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Intelligence Memorandum

*Soviet Military Policy in 1968:
Problems and Prospects*

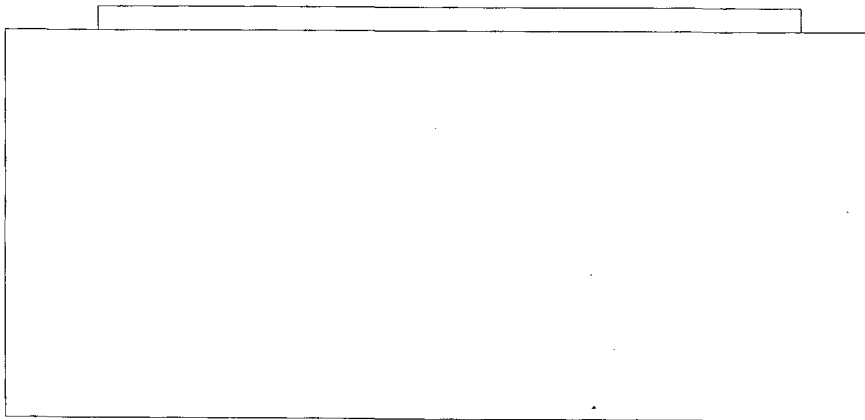
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
15 April 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Soviet Military Policy in 1968:
Problems and Prospects

Summary

The Soviet Union is continuing the expansion of its military effort despite improvements in its strategic situation and the economic burdens the effort entails.

The announced military budget for this year registers a continuation of the upward trend that began in 1966. Although preliminary estimates do not show actual military expenditures in 1968 rising this sharply, they do indicate that there will not be any drop from the high level reached in 1967.

The arms competition with the United States is the major factor affecting Soviet military policy. Having committed itself to the view that the buildup of its military power is essential to its security and political influence in the world, the Soviet Union's freedom of action in military policy is constrained by the military policies of its potential enemies, particularly the United States. China is also an increasingly important factor.

The military and political rationale for a continuing high level of defense expenditures is reinforced by influences arising from the long-term nature of the commitments involved in modern military

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programs, and from the pressures of groups in the Soviet military-industrial bureaucracy with a vested interest in these programs. The most influential of these groups is the military establishment, and the present leadership is not inclined to stand against its demands.

The nature of the collective leadership itself has contributed to the current military accent in Soviet policy. It has encouraged middle-of-the-road approaches designed to maximize the base of support for policies undertaken and to preserve the consensus on which the authority of the leadership rests. It has also discouraged the kind of bold, integrative leadership that would impose the discipline of comprehensive planning on policy-making.

Improvements programed for US offensive forces over the next few years could make it difficult for the Soviet Union to maintain the relative strategic offensive position it has recently achieved. Nevertheless, it will be under pressure to try to match and, if possible, overmatch the US in strategic offensive power. Soviet planners are unlikely to believe that numbers of missile launchers alone will tip the balance decisively. They will almost certainly try to improve their relative position on this score, but over the longer run they are probably counting on research and development to provide better answers to the problem.

In considering the future of their strategic defenses, Soviet leaders must decide whether their state of the art in ABM's is sufficiently effective against the expected US threat to warrant further deployment of ABM defenses at this time. It is already late--perhaps too late--for an expansion of the Moscow ABM system to other cities. The Soviets have been working on the deployment of this system for six years now, and their continuing efforts to improve it reflect its shortcomings. In the meantime, there is no evidence that they have reached an advanced stage in developing a new ABM system.

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Regarding their general purpose forces, the Soviets continue to face the problem of adapting their military power to the range of political uses that their commitments and interests require. This is, in the first instance, a military problem of improving the mobility and diversity of general purpose forces. But beyond this, there is the political problem of determining how, and under what conditions, military power can be used without unacceptable risks, and in what geographical areas Soviet interests are so vitally involved that risks may be run.

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Questions Posed by Soviet Military Policy

1. The questions to be asked about Soviet military policy in 1968 begin mostly with the word why. There is no longer much doubt as to the general direction of the Soviet military effort and the impetus behind it. And as evidence accumulates on Soviet weapon development and deployment programs, it is becoming easier to say what the Soviets are doing and where they are moving in the development of their forces. But as the details of the picture become more clearly defined, the general concept of the artist becomes more difficult to discern.

