risky, and cite the consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis in support. Whatever the mixture of motivations, these views are more likely to be shared in the military—hence the significance of the role of the Soviet military in the management of Soviet defense. By contrast, American nuclear strategic ideas were developed almost exclusively by the "civilian strategists." The power of their ideas came to dominate both the scholarly strategic community and, under Secretary of Defense McNamara, the top levels of the national security establishment in the United States. Civilian dominance has remained and, if anything, grown in American security planning—a crucial difference between the United States and the Soviet Union.

**Nuclear Doctrine and the Future of SALT**

Two important factors have largely determined the evolution of Soviet nuclear doctrine. One is the sometimes inhibiting effect of the Marxist-Leninist doctrinal context within which all Soviet intellectual activity occurs. The other is the strong influence produced by the exclusive authority of the Soviet military over virtually all military activity below the major Politburo-level choices. The doctrinal inhibition raises obstacles to any strategic concept that would require a logical admission of the "non-inevitability" of the ultimate victory of socialism. This would remain true even were a civilian strategic establishment to arise advocating such a concept. The dominant shaping influence, however, has been the preeminence of the professional military in all spheres of military and strategic thought. Thus, for Soviet nuclear doctrine to become more like that of the United

---

29. Thomas W. Wolfe and William R. Van Cleave, among others, share this view. See, for example, the citation from Wolfe in Van Cleave, op. cit., p. 47.
States, requires a class of strategic thinkers substantially freed of both traditional professional military perspectives and Marxist-Leninist constraints, as well as the political influence to impose the change upon a resistant system.

The absence of such conditions has resulted in a fundamental difference between U.S. and Soviet strategic theory. Soviet doctrine does not dismiss deterrence. On the contrary, most of the open military literature seems preoccupied with enhancing it. It is a theory of deterrence, however, which is substantially at variance with the American formulation. As a result of the difference, Soviet doctrine denies the American formulation of stability—the absence of threats to each side’s punitive capabilities—but rather defines it, when it does, more generally and self-servingly as the absence of any significant innovation or new deployment above what is described as parity. This is not a sign of inability to comprehend the American strategic analysis. More likely, it is an inability to exit from the corner into which their doctrinal evolution has painted them. The Soviet military almost certainly recognize the dangers posed by American developments which threaten the survivability of Soviet second-strike forces; this is evident in their doctrinal writing and in their deployments. To acknowledge that such developments are especially threatening however, would be to admit the validity of the American strategic concept, and perhaps more important, to concede an important bargaining advantage in SALT. For it is Soviet ICBM forces which pose the earliest threat to the survivability of a major U.S. strategic force component. And it is these ICBM forces which have been the major SALT concern of the United States since the ABM Treaty was signed. It is also the Soviet Union which maintains large investments in other “damage limiting” capabilities, such as air and civil defense programs. The only practical Soviet position, therefore, has been to deny the U.S. formulation of the strategic arms problem, while bargaining in entirely pragmatic terms.

Soviet nuclear doctrine has been the basis for the development of Soviet strategic forces which today appear to pose precisely the threat which their public doctrinal debates of two decades ago made clear they would like to pose. The large throwweight of Soviet ICBMs lends itself to an early threat to the U.S. Minuteman Force. Yet we must keep in mind that this has been the major Soviet strategic program for two decades. In addition, large ICBMs have turned out to be the vehicle for catching the United States in one of the major measures of strategic competence, multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). To concede the validity of the American theories of deterrence stability thus sacrifices the argument against the central U.S. theme in SALT (i.e., that
constraints upon threats to the survivability of each side’s retaliatory capabilities ought to be the central focus). This concession would have a major impact upon the most important Soviet strategic modernization programs, and none of consequence upon U.S. programs.

Seeking doctrinal convergence as a formal goal in SALT thus seems impractical at best. But does this fundamental irreconcilability warrant the pessimism in some Western strategic circles about the prospects of any progress in SALT? The answer is a qualified no. First, the Soviets have shown themselves able to reach SALT agreements at variance with their military doctrine. The obvious example is the ABM Treaty. Second, the United States may find arrangements desirable which do not visibly conflict with the prescriptions of Soviet doctrine (though they may conflict with military judgements about what is prudent). Here, a variety of lesser measures may prove marginally useful. High ceilings on weapon numbers would be roughly compatible with Soviet doctrine, as would a variety of constraints ensuring the effectiveness of warning and verification systems. In the longer run and perhaps not so much longer, given the age of the current leadership, the Soviet Union may again have a leader like Khrushchev who is more amenable to American ideas about deterrence and sufficiency, and more interested in shifting resources into non-military investment.

How are we to deal with SALT in the absence of doctrinal convergence? Here the ABM Treaty is instructive. The ban on ABM systems embodied in SALT I is consistent with the American view of the nuclear problem and its solution. Observance of the Treaty precludes any hope of effective defense against major ballistic missile attack. In fact, there was some euphoria in the American arms control community when it was signed, as some believed it signalled Soviet acceptance of the American strategic view. Disillusionment eventually replaced excessive euphoria (although more pragmatic satisfaction with the concrete consequences remains). The alternative explanation for Soviet agreement on ABM is that they were in technological difficulty, and could not rule out the possibility that American ABM research might lead to a competent deployed system. The

32. This is my interpretation, but it is consistent with the view, among others, of Raymond L. Garthoff, a long-time and highly-regarded observer of Soviet military affairs and a participant in SALT I. See Garthoff, “SALT and the Soviet Military,” Problems of Communism, January/February 1975. On this point also, Pipes is in fundamental agreement (op. cit., p. 33), though his cryptic comments about the ABM treaty (“...certain imprecisely defined limitations...”) and its connection to Soviet air defenses suggest once again a strategic perspective quite at variance with the American consensus described above.
ABM Treaty thus was a straightforward bargain—pay the Americans their price to get them to stop something which might eventually prove worrisome.

This interpretation could testify to a Soviet understanding of—and perhaps even some tacit agreement with—the American formulation, perhaps more convincing than an open Soviet announcement would have been. Why else would they pay any price at all to halt a purely defensive American program if they did not perceive that it might eventually affect their deterrent? Though their deterrent is not formally premised upon a second-strike capability, they have never successfully elaborated a convincing case that preemption might actually work with contemporary forces. In any case, they have worked hard to attain an unquestioned capability for major strategic attack upon the United States, whether preemptively, preventively, or in a de facto second-strike.

This is the key to long-run progress in SALT—pragmatic case by case bargaining. It will not be found in some chimeric search for a formal common understanding on strategic principles. The United States is, in any case, more interested in Soviet strategic behavior—in what forces they do or do not deploy in answer to U.S. attempts to influence those choices. We are unlikely to influence Soviet choices by asserting our good intentions or by demonstrating conclusively the flawless logic of American theories. This game is played with sticks and carrots, threats (necessarily subtle and as private as possible), and incentives. For the necessary chips with which to play, we should expect to pay a price, and therefore seek to accumulate and maintain sufficient amounts of the appropriate currency.33

33. My thinking, in pursuing this analysis, was clarified, though perhaps despite himself, by exposure to Dr. (Lt. General-Retired) Mikhail Milstein of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, in several seminars at Harvard and M.I.T. during April of 1977.