59 has added a new element to mutual U.S.-Soviet recriminations. Both sides accuse each other of being unwilling to live with nuclear parity, of seeking unilateral advantages, and of trying to develop capabilities to fight and win a nuclear war. On the surface, there is indeed some convergence in American and Soviet strategic concepts. And it may even appear that instead of educating the Soviet Union about the virtues of Mutual Assured Destruction, the United States has moved closer to the Soviet view that there can be no credible deterrence without the capacity to fight in the case of its failure.

But here the similarities between U.S. and Soviet strategic pronouncements end. The more impressive the Soviet nuclear arsenal becomes, the more the Kremlin tends to follow Teddy Roosevelt’s advice to walk softly and carry a big stick. Moscow’s claims of its military superiority and ability to win a nuclear war have become increasingly rare. This has happened at precisely the time when those American strategists who originally warned that the Soviets intended to prevail in a nuclear war now argue that it is the United States which should adopt a war-winning nuclear strategy.1

It is important to realize that like the actual Soviet strategic posture, Soviet strategic thinking has its own cycle of development, is influenced by different traditions and beliefs, responds to differently perceived challenges, intends to exploit a different combination of opportunities, and is formulated in a different institutional fashion through very different procedures than in the American case. Similarly, there is a need to view the Soviet concept of deterrence in the context of the aging Kremlin leaders’ world outlook. These people do know first-hand how catastrophic war can be, and are not inclined to play with fire. But there is another, far less encouraging, aspect to their international philosophy, namely, a deeply felt commitment to achieve what


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Dimitri Simes is a member of the Faculty at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies. He was formerly associated with Georgetown University’s Center for Strategic and International Studies, and until 1972, with Moscow’s Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO).
amounts to almost absolute security. And absolute security for the USSR means very little security for everybody else. The Soviet elite constantly feels obliged to prove the legitimacy of its rule, both abroad and to the Russian empire's own citizens. As stagnation of the Soviet economy, discontent in Eastern Europe, and the international communist movement itself increasingly raise questions about the future of the Soviet model of communism, Moscow is particularly tempted to seek compensation through the use of force and coercion to obtain a greater role. And the Soviet interpretation of deterrence is inevitably influenced by the general offensive orientation of the USSR's foreign policy.²

It would require an extreme believer in technological determinism to expect that similar developments in weaponry would dictate identical strategic concepts, and to be surprised that in addressing nuclear warfare, the Kremlin gerontocracy thinks and acts differently from successive White House administrations. In fact, Soviet writers sometimes complain about the American tendency to impose on the USSR rules of nuclear warfare that are convenient and comprehensible to the United States. The Soviets make clear that they are not going to give the United States the luxury of—as they put it—"orchestrating its own strategic combination," so that the USSR would be reduced to following a scenario designed by American strategic planners.³

There is a seeming contradiction between the vocal Soviet rejection of the possibility of a limited and controlled nuclear conflict on the one hand and the ever-growing capabilities to engage in one on the other. To understand the subtleties and ambiguities of the Soviet attitude toward deterring and fighting nuclear war, it is imperative to take into account the existence of different levels in Soviet national security thinking—philosophical/strategic, and operational/technical—as well as the intricacies of the Soviet decision-making process with its notorious compartmentalization.

Misleading Dichotomies

The discussion of Soviet strategic doctrine and security planning has been seriously imperilled during the last 10 to 15 years by a number of false
dichotomies. These have often prevented analysts not only from reaching the correct conclusions but also from asking the truly relevant questions. It is not that incisive research has been unavailable. But polemical and exaggerated notions rather than scholarship have primarily shaped the American debate about Soviet national security culture and machinery.

First, there is the supposed contrast between the U.S. commitment to Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) and the conflicting Soviet desire for a capability to fight and win a nuclear war. There is undoubtedly a great discrepancy between U.S. and Soviet thought, but deterrence and war-fighting ability per se are hardly incompatible in principle. If anything, the ability to fight a war has traditionally been considered one of the more reliable ways to deter aggression. The American approach developed in the 1960s—that it would be enough to deny an opponent victory even at the price of self-annihilation to achieve credible deterrence—is not the only way responsible leaders may want to protect their states. Moreover, the whole debate about the deterrence/war-fighting dichotomy tends to obscure a truly crucial question, namely, how strategic nuclear weapons complement the overall Soviet military design. Is it a principal task of the USSR's strategic nuclear forces to preserve the Soviet homeland or is it instead designed to paralyze U.S. opposition to the Kremlin's geopolitical advances?

Whether Moscow would be satisfied with parity (whatever it means) or whether it is determined to achieve superiority over the United States in strategic nuclear forces has become the subject of a second controversy among Western analysts. But surely U.S. and Soviet definitions of equality are bound to differ considerably. It is futile to try to determine legitimate defense requirements for another state. Because of different traditions and images of threat, Soviet decision-makers are bound to have a markedly different view than their U.S. counterparts of how much is enough. The fact that one power seeks superiority in strategic nuclear weapons does not necessarily tell very much about its overall foreign policy intentions. A country with superior strength on all lower levels of the military balance may seek strategic supremacy in order not just to buy over-insurance, but also possibly to acquire the status of an undisputed manager, if not arbiter, of the international process. On the other hand, a state which for a variety of reasons is incapable of matching its rival's conventional capabilities may perceive nuclear, including strategic nuclear, superiority as a last resort to avoid defeat or surrender. In addition, the United States and the Soviet Union pursue different foreign policies, enjoy different advantages in international com-
petition (geographical, resource availability, alliance systems, etc.) and also have different vulnerabilities. Static indicators of strategic power are insufficient to establish who can inflict greater damage on whom, particularly in a confrontation short of total war.