2. Why, for example, did the Soviet Union think it necessary to accept a high level of military spending for the third year in a row when important domestic economic programs were clearly hurting for want of resources? Why has the Soviet ICBM force continued to expand when the credibility of the Soviet deterrent is more than adequately assured? And why has the Soviet Union dallied with the American invitation to discuss restraints on strategic weapon deployments, when an early acceptance of the offer might have eased the pressures of the arms race and possibly delayed the American decision to begin deploying ABM's?

3. As these questions suggest, the puzzles posed by Soviet military policy in 1968 arise not only from what the Soviets are doing but also from what they have failed to do. To the outside observer, at least, it seems that the Soviet Union might have chosen differently on each of the issues referred to, and that an alternative choice need not have prejudiced, and indeed might have profited, Soviet interests. To seek the reasons why the Soviet Union has chosen the course it is following, it is necessary to look to the influences operating on Soviet military policy today. More specifically, it is necessary to look to the men who make the decisions, and to the conditions that frame their choices--the pulls and drags exerted on Soviet military policy by the inertia of past commitments, the expediencies of collective leadership politics, and the pressures of special interest groups.

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The Framework of Choice in Military Policy

4. The objectives of Soviet military policy are related to Soviet national interests as means are related to ends. Taking the concept of national interests in its broadest sense, it can be said that Soviet military policy is directed toward insuring the security of the Soviet Union, and enhancing its ability to act in world affairs. More specifically, it can be said that the Soviet Union seeks to develop forces powerful enough to deter the United States, or any other power, from attacking the Soviet Union directly, and flexible enough to assert and defend Soviet interests wherever and whenever the need arises. For the Soviet Union, the pursuit of power has meant above all an effort to match and, if possible, to overmatch the military forces of the United States--an enterprise that has imposed rigorous requirements on all aspects of Soviet military policy.

5. The announced Soviet military budget for 1968 registers a continuation of the upward trend that began in 1966. Although preliminary estimates of actual military expenditures do not indicate an increase of comparable magnitude for 1968, they do show that there will not be any reduction from the high level reached in 1967.

6. The Soviet leaders may have had reason to wonder, as they took the decision last October to accept a high level of military expenditures for the third year in a row, whether they were acting from necessity or choice. The range of alternatives available to them was undoubtedly narrow. In a sense, it might be said that they had only two choices: either to carry forward the policies they had followed since 1965, in which case questions concerning particular programs would be largely solved by past decisions; or to seek to alter the pace or course of the arms competition with the United States, in which case questions concerning particular programs and their military affairs in general would take on a radically new and critical aspect. In view of the incentives prompting the first choice, and the potential political costs attached to the second, it is not surprising that the Soviet leaders acted as they did.

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7. Indeed, there was little in the international situation in 1967 to justify a different course. The war in Vietnam and the hostility of China provided strong reasons for not relaxing military efforts. Regarding their overall strategic situation, the Soviet leaders were aware that the United States has embarked on programs of improvements in its strategic offensive forces that would greatly increase the numbers of warheads that could be fired at the Soviet Union in the event of war.

8. The pressures for continuing the buildup of their own ICBM forces which the Soviet leaders no doubt felt on this account were probably intensified by their experience in the Middle Eastern crisis. Although the crisis posed no real threat to Soviet security, it underscored the possibility that such a threat might arise in the future, and it dramatized the extent to which the country's role in world affairs hinged on its power relationship with the United States. One of the striking consequences of the war, insofar as it affected Soviet military policy, is the concern that it prompted in the Soviet Union regarding the country's overall readiness for war.

9. These incentives of a positive nature were no doubt reinforced by considerations relating to the costs that would be entailed by any effort to curb or redirect the country's military effort. There would be the political cost of repudiating an assessment of national needs that the leadership had repeatedly expressed and reconfirmed in a series of program decisions extending back over several years. To some of the leaders, at least, and the majority group in particular, the investment of political capital embodied in these decisions probably represented a stake of considerable proportions. There would be the added cost of risking offense to the bureaucratic groups with a vested interest in a continuing high level of military expenditures. Finally, there would be the risk of material costs --the possibility that curbs on expenditures would lead to premature cutoffs of programs and, hence, to a waste of the investments that they represented.

