

Contrasts in American and Soviet Strategic Thought

Fritz W. Ermarth,
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We are having trouble with Soviet strategic doctrine. Soviet thinking about strategy and nuclear war differs in significant ways from our own. To the extent one should care about this—and that extent is a matter of debate—we do not like the way the Soviets seem to think. Before 1972, appreciation of differences between Soviet and American strategic thinking was limited to a small number of specialists. Those who held it a matter of high concern for policy were fewer still. Since that time, concern about the nature, origins, and consequences of these differences is considerably more widespread, in large measure as a result of worry about the Soviet strategic arms buildup and the continued frustrations of achieving a real breakthrough in SALT.

Heightened attention to the way the other side thinks about strategic nuclear power is timely and proper. The nature of the Soviet buildup and some of our own previous choices have locked us out of pure "hardware solutions" to our emerging strategic security problems that are independent of the other side's values and perceptions. Whatever one thinks about the wisdom or folly of the manner in which we have pursued SALT so far, it is desirable that management of the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship have a place for an explicit dialogue. That dialogue should include more attention to strategic concepts than we have seen in past SALT negotiations. Moreover, whatever the role of SALT in the future, the existence of "rough parity" or worse almost by definition means that we cannot limit strategic policy to contending merely with the opponent's forces. In the cause of deterrence, crisis management, and, if need be, war, we must thwart his strategy. That requires understanding that opponent better.

The Need to Understand Strategic Doctrine

Let us define "strategic doctrine" as a set of operative beliefs, values, and assertions that in a significant way guide official behavior with respect to strategic research and development (R&D), weapons choice, forces, operational plans, arms control, etc. The essence of U.S. "doctrine" is to deter central nuclear war at relatively low levels of arms effort ("arms race stability") and strategic anxiety ("crisis stability") through the credible threat of catastrophic damage to the enemy.

Fritz W. Ermarth has been an analyst of Soviet and American strategic policies at the Central Intelligence Agency and the Rand Corporation. Most recently he has directed Rand's Strategic Studies Program. Since submission of this article, Mr. Ermarth has become a member of the National Security Council staff to work on U.S. strategic and arms control policy.

should deterrence fail. In that event, this doctrine says it should be the aim and ability of U.S. power to inflict maximum misery on the enemy in his homeland. Making the world following the outbreak of nuclear war more tolerable for the United States is, at best, a lesser concern. Soviet strategic doctrine stipulates that Soviet strategic forces and plans should strive in all available ways to enhance the prospect that the Soviet Union could survive as a nation and, in some politically and militarily meaningful way, defeat the main enemy should deterrence fail—and by this striving help deter or prevent nuclear war, along with the attainment of other strategic and foreign policy goals.

These characterizations of U.S. and Soviet strategic doctrine and the differences between them are valid and important. Had U.S. strategic policy been more sensitive over the last ten years to the asymmetry they express, we might not find ourselves in so awkward a present situation. We would have been less sanguine than we were about prospects that the Soviets would settle for an easily defined, non-threatening form of strategic parity. We would not have believed as uncritically as we did that the SALT process was progressing toward a common explication of already tacitly accepted norms of strategic stability.

It is, if anything, even more important that these asymmetries be fully appreciated today. They are a crucial starting point for strategic diagnosis and therapy. But they are only a starting point. The constellations of thought, value, and action that we call, respectively, U.S. and Soviet strategic doctrine or policy are much more complicated, qualified, and contradictory than the above characterizations admit by themselves. To be aware of these other ramifications without fully understanding them could lead to dangerous discounting, on one hand, or distorting, on the other, the real differences between U.S. and Soviet strategic thinking.

Comparative Strategic Doctrine

The following discussion is intended only to suggest some of the contrasts that exist between U.S. and Soviet strategic thinking. The issues raised are not treated exhaustively, and the list itself is not exhaustive. Our appreciation of these matters is not adequate to the critical times in the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship we are facing. It would be highly desirable to develop the intellectual discipline of comparative military doctrine, especially in the strategic sphere. Systematic comparative studies of strategic doctrine could serve to clarify what we think and how we ourselves differ on these matters, as well as to organize what we know about Soviet strategic thinking.

Although many have and express views on how both the United States and the

Soviet Union deal with strategic problems, there is in fact little systematic comparison of the conceptual and behavioral foundations of our respective strategic activity. In this area, more than other comparative inquiries into communist and non-communist politics, there are the obstacles of secrecy in the path of research. Perhaps as vital, neither government nor academic institutions appear to have cultivated many people with the necessary interdisciplinary skills and experience.

The most influential factor that has inhibited lucid comparisons of U.S. and Soviet strategic thinking has been the uncritically held assumption that they had to be very similar, or at least converging with time. Many of us have been quite insensitive to the possibility that two very different political systems could deal very differently with what is, in some respects, a common problem. We understood the problem of keeping the strategic peace on equitable and economical terms—or so we thought. As reasonable men the Soviets, too, would come to understand it our way.

