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A Soviet Military and Political View of a Deep-Cuts START Treaty

An Intelligence Assessment

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by ~~_____~~
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A Soviet Military and Political View of a Deep-Cuts START Treaty

Key Judgments
*Information available
as of 1 May 1988
was used in this report*

The Soviets appear to see a diminishing chance that an agreement on reducing strategic offensive arms can be reached during the remainder of the Reagan administration. We think that one of the main goals of the Gorbachev regime continues to be the conclusion of a START treaty with the United States []

[] Even if a full-scale treaty cannot be achieved before a new president is inaugurated, and [] pointing out that further moves in arms control from the Soviet side should await a new administration.

Gorbachev's political allies are seeking ways to impart momentum to the arms-control process. [] for example, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze has stated that, while there is little chance of concluding an agreement in time for the summit, the USSR should, nonetheless, continue to promote the idea of signing a START treaty in the shortest possible time in an attempt to make the greatest possible progress at the negotiations. Shevardnadze also [] declared that whoever succeeds President Reagan, even if not closely identified with the current draft treaty, would be reluctant to repudiate the progress made so far.

Like Shevardnadze, other advisers close to Gorbachev would probably stress that sustaining momentum in arms control and ensuring a Reagan administration endorsement of the progress achieved so far warrant continued intensive efforts to conclude a treaty. If they judge that this is unattainable before the US election, we think they would recommend that the USSR pursue informal understandings- [] on essential issues such as SDI testing, mobile missiles, and sea- and air-launched cruise missile limits. Their rationale would be that such moves on strategic arms control would enhance the positive political climate created by the signing of the INF Treaty. They would assert that this would be a more effective way of shaping a context for US-Soviet relations helpful to Gorbachev's aims than would a drastic slowdown in the arms control process

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Meanwhile, Gorbachev's top military advisers probably are continuing to give cautious support to a treaty involving deep cuts in strategic offensive arms. They evidently see this as the best means to limit the rapid growth in the number of hard-target weapons in the US arsenal and to constrain US progress in the development of advanced strategic defenses. [

] shows that—under a START treaty that encompassed Soviet bottom-line negotiating positions—the USSR's ability to attack targets in North America and Eurasia would not be significantly different than it would be if there were no new agreement on strategic arms. Conversely, the General Staff probably has also argued strongly—and will continue to do so—that a START treaty that placed restrictions on heavy ICBM modernization, banned mobile ICBMs, or allowed the United States eventually to deploy an effective space-based defense would leave the USSR in a position of strategic inferiority in the next century. Conservatives in the Soviet leadership—military and civilian—probably would use such findings to insist that the Soviets should hold firm on all of these key positions, and, if the United States persists, then the only recourse is to put arms control "on hold."

We have no direct way of knowing how Gorbachev's balance sheet weighing these arguments will ultimately read. We think there are three basic competing positions among Soviet leaders: to press for a treaty, to put arms control "on hold," or to keep up intensive discussions in hopes of finalizing a treaty early in the next administration's term. We think Gorbachev's closest political advisers would recommend and the Soviet leadership would settle on, the final option

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