A third dichotomy supposes the existence of and conflict between “doves” and “hawks” in Soviet ruling circles. These categories, born of U.S. Vietnam era divisiveness, have been artificially projected onto the Soviet Union. It has never been adequately explained how Soviet domestic forces or external influences were supposed to produce fundamental disagreements among apparatchiks, technocrats, and military commanders whose formative experiences went back to Stalin’s era, when democratic centralism was clearly the name of the game in Soviet institutional politics. No serious effort has been made to explain how these supposed doves and hawks were able to oppose each other constantly without losing their positions and/or bringing about any sudden shifts in Soviet policy. Such effects would be expected if a constant, intensive struggle among the elite were taking place.

Even if there were doves and hawks in the Kremlin, what are the implications for U.S. policymakers? Those who believe in such a dichotomy among Soviet leaders somehow tend to assume that greater flexibility and generosity would favor the Soviet softliners. Conversely, those who argue that the Soviet leadership represents a generally like-minded group disagreeing primarily over questions of hierarchy suggest that Soviet rulers only understand force; concessions would be met with contempt and perceived as naive at best and weak at worst. The policy implications of both interpretations of Soviet politics are obscure. Assuming there are indeed hawks and doves in the Kremlin, is it not possible that excessive accommodation could strengthen the hawks who may push for greater assertiveness? If, on the other hand, the Kremlin leadership is monolithic, can it be discounted that manifestations of hostility could confirm the Soviets’ worst fears but not necessarily lead to any additional willingness to compromise?

A similar case can be made in connection with a fourth dichotomy between the single, rational actor (totalitarian) and pluralistic models of Soviet policy formulation. Despite many serious analyses of the Soviet decision-making process and domestic politics in general, the U.S. political debate seems to emphasize two extreme points of view. One emphasizes the pluralistic nature

4. For instance, this approach to relations with the USSR was eloquently advocated in Victor Zorza's column which used to appear in the Washington Post.
of Soviet policy formulation and expresses hopes that a greater interaction with the West would lead to further Soviet adaptation of Western political values and standards. A less benign view suggests that changes in the Soviet political modus operandi since Stalin’s death have been essentially cosmetic and that Soviet foreign and domestic policies have developed not through complex bureaucratic bargaining but as some sort of grand strategy dictated either by the Russian historical predicament or by communist ideology, or by some combination of the two. Few responsible students of Soviet affairs would identify with either of these two exaggerated positions, but it is precisely these ideas, rather than a more sober and multi-dimensional analysis, that have had a profound impact on the creation of American public images of the Soviet Union during the last decade.

The greatest fallacy in studying Soviet policy formation is founded in the assumption that a movement toward pluralism in the USSR should by definition lead to a more restrained Soviet foreign policy. Adherents of a totalitarian model, on the other hand, seem to believe that strong centralized authoritarian controls are likely to result in more belligerently anti-Western international activities. While these assumptions, rooted in the U.S. political tradition, are commendable for their faith in pluralism and democracy, they would hardly survive the scrutiny of history. There are numerous examples of strong authoritarian rulers who conducted policies of peace and caution (and conversely of democracies which launched crusades and even revolutionary wars). Khrushchev, for example, on a number of occasions overruled the military, proceeded with an impressive demobilization of the armed forces, and initiated a dialogue with the United States. In 1968, the Soviet Union, conversely, was governed by a collective leadership with a greater margin for defense of bureaucratic and functional interests than under Khrushchev. As some thoughtful studies indicate, it was precisely this vested interest of individual Soviet power complexes which contributed to the Kremlin’s decision to crush the Prague Spring. There is therefore no conclusive correlation between pluralism in policy formulation and a moderate foreign policy.

A fifth dichotomy is represented by serious disagreements between those who have made a case for domination of military considerations in the Soviet political process and those who feel there is a strong tension, if not outright

conflict, between the Soviet military and the civilian leadership. Assertions are often made that the latter somehow exercises a moderating influence on overassertive marshals and admirals. Again, there is a clear element of mirror-imaging which attributes the American tradition of civil/military division to Soviet society. In terms of policy implications, what is the evidence that Soviet party apparatchiks and technocrats are necessarily a voice of caution, while the uniformed military supports foreign adventures? Could not an equally plausible argument be made that the military, precisely because of its professionalism and responsibility for war-fighting, would be particularly careful not to get involved in international situations that they did not have the military capability to handle or that could lead to a major confrontation with possibly disastrous consequences? And in light of the necessity for the civilian leadership to legitimize its regime by advancing and protecting socialism abroad, it could also be argued that the civilian authorities, to an even greater extent than the military leadership, have every incentive to favor military action that serves that end.

In sum, the collapse of American consensus on foreign policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s has led to polarized and often mistaken debate about the nature of the Soviet Union and its national security planning. Sometimes it seemed that those academics who left their ivory towers to help Washington formulate its foreign and defense policies were losing their scholarly grasp of nuance in order to score points in political battles. However noble were the partisan causes for which they fought, our understanding of the genesis and direction of Soviet national security policy has suffered immensely.

Rejecting Nuclear War

According to contemporary declaratory Soviet policy, nuclear war is inherently unwinnable, would lead to the destruction of civilization, and consequently cannot serve any rational political ends. As retired Lieutenant General Mikhail A. Milstein, director of the Political-Military Department of the Institute of the United States and Canada Studies, states, “nuclear war will bring no advantage to anyone and may even lead to the end of civilization. And the end of civilization can hardly be called ‘victory.’” Such unqualified rejection of nuclear war as a continuation of policy developed only gradually

in the Soviet Union and not without an intensive domestic debate. Even today, traces of the old nuclear war-winning school of thought may be found in some Soviet military writings. Nevertheless, an assessment of Soviet literature strongly suggests that during the last 15 to 20 years, the Soviet leadership has gradually but steadily, albeit with zigzags, moved toward acceptance of mutual deterrence and a rejection of prior claims that the Soviet Union possesses superior forces capable of assuring victory in a nuclear war.\(^7\)

