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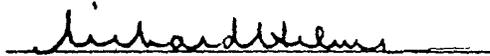
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The Soviet Approach to Arms Control

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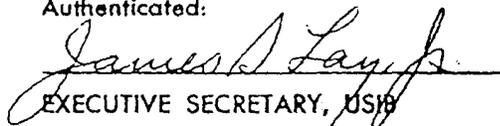
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THE SOVIET APPROACH TO ARMS CONTROL¹

NOTE

This paper is addressed primarily to the subject of the Soviet attitude toward negotiation of limitations on strategic weapons systems. It also evaluates briefly the significance of the Soviet nine-point memorandum on disarmament issued on 1 July 1968.

THE ESTIMATE

I. BACKGROUND

1. Traditionally, the Soviets have appeared to view arms control and disarmament primarily as a field of political warfare. While such considerations have continued to color much of the Soviet attitude during the past few years, the USSR did enter into agreements on nuclear testing in 1963, on weapons in outer space in 1967, and this year on nuclear nonproliferation. There were advantages to Soviet foreign policy in doing so, and in addition, the progress which was being made in their strategic programs gave the Soviet leaders confidence that their relative position would not be disadvantaged by these limited agreements. The willingness of the Soviets to entertain more far-reaching agreements with the West will obviously depend on a very complex interplay of military, political, and economic considerations.

2. The Soviet nine-point disarmament memorandum publicly issued on 1 July 1968 was primarily a propaganda document. With various points addressed to different potential forums, the memorandum was evidently not intended as a package proposal. Probably it was aimed mainly at claiming the initiative for the USSR and obscuring the fact that it was the US which, for more than 18 months, had pressed for a new effort to negotiate limitations on strategic weapons. Most of the proposals contained in the memorandum are old standbys which have been used in a propaganda context for many years (e.g., calls for banning the use of nuclear, chemical, and bacteriological weapons, for abolishing foreign

¹Some of the considerations which bear on this subject are discussed in greater detail in NIE 11-4-68, "Main Issues in Soviet Military Policy," dated 19 September 1968, SECRET.

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military bases, and for prohibiting nuclear armed bomber flights outside national frontiers). But a few of them concern matters on which Moscow has expressed interest in other ways, and on which it may see advantage in serious negotiation. Such proposals concern limitation of strategic weapons systems, peaceful uses of the seabed, banning underground nuclear testing, and some measures for regional arms control. None of these is fundamentally new either; all are items that have been periodically promoted by the USSR at the UN and elsewhere. Clearly, the first of these is the most basic in its implications for the relationship between the two powers and the only one now contemplated for bilateral negotiations.

3. The Soviets had, of course, agreed to have talks with the US on strategic arms limitations several days prior to the issuance of the nine-point memorandum, which was released in connection with a Kosygin speech made at the Moscow signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The moment chosen for the USSR's belated acceptance of the US proposal suggests that the motives which underlay the decision must have been complex. The response came during a period when there seemed to be no noticeable relaxation in Soviet propaganda attacks against the West; it coincided with the buildup of heavy military and political pressures against Czechoslovakia; and it was announced only months before a change of administrations in Washington. Moreover, the Soviets had long maintained that major steps toward improving relations with the US were impossible during the Vietnam War. While on the face of things the moment chosen may seem improbable, some of these circumstances may actually have given the Soviets incentives to move when they did.

4. Both political and military factors probably figured in the long delay of the Soviet response. For one thing, the Soviets have customarily responded to US arms control initiatives with a great measure of caution and suspicion. On so complex and sensitive an issue as strategic arms limitations, the misgivings—probably, in fact, the resistance—of certain elements both within and outside the Soviet political leadership must have been considerable. The period of delay permitted a further narrowing of the gap between Soviet and American strategic forces; the Soviets are now approaching the US in numbers of operational inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers and are also building a submarine force similar to the Polaris. They must now have strengthened confidence in their possession of an assured destruction capability, and considering qualitative differences in weapon systems such as warhead yield, the target system to be attacked, and damage-limiting capabilities, they may actually consider that they have now achieved rough strategic parity with the U.S. Thus, they must believe that their bargaining position in negotiations has become stronger.

