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Gorbachev's "New" Military Doctrine and Its Implications for  
Conventional Arms Control: A Preliminary Assessment<sup>1</sup>

## Summary

Mikhail Gorbachev began early in his term in office articulating an interest in conventional arms control and has pressed the West on the subject by issuing, along with his allies, the Warsaw Pact's "Budapest Appeal" in mid-1986 and, in May this year, by endorsing the "Jaruzelski Plan" and by prompting the Pact to issue a statement on military doctrine at a meeting in Berlin. Gorbachev is probably interested in conventional arms reduction in part for the propaganda benefits his proposals may yield in the West, but also because movement in this area of arms control could give him the biggest pay off in his effort to reallocate substantial resources from the Soviet military to the civilian economy. His proposals have expanded the scope of the area covered in a potential arms control agreement from Central Europe to the region between the Atlantic and the Urals. The Pact doctrine, if its language and explication by Gorbachev's civilian spokesmen can be taken at face value, means that the Soviets are willing eventually--if the West is as well--to restructure ground forces in Europe in a manner that would:

- require that each side retain a force "sufficient" to repulse--but not pursue--an invading army;
- disallow the possibility of a surprise attack by either side;
- necessitate the withdrawal of substantial quantities of "offensive" equipment--tanks, bridging equipment, helicopters, for example--from front lines;
- and, ultimately, lead to the return of armies in Europe to their national borders and the dissolution of the two major military alliances.

The doctrine, however, has apparently received mixed reviews within the Soviet Union. In the propaganda campaign that followed the doctrine's public assertion, civilian spokesmen issued robust definitions of its pacific meaning and "historic" importance that

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emphasized Moscow's willingness to compromise and the economic imperative for working a deal with the West. Some Soviet generals, however, have endorsed the doctrine with less enthusiasm and have attempted to define its provisions as nothing especially new and allowing for the traditional "crushing rebuff" to be dealt to an aggressor on his home soil. Unlike the civilians, including Gorbachev, the military is also loath to admit that there are any significant asymmetries in the NATO-Pact ground forces balance that might require that the Red Army pull anything back to build NATO's confidence. The ferment over doctrine and conventional arms control issues within the Soviet system does not appear over. [redacted]

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Mikhail Gorbachev's quest to modernize the Soviet economy is, according to his own public testimony [redacted]

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[redacted] the central objective that guides not only his domestic policy but also policy toward the West. His quest for economic renaissance, especially in building up the scientific and technological base that he believes must underlie the USSR's economic viability, has led him to pursue a policy toward the West that in the near-to-medium term--his spokesmen speak of 15 years--requires a renewed detente. That policy, he appears to hope, will at once bring the USSR two benefits. One is a fuller economic relationship with the West that infuses the Soviet Union with Western technology, capital, and managerial know-how. The other is a slow down in the arms race that will allow the reallocation of resources from the military to the civilian economy. [redacted]

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Central to both objectives are his arms control initiatives. Although they have major public diplomacy objectives and play to a longer term Soviet political agenda of bolstering the European left, the campaign for arms control apparently represents a serious effort to cut back the money Moscow spends on arms without at the same time diminishing--and preferably enhancing--Soviet security. The most vocal thrust of the arms control campaigns in the first two years of Gorbachev's tenure has been in his push for limitations in space "weapons," strategic systems, intermediate range systems, nuclear testing, and chemical weapons. The USSR invests substantial sums in all of these areas and its civilian economy would undoubtedly profit from a reallocation of resources due to a lower rate of expenditure on any of them. [redacted]

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#### Importance of Conventional Arms Control

The area, however, where major savings could be made in military spending--and where the Soviets continue to have the greatest advantage vis-a-vis the West--is in conventional arms control. Within the Soviet Union, this is perhaps the most sensitive and politically difficult area for the regime to formulate policy. The Soviet and Warsaw Pact armies not only guard against a perceived threat from the West, but the Red Army also serves as a de facto occupying force in several Warsaw Pact countries that bolsters the satellite communist regimes. Soviet ground forces, moreover, are by far the largest component of the Soviet armed forces. They eat up the most resources