If Leonid Brezhnev is to be believed, the Soviet Union “is not seeking military superiority.” He claims that “Soviet strategic doctrine is strictly defensive in nature.”\(^8\) The Soviet leader says that Soviet foreign policy makes every effort to avoid nuclear war and would not consider a first strike against the United States.\(^9\) That is because, as Politburo candidate member and Central Committee Secretary in charge of the International Department, Boris N. Ponomarev explains, “Both quantitatively and qualitatively, the means of destruction of people have reached such a level that world war as a vehicle to achieve a political objective has become impossible.”\(^10\) Soviet civilian analysts go much further than that. Georgiy Arbatov, member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and director of the Institute of the USA and Canada Studies in Moscow, paraphrases Clausewitz by saying “with the emergence of nuclear missiles, ‘any correspondence between the political ends of war’ and the means was lost, since no policy can have the object of destroying the enemy at the cost of self-annihilation.”\(^11\) Professor A. Feoktistov, corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and a former astronaut, declares that, “Nuclear war in terms of its consequences would be terrible and senseless.” He rejects arguments of some Western strategists that counterforce strikes would not necessarily lead to unacceptable civilian casualties. The Soviet scientist reminds us that there are about 1000 major cities in the USSR and that the majority of urban population and almost all industry and other “material valuables” are concentrated in them. Thus, there is no way to avoid “huge, incomparable casualties in case of a surprise nuclear strike.”\(^12\) It is rather remarkable, to say the least, for a senior Soviet

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7. This view is articulated particularly strongly in the FBIS Analysis Report President Brezhnev and the Soviet Union’s Changing Security Policy. May 25, 1979, FB 79-10009.
scientist to argue in a mass circulation newspaper that his country is so vulnerable to enemy attack.

Another Soviet commentator declares that world war increasingly becomes an anachronism as a tool to reach political objectives. Referring again to Clausewitz, who is much respected by Soviet theoreticians, V. Kortunov states in the Communist Party's main journal Kommunist that at a certain point, "'war may go outside the margins of policy and begin to act according to its own laws, and as soon as that happens, war stops being a tool of rational policy and becomes an end in itself.' "13 In the same issue of Kommunist, Aleksandr Bovin, a serious and influential political commentator for Izvestia, is even more categorical. Citing Clausewitz, he speaks about "the change in the very nature of war, connected with the scientific technological revolution and the emergence of nuclear missile weaponry."14 Bovin goes on to say that general nuclear war cannot be considered a rational policy tool because an aggressor would be subjected to a devastating second strike. Consequently, "aggression would become suicide, a self-destruction of the aggressor."15 A young, but already noted Soviet analyst, Alexei G. Arbatov (son of the Institute director), points out in his recent book that the revolution in weaponry has transformed the very nature of security. In his view, "ways to improve the security of a state changed fundamentally under conditions wherein tremendous arsenals of the means of destruction capable of finishing our civilization are accumulated on earth."16

Not only civilian analysts but also Soviet military officers seem to admit that nuclear war could become an unqualified disaster, even if the latter use less dramatic language. As Major General Raer Simonyan says in Pravda, "Soviet people from their own experience know better than anyone else what war is and what tremendous casualties and devastation could be caused by the actions of an aggressor."17 And Soviet Minister of Defense Dmitriy Ustinov in an authoritative article recalls the 20 million dead the Soviet Union had to pay for victory in World War II. According to Ustinov, "A clear appreciation by the Soviet leadership of what a war under contemporary conditions would mean for mankind determines the active position of the USSR" (against nuclear war).18

These unequivocal statements are duly acknowledged by those who argue that the Soviet Union thinks it can fight and win a nuclear war. But they dismiss them as propaganda designed to delude the West into a false sense of security. It is suggested instead that the real Soviet doctrine is reflected in the missile-rattling evident in what might be called the war-winning school in Soviet nuclear theory.

The majority of Soviet writers who claim that nuclear war is winnable, however, are neither top statesmen nor leading military personalities. As a rule, they are professors of Marxist-Leninist philosophy or of communist party history and are associated with the Military-Political Academy or with political indoctrination departments of other military educational institutions. This group of "military commissars" plays an important role in what the Soviets call "moral political preparation" for a possible war. It would be rather illogical for indoctrination experts to accept easily that there is no hope whatsoever in case of a major nuclear exchange. As spokesmen for the military establishment in general, these commissars may perform a function of warning about the sinister plans of "imperialist forces" on the one hand, and on the other, improving the morale of the Soviet armed forces and population by telling them that even a nuclear war may be won by their country.

Military commissars may be earnest in their optimistic war-winning pro-nouncements, but their views for one reason or another are more and more overshadowed by a new orthodoxy closer to the Arbatovs and Milshteins.

Milshtein suggests in his New York Times interview that the book on military strategy edited by Marshal Vasily Sokolovskyi and other writings dating back to the 1960s and early 1970s which imply the possibility of victory in nuclear war are now obsolete; they cannot be viewed as reflecting current Soviet doctrine. General Milshtein, allowed by his superiors to grant an unusual interview to The New York Times, undoubtedly serves the purpose of reducing U.S. concern over Soviet nuclear theories and acquisitions. And yet, there is evidence that while he could have overstated his case, a modern nuclear war-winning orientation has indeed become less dominant in Soviet national security philosophy.