10. All the major military programs now in evidence in the Soviet Union represent investments of national energies that have been several

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years in the making. The SS-9 and SS-11 ICBM programs, the mainstays of the country's strategic offensive forces, date back to decisions taken during Khrushchev's time. The new solid-propellant ICBM, the KY-6, has a shorter genealogy, but the efforts that went into the mastering of solid-fuel technology have been evident for some time in the Soviet Union. A comparably long history lies behind the major new additions to Soviet naval power, the helicopter carrier and the Polaris-type submarine. Even the current trends in the general purpose forces, aimed at enhancing the mobility and effectiveness of the country's conventional forces, stem from studies that date back several years.

11. It is no doubt true that in arms races, as in other economic activities, there is a point of diminishing returns at which additional increments of strength begin to yield declining profits in terms of the values appropriate to the system. It is possible that the Soviet Union may have reached such a point in one or another of its military programs by 1967. But to recognize the fact, and to act in the light of such a recognition, are two different things. The really hard decisions in national security policy are the "stop" decisions, and there has been little evidence over the years that the Soviet leadership has been particularly adept at making such decisions. Indeed, much evidence points the other way: the redundancies in the Soviet Union's force structure, the duplicative effort in its R&D procedures, and the dissatisfaction of its military specialists with the whole process of planning and developing military forces.

12. In brief, it may be said that the current trends in Soviet military policy reflect a series of program decisions taken over an extended period. The military-economic decisions mark a continuation of existing policy, not a new departure. To the extent that they bear on the question of leadership attitudes and intentions, they speak of the limitations on the leadership's freedom of choice in military policy--the constraints that affect its ability to maneuver resources once it has undertaken the long-term commitments involved in modern military programs. This is not to say that the

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Soviet leadership could not have chosen differently, or that it could not choose differently tomorrow. But it is to suggest that there are strong pressures arising from the nature of modern military programs that are working to keep the Soviet leadership on the course of military buildup it has chosen.

The Collective Leadership

13. One of the conditions contributing to the current trend in Soviet policy is the collective leadership system itself. The collective leadership principle is more than a fig leaf covering the realities of Kremlin politics, although it is that. It is also the practical principle of day-to-day Politburo operations, and the basis upon which national decisions are taken. Nothing of consequence can be decided in the Soviet Union until it has passed the test of collective scrutiny. And nothing of consequence is likely to pass this test until at least most of the leaders are satisfied that it serves their collective and individual interests. The system has worked to encourage piecemeal approaches to policy, and to discourage the kind of bold, integrative leadership that would impose the discipline of comprehensive planning on policy-making.

14. The leader best qualified to assume this role has been Kosygin, but his ambitions and power seem never to have matched his qualifications. From the beginning it has been clear that his relationship with Brezhnev has rested on a more or less explicit understanding regarding the division of their respective responsibilities, and that Kosygin has interpreted his responsibility as including a mandate to oversee the management of the economy and to work for improvements in economic performance. No outsider can say whether the prospects for this mission have been jeopardized by the budget and plan decisions taken last October. But there is reason to believe that Kosygin viewed these developments in this light at the time, and thus reason to believe that he suffered a setback by these decisions.

15. Brezhnev, in the meantime, the putative leader of the present majority, has obviously been prospering. He has moved effectively over the past

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year to neutralize the potential threat to his position posed by the Shelepin group, and he has come forward increasingly with the symbols of rank marking him as the "first among equals." There is little evidence, however, that his talents as a formulator of policy measure up to his talents as a manipulator of votes. Indeed, the role that he has assumed as custodian of the collective principle seems perfectly suited to his talents and political interests. Brezhnev would seem to have much to lose and little to gain by bold ventures in policy, or by direct assaults on vested interests.

16. The present diffusion of authority and uncertainty of direction have not prevented the leadership from dealing successfully with a wide range of foreign and domestic policy problems, or from handling the affairs of government with reasonable efficiency. The leadership has done this, however, on the basis of a cautious, middle-of-the-road approach to policy, designed to maximize the base of support for policies undertaken and to minimize the risk of political reprisal in the event of policy failure. Indeed, when the leadership has faced critical or difficult decisions, as in its Middle Eastern policy last spring, and in its budget and plan decisions last fall, the vulnerability of its authority to political challenge has been dramatically demonstrated. The voices of dissent raised within the regime on these occasions suggest that the leadership is able to take a strong stand on divisive issues only at the risk of upsetting the consensus on which its authority rests.