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and are thus the force that, if reduced, would free up the most money for the civilian economy. Ground forces are also probably the sector in the military that has the most entrenched and powerful political clout in the party. [REDACTED]

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The ability of the Party and military to come to grips with conventional arms control is probably complicated by other factors as well. The propaganda value of the subject in the West is limited, although this may be changing somewhat. Thus the use of a conventional arms control initiative provides potentially fewer public diplomacy or propaganda benefits than nuclear arms control; if the proposals are made, their main value comes in reaching--or stalling--an agreement with the West. Reaching an agreement on conventional arms control can also be complicated by the need to coordinate Moscow's position with Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact members. [REDACTED]

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There are also, for a party leadership attempting to grapple with conventional arms control, the problems of information and credibility. Gorbachev does not appear to enjoy the luxury of leaders in the West who have access to accurate descriptive and critical information about their own military from civilian sources. His information on arms control and net assessments of NATO-Warsaw Pact balance comes, it can be assumed, largely from the military itself. Academic institutes independent of the military offer some help, but their credibility is limited, as is their own information, and their views are probably dismissed by the Soviet generals. As a result, Gorbachev is in a bind if he wants to gain the kind of economic purchase from arms control that he appears to be after. [REDACTED]

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### Gorbachev's Growing Interest

Gorbachev's interest in a revised doctrine and conventional arms control was hinted at publicly within the first year of his tenure,<sup>2</sup>

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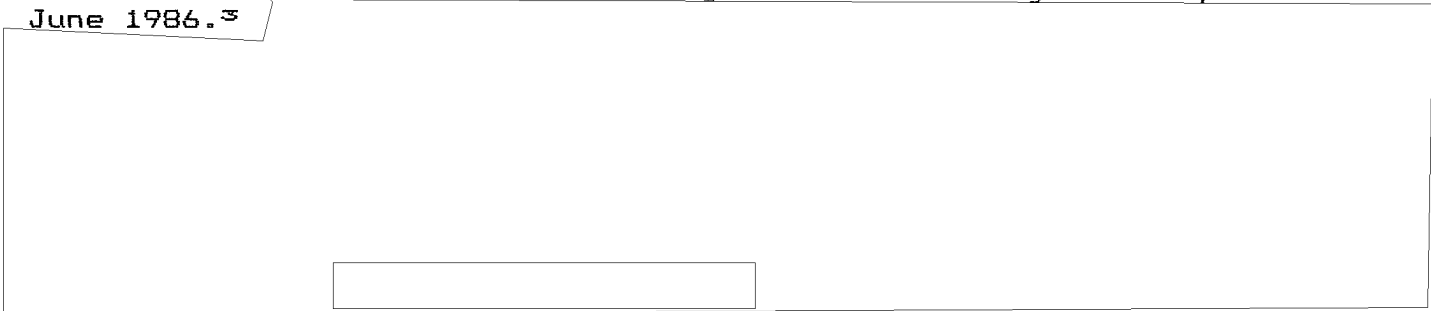
<sup>2</sup>Before the Supreme Soviet in November 1985, after a review of Soviet arms control and peace initiatives already under way, he noted the need to "reach a common understanding of what level of weapons on each side could be considered relatively sufficient, from the point of view of reliable defense. We are convinced that the level of this sufficiency is much lower than that which the USSR and United States in fact possess at the moment." (Moscow Television Service, 27 Nov 85.) In his report to the 27th Party Congress in February 1986, Gorbachev noted that Soviet military doctrine was being drawn up to indicate that the USSR intended "to act in the future so that no one has grounds for fears, even if they are imagined, for their their security." (Gorbachev's CPSU Central Committee, Moscow Television Service, 25 Feb 86.) The Party Program published after the Congress called for the "limitation of conventional arms" and the end of efforts to create "new types of conventional arms which approximate to weapons of mass destruction." (New Edition of CPSU Program, *Pravda*, 7 Mar 86.) In April at a meeting in East Berlin, Gorbachev publicly called for an agreement between the blocs on "substantial reductions in all the components of the land forces and tactical air forces of

