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CHANGING SOVIET CIVIL DEFENSE CONCEPTS



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CHANGING SOVIET CIVIL DEFENSE CONCEPTS

Accumulating evidence indicates that there has been significant controversy over Soviet civil defense policy since an apparent rejection by the Soviet leaders in 1958-59 of proposals to construct massive, deep-level air raid shelters for the urban population and, further, that this controversy has recently been resolved in favor of a continued widespread civil defense effort embracing a variety of protective measures. The alternative protection to be afforded probably includes strategic urban evacuation, the continued use and some additional preparation of basement and freestanding shelter, the adaptation and use of potential fallout shelter areas, and the use of self-constructed "covers" located underground in the form of dugouts or covered earth trenches. Evidence of the conflict over the shelter program and its resolution is manifested in statements by top Soviet leaders, in recent pronouncements on civil defense published in the USSR and the European Satellites, and in the unusual stress placed on civil defense at a recent paramilitary congress.

Construction of air raid shelters probably was a subject of discussion in high government levels of the USSR about 1958. In February 1959, Premier Khrushchev held a conversation with the Norwegian ambassador during which the latter asked Khrushchev what the USSR was doing about civil defense. Khrushchev stated that "they" had discussed the problem thoroughly in the Council of Ministers and had become convinced that nothing effective could be done. 1/ Further evidence of high-level civil defense discussion can be found in a remark by Mikoyan in August 1960, when he stated, "I have seen films showing mock towns, bridges, and the like to test the destructive power of nuclear weapons. I saw this picture, and I was appalled, and I said, 'Why should I support billions to be spent on bomb shelters?'" 2/ The remarks of Khrushchev and Mikoyan taken together demonstrate the fact that members of the Soviet Council of Ministers were briefed on civil defense problems and that both men apparently felt that effective civil defense was unobtainable. Mikoyan's remark about "billions" for shelters seems to indicate that the question of massive, deep-level shelters for the Soviet urban population had been examined and

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found to be too costly.

In spite of the apparent concern of Khrushchev and Mikoyan over the effectiveness and cost of large-scale civil defense efforts, there is now good evidence that debate over civil defense policy has continued in the USSR and that the controversy has been resolved in favor of those who believe a valid civil defense program can be established without reliance on heavy blast shelters. Two significant articles appeared in the February 1962 issue of Voyennyye Znaniya, a magazine published by DOSAAF, the Soviet paramilitary society that has as one of its responsibilities public civil defense training in the USSR. In one article a Lieutenant General (Engineering Troops) Ye. Leoshnya wrote, "Some incompetent personnel think that the only reliable means of defense against nuclear weapons are special, durable shelters, built deep underground, and that all other means of defense are useless. Such a viewpoint is entirely erroneous... ." 3/ The second article, by a known Soviet civil defense official, Colonel General (Aviation) O.V. Tolstikov, stated, "...the appearance of new, superpowerful types of weapons of mass destruction has produced erroneous views among certain comrades on the problem of safeguarding the population and a skeptical attitude toward the possibilities of resolving this problem. Engineer-technical measures /that is, air raid shelters/ have caused a particularly great amount of doubt. In this connection, those persons who have erroneously assumed that protective measures include only the construction of shelters (ubezhischa) have ignored other ways and means of defense. It is clear that such views cannot be considered correct. Protective structures (zashchitnyye sooruzheniya) are effective means of defense. For example, garages, movie houses, transport and pedestrian tunnels, and the like should be adapted as cover (ukrytiya) for personnel, as well as for use in the economy... ." 4/

A similar reflection of a recent decision on civil defense policy is found in a Hungarian civil defense publication of May 1962. The writer of an article on construction of emergency shelters says, "...The shelter will continue to be one of the most important tools in defense... . Those who belittle the structures that offer less protection and who trust only in superstructures are wrong... . Within the framework of peaceful constructive work, one cannot provide mass shelters, for this would involve very great unproductive economic investment and a great burden... ." 5/

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The article goes on to indicate that some of the advocated defensive structures offering "less protection" include converted basements and covered trench shelters.

The continued importance of air raid shelters was endorsed in Poland in March 1962, when the commander of civil defense stated, "...The experience of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and proving grounds research prove that much can be done... . The importance of shelters is recognized /in Poland/; we have many of them... ." 6/

On 1 April 1962 an article appeared in Zolnierz Wolnosci. (Warsaw) that stressed the necessity for civil defense preparations. In regard to shelter, the article stated that sufficient shelter (that is, formally designed and constructed air raid shelters) could not be built to accommodate the entire population -- only civil defense workers and those engaged in industries contributing to the military effort could be provided for by the government. The remainder of the civilian population must be evacuated as far as possible from large cities and other targets of nuclear attack. 7/

The well-publicized proceedings of the Fifth DOSAAF Congress held in May 1962 appear to constitute a public endorsement of the need for continued and improved Soviet civil defense. Attended by many leading military figures, the Congress should signal the end to most controversy on civil defense in the USSR. Any doubts as to the validity of civil defense activity were dispelled when Marshal V.I. Chuykov, speaking at the Congress "on behalf of the Soviet Armed Forces and R. Ya. Malinovskiy, Minister of Defense, USSR," stated, "Civil defense now must be considered as one of the basic elements in over-all preparation of the country for defense." As a basic element of national defense, a civil defense program without provision for shelter would be meaningless.

Recent Soviet Bloc civil defense literature and reporting provide insight into currently emphasized protective measures. First, since 1958, Soviet civil defense publications have given increasing treatment to strategic urban evacuation. 8/ Second, recent articles stress that self-constructed, covered trench shelters (or "covers") are sound means of defense against fallout radiation and shock wave, giving 200-fold to 300-fold attenuation of radiation in addition to protection from "the direct effect of the shock wave" and flying debris. 9/ Third, the use of prepared, formally constructed air raid shelters is

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still advocated -- including both the basement and free-standing types. It is said that these types of shelter are intended to protect personnel from "all means of mass destruction." 10/ Fourth, Soviet civil defense literature is including increasing references to the use of such adaptable shelter as caves, underpasses, cellars, and internal areas of large buildings. It thus appears that the USSR is approaching a concept of some protection for everyone through (1) partial strategic evacuation in the case of cities, (2) the use of formal shelter and adaptable shelter space when available, and (3) the preparation and use of self-constructed, covered earth shelter or dugouts for those lacking other protection. Presumably the latter could be used by urban evacuees as well as local inhabitants in small towns and rural areas. (The endorsement of adaptable space and homemade shelter does not necessarily exclude the possibility that some good shelter is being prepared in cities for personnel of important factories and communications or control groups.)

There are several advantages to a program of mixed protection such as that which is indicated to be current Soviet civil defense policy. Such a program avoids the cost of building high overpressure urban air raid shelters, and at the same time the projected use of adaptable shelter areas and covers permits assigning to everyone some type of protection. Finally, the program should permit the earlier attainment of readiness in terms of shelter than could be reached with a plan for constructing numerous heavy shelters for the urban population of the USSR. A desire for combat readiness has been expressed in Soviet military doctrine 11/, and a posture of constant readiness is increasingly stressed in civil defense literature of the USSR. 12/

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