Explaining this particular expression of our cultural self-centeredness is itself a fascinating field for speculation. I think it goes beyond the American habit of value projection. It may result from the fact that post-war developments in U.S. strategy were an institutional and intellectual offspring of the natural sciences that spawned modern weapons. Scientific truth is transnational, not culturally determined. But, unfortunately, strategy is more like *politics* than like science.

The next five to ten years of the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship could well be characterized by mounting U.S. anxieties about the adequacy of our deterrent forces and our strategic doctrine. There seems to be little real prospect that the SALT process, as we have been conducting it, will substantially alleviate these anxieties. Even if a more promising state of affairs emerges, however, it is hard to see us managing it with calm and confidence unless we develop a more thorough appreciation of the differences between U.S. and Soviet strategic thinking. Things have progressed beyond the point where it is useful to have the three familiar schools of thought on Soviet doctrine arguing past each other: one saying "Whatever they say, they think as we do;" the second insisting, "Whatever they say, it does not matter;" and the third contending, "They think what they say, and are therefore out for superiority over us."

Comparative strategic doctrine studies should address systematically a series of questions:

- What are the central decisions about strategy, force posture, and force employment or operations that doctrine is supposed to resolve for the sides examined?
- What are the prevailing categories, concepts, beliefs, and assertions that appear to constitute the body of strategic thought and doctrine in question?

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—What are the hedges and qualifications introduced to modify the main theses of official thinking?

—What are the “non-strategic,” e.g., propagandistic, purposes that might motivate doctrinal pronouncements? Does the doctrinal system recognize a distinction between what ideally ought to be, and what practically is (a serious problem in the Soviet case)?

—In what actions, e.g., force posture, does apparent doctrine have practical effect? Where does it lie dormant?

—To what extent are doctrinal pronouncements the subject of or the guise for policy dispute?

—What perceptions does one side entertain as to the doctrinal system of the other side? With what effect?

Answering these questions for both the United States and the Soviet Union is admittedly no easy matter, especially in a highly politicized environment in which many participants have already made up their minds how they want the answers to come out with respect to assumed impact on U.S. strategic policy. But we have the data to do a good deal better than we have to date.

U.S. and Soviet Doctrine Contrasted

What is U.S. strategic doctrine and policy? What is Soviet strategic doctrine and policy? The Soviets provide definitions of doctrine (*doktrina*) and policy (*politika*) that state they are official principles, guidance, and instructions from the highest governing authorities to provide for the building of the armed forces and for their employment in war.

The most useful thing about these definitions is that they remind us—or should—that we do not have direct and literal access to Soviet strategic doctrine and policy through the most commonly available sources, i.e., Soviet military literature and various pronouncements of authoritative political and military figures. Our insight into Soviet strategic policy is derived by inference from such sources along with inferences from observed R&D and force procurement behavior, what we manage to learn about peacetime force operations and exercises, and occasional direct statements in more privileged settings, such as SALT, by varying persuasive spokesmen.

The value of all these sources is constrained by the limitations of our perceptive apparatus, technical and intellectual, and the fact that Soviet communications on strategic subjects serve many purposes other than conveying official policy, such as foreign and domestic propaganda. For all that, we have gained over the years

a substantial degree of understanding of the content of Soviet strategic thinking, of the values, standards, objectives, and calculations that underlie Soviet decisions. It is this total body of thinking and its bearing on action that are of concern here.

Where lack of access complicates understanding of Soviet strategic doctrine, an overabundance of data confuses understanding of the American side, a point that Soviets make with some justice when berated with the evils of Soviet secrecy. If, in the case of the United States, one is concerned about the body of thinking that underlies strategic action it is clearly insufficient to rely on official statements or documents at any level of classification or authority. Such sources may, for one reason or another, not tell the whole story or paper over serious differences of purpose behind some action.

One of the difficulties in determining the concepts or beliefs that underlie U.S. strategic action is that strategic policy is a composite of behavior taking place in at least three distinguishable, but overlapping arenas. The smallest, most secretive, and least significant over the long-term, assuming deterrence does not fail, is the arena of operational or war planning. The second arena is that of system and force acquisition; it is much larger and more complex than the first. The most disorganized and largest, but most important for the longer-term course of U.S. strategic behavior is the arena of largely public debate over basic strategic principles and objectives. Its participants range from the most highly placed executive authorities to influential private elites, and occasionally the public at large. Strategy-making is a relatively democratic process in the United States.

To be sure, many areas of public policymaking can be assessed in terms of these overlapping circles of players and constituents. But the realm of U.S. strategic policy may be unusual in the degree to which different rules, data, concerns, and participants dominate the different arenas. These differences make it difficult to state with authority what U.S. strategic policy is on an issue that cuts across the arenas. For example, public U.S. policy may state a clear desire to avoid counter-silo capabilities on stability grounds. The weapons acquisition community may, for a variety of reasons, simultaneously be seeking a weapons characteristic vital to counter-silo capability, improved ballistic missile accuracy. As best they can with weapons available, meanwhile, force operators may be required by the logic of their task to target enemy missile silos as a high priority.