An interesting example of this shift may be the third edition (1979) of Major General Sergei K. Il’in’s book, The Moral Factor in Modern Wars. General Il’in is one of the more hardline Soviet strategic official writers, claiming that nuclear war would once and forever settle the issue of imperialism’s exis-
He declares that the outcome of a nuclear war would be first determined by the “strength of moral spirit of the people and the army” and also by “perfection of military organization” and “the level of military art.” On the basis of all these factors, and especially the moral spirit of the troops, according to him, supremacy will undoubtedly be on the side of the Soviet Army and of the other socialist countries. While these disturbing statements should not be taken lightly, a comparison between the second (1969) and third editions of General Il’in’s book offers a less alarmist perspective. On the very first page of the second edition, he talks about “strengthening Soviet Army and Navy readiness to wage a victorious war against any aggression.” This sentence is deleted from the third edition. Similarly, in the second edition, Il’in says that “the Soviet Union is doing everything to ensure military technological superiority of our armed forces over the imperialist armies.” In the third edition, the sentence reads: “The Soviet people do everything to ensure a high level of technological equipment for the Soviet armed forces in the spirit of current requirements.” An obvious effort is made to de-emphasize but not eliminate a war-fighting, superiority-oriented theme in the general’s monograph.

The differences between the second and third editions of Il’in’s book illustrate a trend in Soviet military writings against boasting about Soviet ability to win a nuclear war. This trend is evident at the highest levels. The late Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Andrei A. Grechko described the task of the Soviet military in the following way: “In this stage, the armed forces should be able in any situation to ensure failure of an aggressor’s surprise attack, relying for that on nuclear as well as conventional forces. Quick devastating strikes would destroy its main nuclear missile means and groups of forces would guarantee favorable conditions for further conduct and a victorious conclusion of the war.” Grechko’s successor, Marshal Dmitriy Ustinov, on the other hand, says simply that “retribution for attack against the Soviet Union and other countries of the socialist commonwealth will be inevitable.” The difference between the language of the two defense min-

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20. Ibid., p. 72.
22. Ibid., p. 122.
isters is meaningful. If Grechko still promised victory, Ustinov talks only about assured punishment of the enemy. The shift from war-fighting to a Soviet style of deterrence is self-evident.

Of course, declaratory policy does not necessarily reflect the real thinking of the Soviet (or for that matter, American) leadership. Significantly, a less belligerent tone in the Soviet discussion of war gradually developed in the 1970s, during the period of détente and SALT. The Soviets had sound reasons of public relations to restrain their militaristic rhetoric. As the Soviet Union increasingly enjoyed international recognition as a strategic equal to the United States, boasting about military capabilities could lead to fears of USSR superiority. The Kremlin wants its power to be respected and even feared. But once satisfied that its military capabilities are recognized, it has an interest in being careful not to provoke the West into rearmament.

Self-serving and even misleading as they are, statements about the impossibility of winning a nuclear war in any meaningful way cannot be dismissed. The Soviet media, after all, cannot entirely subordinate its pages to the requirements of domestic indoctrination and foreign policy misinformation. Soviet media comment is also an important channel of communication between the leadership and the second echelon of the elite, as well as to the Soviet people as a whole. To tell the Soviet population that contrary to the teachings of Marx and Lenin, its civilization may disappear rather than spread and flourish, has consequences for public morale. If the USSR indeed was seriously thinking about launching missiles to achieve an international "moment of truth," one would expect a greater effort to prepare its subjects psychologically for an ultimate test of the Soviet regime.

The Soviets' strong desire to avoid nuclear war, however, does not mean that they are entirely persuaded that it will not take place. During the heyday of détente in the mid-1970s, representatives of the Soviet leadership frequently suggested that the likelihood of nuclear war had been reduced. But as the deterioration of the U.S.-Soviet relationship began to accelerate in the

26. The exchange between those who argue that nuclear war would mean an end to civilization (Arbatov; Bovin) and their commissar-type critics (Admiral Shelyag; Colonel Rybkin) who insist that despite great sacrifices for both sides, only capitalism would be destroyed, took place in late 1973–early 1974. The first unequivocal statement by Brezhnev himself that "man dies only once. However, in recent years, a quantity of weapons has already been amassed sufficient to destroy everything living on earth several times" was made in July 1974, one month after his summit meeting in Moscow with Richard Nixon, which resulted in some SALT-related agreements. (Pravda, July 22, 1974).

27. XXV S'ed Kommunisticheskoy Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza, Moscow, 1976, volume 1, p. 43.
latter part of the decade, the expression of this sentiment became increasingly rare among Politburo members. Relative moderates from the ranks of foreign policy commentators as well as analysts like Bovin still say that the “probability of global nuclear missile conflict has been reduced.” But “reduced” is not excluded. As Politburo candidate member Ponomarev has declared, “We are convinced that there is no fatal inevitability of nuclear war. But this does not mean unfortunately that its occurrence is excluded.” And while the Soviets are not at all sure that they could fight and win a nuclear war, they are making every possible effort to prepare for it.

Decisions of peace and war are the prerogative of the top political leadership. It is on this level that one finds a delineation between nuclear and conventional, primarily local, wars. How to deter nuclear war is a separate issue and is handled in a different manner. It is less philosophical and more operational. Development of the Soviet deterrence policy involves both the foreign policy establishment and the military/industrial complex. Undoubtedly, there are particularly drastic differences between the writings of the academics of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, or of commentators such as Bovin on the one hand, and the military/political commissars on the other. Nevertheless, deterrence and war-fighting are two sides of the same coin. In a paradoxically integrated way, the Soviets pursue deterrence through détente and arms control but simultaneously through a unilateral military effort; they act on the assumption that only a credible war-fighting capability can assure adequate deterrence.