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but the first major bloc statement on conventional arms reduction came in the "Budapest Appeal" issued at the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee (PCC) meeting held in the Hungarian capital in June 1986.<sup>3</sup>

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Running parallel to private commentary and public declarations of Pact interest in arms control in the summer of 1986 were two other substantive events indicating, at a minimum, greater Soviet

the European states and the relevant forces of the USA and Canada deployed in Europe." Geographically, the reductions were to "cover the entire European territory from the Atlantic to the Urals." (TASS, 18 Apr 86)

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flexibility in dealing with NATO.

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Also in the summer of 1986, the Soviets

made a significant number of changes in talks on confidence building measures in Stockholm that backed away from long-held rigid positions on inspection of military exercises. Their concessions led to compromises on all sides that gave the West most of what it wanted on notification, observation, and verification of exercises--concessions that reliably prompted criticism in the MFA as a major setback for Soviet foreign policy. <sup>a</sup>

Soviet expressions of interest in conventional arms control continued in the winter and appeared to increase in 1987.

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Gorbachev had planned by the beginning of the year a "peace offensive" that would buttress his concept of peaceful coexistence with the West. Along with pursuit of already tabled proposals on INF limitation in Western

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Gorbachev pressed his interest in conventional arms control and a revision in Soviet doctrine--or at least its public appearance-- personally and forcefully over the next two months. To the public audience, the Moscow Peace Forum in mid-February, Gorbachev made a passing reference to a military doctrine that "quite naturally . . . must be purely of defensive nature."<sup>11</sup> In March, in a speech before a private Pact audience, he again referred to doctrine, noting that he had personally forced the Soviet military to change its public posture and the public image of Soviet military doctrine, [redacted]

[redacted] He wanted the Soviet military, [redacted] to take all steps to calm Western governments in order to make treaties with the West and he had brought to official thinking of both the military and the civilian sectors the new concept of "compromise."<sup>12</sup> [redacted]

[redacted] the group as a whole concluded that arms control should be approached "aggressively" in order to achieve "concrete results."<sup>13</sup> [redacted]

By May 1987, the Soviets and their allies were ready to unveil a new conventional arms proposal and the new military doctrine that Gorbachev had hinted at before the 27th Party Congress and before Warsaw Pact private forums. Early in the month, Poland's party chief Jaruzelski [redacted] with the encouragement of Gorbachev over the opposition of the Polish military<sup>14</sup>--floated a "plan" to establish an enlarged regional sub-area for conventional and nuclear force reductions as the first step toward all-European negotiations. It called for gradual reductions in tactical nuclear and conventional weapons, for a defensive military doctrine, and for agreement on new confidence-building measures. Unlike the Budapest appeal, it emphasized Central Europe and implementation of a phased process.

### The "New" Pact Doctrine

The Soviet press played up the Jaruzelski Plan as an important contribution to peace, but saved its full court propaganda for the statement on a "new" doctrine made by Warsaw Pact chiefs meeting in East Berlin in late May. The document called for negotiations with the West to achieve several long-articulated Soviet goals: a ban on nuclear testing, a ban on space weapons, an end to chemical weapons of mass destruction, the creation of nuclear free zones, declaratory

<sup>11</sup>Moscow Television Service, 16 Feb 87.

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statements by both sides on the non-use of force, and the liquidation of military alliances. The document also appeared to contain a contradiction. In one paragraph it called for the maintenance of armed forces in "a composition and at a level that would allow them to repulse any attack from outside"--a phrase that sounded defensive in the literal sense of simply pushing an aggressor back across the border. Two sentences later, however, the communique put an offensive spin on defense--consistent with traditional Soviet military-technical doctrine calling for an offensive defense that crushes the enemy in his homeland--by asserting that the pact would deal, in the event of an attack, a "devastating rebuff to the aggressor." The phrase "devastating rebuff"--a standard Soviet phrase long predating the May Pact communique--seemed to allow for more than a simple hurling back of NATO forces from Warsaw Pact soil. [redacted]