Despite these complexities, however, it is possible to generalize a body of policy concepts and values that govern U.S. strategic behavior. There are strong tendencies that dominate U.S. strategic behavior in the areas of declaratory policy, force

acquisition, and arms control. Some of the tendencies may be cited. Today the U.S. is engaged in a struggle against Soviet missile silos that will last indefinitely. This is in part a result of Soviet efforts to acquire a large number of small ICBMs and the consequent result of Soviet efforts to improve their counter-silo capability, because it threatens the U.S. ability to possess.

The situation seems more complex than it is. Strategic policymaking takes place in an arena that is monopolized by the military, although elites external to the military, if they cannot seriously influence the process, force acquisition, and force posture within this decision group. The U.S. has a wide range of possible. Public evidence of the U.S. strategy from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, and parameters of the U.S. strategy. These considerations may be the result of U.S. and Soviet strategic behavior. Some confidence how the U.S. strategy is central to the strategic behavior of the U.S. and Soviet strategic behavior. Five central issues: (1) the U.S. strategy, the phenomenon of deterrence, the U.S. strategy, intercontinental arms race, and the U.S. strategy.

THE CHALLENGES OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. In the generation, the relative importance of the U.S. strategy. We have agreed that the U.S. strategy is a disaster of immediate consequence to the Soviet Union with a view to the U.S. strategy. Sometimes suspicious of the U.S. strategy to Russians, the U.S. strategy is unreal, if certain.

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acquisition, and arms control policy. Again, the case of U.S. counter-silo capabilities may be cited. Today, the United States lacks high confidence capabilities against Soviet missile silos; it may continue to lack them for some time or indefinitely. This is in part the result of technological choice, the early selection of small ICBMs and the deployment of low-yield MIRV weapons. It is also the result of Soviet efforts to improve silo hardness. But the main reason for this lack is that we have abided by a conscious judgment that a serious counter-silo capability, because it threatens strategic stability, is a bad thing for the United States to possess.

The situation seems more straightforward, if secretive, on the Soviet side. Soviet strategic policymaking takes place in a far more vertical and closed system. Expertise is monopolized by the military and a subset of the top political leadership. Although elites external to this group can bid for its scarce resources to some extent, they cannot seriously challenge its values and judgments. Matters of doctrine, force acquisition, and war planning are much more intimately connected within this decision group than in the United States. Policy arguments are indeed possible. Public evidence suggests a series of major Soviet debates on nuclear strategy from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, although identification of issues, alternatives, and parameters in these debates must be somewhat speculative.

These considerations make difficult, but not impossible, the comparative treatment of U.S. and Soviet strategic belief systems and concepts. One may describe with some confidence how the two very different decision systems deal with certain concerns central to the strategic nuclear predicament of both sides. Much about U.S. and Soviet strategic belief systems can be captured by exploring how they treat five central issues: (1) the consequences of an all-out strategic nuclear war, (2) the phenomenon of deterrence, (3) stability, (4) distinctions and relationships between intercontinental and regional strategic security concerns, and (5) strategic conflict limitation.

CONSEQUENCES OF NUCLEAR WAR

For a generation, the relevant elites of both the United States and the Soviet Union have agreed that an unlimited strategic nuclear war would be a socio-political disaster of immense proportions. Knowing the experiences of the peoples of the Soviet Union with warfare in this century and with nuclear inferiority since 1945, one sometimes suspects that the human dimensions of such a catastrophe are more real to Russians, high and low, than to Americans, for whom the prospect is vague and unreal, if certainly forbidding.

For many years the prevailing U.S. concept of nuclear war's consequences has been such as to preclude belief in any military or politically meaningful form of victory. Serious effort on the part of the state to enhance the prospect for national survival seemed quixotic, even dangerous. Hence stems our relative disinterest in air defenses and civil defenses over the last fifteen years, and our genuine fear that ballistic missile defenses would be severely destabilizing. Growth of Soviet nuclear power has certainly clinched this view of nuclear conflict among critical elements of the U.S. elite. But even when the United States enjoyed massive superiority, when the Soviet Union could inflict much less societal damage on the United States, and then only in a first strike (through the early 1960s), the awesome destructiveness of nuclear weapons had deprived actual war with these weapons of much of its strategic meaning for the United States.

The Soviet system has, however, in the worst of times, clung tenaciously to the belief that nuclear war cannot—indeed, must not—be deprived of strategic meaning, i.e., some rational relationship to the interests of the state. It has insisted that, however awful, nuclear war must be survivable and some kind of meaningful victory attainable. As most are aware, this issue was debated in various ways at the beginning and end of the Khrushchev era, with Khrushchev on both sides of the issue. But the system decided it *had* to believe in survival and victory of some form. Not so to believe would mean that the most basic processes of history, on which Soviet ideology and political legitimacy are founded, could be derailed by the technological works of man and the caprice of an historically doomed opponent. Moreover, as the defenders of doctrinal rectitude continued to point out, failure to believe in the “manageability” of nuclear disaster would lead to pacifism, defeatism, and lassitude in the Soviet military effort. This should not be read as the triumph of ideological will over objective science and practical reason. From the Soviet point of view, nuclear war with a powerful and hostile America was a real danger. Could the state merely give up on its traditional responsibilities to defend itself and survive in that event? Their negative answer hardly strikes one as unreasonable. Their puzzlement, alternating between contemptuous and suspicious, over U.S. insistence on a positive answer is not surprising.