17. This is not to suggest that there is a serious question within the leadership regarding the need for vigorous defense measures. But as the stresses and strains entailed by the mounting costs of military programs accumulate, questions may arise regarding this or that program, and pressures may intensify for this or that adjustment of priorities. Until the recent plan and budget decisions, leaders with special interests to promote have had reason to persuade themselves that the growth of the economy would provide sufficient resources to satisfy all claimants. Now they must face the prospect of an intensified scramble for

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resources, and the likelihood that this situation will worsen as the curtailment of planned investments affects economic growth.

18. This situation invites the intrusion of special interest groups into the policy-making process. The evidence of the past year suggests that the military establishment will not be reluctant to mix in the political arena to assert or defend its interests.

The Military Establishment

19. Developments affecting the military establishment during 1967 have reinforced the observation that the Soviet military tends to advance its institutional interests when political power is relatively slack, as it has been under the present collective leadership.

20. The confidence and vigor exhibited by military men in writing and commenting on issues of national significance are one important measure of this condition. By this yardstick, the military scored high marks for aggressiveness during 1967. During the spring and early summer, when preliminary discussions concerning the plan and budget were presumably under way within the government, the military press launched a campaign for continued heavy allocations of industrial resources to military uses, featuring articles of almost neo-Stalinist flavor in the stress they placed on heavy industry and the priority of defense.

21. On foreign policy, also, military spokesmen, in elaborating the official line, have built up a public record of consistently hard positions. Grechko has stressed the dangers allegedly posed by the present international situation, alluding in this connection to the old "encirclement" theme, generally subdued in Soviet propaganda since the 1950's by the peaceful coexistence refrain.

22. There have also been important structural changes affecting military-political relations that seem highly favorable to the military's sense of

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professional integrity. These changes concern the lines of control running from the Central Committee (i.e. the Main Political Administration) to the subordinate political organs in the various branches of service. When Marshal Zhukov was minister of defense, these lines were indirect, being channeled through political organs of the various branch-of-service commands organizationally subordinate to the respective commanders. After Zhukov's fall, direct lines were re-established, except in the case of the Strategic Rocket Forces where special conditions obtained. Indeed, the abolition of the branch-of-service organs--the "intervening links," as one writer put it at the time--was one of the principal measures taken after the fall of Zhukov to reaffirm the party's influence in the armed forces.

23. Now these "intervening links" have been re-established. Recent press notices concerning the Ground Forces, the Air Defense Forces (PVO), the Air Forces, and the Navy indicate that branch-of-service political administrations are now operating in these services. What effect these changes may have on the authority of the top commanders in political affairs remains to be seen. The symbolic significance of the changes cannot but affect the relations of military and political officers at all echelons of command, and the atmosphere created by the changes seems likely to result in an enhancement of the prestige of the military professional.

24. Changes affecting the High Command over the past year have also pointed toward an enhancement of professionalism in military affairs and a strengthening of the military's position in matters affecting military-political relations. The most dramatic symbol of these new conditions was the re-establishment of the post of commander in chief of the ground forces at the end of the year. No post in the Soviet High Command carries more connotations of past military glories, and of political battles won and lost. Marshal Chuykov was relieved of the command, and the post abolished, in the midst of vigorous controversy over the role of the ground forces in modern war inspired by Khrushchev's last effort, at the end of 1963, to reduce manpower strength.

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25. The restoration of the post now with the appointment of General Ivan Pavlovskiy will undoubtedly be regarded by senior military officers as a vindication of their efforts on behalf of the traditional arms of service, and as a pledge of the leadership's favor. In more practical terms, it may strengthen the hand of ground force advocates in intraservice competition for resources, particularly if the upgrading of the role of conventional forces in Soviet military doctrine continues to evolve as it has in recent years.

26. Other changes in the High Command go back to the period following Malinovskiy's death on 12 April 1967. When Marshal Grechko succeeded to the post of minister of defense, several other important appointments were made. Army General I. I. Yakubovskiy and Colonel General S. L. Sokolov were appointed first deputy ministers of defense and promoted to the ranks of marshal of the Soviet Union and army general, respectively. Colonel General Pavlovskiy (the present commander in chief of the ground forces) was appointed a deputy minister of defense and promoted to the rank of army general. Subsequently, Yakubovskiy was named commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, and has since ranked immediately below Marshal Grechko and above Marshal Zakharov, chief of the General Staff, in matters of protocol. Yakubovskiy's appointment makes him the natural successor to Grechko. No specific duties have been announced for Sokolov, although he is expected to succeed Zakharov, who is 70 years old and reportedly in poor health.