5. The Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia has complicated the political environment bearing on arms control. It indicated that Moscow's determination to preserve a secure position in Eastern Europe outweighed other considerations, including its interest in early negotiation on strategic arms control. It is still too soon to evaluate the full implications of the Czech crisis for Soviet policy, and specifically for Soviet attitudes toward arms control. The move toward new disarmament negotiations was probably calculated to help offset the op-

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probrium the USSR suffered from the Czech intervention. How Moscow's attitude toward strategic arms talks now develops will also depend on the impact of recent events on attitudes and policies in Washington. The Soviets have maintained that the Czech crisis is no one's business except their own and Eastern Europe's and a matter quite apart from questions of mutual interest to both East and West. It was in this spirit, at least, that Gromyko recently reaffirmed Soviet desires to begin talks with the US.

II. CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING THE SOVIET APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS

The Strategic Relationship

6. Having significantly improved their relative position in strategic forces in recent years, the Soviets probably believe that a considerable sustained effort will be necessary to maintain the position they have now achieved; the Soviets must recognize that the competition in this field will not stand still. They probably fear that projected US programs will once again increase the US relative advantage considerably, unless the Soviets themselves undertake strenuous new efforts. The choices posed for the Soviet leaders at present are: (a) to attempt to keep pace by making the indicated effort; (b) to permit the US to move out far ahead once more; or (c) to attempt by agreement to stabilize the strategic relationship at a point less unfavorable to the USSR than it ever has been.

7. It seems likely that, after the effort they have made and the resources they have expended, the Soviet leaders would find it intolerable to see their improved position degraded. No doubt there would be some who would argue that the forces the Soviets will have under current programs would give them an assured destruction capability for many years to come, regardless of what the US did. But it is unlikely that the pressures of military leaders and the play of Kremlin politics would permit resigned acceptance of a widening gap. The argument for staying in the race, for political as well as security reasons, would probably prevail in the end.

8. Faced, however, with the oncoming US programs—Poseidon and Minuteman III (with multiple independently-targeted reentry vehicles), and Sentinel—the Soviets must recognize that, if they want to stay in the race, they have their work cut out for them. Not only would there be enormous economic costs, but the Soviets would inevitably have some doubts of their ability to match the US over the whole range of technological development for more advanced systems. Moreover, further large allocations of resources to strategic forces would tighten the squeeze on other military programs. This would be particularly troubling to those military leaders who feel that the general purpose forces are now in pressing need of refurbishing and perhaps enlargement.

9. The outlook for the competition between the US and the USSR in the field of ballistic missile defense probably offers the Soviets grounds for concern. They have a system of limited effectiveness deployed at Moscow, but they

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evidently realize that more development work is needed before extensive deployment would be worthwhile.² They recognize that the US program in this field is still at an early stage and will not affect the balance of strategic power for some years, but they know that development work is going forward in the US and that deployment is planned. While the Soviets, on the basis of the extensive work they have already done, are probably confident that they can sustain the competition in this field, they may also come to believe that the net result would be a vast expenditure of economic resources without any effective return in increased security.

10. Thus, there are incentives for the Soviets to consider more seriously now the option of negotiations to limit strategic forces. They could calculate that an agreement to stabilize the strategic relationship, or at least to slow down the competition, if achieved in the next year or two, would be the best means of preserving the improved relative position the USSR has been acquiring. They might further think that, even if no agreement was finally reached, the process of negotiation itself, because of the expectations it would arouse in the US and elsewhere, would act to slow the pace of the competition for a time.

Economic Factors

11. Economic considerations doubtless contributed also to the USSR's decision to discuss strategic arms control. To the extent that the Soviets had been motivated by the desire to limit over-all military costs and free resources for other purposes, they would presumably continue to want to avoid provoking a new surge in arms competition. Soviet spokesmen have, over the past year, repeatedly pointed to the high level of defense expenditures in the US. Though some of these statements were probably intended as arguments for, or justification of, increases in Soviet defense outlays, others almost certainly reflected the Soviets' concern over similar rising costs in the USSR.