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The document also went further by calling for the "reduction of the armed forces and conventional armaments in Europe down to the level where neither side . . . would have means for a sudden attack on the other side" and "the withdrawal of troops within the confines of national borders, the mutual withdrawal of the most dangerous offensive types of armaments from the zone of direct contact of the two military alliances and the lowering of the concentration of that zone of armed forces and armaments to the minimum agreed-upon level." There was also a call for comparing the doctrine of the two alliances and the allowance that "existing imbalances and asymmetries in certain types of armaments and armed forces . . . could be a subject of consultation."<sup>15</sup> [redacted]

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The Soviets' post-East Berlin hype of the "historic new doctrine" was impressive in its volume and unctuousness. The common theme of commentators was the historic nature of the document and the sanctity of the Pact's pledge "never, under any circumstances" to start a war. One of the leading commentators, the Institute of World Economics and International Relations director Yevgeniy Primakov, gave the most robust explication. The West, he claimed, had been trying to "bleed the Soviet Union dry" in the arms race and had, in effect, tricked the USSR into following it "in almost mirror-image fashion" in acquiring weapons. What the doctrine now provided for was a policy of "sufficient means for reliable defense to guarantee reliable security of the country. Sufficient means, no more."<sup>16</sup> [redacted]

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### The Generals Dissent

Soviet military organs and spokesmen also joined in the propaganda campaign, but seemingly with little enthusiasm. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, in an editorial in mid-June, covered much of the same ground as the civilians, but several important Soviet generals also spoke or wrote on the new doctrine and the question of sufficiency in a way

<sup>15</sup>*Pravda*, 31 May 87.

<sup>16</sup>*Izvestiya*, 13 Jun 87, and "Studio 9," Moscow Television Service, 4 Jun 87.

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that seems to interpret it as allowing offensive operations on the aggressors' territory:

- Colonel-General Makhmut Gareyev, a deputy chief of the General Staff of the Soviet armed forces, spoke out at a news conference in June in support of the "historic" document, but appeared to hedge, according to a *Krasnaya Zvezda* summary, on endorsing its purely defensive nature. "The main means of action to be used by the Soviet Armed Forces in repulsing aggression will be defensive operations and combat actions," he said. Gareyev did not specify what other means might be use.<sup>17</sup>
- Army General Dmitriy Yazov, the new defense minister, endorsed the May doctrine statement and defense sufficiency in a *Pravda* article at the end of June, but reminded his reader that military-strategic parity remained the "decisive factor" in preventing war. He also assured his reader that "any conjectures about an aggressor possibly escaping punishment" were "unfounded," and he borrowed from the hardline language of the document by asserting that the aggressor would be given a "crushing rebuff."<sup>18</sup>
- In late September *Krasnaya Zvezda* published an interview with Army General A.I. Gribkov, chief of staff the Warsaw Pact Combined Joint Armed forces, who essentially dismissed any notion that the defensive doctrine was new. He also used the phrase "crushing rebuff" to describe the fate befalling an aggressor and observed that, in the event of attack, the Pact, "while repulsing the aggression, . . . will also conduct counteroffensive operations." Such a move would not contravene the defensive doctrine, he claimed, any more than did similar "necessary" operations in the Great Patriotic War. The question of asymmetries he dismissed as seemingly irrelevant; within Pact forces there was "not a single superfluous component" and thus, presumably, no room for tidying up Western-claimed imbalances.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 24 Jun 87.

<sup>18</sup>*Pravda*, 27 Jul 87.