In recent years the changing strategic balance has had the effect of strengthening rather than weakening the asymmetry of the two sides' convictions on this matter. Dubious when the United States enjoyed relative advantage, strategic victory and survival in nuclear conflict have become the more incredible to the United States as the strategic power of the Russians has grown. For the Soviets, however, the progress of arms and war-survival programs has transformed what was in large measure an ideological imperative into a more plausible strategic potential. For reasons to be examined below, Soviet leaders possibly believe that, under favor-

able operational conditions today. Notwithstanding this, they may also believe they could

DETERRENCE

The concept of deterrence is a central strategic belief system. It has many dimensions, and a good deal of functional symmetry between the two sides of hostile action across a spectrum of consequences in war. Over time, the asymmetries of thinking have changed. Strategic deterrence has tended to become a policy, and it has become a policy of the Soviets, deterrence—or at least the last objective of strategic policy that had both offensive and defensive implications—against the ultimate objective of nuclear war. If deterrence could fail. The Soviet system has improved for the sake of war prevention and the sake of themes that include the protection of national interests. Repetitive use of nuclear power, among other

stability is a concept that is so vital to U.S. strategic writings. In U.S. strategic writings, the incentives inherent in the system and, closely related, the environment dominated by the vulnerable ultimate objective on the basis of a balance of power forces. Emphasis on the counterforce, a

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able operational conditions, the Soviet Union could win a central strategic war today. Notwithstanding strategic parity or essential equivalence of force, they may also believe they could lose such a conflict under some conditions.

DETERRENCE

The concept of deterrence early became a central element of both U.S. and Soviet strategic belief systems. For both sides the concept had extended or regional dimensions, and a good deal of political content. There has, in short, been some functional symmetry between the deterrence thinking of the two sides: restraint of hostile action across a spectrum of violence by the threat of punishing consequences in war. Over time and with shifts in the overall military balance, latent asymmetries of thinking have become more pronounced. For the United States, strategic deterrence has tended to become the only meaningful objective of strategic policy, and it has become progressively decoupled from regional security. For the Soviets, deterrence—or war prevention—was the first, but not the only and not the last objective of strategy. Deterrence also meant the protection of a foreign policy that had both offensive and defensive goals. And it was never counterposed against the ultimate objective of being able to manage a nuclear war successfully should deterrence fail. The Soviet concept of deterrence has evolved as the strategic balance has improved for the Soviet Union from primary emphasis on defensive themes of war prevention and protection of prior political gains to more emphasis on themes that include the protection of dynamic processes favoring Soviet international interests. Repetition of the refrain that detente is a product of Soviet strategic power, among other things, displays this evolution.

STABILITY

Strategic stability is a concept that is very difficult to treat in a comparative manner because it is so vital to U.S. strategic thinking, but hardly identifiable in Soviet strategic writings. In U.S. thinking, strategic stability has meant a condition in which incentives inherent in the arms balance to initiate the use of strategic nuclear forces and, closely related, to acquire new or additional forces are weak or absent. In an environment dominated by powerful offensive capabilities and comparatively vulnerable ultimate values, i.e., societies, stability was thought to be achievable on the basis of a contract of mutually vulnerable societies and survivable offensive forces. Emphasis on force survivability followed, as did relative uninterest in counterforce, active, and passive defenses.

Soviet failure to embrace these notions is sufficiently evident not to require much elaboration. One may argue about Soviet ability to overturn stability in U.S. terms, but not about Soviet disinclination to accept the idea as a governing principle of strategic behavior. Soviet acceptance of the ABM agreement in 1972 is still frequently cited as testimony to some acceptance of this principle. It is much more probable, however, that the agreement was attractive to Moscow because superior U.S. ABM technology plus superior U.S. ABM penetrating technology would have given the United States a major advantage during the mid- to late 1970s. In a unilateral sense, the Soviets saw the ABM agreement as stabilizing a process of strategic catch-up against a serious risk of reversal. But it did not mean acceptance of the U.S. stability principle.

The United States has always been relatively sensitive to the potential of technology to jeopardize specific formulae for achieving stability, although it has been relatively slow to perceive the pace and extent to which comparative advantage has shifted from passive survivability to counterforce technologies. The Soviets have also been sensitive to destabilizing technologies. But they have tended to accept the destabilizing dynamism of technology as an intrinsic aspect of the strategic dialectic, the underlying engine of which is a political competition not susceptible to stabilization. For the Soviets, arms control negotiations are part of this competitive process. Such negotiation can help keep risks within bounds and also, by working on the U.S. political process, restrain U.S. competitiveness.

Soviet failure to embrace U.S. strategic stability notions as strategic norms does not mean, as a practical matter, that the Soviets fail to see certain constellations of weapons technology and forces as having an intrinsic stability, in that they make the acquisition of major advantages very difficult. What they reject is the notion that, in the political and technical world as they see it, those constellations can be frozen and the strategic competition dimension thereby factored out of the East-West struggle permanently or for long periods.