12. Over the past several years, the Soviets have been following a policy of expanding strategic programs and increasing investment in the consumer goods and services sectors of the economy while allowing rates of growth of investment in heavy industry to decline. This policy limits the output of producers goods and will ultimately retard the over-all rate of economic growth. Thus, the Soviet leaders probably must divert resources to the producers goods sector of the economy in the near future or risk seriously impairing future capacity for satisfying military as well as civilian objectives. The important question is which claimant is going to yield—the consumer or the military—and when? In the past, the Soviet decision would have been quite predictable: the consumer has traditionally borne the brunt of any resource bind. The Soviet leaders probably recognize that the political cost of this course is greater in their society now than it used to be. Therefore, as certain strategic programs approach planned levels, some

² For a full discussion of the status and prospects of the Soviet antiballistic missile program, see NIE 11-3-68, "Soviet Strategic Air and Missile Defenses," dated 31 October 1968, TOP SECRET, RESTRICTED DATA.

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Soviet leaders might prefer to avoid heavy new expenditures for follow-on military programs. An arms control agreement could reduce the pressures for such programs.

13. It is conceivable that the new military requirements generated by the Czech crisis may aggravate the resource allocations problem and thus *add* to Soviet incentives to seek strategic arms limitations. The Soviets may consider that their occupation of Czechoslovakia and new uncertainties about the contributions of their allies will require further strengthening of Soviet forces in the European forward area and the reinforcement of their general purpose forces in the western USSR. These requirements, in addition to the ongoing buildup of military forces along the Chinese border, will probably lead to substantial increases in Soviet theater forces in general. The cost of meeting these demands will add to the current record high level of defense spending that already appears to be generating potentially serious economic problems. The Soviets may thus at this time be interested in strategic arms control as a way of conserving some economic resources for other military programs and also as a way of relieving strains in the economy generally.

III. FACTORS AFFECTING THE COURSE OF NEGOTIATIONS

14. Soviet willingness to enter into arms control talks with the US does not, of course, signify a firm commitment to strive for an agreement. In the early phases, the Soviets would probably concentrate on probing the US position. Should they decide to get down to serious business, the negotiations would inevitably be hard and prolonged.

15. The political climate at the time of talks, and developments on the international scene which might affect it for better or worse, would have a considerable bearing on success or failure. There will be the usual suspicion and mistrust on the Soviet side, and the problem of breaking through resisting layers of bureaucracy to get decisions will be particularly formidable in view of the complexity of the issues. It is likely also that there will be divisions among the top leaders, and that politicking for future place and power will figure in the positions they adopt. Thus, the obstacles to actual achievement of an agreement will be great, especially in the absence of some simultaneous advance toward resolution of the more basic East-West issues and the improved political climate so generated.

16. The Soviets will approach negotiations with one basic criterion in mind: they will want their right to equality in strategic forces acknowledged in principle. In fact, one motive they had for accepting the US invitation to negotiate was probably the belief that the US move tacitly conceded this right, or at least could be so construed by them. Acknowledgment of the claim to equality would be valued not merely on security grounds, but also because of the implication it would carry that the USSR was entitled to a political role in world affairs equivalent to that of the US. Thus, the Soviets would be sensitive to any attempt from the US side to "negotiate from strength" or to claim a permanent advantage in strategic forces.

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17. What in fact constitutes equality—in view of the different composition of strategic forces on the two sides and their different geopolitical situations—would be recognized by the Soviets as a proper subject of negotiation. They would surely bargain hard and take every advantage, but would probably be willing in working out the problems of equivalence to consider trade-offs between different weapons systems of the two sides. Their view of the nature of power would lead them to weigh other ingredients than numbers of strategic weapons alone—other kinds of forces, political strengths and influence—in measuring the relative power of the two sides. Once involved in the negotiations, therefore, they would probably not be disposed to break off merely because of difficulties encountered, and they would also recognize the political costs of doing so.

18. The problem of verification which has dogged all previous disarmament negotiations will persist. The Soviets will probably continue to resist verification procedures which require the presence of foreign inspectors in the USSR. Traditionally, the Soviets have regarded such inspection arrangements as militarily disadvantageous and politically harmful. If anything, their fear of ideological contagion is currently heightened. Thus, Moscow is still unlikely to accept an arms control agreement which cannot be verified primarily through national means.

19. In sum, we believe that Moscow's incentives to try for strategic arms limitations and for stabilizing the USSR's strategic relationship with the US are stronger now than they have been. Nevertheless, the forces and institutions in the USSR with a vested interest in stalling and even blocking movement toward arms control continue to be strong, and will weigh heavily against the prospects for achieving an agreement. Moreover, the absence of a political climate of mutual trust between the US and USSR could strengthen the case of those forces in the USSR opposed to serious negotiation and, in general, hamper efforts to achieve agreement.

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