<sup>19</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, undated (September 1987)

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The passage of weeks since May has brought a slaking in momentum of the Soviet propaganda hyping the new doctrine, although it remains a theme in most Soviet public statements on conventional arms control; Soviet propagandists have since moved on to other "historical" Soviet pronouncements. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze referred to the new doctrine in a speech before the United Nations in late September<sup>20</sup> and the Soviets still discuss it regularly in the press and have made general declarations about it at talks in Vienna. A mid-October article in the English language version of *New Times* by three USA and Canada Institute (IUSAC) officials even went beyond the more robust notions about the content of the new doctrine by arguing for a "readiness to make concessions." The authors wrote of the wisdom of taking "unilateral measures" in arms control that would "by no means weaken the international position of the USSR."<sup>21</sup>

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The ferment on doctrine, meanwhile, has been evident to private scholars in recent weeks who have talked to an array of Soviet officials in Moscow and the United States, both civilian and military:

- Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrofskiy--who had participated in the initial hype for the doctrine statement in June--claimed to his American interlocutors that "new political thinking" in conventional arms control was tied to the adversary's forces, as asserted by Yazov in his June article. That was the view held by Gorbachev, he claimed, and the "Primakov" line that sufficiency need not be tied to an adversary's actions was strictly Primakov's own.
- Major General Yuri Markelov of the Ministry of Defense seemed to dismiss one of the key points of the doctrine statement by offering the view that he did not believe that one could realistically distinguish between purely offensive and purely defensive weapons in conventional forces.
- IUSAC official Sergi Karaganov observed that the concepts of "defensive defense" and "reasonable sufficiency" came down from Gorbachev's people and had yet to be converted into

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<sup>20</sup>PIASS International Service, 23 Sep 87.

<sup>21</sup>*New Times*, 12 Oct 87. See also *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 17 Oct 87, for an article by a Lieutenant Colonel Prikhodchenko praising the Chinese PLA's decision to cut its forces significantly to gain extra resources for the research and force modernization.

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operational notions. Karaganov also questioned the utility of further MBFR-type talks and suggested that the two sides instead restructure their forces unilaterally (or in tacit agreement) along the lines of the new thinking on defensive defense.

-- Ministry of Defense Arms control specialist Colonel-General Chervov, in contrast to Karaganov, did not believe that significant defensive restructuring should take place without corresponding moves by NATO.<sup>22</sup>

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What is Moscow Up To?

There are several interpretations for the Soviet drive to define a new doctrine and Moscow's renewed pursuit of conventional arms control. One answer, which does not exclude supplementary explanations, appears to lie in Gorbachev's desire to take the high ground on all arms control issues for the purpose of embarrassing the United States and its allies. He also, no doubt, stands ready to pocket any Western concession on ground forces that his declaratory policy might elicit. But it is also possible, and even likely, that Gorbachev has another purposes in mind as well--a build down of arms to help reallocate resources for the rebuilding of the Soviet economy. Whether or not Gorbachev actually seeks to achieve all of the May document's detailed proposals is less clear; there has been little discussion, for example, of a withdrawal of all ground forces to their national homelands, even by civilian commentators. The document is perhaps meant to be taken more as a propaganda/confidence building measure than a blueprint for conventional arms control--Moscow itself has clearly not sorted out what the document's various phrases and concepts mean in potentially operational terms. The Pact statement, however, may nonetheless reflect a desire on the part of Gorbachev, if not all of his generals, for movement in conventional arms control.

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What, then, should be made of the evident dissent of some of the generals? A partial answer may be glasnost--the system allows more candor than it did in the past. But the candor also reveals some negative feelings for the doctrine's program of pulling back offensive

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forces from the front and for its change in the Red Army's traditional military-technical doctrine that calls for the Pact to deal a "crushing rebuff" to NATO on the alliance's territory. The generals' comments also signal to their skeptical political leaders--especially Gorbachev--that there are no asymmetries in alliance forces that would require a substantial pull down of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe without near identical concessions on the part of the West. [redacted]

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The result may then be that a critical mass of generals, in possible association with some of Gorbachev's senior level domestic opponents, are digging in, attempting to give the new doctrine its most conservative interpretation. Given their control of information on military affairs and potential alliances with party conservatives, their leverage over the civilian leadership may in fact be strong. Whether or not they will be brought on board sufficiently to allow the Soviets to present and pursue flexible arms control proposals in talks with the West--be it based on the new doctrine, the Budapest Appeal, the Jaruzelski plan, or something else--may not be evident until a new negotiating forum and mandate for talks has been established with the West [redacted]

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