It would be a gross understatement to imply, however, that the Soviets developed their formidable war-fighting capabilities strictly to enhance deterrence. Once a judgment is made that there still exists a threat of nuclear war, the Soviet military is authorized to develop strategy and weapons to

fight it in the most efficient way possible. In the USSR, "strategic warfare is seen as less distinct from other forms of warfare." 32 Despite all their pronouncements that nuclear weapons can serve only purposes of deterrence, or failing that, of massive retaliation against an aggressor, the Soviets still have not articulated "in operationally meaningful terms a benign rationale for the military deployments they make and the new strategic arms they are acquiring." 33

The current posture of Soviet strategic forces reflects the decisions of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the war-winning school dominated Soviet military and even civilian writings. To impute current Soviet nuclear thinking on the basis of today's strategic posture may lead to alarming misjudgments if this time gap between decision and deployment is not considered. Among both superpowers, force posture is not always the most reliable guide to assessing attitudes of decision-makers to issues of war and peace. It is more important to make a clear distinction between the Soviet view of nuclear war avoidance and the conviction that as long as the possibility of nuclear war cannot be excluded, the Soviet Union should be well prepared for it. According to a highly authoritative Soviet military manual edited by Colonel General N. A. Lomov of the General Staff, use of nuclear weapons in a modern war would "threaten the lives of tens if not hundreds of millions of people." 34 As Lomov and his military colleagues see it, a limited nuclear war—a contingency they do not preclude—would result in disasters of unprecedented magnitude. This hardly looks like evidence of the war-winning mentality. But on the other hand, the manual provides clear suggestions regarding Soviet strategy in a nuclear war, and these are based on surprise, damage limitation, and strikes against nuclear forces and command centers of the enemy. 35 And even the usually "moderate" Trofimenko does not dispute the legitimacy of this dual approach. He points out that "the military in the United States and the Soviet Union must be ready for war-fighting," and consequently "if actual engagement of the main forces should occur, the

Soviet Union would undoubtedly act in accord with its own military doctrine, aimed at eliminating the opponent’s marginal benefits and defeating the aggressor.” Michael McCGwire explains this disjunction by stating that an assessment of both actual Soviet deployments as well as the literature supplies “unambiguous evidence that Soviet military planners take the possibility of nuclear war very seriously and plan to fight such a war should deterrence fail.” But he wisely cautions that “the evidence does not, however, support the thesis that there is an urge to war in the Kremlin.

Deterrence as Offensive

It seems that one important reason Moscow stresses the irrationality of strategic nuclear war is that it has grounds to be increasingly hopeful about its ability to change the international status quo with the use of conventional forces. Not illogically, the Kremlin may be interested in convincing the United States that a nuclear response is hardly a credible option in dealing with an increasingly assertive Soviet global diplomacy of force.

The Soviet concept of strategic deterrence does not at all imply less reliance on military force as an important foreign policy instrument. If anything, recent trends suggest the opposite conclusion. Unlike analyses of Soviet nuclear planning, there is much evidence surrounding Moscow’s use of military power at lower levels of confrontation. From arms shipments and military training for left-leaning nationalist movements in the 1960s, Soviet foreign policy proceeded to reliance on proxy forces in the 1970s, and the 1980s dawned with the first post-World War II direct Soviet use of ground troops outside of Moscow’s traditional sphere of dominance.

New Soviet capabilities of displaying military force—whether through arms transfers, by proxy troops, or directly—are a precondition for increased Soviet assertiveness in the third world. And Moscow’s perception that the balance of strategic forces has shifted considerably in its favor has probably influenced calculations of costs and benefits in areas of international turmoil. What could be viewed as an outright adventure 10 to 15 years ago now may be seen by the Kremlin leadership as an innovative and assertive, but still prudent step.

Steady progress in changing the military balance, coupled with successful meddling in troubled international situations, apparently contributed to greater self-confidence and boldness among the Soviet elite. While the view of the correlation of forces goes beyond a simple calculation of the military balance, the latter is perceived as an extremely important element of the equation. “America consistently lost its monopoly on nuclear weapons, then on the means of their delivery, then its ‘geographic invulnerability’ and finally, by the early 1970s, was forced to acknowledge a state of nuclear missile parity with the USSR,” states Vitaliy V. Zhurkin, deputy director of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies. According to Zhurkin and many other Soviet authors, it is superpower parity that persuaded U.S. “ruling circles” to take a more realistic approach to relations with the Soviet Union. From Leonid Brezhnev’s standpoint, the very shift to détente in the superpower dialogue was caused primarily by “a general change in correlation of forces in the world arena.” Still other Soviet sources elaborate further on the meaning of pro-Moscow shifts in the military balance.

The Soviets have been concerned that U.S. nuclear superiority could encourage Washington to be more forthcoming in opposing Soviet foreign policy exploits. Soviet analysts acknowledge a possibility of superpower conflicts in the third world, and they have indicated that the United States may have a tendency to approach future superpower confrontations in the fashion of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. It would not be unreasonable for Moscow to try to assure that whenever the United States and the Soviet Union are on a collision course, Washington would not think in terms of a repetition of the Cuban crisis’s decisive stand and would instead hesitate to challenge the Soviets too boldly.

The credit for the clearest explanation of the Soviet view on the military role of nuclear deterrence possibly belongs to Bovin. Writing in Kommunist, he states, “It is impossible to ban civil and national liberation wars. It is

40. “The Soviet Union and other socialist countries, through their growing military potential change the balance of military forces in the world arena in favor of the forces of peace and socialism. This has a sobering impact on extremist circles of imperialist states and creates favorable conditions for implementation by Soviet foreign policy of its objectives in the world arena on the basis of the principles of peaceful coexistence.” Voennaya Sila i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, Moscow, 1972, p. 222.
41. Yu. Listvinov, Obuchnoe Oружие v Yadernom Veke, Moscow, 1975, p. 27.
42. Ibid., p. 5.
impossible in general to ban revolution as a way of changing the political and social order.43 This, in turn, in Bovin’s view can lead to local wars, which he finds dangerous in their potential for going out of control and leading to a superpower confrontation. But the Soviet columnist is quick to emphasize that the responsibility for avoiding local wars is entirely on the West, and primarily on the United States. The Soviet Union is by virtue of its revolutionary Marxist-Leninist tradition entitled to support national liberation movements. It is up to the United States, then, to display common sense and moderation. In this context, “nuclear missile parity is a condition contributing to the policy of peace” because it allows a more hospitable environment for success of the Soviet global offensive, short of war with the United States and particularly short of nuclear disaster.44 In brief, it seems that one essential function of nuclear deterrence, Soviet-style, is to discourage the West, primarily the United States, from risking military opposition to Soviet advances in the third world.45

