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Soviets, unlike US, prepare civil populace for nuclear war

By John K. Cooley
Staff correspondent of
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While the United States has largely neglected protecting Americans against possible nuclear attack, the Soviet Union has moved rapidly ahead with a program of shelters, evacuation plans, and protection of key military and civilian targets.

According to a leading US expert on Soviet civil defense, Leon Gouré, and Carter administration experts, this shows that the Soviets — unlike the United States — believe that a nuclear war is not only possible, but that millions of civilian lives could be saved by adequate defense measures.

Dissident Soviet nuclear scientist Andrei Sakharov, in written responses to questions sent him at his place of exile in Gorky, USSR, by the Washington Post, alludes to conscious preparation of Soviet society for possible nuclear war. While compensating "for internal defects with external activism," says Dr. Sakharov, the Soviets have been preaching détente abroad and simultaneously "strengthening the militarization of the economy and military-industrial complex at home."

The totally different US attitude was summed up here by a group of 60 US physicians. They addressed a message March 7 to President Carter and Soviet Communist Party Chairman Leonid Brezhnev, expressing alarm at "an international political climate that increasingly presents nuclear war as a 'rational' possibility."

Casualties in such a war would "have no precedent in the history of human existence." Medical "disaster planning" would be meaningless because of widespread destruction of hospital or other medical facilities, and "there is no effective civil defense" since "blast, thermal, and radiation effects" would reach even those in shelters, whereas fallout would affect those evacuated, the physicians said.

The group, including Nobel Prize laureates Salvador Luria, Daniel Nathans, Frederick C. Robbins, Hamilton O. Smith, and Carl F. Cori, asked for an early meeting with Mr. Carter and Mr. Brezhnev to discuss defusing Soviet-US tensions, banning all nuclear arms and a start to dismantling them.

A 1978 move by President Carter and Defense Secretary Harold Brown to give the US a comprehensive, long-term program of providing shelters, evacuation plans, and other measures like those the Soviets have taken since the 1950s was never followed up by the White House, Dr. Gouré says.

Rep. Ike Skelton (D) of Missouri last year proposed a \$1.9 billion US civil defense program. It successfully passed the House but was killed in a Senate-House conference committee.

A modest new \$120 million effort for fiscal 1981 (about 12 percent more than appropriated in 1980) has been proposed for civil defense by John W. Macy Jr., director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It would give priority to protecting Americans living near missile fields, bomber bases, nuclear submarine ports, and other possible priority Soviet military targets in 31 US states.

"Token" measures — marking old shelter areas like underground garages or subway stations, or building a few new shelters — would be useless in case of a nuclear war today between the United States and the Soviet Union, Dr. Gouré asserted. He spoke at a briefing in which he illustrated with Soviet photographs, films, and texts the USSR's huge civil defense program.

"Between 110 and 140 million Americans," said Dr. Gouré, associate director of the Advanced International Studies Institute of the University of Miami, Fla., "would perish, while Soviet fatalities would likely be under 20 million" because of Soviet protection measures, including comprehensive plans to evacuate cities.

"This means," he added, "that the US would suffer certain defeat in the war and probably extinction as a functioning society. The Soviet Union would survive with its present leadership and system of rule essentially intact," and with power to reconstruct and dominate the postwar world.

The present strategic balance — which former US arms control chief Paul Warnke said last year would tip against whichever superpower developed no comprehensive civil defense system, if the other one did — is now so unfavorable to the US that "the American people are in hostage to the strategic power of the USSR, with their lives dependent on the restraint of the Soviet leadership," Dr. Gouré charged.

While the US has believed a US-Soviet nuclear war would bring "mutual assured destruction" (MAD) of both, and therefore was unlikely, the more vulnerable the US was, the safer it would be, Dr. Gouré contended.

By contrast, the USSR rejects the MAD concept and seals its own "unilaterally assured survival," welcoming the continued weakening of US defenses, he added. Dr. Gouré quoted Soviet military and political leaders as expressing confidence that nuclear war can be successfully fought and won.

In the West, said Dr. Gouré, only Switzerland, Sweden, and Norway have provided their populations with real protection against nuclear war comparable to some of the Soviet measures:

- Independent scholarly assessments, and those of British, Swedish, and Swiss intelligence, indicate the Soviets spend about \$7 to \$35 per person each year on civil defense, while the US spends 45 cents.

- The Soviet civilian defense effort, directed since 1973 by Gen. Alexander T. Altunin, is under the control of the Red Army and Soviet Communist Party. About 100,000 full-time civil defense personnel, including 50,000 general officers, are supplemented by about 20 million part-time workers.

- Soviet schoolchildren get compulsory audiovisual instruction in the second, fifth, and ninth grades in what nuclear warfare is like, and what can be done to survive it. Summer camps give Soviet youths detailed field instruction in conventional and nuclear civil defense techniques even before they are drafted into military service.

- Dr. Gouré says the CIA and others have underestimated the Soviet capacity to protect key leaders, crucial industrial workers, and other high-priority people, as well as their industries.