INTERCONTINENTAL AND REGIONAL POWER

Defining the boundary line between strategic and non-strategic forces has been a troubling feature of SALT from the beginning. It is one of diplomacy's minor ironies that forward capabilities the United States has long regarded as part of the general purpose forces we have been hard pressed to keep out of the negotiations. But peripheral strike forces the Soviets have systematically defined and managed as strategic seem very difficult to bring into the picture.

Geography imparted an intercontinental meaning to the term strategic for the United States. The same geography dictated that, for the Soviet Union, strategic

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concern began at the doorstep. Soviet concern about the military capabilities in the hands of and on the territory of its neighbors is genuine, although Soviet arguments for getting the United States to legitimize and pay for those concerns at SALT in terms of its own central force allowances have been a bit contrived. They are tantamount to penalizing the United States for having friends, while rewarding the Soviet Union for conducting itself in a manner that has left it mostly vassals and opponents on its borders.

Underlying these definitional problems are more fundamental differences between U.S. and Soviet doctrines on what is generally called "coupling." It has long been U.S. policy to assure that U.S. strategic nuclear forces are seen by the Soviets and our NATO allies as tightly coupled to European security. Along with conventional and theater nuclear forces, U.S. strategic nuclear forces constitute an element of the NATO "triad." The good health of the alliance politically and the viability of deterrence in Europe have been seen to require a very credible threat to engage U.S. strategic nuclear forces once nuclear weapons come into play above the level of quite limited use. For more than twenty years NATO's official policy has had to struggle against doubts that this coupling could be credible in the absence of clear U.S. strategic superiority. Yet the vocabulary we commonly employ itself tends to strain this linkage in that theater nuclear forces are distinguished from strategic. Ironically, the struggle to keep so-called Forward Based Systems out of SALT, because we could not find a good way to bring in comparable Soviet systems, tended to underline the distinction. In our thinking about the actual prosecution of a strategic conflict, once conflict at that level begins we tend to forget about what might be the local outcome of the regional conflict that probably precipitated the strategic exchange.

The Soviets, on the other hand, appear to take a more comprehensive view of strategy and the strategic balance. Both in peacetime political competition and in the ultimate test of a central conflict, they tend to see all force elements as contributing to a unified strategic purpose, national survival and the elimination or containment of enemies on their periphery. The U.S.S.R. tends to see intercontinental forces, and strategic forces more generally, as a means to help it win an all-out conflict in its most crucial theater, Europe. Both institutionally and operationally, Soviet intercontinental strike forces are an outgrowth and extension of forces initially developed to cover peripheral targets. Land combat forces, including conventional forces, are carefully trained and equipped to fight in nuclear conditions. In the last decade, the emergence of a hostile and potentially powerful China has more firmly riveted the "rimland" of Eurasia into the Soviet strategic perspective. Whatever the consequence of a central U.S.-Soviet nuclear conflict for their re-

pective homelands, it could well have the effect of eliminating U.S. power and influence on the Eurasian landmass for a long time. If, by virtue of its active and passive damage-limitation measures, the Soviet Union suffered measurably less damage than did the United States, and it managed to intimidate China or destroy Chinese military power, the resultant Soviet domination of Eurasia could represent a crucial element of "strategic victory" in Soviet eyes. In any case, regional conflict outcomes seem not to lose their significance in Soviet strategy once strategic nuclear conflict begins.

CONFLICT LIMITATION

Nuclear conflict limitation is a theme on which influential American opinion is divided. After much thought and argument, the previous administration adopted a more explicit endorsement of limited strategic nuclear options as a hedge against the failings of a strategy solely reliant on all-out war plans for deterrence or response in the event of deterrent failure. The present administration has appeared more doubtful about the value of limited nuclear options because it appears generally to doubt the viability of nuclear conflict limitations. It may also share the fear of some critics that limited options could seem to make nuclear use more tolerable and therefore detract from deterrence.

Theories of nuclear conflict limitation entertained in the United States tend to rest on concepts of risk management and bargaining with the opponent. We are interested in limited options because they are more credible than unlimited ones in response to limited provocation. Whether or not they can be controlled is uncertain; hence their credible presence enhances the risk faced by the initiator of conflict. Should conflict come about, then limited options might be used to change the risk, cost, and benefit calculus of the opponent in the direction of some more or less tolerable war termination. This would not be a sure thing, but better have the limited options than not.

How the Soviets view the matter of nuclear conflict limitations is obscure. The least one can say is that they do not see it in the manner described above. From the early 1960s, after McNamara's famed Ann Arbor speech, Soviet propagandists have denounced limited nuclear war concepts as U.S. contrivances to make nuclear weapons use more "acceptable" and to rationalize the quest for counterforce advantages. They have replayed the criticism that such concepts weaken deterrence and cannot prevent nuclear war from becoming unlimited.

