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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

9 May 1980

MEMORANDUM

POSSIBLE SOVIET INITIATIVES ON TNF

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Summary

*The Soviets will probably make a policy statement covering the whole range of European disarmament issues at next week's celebration of the Warsaw Pact's 25th anniversary. On the key question of what, if anything, they will say about long-range European theater nuclear forces (TNF), past Soviet adamancy suggests continued temporizing as the most likely Soviet course. Although some dramatic gesture like Brezhnev's unilateral troop and tank withdrawal offer of last October cannot be excluded, the Soviets are less likely this time--in part because of the failure of that October gambit--to offer any militarily significant concession. They are not likely, for example, to propose a freeze that limits SS-20 deployment. Rather, their focus is likely to be on political measures designed to preserve a security dialogue with the West Europeans and to encourage them to distance themselves from US military policies. Such an approach could take the*

*This memorandum was prepared at the request of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, Department of State, by [redacted] USSR-EE Division, Office of Political Analysis. It has been coordinated with the National Intelligence Officers for the USSR and Eastern Europe and for General Purpose Forces and with the Office of Strategic Research. Comments may be directed to the Chief, Multidisciplinary Branch, [redacted]*

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*form of a statement of Soviet interest in talks, perhaps related to the CSCE framework, but combined with a reiteration of the unacceptability of NATO's December decision.* [redacted]

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The celebration next week of the Warsaw Pact's 25th anniversary may be the occasion for a Soviet initiative regarding long-range European theater nuclear forces (TNF). The meeting in Warsaw of the highest council within the Pact, the Political Consultative Committee (PCC), will be attended by the top party and government leaders of the member states, and its major policy declaration will address European security issues, including TNF. At a PCC meeting in November 1978, the Pact declared its willingness to discuss weapons that were not currently the subject of negotiations and specifically asserted that there was no weapon that it would refuse to limit. At a foreign ministers meeting in May 1979, the Pact proposed an all-European Conference on Military Detente (CMD) and the conclusion of a treaty among CSCE signatories that would ban the first use of nuclear or conventional weapons. [redacted]

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Current Soviet Stance

Publicly and in their formal demarches to the United States, the Soviets continue to insist that NATO's decision in December to proceed with its TNF modernization program has imposed "unacceptable preconditions" on the conduct of negotiations, and that talks can begin only if the decision is revoked or "if its implementation is officially halted and an announcement is made about this." [redacted]

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(1) informally, the Soviets have attempted to persuade West Europeans that they are eager for progress in all existing multilateral and bilateral arms control negotiations and wish to hold new meetings on European security measures, while arguing that responsibility for the next move rests with the West. Concerning TNF, the Soviet Union and its allies have hinted only vaguely and inconsistently at possible Eastern counterproposals to NATO's negotiation offer, and more frequently have simply reiterated their formal demand that NATO first alter its December decision. [redacted]

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(6) These hints are always vague, occasionally contradictory, and at least one can be found in support of virtually every possible Soviet move on TNF from military moves to eventual accommodation, but taken together and considered in the context of recent Soviet policy on European security they do suggest a somewhat narrower range of reasonable possibilities. [redacted]

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Announcement of a Possible Military Response

(8) Although much Western speculation has centered on the possibility of an eventual conciliatory move by Moscow, the Soviets may feel that continued intransigence is the better tactic at this time in order to show West Europeans that the arms-control half of NATO's dual track policy is not working. Last fall, Soviet press commentary alluded several times to the possibility that NATO's TNF program would necessitate "countermeasures," possibly "counterdeployments," on the part of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. Similar public assertions, albeit less bluntly put, were made at the same time by First Deputy Chief of the Soviet General Staff Akhromeyev and Soviet Minister of Defense Ustinov. The possibility was raised again last week by a Soviet newspaper editor, who warned Western participants at a meeting of the Political Club of Berlin that unless the mid-May session of NATO's Defense Planning Committee resulted in a public decision to limit implementation of the December decision, the Soviets and their allies would be obliged to announce an unspecified but strong reaction at the Pact summit. [redacted]

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(11) If a Pact announcement is made about a joint military response, it probably will be vague. It could conceivably include, however, a commitment to enhance Pact air defense against the threat of cruise missiles or some reference to a future "shifting of nuclear forces." Such a reference could imply a highly demonstrative expansion or enhancement of long-range offensive TNF systems. Or, despite the asymmetry in systems capabilities involved and the radical departure from past Soviet reticence it would represent, it could imply such low-cost options as the forward deployment of Soviet nuclear-capable SU-24 fighter-bombers presently stationed in the Soviet Union or the deployment of new tactical missile systems such as the SS-21 and SS-23, as well as nuclear-capable artillery, in Eastern Europe during peacetime. [redacted]