27. Yakubovskiy, Sokolov, and Pavlovskiy are comparatively young men; their average age is only 56. All three belong to the generation of soldiers who joined the army in the early thirties and the party during or just after the purge of the Red Army in 1937-1938. The effect of these changes alone has been to lower the average age of the deputy ministers of defense from over 65 to just over 59. These changes strongly suggest that the long-delayed renovation of the high command is now under way.

28. One additional important step in the rejuvenation process was the enactment in October 1967 of a new military service law which became

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effective the first of this year. According to one provision of this law, officers of the ranks colonel-general through marshals of arms and admiral of the fleet will for the first time be required to retire at the age of 60, unless the Council of Ministers grants a five-year extension. Many of the top officers of the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff, and the command staffs of the military districts thus seem to face the prospect of early retirement.

29. While recent promotions suggest that the optional five-year extension will be applied liberally, the new measure indicates that the regime recognizes a need to advance younger officers to responsible positions in the High Command. The regime may feel that it can strengthen its hand in the field of military policy by staffing the top military posts with officers who will owe their allegiance to present leaders. Whether the younger, technically trained officers who stand to benefit by the new promotion opportunities will prove, in fact, to be more pliable than their predecessors remains to be seen. The expertise that they will bring to bear to support their advice on policy issues could be a more potent political asset than the more purely personal authority their elders enjoyed.

30. Trends in Soviet military doctrine over the past year have been generally consistent with the trends in the military's institutional fortunes reflected in the structural and administrative changes discussed above. Increased attention has been given to the role of conventional forces in war and to their utility as instruments of national policy, but stress has also been placed on the Strategic Rocket Forces as the primary instrument of deterrence, and the ultimate recourse in war. The strategic offensive forces appear to have gained new esteem in doctrinal writings as a result of the increased concern about the country's readiness for war inspired by the Middle Eastern crisis. Restraints appear to have been imposed on the discussion of ABM's during the present period of diplomatic sensitivity on the issue, but there seems little doubt that there is a strong lobby within the military establishment favoring a continued effort to develop an effective ABM defense.

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Issues and Prospects

31. In looking ahead to developments that may affect Soviet military policy in the future, three points seem particularly worth mentioning.

32. First, the arms competition with the United States is imposing rigorous requirements on all aspects of the Soviet Union's military policy, including the general magnitude of its defense effort. Its freedom of choice in military policy is constrained by the military policies of its potential enemies, particularly the United States.

33. Secondly, the constraints imposed by these external considerations are being reinforced by internal influences arising from the momentum of the long-term commitments involved in modern military programs, and from the pressures exerted by groups in the military-industrial society that acquire a vested interest in these programs.

34. Finally, the present Soviet leadership seems little inclined to stand against these external and internal pressures despite the burden this places on the economy, especially in terms of future growth. Indeed, whether for expediency's sake, or for its own good reasons, the regime seems intent on riding these pressures, and on riding them with a fairly loose rein.

35. It used to be that the best leads for detecting future trends in Soviet military policy could be derived from economic and technological considerations. These factors are still important, since they limit the range of probabilities that need to be considered in forecasting Soviet courses of action. But the dominant factors affecting Soviet military policy today are being supplied not by the strictures of the economy or the pace of technological progress but by the dynamics of the international competition for power. It is necessary to look to the latter, therefore, for leads as to how the Soviet Union may act on the major issues of military policy that face it in the period immediately ahead.

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36. In view of the improvements currently programed for the United States strategic offensive forces, the Soviet Union will be hard pressed over the next few years simply to maintain the relative strategic position that it has only recently achieved. The Soviet Union is aware that the United States has embarked on MIRV programs that will multiply the number of warheads that can be delivered to the Soviet Union in the event of war. The long-term answer for the Soviet Union may include similar programs for the Soviet strategic offensive forces. In the meantime, the Soviet Union can seek to minimize the effect of these US developments by expanding its own ICBM forces, by camouflaging some of its launching sites, and by deploying mobile missile launchers.

37. It is still too early to say whether the concept of "parity" has lost its value as a description of the goal that the Soviet Union is pursuing in the buildup of its ICBM forces. The concept is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for wide variations of judgment as to the precise force levels it implies. The Soviet military would be likely to press for the higher variables--to equate the concept of parity with a comfortable margin of superiority. But, given the scale on which military power is measured today, they are not likely to believe that numbers of launchers alone can confer a genuine military advantage.

