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Using Arms Talks to Gauge U.S. Intentions

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The death of Soviet Communist Party chief Konstantin I. Chernenko will probably not greatly affect the disarmament talks that begin today in Geneva. Moscow's decision to return to the negotiating table had more to do with the ending this year of the Soviet 20-year Defense Cycle than to the policies of any individual Soviet leader. The Geneva talks provide the Soviets with a preview of U.S. intentions to develop new weapons systems, essential information for Moscow in planning its own acquisitions.

This December, the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union will cement into place the strategic requirements of the next defense cycle for the years 1986-2005. The Soviets use these cycles to define and pursue national military goals in a systematic way, defining the force structures and the main weapons systems to be developed and acquired in the next 20 years. Experience has shown that these decisions are not significantly amended by changes in Kremlin leaders.

A Protracted Process

For this reason, the current controversy in the U.S. intelligence community about the percentage of Soviet gross national product spent on the military may be irrelevant. Soviet weapons are mission-oriented and acquired in accordance with specific long-range military strategies. Once the weapon is decided upon, the U.S.S.R. develops the technological-industrial infrastructure and then the weapon itself. This is a protracted process that may take as much as 20 years to complete. Changes in budget reflect problems in production but not political or strategic decisions. In any cycle, in the development of any weapon, the bulk of the expenditure is the cost of acquiring the industrial infrastructure to produce it at the beginning. Because we are now at the beginning of a cycle, what we may be seeing is the shift of resources toward these new products.

Soviet military thinking, on the whole, may be one of the last refuges of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy: The dominant factor that determines military strategic concepts is "the scientific laws of objective dialectical relationship between military technology and military thought." In a recent article, Gen.-Maj. (Rt.) M.A. Milsh-teyn, perhaps the most prominent Soviet strategist, wrote that the military-strategic concepts of the U.S. should be reevaluated and examined in accordance with these objective rules that apply to all states, including the U.S.S.R. Gen.-Maj. Milsh-teyn

quoted Marx's collaborator, Friedrich Engels, when he wrote: "... the successes of technology, as soon as they become applicable and put into practice in military matters, immediately—and almost violently, and frequently against the will of the military command—cause changes and revolutions in the methods of waging battles. . . ." And Engels goes on, Gen.-Maj. Milsh-teyn points out, to say that "not the 'free creativity of the intellect' of brilliant commanders has had revolutionizing effect, but the inventions of the best weapons." Gen.-Maj. Milsh-teyn writes that "therefore, there exists a huge gap between (the U.S.'s) declared military policy and its practical expression in concrete military plans."

He argues that true military strategies

because they had as many strategic nuclear weapons as the U.S.—which they did not. They believe parity was achieved because Moscow was recognized by the U.S. as an equal and as the second superpower, with legitimate global interests.

Furthermore, the Soviets believe that the danger of nuclear war will be eliminated when the West recognizes, according to Mr. Ogarkov, "the historical futility of the capitalist system. The correlation of forces in the international arena has changed irreversibly in favor of the forces of peace and social progress. . . . In our time the Communist Party . . . has drawn the conclusion that war is not fatally inevitable. Although the class nature and aggressive essence of imperialism remain unchanged, the deepening of the overall

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of a state do not depend on transitory policy declarations but on concrete military moves such as the emergence of contingency plans and long-range operational-strategic planning, and, even more, on weapons-systems development. What makes his article important is that the same Engels quotes have been used by Dimitri F. Ustinov, the late defense minister, and N.V. Ogarkov, marshal of the Soviet Union, to support military decision making about weapons and strategies.

These Soviet strategists are fully aware of the economic and military-technical superiority of the U.S. They know that in the past the U.S. succeeded in introducing innovative strategic-weapons systems before the Soviet Union, and that once Washington committed itself to a national challenge, it could overcome any conceivable technological obstacle.

But Soviet strategists believe that they nevertheless reached parity with the U.S. in the early 1970s. They consider it a decisive milestone in history, the equal of their October Revolution and the war against Hitler. Moscow is determined not to lose that parity under any conditions. However, partly due to a successful Soviet campaign of disinformation, Soviet concepts of parity have been perceived erroneously in the West as quantitative. Rather, the Soviet thinkers see parity as a qualitative indication of the position of a state in relation to other friendly and hostile states or coalitions. The Soviets believe they reached parity with the U.S. in the early 1970s not

crisis of capitalism and the intensification of the role of socialism in international life, the formation and steady development of a world socialist system, the raising of the defense capability of the socialist community countries to the level of the assured destruction of any aggressor, and the increase in the cohesion and activation of the Non-Aligned Movement and of other peace-loving forces and movements considerably restrict the opportunities of imperialism for unleashing aggressive wars, especially against socialist countries, and create sociopolitical and military-technical preconditions for preventing a new world war. Here, of course, the threat of war remains, but it can be neutralized."

The Soviets believe that neutralization of the West lies in creating a belief in the West in the futility of resisting Moscow's might—and especially its nuclear capabilities. That would enable Moscow to attain the inevitable victory with little or no fighting. But at the same time, the Soviets should be able to deliver a crushing defeat to the West in any form of warfare if the need should arise. Thus, by definition the Soviet perception of parity is to strive for growing military superiority.

But the Soviets are confronted with an unprecedented scientific-technological challenge in the development of new generations of weapons. Mr. Ogarkov has emphasized that "there are now other purely military preconditions restricting the opportunity for imperialism for unleashing

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new wars. These preconditions are caused by the rapid scientific and technical revolution in military affairs." President Reagan's espousal of revolutionary new weaponry in the Strategic Defense Initiative proposals has further complicated this aspect of the Soviets' strategic problem.

With the beginning of a new Defense Cycle, the Soviets are attempting to identify the long-term military-technological outlines of future weapons systems. Arkady N. Shevchenko, the Soviet diplomat who defected to the U.S. at the United Nations, explains that "sophisticated (Soviet) military officers approached SALT as a means to achieve by negotiation what the Soviets feared they could not attain through competition: a restraint on America's ability to translate its economic and technological strength into military advantage and a breathing space during which the U.S.S.R. would work to narrow the gap." Therefore, the Soviets are determined to try to minimize the risks and uncertainties in strategic-weapons development through successful negotiations.

Moscow Learned a Lesson

The SS-19 incident where the Soviets, by developing and deploying a major new strategic system brought on a howl and cry in the U.S., taught Moscow a lesson. The Soviets now must take into consideration

the growing awareness of Soviet treaty violations in the U.S. For as their weapons systems are mission-oriented, it is virtually impossible for the Soviets to cancel a weapons-system development and deployment once it has been inaugurated. It is therefore necessary for them, with their more limited resources, to determine which weapons systems will be totally unacceptable to Washington before committing themselves to any development. Any wild card that would bring about concentrated development by the U.S. would force the Soviets into the difficult strategy of seeking a counter to surpass it.

The Soviets, therefore, want to maintain what they perceive as their superiority-parity without having to risk a major military-technological race, and if forced to, to limit its gray areas. It is therefore prudent of the Soviets, on the eve of their new critical, long-term decision-making process, to clarify the U.S. position and its objectives. Past experience with SALT has taught the Soviets that that can best be accomplished through arms-control negotiations.

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