In the United States, the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction was developed in the charged political environment of the 1960s, when not only nuclear force but military power in general began to be viewed by a dominant segment of the national security establishment as increasingly ineffective and even distasteful. Only a doctrine that would preclude any use of military force short of unacceptable devastation could be politically palatable to Americans. The Soviets on the other hand did not have a period of prolonged suffering leading to a humiliating defeat that became the formative experience in their current national security thinking. Consequently, as genuinely concerned as they are with the implications of nuclear war, members of the Soviet ruling group approach nuclear deterrence not as a way to preclude use of military force, but on the contrary, as a means of allowing greater operational flexibility below the nuclear threshold. When Moscow talks about strategic stability, it does not mean stability on all levels of military competition; rather, it seeks stability that deters action only on the highest (holocaust) level of superpower confrontation to create more favorable conditions to exploit its conventional military advantages.

While U.S. strategic doctrine, as manifested in Presidential Directive 59, has moved in recent years from reliance on Mutual Assured Destruction to

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43. Kommunist, No. 10, July 1980, p. 79.
44. Kommunist, No. 10, July 1980, p. 78.
45. V. A. Kremenyuk, Politika SShA v Razvivayushchikhsya Stranakh, Moscow, 1977, p. 156.
selective targeting, the Soviets insist that nuclear war, once started, will be uncontrolled. "As far as arguments about the possibility of fighting a 'limited nuclear war against the USSR,' they cannot sustain any criticism and are designed for uninformed people. The very nature of nuclear weaponry as a means of mass destruction which can be delivered in a short time over huge distances predetermines a decisive and quick response, a full-scale response," declares Yuriy Zhukov, Pravda's best known political commentator. The Soviet position against limited nuclear war has a logic going beyond the fear that nuclear exchanges, unlike a game of chess, are hard to manage and would not necessarily allow both players to calculate rationally their gains and losses, assess the consequences of their next step, and either accept a stalemate or admit defeat in time.

Another concern the Soviets have (or at least articulate forcefully) is that the combination of retargeting, greater precision and yield of nuclear weapons required for limited nuclear options may provide the United States with first-strike capability. More important is the apparent Soviet belief that U.S. adoption of limited nuclear war options is connected with "long-term efforts to transform the nuclear force into an effective foreign policy instrument." Soviet leaders worry that the United States may be tempted "to play its nuclear 'muscles'" in some regional conflicts such as possible Persian Gulf contingencies, and especially in case of a war in Europe. Moscow by contrast is interested in de-coupling nuclear and conventional war. As Richard Burt observes, the threat of escalation will continue to provide both sides incentives for exercising restraint in local conflicts. But the degree of Soviet restraint will depend, in large part, on American possession of credible options for escalation." And it is precisely such options, especially nuclear options, the Soviets are determined to deny the United States.

46. Pravda, August 14, 1980.
47. Krasnaya Zvezda, August 8, 1980.
48. Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, No. 4, April 1979, p. 39. Also, as Tom Wolfe reports, at a U.S.-Soviet symposium on strategic issues, a Soviet participant stated that "while it was true that Soviet doctrine has called for counterforce strikes in the event of 'all-out nuclear war,' there was no Soviet doctrine for 'limited nuclear warfare' in that part of the spectrum between general nuclear warfare and small-scale conventional conflict. What the Schlesinger approach was aimed at, he charged, was to restore 'the political leverage' of strategic forces in this part of the spectrum and, thereby, to 'intimidate' and 'dictate' to the Soviet Union." (Thomas W. Wolfe, The SALT Experience: Its Impact on US and Soviet Strategic Policy and Decisionmaking, RAND, 1975, p. 153.)
There is no conventional threat to the Soviet Union which it could not handle with its non-nuclear weapons. The same is true of Eastern Europe. Vietnam and Cuba, as well as more remote Soviet allies such as Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen, are a different case in point. The United States in the Caribbean or China in Southeast Asia could probably overwhelm Soviet clients, and Moscow would be unable to respond locally in a conventional mode. And in Africa, combined Western projection of power capabilities are still superior to anything the Soviets can offer. The declaratory Soviet position has long been that nuclear weapons can be used in support of the Soviet Union and her Warsaw Pact allies; that does not include any of the nations above. Precisely because the Soviets do not appear to have confidence in control of nuclear conflict escalation, even Cuba and Vietnam hardly amount to justification for risking a holocaust.

Because of this articulated lack of faith in escalation control, Moscow probably does not feel that the perception of more flexible use of nuclear weapons is on balance in the Soviet interest. Soviet strategists are concerned that a belief in the feasibility of limited counterforce strategy would make U.S. policymakers more inclined to challenge Soviet advances in the third world. In short, the Soviet approach to deterrence is designed to serve Moscow's overall geopolitical objectives by becoming a nuclear umbrella over the determined Soviet drive to modify the international status quo by using, among other tools, enhanced conventional forces.

The Making of Soviet National Security Policy

The peculiarities of Soviet strategic thinking are in many ways connected with the nature of the Soviet national security formulation process. The institutional background of Soviet decision-making, as well as the bureaucratic procedures and informal arrangements which establish the rules of the game, guarantee a privileged position for military considerations and the military itself. This is not to suggest that marshals and generals control or even dominate the Soviet leadership in deliberations over national security policy. Nor does it imply that the Soviet top command is always unanimous on crucial foreign policy and defense matters. However, an impressive body of evidence indicates that as far as basic principles of national security are concerned, there exists an essential consensus among the Soviet leadership.

Furthermore, compartmentalization of the Soviet decision-making process puts the uniformed military, together with some elements from the defense industries and defense research establishments, in a position of almost total monopoly over crucial information about the USSR’s acquisition of weapons and actual deployments.