To some degree, Soviet propaganda on this theme is suspect for being aimed at undermining U.S. strategy innovations that detract from the political benefits of Soviet strategic force improvement. Given differences of view in the United States

on this subject, most of the U.S. argument should not be taken as thinking and planning acceptance in doctrinal nuclear phase, in the conflict limitation growth and modern broader array of error imparted some confidence not be surprising, the kinds of limited nuclear. One may seriously the problem of continental baggage the U.S. doctrinal thinking presence of limited nuclear more traditional options and their consequences possible in the common likely to approach American counter

Methods of Assessment

Comparative study of many related matters has been made to what should be U.S. and Soviet significantly. They rather aim the and value of a realistic device and analysis however, as a of their technological primitive in the

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on this subject, moreover, the Soviets could hardly resist the temptation to fuel the U.S. argument. There are several reasons why Soviet public pronouncements should not be taken as entirely reflecting the content of operative Soviet strategic thinking and planning regarding limited nuclear use. For one thing, qualified acceptance in doctrine and posture of a non-nuclear scenario, or at least a non-nuclear phase, in theater conflict displays some Soviet willingness to embrace conflict limitation notions previously rejected. Soviet strategic nuclear force growth and modernization, in addition, have given Soviet operational planners a broader array of employment options than they had in the 1960s and may have imparted some confidence in Soviet ability to enforce conflict limitations. It would not be surprising, therefore, to find some Soviet contingency planning for various kinds of limited nuclear options at the theater and, perhaps, at the strategic level.

One may seriously doubt, however, whether Soviet planners would approach the problem of contingency planning for limited nuclear options with the conceptual baggage the U.S. system carries. It would seem contrary to the style of Soviet doctrinal thinking to emphasize bargaining and risk management. Rather the presence of limited options planning in the Soviet system would seem likely to rest on more traditional military concepts of economizing on force use, controlling actions and their consequences, reserving options, and leaving time to learn what is possible in the course of a campaign. The Soviet limited options planner would seem likely to approach his task with a more strictly unilateral set of concerns than his American counterpart.

Methods of Assessing the Strategic Balance

Comparative study of U.S. and Soviet strategic doctrine should give attention to a closely related matter: how we perceive and measure force balances. Allusion has already been made to asymmetries between U.S. and Soviet definitions of strategic forces, what should be counted in SALT, etc. This is by no means the heart of the matter. U.S. and Soviet methodologies for measuring military strength appear to differ significantly.

Many rather amateurish and misleading beliefs about the way the Soviets measure and value military strength prevail; for example, that the Soviets have some atavistic devotion to mass and size. Mass they do believe in because both experience and analysis show that mass counts. They can be quite choosy about size, however, as a look at their tank and fighter designs reveals. Within the limits of their technological potential, they have been quite sensitive and in no way primitive in their thinking about quality/quantity tradeoffs.

Another widespread notion is that the Soviets have an unusual propensity for worst-case planning or military overinsurance. This is hard to demonstrate convincingly in Soviet behavior. The Soviet theory of war in central Europe, for example, is daring, not conservative. Despite much rhetoric on the danger of surprise and the need for high combat readiness, Soviet strategic planning has not accorded nearly the importance to "bolt-from-the-blue" surprise attack that the United States has. This does not look like overinsurance.

The problem of measuring strength goes more deeply to differing appreciations of the processes of conflict and how they bear on force measurement. U.S. measures of the overall strategic balance tend to be of two general types. First come the so-called static measures of delivery vehicles, weapons, megatonnage and equivalent megatonnage, throwweight, and, perhaps, some measure of hard-target kill potential (such as weapon numbers times a scaled yield factor divided by the square of Circular Error Probability). Comparisons of this type can display some interesting things about differing forces. But they say very little about how those forces, much less the nations that employ them, will fare in war. By themselves, static measures can be dangerously misleading.

We then move on to the second, or quasi-dynamic, class of measures. Here the analyst is out to capture the essential features of a "real war" in terms general enough to allow parametric application, frequent reiteration of the analysis with varying assumptions, and easy swamping of operational and technical details which he may not be able to quantify or of which he may be ignorant. Typically, certain gross attributes of the war "scenario" will be determined, e.g., levels of alert, who goes first, and very general targeting priorities. Then specified "planning factor" performance characteristics are attributed to weapons. Because it is relatively easy (and fun), a more or less elaborate version of the ICBM duel is frequently conducted. The much more subtle and complicated, but crucial, engagement of air and sea-based forces is usually handled by gross assumption, e.g., n percent of bomber weapons get to target, all SSBNs at sea survive. Regional conflicts and forces are typically ignored. Of course, all command/control/communications systems are assumed to work as planned—otherwise the forces, and even worse, the analyst would be out of business. Finally, "residuals" of surviving forces, fatality levels, and industrial damage are totaled up. A popular variant is to run a countermilitary war in these terms and then see whether residual forces are sufficient to inflict "unacceptable damage" on cities. If so, then deterrence is intact according to some. Others point to grossly asymmetric levels of surviving forces to document an emerging strategic imbalance.

