

PES 21 1967

WASHINGTON CLOSE-UP*Russians Debate Nuclear 'Victory'*

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

Soviet military men are arguing these days over whether a nuclear war can be "won."

The end of the debate is not yet in sight, but the main lines have been developed. It is of more than scholarly interest to U.S. specialists because if the "no-win" side comes out on top, it will make possible a number of East-West agreements that the "win" group would oppose.

Under Nikita S. Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" leadership, military men tended to admit that nuclear war was likely to be militarily unmanageable—that nobody could win such a war. Khrushchev obviously was rankled by heavy defense expenditures, and seemed to be happy with a deterrent program that, while inferior to the United States, was felt to be strong enough to persuade the United States not to attack first.

After Khrushchev's fall, the matter remained quiet for awhile, although some military men began pressing for additional funds.

The current debate came into the open in September 1965, in the "Communist of the Armed Forces," official journal of the political department of the defense ministry.

An article by a Lt. Col. Ye. Rybkin attacked such well known Soviet writers as Nicolai Talensky for having spread the "fatalistic" doctrine that it is no longer possible "to find acceptable forms of nuclear war."

While admitting that nuclear war would cause great havoc, Rybkin said no one should

succumb to the view that victory in nuclear war is impossible.

"Any 'a priori' rejection of the possibility of victory is harmful because it leads to moral disarmament, to a disbelief in victory, and to fatalism and passivity. It is necessary to wage a struggle against such views and attitudes," he wrote.

He went on to argue that victory was feasible if the country conducted nuclear war in such a way as to minimize damage to itself. He seemed to stress the need for Russia to step up its production of offensive nuclear missiles and at the same time to develop a missile defense.

Rybkin's ideas were carried further, a year later in the same journal, by Lt. Col. V. Bondarenko in an article called "Military-Technological Superiority—a Most Important Factor in the Reliable Defense of the Country."

Bondarenko argued that the key to victory lies in military superiority to be attained only through a large-scale commitment of resources in advanced weapons development and production.

Implicit in his article was an attack on the policy of Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin, who has stressed the primacy of the consumer sector in the economy. Bondarenko makes it clear he is thinking of developing some new weapon, which he says "can abruptly change the relationship of forces in a short period of time."

The Communist party leadership did not take issue

with these statements until just last month, in a long unsigned article in "Red Star," official newspaper of the defense ministry. It seemed to speak for the top leadership.

It took issue directly with the views stated by Rybkin and Bondarenko and specifically attacked Rybkin by name. The article stressed that Rybkin was acting "independently" and did not speak for anyone but himself.

In a significant paragraph, the article said that progressive people in the West realize "what results a world nuclear war could cause and that such a war has ceased to be an expedient means of politics and a means for the achievement of certain political and economic objectives."

"Assertions of this type express above all a condemnation of a nuclear war, and its dangers and inexpediency are emphasized," the article said. "All peace-loving and anti-imperialist forces oppose a world nuclear war as a means of the continuation of politics."

The "Red Star" article aroused particular interest in Washington because it came at a time when the administration had begun to sound out the Russians on an agreement for a freeze on both defensive and offensive weapons.

It is quite possible that the leadership ordered the Red Star article in order to tell the West that the militarists in the army were not making policy—and that Moscow was still open to arms control measures.