It is important to know how much leeway different Soviet institutions and interest groups have in arguing their cases, to what extent Soviet national security policy represents a rational collective judgment of the leadership, and to what degree it reflects compromises.

The fact is that several considerations inhibit the expression of pluralism in Soviet foreign policy formulation, irrespective of whether that would or would not result in lesser emphasis on accumulation of military power and foreign policy activism. A particularly prominent role is played by the consensus among Kremlin leaders about the fundamentals of the Soviet world outlook. This does not amount to an absolute likemindedness, but is rooted in a shared image of the basic challenge confronting the Soviet Union and of the main international objectives the USSR should pursue. A similar consensus in some respects was present in the U.S. policy of containment from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s.

In the United States, that consensus was finally destroyed by the war in Vietnam, and the emergence of new foreign policy elites both to the right and left of the traditional foreign policy establishment. Brezhnev and his associates, on the other hand, represent a remarkably homogeneous group of people with quite similar formative experiences and education. There is a shared preoccupation with security. The leadership also shares what Vladimir Petrov calls “fierce patriotism” and a view “that the Soviet Union leads the world-wide struggle against the fundamentally hostile West and that this hostility is predetermined by the conflict between two drastically different socio-economic systems.”

Naturally, there are constraints on the Soviet military effort. But this collective view of the Soviet elite ensures that defense requirements are perceived not as an unfortunate societal burden but rather as a crucial and in many ways beneficial (if expensive) function of the Soviet regime’s leadership role in the socialist movement.

53. In his discussion with American officials, Leonid Brezhnev himself has frequently engaged in reminiscences of his World War II experiences. He left the impression that he was very proud.
virtually ensures that the Soviet view of deterrence will include offensive overtones and would rely more on unilateral military efforts than on any abstract calculations or assumptions shared with a potential enemy about the rules of the game in international conflict.

Another important influence is that the military is well positioned in the Soviet decision-making process to block civilian contributions to operational doctrines. The military’s relationship with the Party apparatus is more and more of a two-way street, with a division of labor rather than a clear-cut preponderance of the Party, as represented by the Central Committee Secretariat.

Officially, the supreme Party organ is the Politburo, but this ultimate policymaking body—a sort of de facto executive-legislative committee of the whole Soviet bureaucratic structure—is in fact composed of leading representatives of all major power groups and not just the Party apparatus. On the Party side, the principal authority just below the Politburo level is in the hands of the Central Committee Secretariat. Significantly, there is no Central Committee unit which would deal with matters of military operations, deployments, and infrastructure. The Main Political Administration of the Armed Forces—simultaneously part of the Ministry of Defense and the Central Committee—and the Central Committee’s Administrative Organs and Defense Industry Departments have responsibilities for political indoctrination, clearing promotions, and procurement for the military. But none of them separately and not even all of them together are qualified to give guidance on matters of a purely military nature, for which the marshals are responsible only to the Politburo itself. To a lesser degree, the same situation occurs in relations between the Central Committee and the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the KGB.

In the seventies, Brezhnev’s personal Secretariat—a small group of top aides to the General Secretary—gradually emerged as substitute substantive staff for the Politburo. But while some of these assistants are senior foreign policy experts, none of them is a specialist on defense issues or on internal security. There is one Major General on Brezhnev’s personal staff, an aide de camp without known substantive responsibilities.

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of his association with the military during the war and later when he served with the Main Political Administration of the Armed Forces in the early 1950s, and when he acted as Central Committee Secretariat supervisor of defense industries in the late 1950s.

54. The Central Committee’s General Department handles technical and administrative arrangements. For more about the General Department, see Leonard Shapiro, “The General Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU,” Survey, Summer 1975, pp. 53-65.
Similarly, the Council of Ministers' Presidium coordinates defense industries and is responsible for allocating resources for weapon acquisition. But it is not involved in military-operational matters. While the Ministry of Defense is officially subordinate to the Presidium, abundant circumstantial evidence suggests that in fact it reports directly to the Politburo. It appears that "although civilian decisions are ultimately shaped by values and perceptions over which the army has no control, civilians do not have the substantial nonmilitary sources of military information found in American politics." And indeed "there are no Soviet equivalents for the Central Intelligence Agency, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, or private consulting firms such as the Rand Corporation."  

The absence of an alternative assessment of Soviet defense requirements and capabilities is an important consideration in evaluating the role of the USSR's Defense Council, chaired by Brezhnev. On paper, members of the Defense Council are appointed by the Supreme Soviet Presidium, where Brezhnev also now serves as chairman. In fact, the membership itself of the Defense Council is likely to be determined by the Politburo. In the absence of reliable evidence, it is usually assumed that in addition to Brezhnev, Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin (or rather, his successor Nikolai Tikhonov), Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Central Committee Secretaries Andrei Kirilenko, and Mikhail Suslov may be members. American officials who negotiated the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with Brezhnev report that on several occasions the Soviet leader mentioned that he had to consult the Defense Council. There are also indications that the Defense Council, like its war-time predecessor, the Main Defense Council (GKO), is responsible for integrating the military effort into Soviet economic development, together with such agencies as the Central Committee's Department of Defense Industry, the Council of Ministers' Military-Industrial Commission, the Committee of Science and Technology, and the State Planning Committee. It is reasonably well established, however, that the Defense Council does

55. The same is true with respect to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KGB, which are also directed by full Politburo members well-placed to circumvent the Council of Ministers.
not have its own substantive staff. Accordingly, it is not a Soviet counterpart of the U.S. National Security Council, but more likely a kind of top-level interagency panel for policy planning and coordination.\(^5\) Like everyone else, it has no alternative to relying on information supplied by the military.