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capture the known, much less the unknown complexities, uncertainties, and fortuities of a real strategic nuclear conflict of any dimension. Such liturgical admissions are usually offered to gain absolution from their obvious consequences, namely that the analysis in question could be, not illuminating, but quite wrong. However, more heroic analytic attempts at capturing the real complexity and operational detail of a major nuclear exchange are usually not made because they are: a) usually beyond the expertise of single analysts or small groups, b) not readily susceptible to varied and parametric application, and c) *still* laden by manifold uncertainties and unknowns that are very hard to quantify. Hence they are very hard to apply to the tasks of assessing strategic force balances or the value of this or that force improvement. The more simplistic analysis is more convenient. The analyst can conduct it many times, and talk over his results with other analysts who do the same thing. The whole methodology thereby acquires a reality and persuasiveness of its own.

The influence of this kind of analysis in our strategic decision system has many explanations. It has sociological origins in the dominance of economists and engineers over soldiers in the conduct of our strategic affairs. It conforms with the needs of a flat and argumentative policy process in which there are many and varied participants, from generals to graduate students. They need a common idiom that does not soak up too much computer time and can be unclassified. And finally, in part because of the first explanation cited, when it comes to nuclear strategy, we do not believe much in "real" nuclear war anyway. We are after a standard of sufficiency that is adequate and persuasive in a peacetime setting.

Two things about this style of strategic analysis merit stating in the context of this paper. First, on the face of it, the value of simplistic, operationally-insensitive methodologies is assuredly less in the present strategic environment than it was when the United States enjoyed massive superiority. Not only are weapons, force mixes, and scenarios more complicated than these methodologies can properly illuminate, but the relative equality of the two sides going into the conflict makes the subtleties, complexities, and uncertainties all the more important for how they come out. Second, the Soviets do not appear to do their balance measuring in this manner.

One can gain a fair insight into the manner of Soviet force balance analysis from public sources, particularly Soviet military literature. Additional inferences can be drawn from the organization and professional composition of the Soviet defense decision system, and from some of the results of Soviet decisions. On the whole it appears that Soviet planners and force balance assessors are much more sensitive than we are to the subtleties and uncertainties—what we sometimes call "scenario

dependencies"—of strategic conflict seen from a very operational perspective. The timing and scale of attack initiation, tactical deception and surprise, uncertainties about weapons effects, the actual character of operational plans and targeting, timely adjustment of plans to new information, and, most important, the continued viability of command and control—these factors appear to loom large in Soviet calculations of conflict outcomes.

The important point, however, is a conceptual one: Unlike the typical U.S. planner, the Soviet planner does not appear to see the *force* balance prior to conflict as a kind of physical reification of the war outcome and therefore as a measure of strategic strength by itself. Rather he seems to see the force balance, the "correlation of military forces," as one input to a complex combat process in which other factors of great significance will play, and the chief aim of which is a new, more favorable balance of forces. The sum of these factors is strategy, and strategy is a significant variable to the Soviet planner.

As a generalization, then, the Soviet planner is very sensitive to operational details and uncertainties. Because these factors can swing widely, even wildly, in different directions, a second generalization about Soviet force analysis emerges: a given force balance in peacetime can yield widely varying outcomes to war depending on the details and uncertainties of combat. Some of those outcomes could be relatively good for the Soviet Union, others relatively bad. The planner's task is to improve the going-in force balance, to be sure. But it is also to develop and pursue ways of waging war that tend to push the outcome in favorable directions.

This kind of thinking occasions two very unpleasant features in Soviet military doctrine: a strong tendency to preempt and a determination to suppress the enemy's command and control system at all costs. The Soviets tend to see any decision to go to nuclear war as being imposed on them by a course of events that tells them "war is coming," a situation they bungled memorably in June 1941. It makes no difference whose misbehavior started events on that course. Should they find themselves on it, their operational perspective on the factors that drive war outcomes places a high premium on seizing the initiative and imposing the maximum disruptive effects on the enemy's forces and war plans. By going first, and especially disrupting command and control, the highest likelihood of limiting damage and coming out of the war with intact forces and a surviving nation is achieved, virtually independent of the force balance.

This leads to a final generalization. We tend rather casually to assume that, when we talk about parity and "essential equivalence" and the Soviets about "equal security," we are talking about the same thing: functional strategic stability. We

are not. The Soviets are taking an equal or better chance in any scenario and take advantage to see that they can win the war. This is not stability. Again, this is not to argue the result of any strategy Soviet leaders would probably exit from the risk of such these exits are closely of strategy to be the point. This then leads them not particularly help off.

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are not. The Soviets are talking about a going-in force balance in which they have an equal or better chance of winning a central war, if they can orchestrate the right scenario and take advantage of lucky breaks. It is the job of the high command to see that they can. If it fails to do so, the Soviet Union could possibly lose the war. This is not stability in our terms.

Again, this is not to argue that the Soviets do not foresee appalling destruction as the result of any strategic exchange under the best of conditions. In a crisis, Soviet leaders would probably take any tolerable and even some not-very-tolerable exits from the risk of such a war. But their image of strategic crisis is one in which these exits are closing up, and the "war is coming." They see the ultimate task of strategy to be the provision of forces and options for preempting that situation. This then leads them to choose strategies that, from a U.S. point of view, seem not particularly helpful in keeping the exits open, and even likely to close them off.