38. Indeed, much of the new thinking in Soviet military doctrine in recent years has centered precisely on the problem of adjusting the old concept of superiority to the new conditions imposed by the nature of nuclear weapons. The solutions proposed have spanned a broad spectrum of opinion, from the view that nuclear weapons have rendered the concept of superiority meaningless to the view that superiority remains a necessary goal of Soviet military policy, and that it should be sought not only in terms of forces in being but also in terms of the pace and quality of research and development on new weapon systems.

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39. It seems likely that some combination of these latter objectives will govern Soviet ICBM policy over the next few years. Both for technical military reasons, and for prestige reasons, the Soviet Union has strong incentives to try to match, and, if possible, to overmatch the United States in the basic elements of strategic power. Over the longer run, the country is probably counting on research and development to provide better answers to its security needs. No feature of the Soviet Union's military policy has been more consistent over the years than the relatively large stake it has placed on research and development. This policy reflects a faith in science that is deeply rooted in Communist traditions and Russian culture, but it no doubt springs in the main from the practical calculations of practical men.

40. Many of these considerations apply also to the Soviet Union's strategic defensive forces. Indeed, these are the forces mainly affected by the United States MIRV programs, which are designed expressly to enable the United States to overwhelm Soviet ABM defenses. The problem posed for the Soviet Union is both technical and political. It involves the question whether the present state of the art is sufficiently advanced to warrant further deployments of ABM defenses at this time. It also involves the political question of how to play the long-neglected American diplomatic overture for limitations of strategic weapon deployments, and how to respond to the more recent American decision to begin deploying a limited ABM defense.

41. Over the past year, the Soviet Union has seemed inclined to temporize on both these issues. As for the technical issue, the time is already late, perhaps too late, for an expansion of the Moscow system to other cities. The Soviets have been working on the deployment of this system for six years now, and their continuing efforts to improve it reflect the extent to which the design falls short of the requirements imposed by rapid advances in weapon technology and by the continuing

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changes in the nature of the US offensive threat. In the meantime, there has been no evidence that the Soviet Union has reached an advanced stage in developing a new ABM system. If the lead times that have prevailed in the past remain applicable, the Soviet Union would seem to be at least two years removed from the point at which it could begin deploying a new ABM system, if indeed it intends to do so.

42. As for the political issue, the Soviet Union has been careful to keep the door open to future negotiations with the United States, but only a crack. As indicated above, there are strong pressures in the Soviet Union for continuing the effort to develop an effective ABM defense, and hence against the notion of negotiations. There are also other pressures, both within and outside the official establishment, that are pushing Soviet policy in the opposite direction. Recent evidence suggests that the Soviet Union is now preparing to explore the long-ignored American offer to discuss the limitation of strategic weapon deployments, although the channel chosen suggests that this exploration will be tentative and noncommittal. Whether the Soviet Union decides to go beyond this to take up the American offer on a fully official basis will depend perhaps more on the overall climate of Soviet-American relations than on strictly technical military considerations.

43. Finally, the Soviet Union continues to face the problem that has occupied it increasingly in recent years--the problem of adapting its military power to the range of political uses that its commitments and interests require. This is, in the first instance, a problem of military policy --that is, a problem of improving the mobility and diversity of Soviet forces. Developments in the Soviet general purpose forces over the past few years have given the Soviet Union a markedly improved capability for employing military forces beyond its own frontiers. The Soviet fleet is now operating in appreciable strength, and with obvious political effect, in the Mediterranean. Besides showing the flag, it is capable of supporting very limited

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landing operations with its own integral elements. As the new AN-22 Cock transport aircraft comes into service, the Soviet Union will have the additional ability to move and support well-equipped ground forces over long distances from the homeland.

44. The critical issue raised by these emerging Soviet capabilities is how they may be used. As the Soviet Union acquires the means to increase its influence in world affairs, the Soviet leaders must face the problems of determining how, and under what conditions, military power may be used without unacceptable risks, and in what geographical areas Soviet interests are so vitally engaged that risks may be warranted. These problems cannot be solved ahead of time; they must be faced and solved as issues arise, in accordance with circumstances at the time and place in question.

45. The new capabilities will give Soviet leaders a broader range of options in foreign policy than they have enjoyed in the past. But it is far from clear that they will be inclined to select their options with any less regard for prudent self-interest and the avoidance of undue risk than they have shown in the past.

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