The same is apparently true with respect to Brezhnev personally in his role as Commander in Chief. During World War II, the Soviet High Command, Stavka as it was called at the time, had to rely on the General Staff for determining Soviet force structure, developing operational plans, and monitoring their implementation.\(^6\) It seems that under the Brezhnev-dominated leadership, with its emphasis on consensus and institutionalization of the policymaking process, the uniformed military is placed better than ever to exploit its traditional prerogatives in formulating national security decisions.

Several Soviet think tanks on foreign affairs, such as the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, the Institute of the USA and Canada Studies, the Institute of Oriental Studies, the Institute of the International Labor Movement, and several lesser establishments focusing on specific regions supply the Central Committee and to a lesser extent, the Defense and Foreign Ministries and the KGB with information and analyses. But the need-to-know principle, coupled with excessive compartmentalization and secretiveness, does not allow these Soviet academics access to information about their own country’s military capabilities. Soviet foreign affairs institutes may help the leadership to understand the international environment, and such an understanding certainly influences deliberations regarding the Soviets’ own military programs. Still, despite the wide publicity enjoyed by top Soviet officials from these institutes visiting the United States, their ability to seriously affect Soviet defense debates is highly questionable.

More influence is probably concentrated in the hands of Soviet scientists associated with defense-oriented research laboratories and research and development bureaus. Coordinated by the State Committee on Science and Technology and to a lesser extent, by the Academy of Sciences, the Soviet scientific community by necessity cannot be denied information about Soviet

\(^{5}\) Thomas Wolfe, *The SALT Experience: Its Impact on US and Soviet Strategic Policy and Decision-making*, Santa Monica, CA: Rand, Sept. 1975, R-1686-PR, pp. 58, 160. Wolfe’s information is supported by this author’s interviews with visiting Soviet scholars of foreign affairs, who unanimously indicated a rather restricted role for the Defense Council. They argue that it was not sufficiently institutionalized and lacked staff expertise to be an effective decision-making body outside the military procurement area.

military technology. But as is the case of foreign affairs, compartmentalization prevents natural scientists from getting involved in policy debates beyond their immediate, narrowly defined areas of responsibility.

Control over information is no less an advantage in influencing policy in Moscow than in Washington. The Soviet military remains virtually unchallenged in advising the top leadership on issues of force structure and actual combat, under the conditions of Brezhnev’s controlled pluralism and within the margins of the national security consensus. While evidently concluding that nuclear war is difficult to control and next to impossible to win, civilian members of the Politburo do not have much choice but to allow the military a great deal of autonomy in determining Soviet operational concepts within the limits of available resources and technology.

Unless one hopes for a fundamental restructuring of the Soviet political process, what may be required to restrict prerogatives of the Soviet military and its defense industry allies is not greater pluralism but the emergence of a strong decisive leader. However, this is unlikely during the early stages of the Soviet succession. Only after a new leader managed to consolidate power could he think about challenging the military-industrial complex. The current deterioration of the U.S.-Soviet relationship and acceleration of Western defense program will create a rather inhospitable environment for any ambitious Soviet statesman to experiment with constraining military momentum or even to question the recommendations of marshals and admirals on matters over which they are accustomed to having a dominant influence.

“The Army should be cherished,” Stalin commented not long before the German invasion. He explained that it was partly a lack of attention to and appreciation of the armed forces that contributed to the easy collapse of France. In spite of Stalin’s purges, memoirs of many retired marshals and generals reflect satisfaction with the unquestionable priority Stalin gave to defense concerns, creating a true national security state.

After the rough days the military (and many of the bureaucracies) suffered during the Khrushchev interlude, Brezhnev’s regime has restored the military’s sense of satisfaction. He and his Politburo associates appear to share,

61. For instance, academician Aleksandr N. Shuchukin, specialist in radio electronics, became Paul Nitze’s counterpart on the Soviet SALT team. American delegates were uniformly impressed with his performance, and more specifically, his knowledge of the Soviet data. See more about him in John Newhouse, Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).
63. G. K. Zhukov, op. cit., p. 236.
as Jack Snyder points out, "many of the military's values and policy preferences." Détsente and arms control, as practiced by the General Secretary and his colleagues, have not reduced the emphasis on unilateral military effort as the principal way to assure Soviet security and promote geopolitical ambitions. And the orderly, highly institutionalized and compartmentalized policymaking process that has prevailed during the Brezhnev years has benefited the military in bureaucratic bargaining.

Conclusion

The privileged position of the military is not set in concrete. Brezhnev's successors will inherit not only tremendous military power but also an accumulation of problems demanding urgent solutions. A combination of economic slowdown, energy shortages, and consumer pressures, coupled with fears of a growing technological gap with the West, may persuade a future leadership to constrain military appetites. Faced with the dilemma of investing in economic modernization or in further military acquisitions, the Kremlin may (depending on the international situation) opt for the former. But for this to happen, the leadership that succeeds Brezhnev will have to resist a temptation to enhance domestic legitimacy through a global diplomacy of force. The disillusionment with détente apparently shared by the majority of the Soviet elite will make it harder for contenders for power to invest too much prestige in cooperation rather than rivalry with the West. Moreover, the tradition, mythology, and inertia of the national security state could represent another obstacle. In short, any attempt to eliminate the war-fighting aspects of the Soviet strategic traditions would encounter considerable bureaucratic and cultural odds and may dearly cost those Soviet statesmen who would dare to challenge it (especially during an initial stage of succession).

The dual nature of the Soviet view of deterrence, emphasizing both offense and war-avoidance, is thus not a result of Moscow's lack of sophistication or of its bureaucratic inertia and confusion. Rather, Soviet coercive deterrence, as contradictory as it may appear to Westerners, represents a logical outcome of Soviet conceptions of national security and war on the one hand, and of domestic political organization on the other. As far as the Soviets themselves are concerned, it is entirely consistent in their terms. More importantly, it works.

64. Jack Snyder, op. cit., p. 33.