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Current Support Brief

URBAN EVACUATION IN SOVIET CIVIL DEFENSE

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URBAN EVACUATION IN SOVIET CIVIL DEFENSE

The USSR has been developing urban evacuation as a civil defense concept since about 1954, and there are indications that evacuation plans for part of the Soviet urban population were developed secretly by civil defense staffs as early as 1955. By 1956, civil defense publications noted that some civil defense operational units should be stationed outside cities in any emergency to insure a postattack capability. Probably spurred on by the increasing size of nuclear weapons and by strategic thinking that sees rocket-nuclear war as the principal danger to the USSR, 1/ civil defense officials have given steadily increasing emphasis to evacuation in Soviet civil defense instructions published since 1958. This emphasis has been accompanied by the publication of estimates of the weapons effects possible with large nuclear weapons. The decision to plan for strategic evacuation was probably given additional momentum by a high-level decision (made about 1958) not to construct substantial, deep-level shelter for the entire urban population. (See 2/ By 1960, civil defense publications and courses contained implementing instructions on evacuation for certain portions of the urban population. A 1962 manual adds that even those workers who must remain in cities during a period of threatening attack will leave the city when not at work in order to rest and to reduce casualties. Continued preparation for urban evacuation appears to reflect a Soviet belief that there is a good chance of receiving sufficient strategic warning to allow for implementation of evacuation plans.

1. Dissemination of Information on the Effects of Nuclear Weapons

The problem of the civil defense planner has been significantly complicated by the growing size of nuclear weapons and new delivery systems. Initially reticent about furnishing the public with information on the effects of nuclear weapons, 3/ Soviet officials have gradually increased the

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availability of such information, and a recent civil defense manual gives data on fall out, blast, and thermal effects for a multimegaton weapon. 4/ Soviet planners do not doubt that Soviet cities will be bombed in a major war and have stated as a part of military doctrine that "targets will . . . include industrial and vital centers . . . and communications centers . . ." 5/ It has been admitted that casualties will be high. For example, a speaker at the Supreme Soviet in 1958 stated, "An explosion of a large hydrogen bomb will cause the death of several million people in a large city . . ." 6/ The 1962 text book, Grazhdanskaya oborona (Civil Defense), gives the area of total destruction from a 10-megaton weapon as "128 square kilometers (49 square miles), while the total area of destruction may be about 2,000 square kilometers (772 square miles), or the area of a large city." 7/ Large fires are expected to occur at radii varying from 5.5 to 16 kilometers (3.4 to 9.9 miles). 8/ Initial radiation and fallout further complicate the picture. (Soviet officials admittedly use published US data on weapons effects in their civil defense publications.) In April 1962, following the 1961 weapons test series, an article in Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn' (International Life) described the effects of a 50-megaton bomb as follows: a radius of total destruction of 40 kilometers (25 miles), heavy damage to 80 kilometers (50 miles), and 12 million people destroyed. 9/ (The radii of damage appear excessive in this case unless thermal as well as blast effects are included.)

2. Treatment of Evacuation, 1954-58

Although civil defense publications did not mention urban evacuation until 1958, there were a few reports and articles in military and other government journals that indicated earlier consideration of effects of nuclear weapons and planning for dispersal or evacuation. A theoretical article by Major General G. Pokrovskiy appeared as early as November 1954 in the Soviet journal Vestnik vozdushnogo flota (Air Fleet Herald). The writer noted that shelters located near the "impact point" would be destroyed by the surface or underground explosion of an atomic weapon. Accordingly, he pointed out that additional defense of the population could be accomplished by dispersing it to proper shelters at a distance

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greater than twice the radius of the area of probable destruction. 10/ Although no similar information was found in civil defense publications, an awareness of the problem -- heavy destruction in urban areas -- had been expressed by a leading Soviet writer on nuclear weapons.

That plans for urban evacuation may have been drawn up as early as 1955 was indicated by a report that a reorganization of civil defense that year was accompanied or followed by the preparation of a "passive defense plan for L'vov." The plan contained provisions to evacuate 83 percent of the population of the city. 11/ A second report (with information of mid-1957) stated that "according to plan" approximately 75 percent of the inhabitants of L'vov must be evacuated in case of emergency. 12/ Other covert reporting of about the same time mentioned evacuation planning in Riga 13/ and at Baku. 14/

If plans for urban evacuation were being made, they were kept from the public. There was less reticence, however, concerning the dispersal and evacuation of civil defense operative units. By 1956, Soviet civil defense publications had made references to the evacuation and dispersal of some operational civil defense forces, particularly fire fighting and engineering groups. 15/ On 18 April 1956 the newspaper Krasnaya zvezda (Red Star) stated that "atomic weapons may be used to strike the center of a city or very important individual objectives. Therefore, to combat fire effectively, fire fighting teams are located on the outskirts of populated areas and on the main highways. This safeguards the flexibility and vitality of the city's fire fighting system. Fire fighting equipment must be placed in special shelters fortified with earth on the side toward the populated area and all personnel of the fire fighting team must be provided with shelter." 16/ In 1957 and 1958, civil defense manuals referred to mobile medical units, to the "deployment" of some, and to the formation of medical clearing and evacuation bases in suburban and rural areas. 17/

By 1958 there were indications that the military also were concerned about the security or survival of troops in a city under attack. A reported air defense drill in 1957 found troops dispersing to areas outside

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Komsomol'sk, and reported practice evacuations for military personnel from Sevastopol'. 18/ A source stated that reservists had an alternate assembly point entered on their military booklet in the fall of 1958. If they could not reach the Military Administration (Voyenkomat) in Tallinn, they were to report to another location outside the city. 19/

Neither Soviet nor Satellite civil defense publications indicated that any evacuation was planned for the urban public until 1958. Rather, city dwellers were required to remain in place in an emergency, to use formally designated shelters to the extent available, or to build covered earth shelters under civil defense direction.