It is frequently argued—more frequently as we become more anxious about the emerging force balance—that the Soviets could not have confidence in launching a strategic attack and achieving the specific objectives that theoretical analysis might suggest to be possible, such as destruction of Minuteman. Particularly because they are highly sensitive to operational uncertainties they would not, in one of the more noteworthy phrases of the latest Defense Department posture statement, gamble national survival on a "single cosmic throw of the dice." This construction of the problem obscures the high likelihood that decisions to go to strategic war will be made under great pressure and in the face of severe perceived penalty if the decision is not made and the war comes anyway. They are not likely to come about in a situation in which the choice is an uncertain war or a comfortable peace. It also obscures the fact that the heavy weight of uncertainty will also rest on the shoulders of U.S. decisionmakers in a crisis.

Dangers of Misunderstanding

In sum, there are fundamental differences between U.S. and Soviet strategic thinking, both at the level of value and at the level of method. The existence of these differences and, even more, our failure to recognize them have had dangerous consequences for the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship.

One such might be called the "hawk's lament." Failing to appreciate the character of Soviet strategic thinking in relation to our own views, we have underestimated the competitiveness of Soviet strategic policy and the need for competitive

responsiveness on our part. This is evident in both our SALT and our strategic force modernization behavior.

A second negative effect might be termed the "dove's lament." By projecting our views onto the Soviets, and failing to appreciate their real motives and perceptions, we have underestimated the difficulties of achieving genuine strategic stability through SALT and over-sold the value of what we have achieved. This has, in turn, set us up for profound, perhaps even hysterical, disillusionment in the years ahead, in which the very idea of negotiated arms control could be politically discredited. If present strategic trends continue, it is not hard to imagine a future political environment in which it would be difficult to argue for arms control negotiations even of a very hard-nosed sort.

The third and most dangerous consequence of our misunderstanding of Soviet strategy involves excessive confidence in strategic stability. U.S. strategic behavior, in its broadest sense, has helped to ease the Soviet Union onto a course of more assertive international action. This has, in turn, increased the probability of a major East-West confrontation, arising not necessarily by Soviet design, in which the United States must forcefully resist a Soviet advance or face collapse of its global position, while the Soviet Union cannot easily retreat or compromise because it has newly acquired global power status to defend and the matter at issue could be vital. In such conditions, it is all too easy to imagine a "war is coming" situation in which the abstract technical factors on which we rest our confidence in stability, such as expected force survival levels and "unacceptable damage," could crumble away. The strategic case for "waiting to see what happens," for conceding the operational initiative to the other side—which is what crisis stability is all about—could look very weak. Each side could see the great operational virtues of preemption, be convinced that the other side sees them too, and be hourly more determined that the other side not have them. This, in any case, could be the Soviet way of perceiving things. Given the relative translucence of U.S. versus Soviet strategic decision processes, however, our actual ability to preempt is likely to be less than the Soviets', quite apart from the character of the force balance. Add to that the problem of a vulnerable Minuteman ICBM force and you have a potentially very nasty situation.

What we know about the nature of our own strategic thinking and that of the Soviet Union is not at all comforting at this juncture. The Soviets approach the problem of managing strategic nuclear power with highly competitive and combative instincts. Some have argued that these instincts are largely fearful and defensive, others that they are avaricious and confident. My own reading of

Russian and Soviet history handle.

The United States and the Soviet Union, the creation of viable weapons. Despite much evidence, these two societies determine how they handle. The democratic society is clearly the task of managing nuclear weapons. The stamp of an imperialism on the United States is willfully admittedly unpleasant condition that suspects to mark the progress of history. It is not going to be easy to change political traditions. But the grounds for fatalism.

The Soviet strategic policy is a military rationalism with a view to war if we enhance the power and they take war away, they so on to our own future.

Russian and Soviet history is that they are both, and, for that, the more difficult to handle.

The United States and the Soviet Union share two awesome problems in common, the creation of viable industrial societies and the management of nuclear weapons. Despite much that is superficially common to our heritages, however, these two societies have fundamentally different political cultures that determine how they handle these problems. The stamp of a legal, commercial, and democratic society is clearly seen in the way the United States has approached the task of managing nuclear security. Soviet styles of managing this problem bear the stamp of an imperial, bureaucratic, and autocratic political tradition. While the United States is willing to see safety in a compact of "live and let live" under admittedly unpleasant conditions, the Soviet Union operates from a political tradition that suspects the viability of such deals, and expects them, at best, to mark the progress of historically ordained forces to ascendancy.

It is not going to be easy to stabilize the strategic competition on this foundation of political traditions. But if we understand the situation clearly, there should be no grounds for fatalism. Along with a very uncomfortable degree of competitiveness, Soviet strategic policy contains a strong element of professionalism and military rationalism with which we can do business in the interest of a common safety if we enhance those qualities in ourselves. The Soviets respect military power and they take warfare very seriously. When the propaganda and polemics are pared away, they sometimes wonder if we do. We can make a healthy contribution to our own future, and theirs, by rectifying this uncertainty.

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