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Announcement of a Possible Political Response

(6) Some Soviet officials have raised privately the possibility of discussing TNF in the framework of a European disarmament conference, rather than in SALT III or in separate TNF talks. The summit communique could propose a variant of the current Pact CMD proposal, perhaps giving TNF prominence equal to the emphasis currently given to confidence-building measures (CBMs). Especially now, after the failure of their efforts to engineer a pre-Madrid conference aimed at influencing

[9] the discussion of CSCE security issues, the Soviets are eager to win support for a post-Madrid meeting linked with the CSCE review process. But they may see advantage in using it as much to create additional pressure against NATO's TNF modernization program as to affect discussions of CBMs. [redacted]

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[6] Proposing that the TNF issue be introduced into a European disarmament conference would be aimed at projecting a Soviet image of reasonableness. But it could also be an opening gambit to move discussion of the issue into a multi-lateral forum involving non-nuclear states and thereby increase political pressures against NATO's TNF plan. Such a proposal could also--despite probable initial French opposition--contain the seed of a possible compromise between the Soviet CMD initiative and the French proposal for a Conference on Disarmament in Europe (CDE). Soviet-French discussions over the last two years, [redacted]

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[redacted] apparently have not brought the two proposals closer together. As a result, Moscow, anxious to turn world attention away from Afghanistan and conscious of the effect a disarmament proposal could have on West Europeans seeking reassurance that detente is not dead, may wish to go public with a proposal that, in effect, suggests that arms control measures considered by a future CMD-CDE have a broader zone of application than the 200-kilometer swath of Soviet territory currently provided for by the Helsinki Final Act in exchange for the inclusion of nuclear weapons--including, and possibly limited to, long-range TNF--on the agenda. [redacted]

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[5]  
[10] A Pact declaration would probably reiterate previous Eastern calls for guarantees of non-first use of nuclear and conventional weapons, non-expansion of alliances, and non-increase of troops in the territory of other states--possibly proposing that such topics be on the agenda of a CMD follow-on after Madrid. In this way, the Soviets might hope, in any bilateral and multilateral discussions held before Madrid, to depict the United States as an increasingly out-of-touch and isolated participant in European security talks. [redacted]

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[5] Such a strategy seems consistent with recent Soviet diplomacy in Europe. While refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of a common Western response to the invasion of Afghanistan, Moscow now seems willing to weather bilateral disagreements on the issue, provided it can maintain a

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European dialogue on security matters. The Soviets hope, by treating Afghanistan as a regional issue and by hinting at a willingness to accommodate some European security concerns, to minimize the possibility that US punitive policies adopted in the wake of Afghanistan will have a long-lasting negative effect on Soviet disarmament policies in Europe. [redacted]

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Is an SS-20 Freeze Likely?

[2]

[3]

[8]

Some Western observers have speculated that the Pact summit may be an appropriate setting for an offer to freeze SS-20 deployment in exchange for a delay in the implementation of NATO's TNF program while negotiations take place. Chancellor Schmidt's recent remarks suggesting a freeze in place could act as a cue to which the Soviets and their allies may respond. Moreover, the Pact summit will occur shortly before probable Belgian reconsideration of the TNF issue, and an apparent concession on the part of the Soviets may convince uncertain parliamentarians that the TNF program is unnecessary to achieve some progress on arms control. Finally, if a Soviet freeze offer were pegged to actual initiation of talks, the military cost of such a proposal may be negligible or nonexistent, since the number of SS-20 bases operational or under construction is nearly eighty percent of our estimate of the planned force. [redacted]

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Although some variant of a freeze proposal involving the SS-20 cannot be ruled out, it seems unlikely. A real halt in the Soviet TNF program would be tantamount to implicit acceptance of NATO's assertion that the Soviets, mainly as a result of their SS-20 deployments, are acquiring a dangerous level of advantage in TNF capabilities--an assertion that the Soviets have consistently denied. The Soviets apparently believe that a halt in deployments is too high a price to pay for negotiations, in both political and military terms.

[12]

[14]

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[redacted]

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The Soviets probably do not view eventual NATO TNF deployment as a foregone conclusion and believe that options involving lower costs than a freeze may still be effective. The recent Soviet-sponsored conference of European Communist parties issued a call for a large gathering of "peace-loving forces" in Helsinki before the November review session in Madrid. Its principal target apparently will be NATO's

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decision on TNF modernization. Even if the Soviets have abandoned hopes that the NATO consensus would collapse from within, they probably will still seek to forestall or prevent implementation by political means before turning to negotiations on NATO's terms.

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