3. Introduction of Evacuation into Civil Defense Publications in 1958

In 1958 a magazine article, appearing in Voyenniye znaniya, contained a simple statement applicable to rural civil defense preparations in a declared threatening situation: "Measures are introduced to . . . receive, quarter, and enroll in work evacuees from the cities." 20/ A training manual, in discussing the mission of the civil defense Transportation Service, stated that the early evacuation of people from large cities would significantly curtail the number of casualties. The Service was said to provide transportation for the evacuation of schools and nurseries and of nonworking urban residents. 21/ A second manual added that the Service for Maintaining Public Order and Safety would cooperate with the Transportation Service in safeguarding "the evacuation of elements of the population unfit for work." 22/

4. Expanded Instructions and Plans, 1960-62

By 1960, civil defense publications had expanded and clarified evacuation procedures. For example, a passage from a magazine article on nuclear weapons stated flatly that "dispersal of the population is one of the fundamental measures in air defense Evacuation is considered one of the basic measures which may be taken to protect the population."

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The writer discussed two types of evacuation, tactical (movement for a short distance, to be accomplished in a period of 1 to 3 hours) and permanent evacuation intended to "relieve" large administrative and industrial centers. The first possibility was apparently dismissed because it required more highways, railroads, and other transport facilities than were available. The second was expanded, noting that it would provide for the evacuation of personnel unable to work, some enterprises, institutions, and other organizations to rural areas or small cities for the duration of any period of danger. The over-all control of urban evacuation was assigned to permanent evacuation commissions. Several paragraphs on procedures for evacuees specified that (1) evacuation was to be initiated on public announcement; (2) personnel to be evacuated should carry bedding, clothes, and a supply of food and water adequate for "several days"; (3) they should report promptly to assembly points from which they would be moved to "evacuee way stations" and thence to points of permanent relocation; and (4) various civil defense services (including public order, medical, and transport) would supervise and assist the movement. 23/ Similar information appeared in a 1960 civil defense manual containing lesson outlines for the public instructors. This manual noted, however, that a large part of the population would remain in cities and populated points. 24/

A military officer, who attended a CBR (Chemical, Bacteriological, Radiological) school in Moscow in 1960 stated that he had "studied" the civil defense plan for Moscow, which specified that shelters were constructed or subways adapted to accommodate 25 percent of the population of the capital and that similar measures were planned for other large cities. The planners believed that they would have adequate warning and planned to evacuate the remainder of the urban population. 25/

Civil defense publications of 1962 added some new factors to the concept of dispersal and reaffirmed the evacuation policy. First, it was stated that civil defense forces must be dispersed at adequate distances from large cities and industrial objectives. 26/ Second, speed of public

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evacuation was newly emphasized. For example, a basic Soviet instruction pamphlet (printed in 750,000 copies) stated that the instructions of civil defense authorities must be followed to insure "rapid" and orderly evacuation of cities. 27/ A new manual stated that "due to the suddenness with which an air attack may come, the evacuation measures must be efficiently executed in the shortest time possible" Evacuees are to be moved to the suburbs by all available transportation; next, to more permanent locations, where they are registered; and at last, sent to "final destinations" for resettlement. 28/ Thus, while the eventual aim apparently remains resettlement in small towns and rural areas (and evacuees still are advised to carry 2 to 3 days' food supply), 29/ a rapid first evacuation step has been introduced. The need for advance evacuation planning is stressed in the manual, which adds, "a number of exercises must be performed to test the soundness of the calculations on shelter, dispersal, and evacuation of the population when an attack threatens." 30/

It will be recalled that the first mention of evacuation for the civil defense forces occurred in 1956 and for the nonworking population in 1958. The implication remained that most factory and service workers were to remain in cities under all circumstances to continue war production and essential services. In 1962, however, the manual Grazhdan-skaya oborona (Civil Defense) stated that some enterprises (factories), or parts thereof, could stop work without "particular damage" to the economy, especially on the alarm for going to shelters. The manual indicated further that workers "off shift" were to leave the city for proper rest and to "reduce casualties." 31/

Although there has been little reporting of the development of local plans for evacuation or of evacuation exercises for the public in the USSR, it is unlikely that such information on local staff planning would become available -- given the secrecy with which civil defense is treated in the USSR. There have been a few reports of the evacuation of civil defense units during drills, 32/ but only one hearsay report of population evacuation exercises in 1962 in Riga and Minsk. 33/ Local planning has been reported from several of the European Satellites in 1961 and 1962. 34/

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5. Conclusions

The coincidence of the release of information on the effects of nuclear weapons and the stress given to evacuation as a proper defense measure has committed the Soviet civil defense system to an attempted urban evacuation if any preliminary air alert is given in the USSR. (Otherwise, urban residents probably would engage in a voluntary, uncontrolled exodus from Soviet cities.) City civil defense officials probably have prepared or are presently preparing evacuation plans for large Soviet cities. Evacuation practices may be held this summer, but these probably will be accomplished only on the basis of small city districts or limited to staff and transportation activities without embarking evacuees. Finally, civil defense operative units and some elements of government almost certainly will leave cities, even in an emergency with short warning.

The Soviet leadership is well aware of US interest in its civil defense activities and must realize that any significant evacuation of urban areas -- whether as part of a test exercise or as a precautionary measure in time of emergency -- would be viewed with concern in the US. Nevertheless, Soviet authorities may at some future date decide to carry out some form of evacuation drill, and the West must be prepared to evaluate the significance of such a step.

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