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R.S.M. #7

16 November 1962

SUBJECT: RECENT TRENDS IN SOVIET STRATEGIC THOUGHT ON
FUTURE WAR

1. This memorandum is a companion piece to R.S.M. #5, "Basic Soviet Ideas on War and the Peacetime Uses of Military Power," of 6 November 1962. Both were prepared in support of NIE 11-4-62.

2. The two memoranda will presently be combined with other materials in a [redacted] study.

3. Distribution of this memorandum within USIB agencies should be confined to the normal audience [redacted]. The memorandum may not be quoted in briefings or publications without prior consultation with the originator.

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TS #186382

16 November 1962

R.S.M. #7

SUBJECT: Recent Trends in Soviet Strategic Thought on Future War

1. Soviet strategic thought on future war proceeds from the premise that should the USSR become involved in a general war, the armed forces of the country must be capable of fighting it effectively and ensuring the survival of the Soviet state. Beyond this general premise, Soviet thinking has not always been uniform and clearcut on the matter of preparing for future war. Soviet defense policy, which is hopelessly entangled with economic policy, over the past year or so has been the subject of considerable controversy in the USSR. Strategic theory has not yet been worked out in all its aspects and is even somewhat contradictory in some places. Not surprisingly for a complex bureaucracy, the Soviet Union has for a long time been living with internal conflicts, compromises and adjustments in the sphere of strategic military planning. And there has been a distinct tendency in such planning to postpone as long as possible very difficult decisions.

2. Official Soviet thinking on the problem of preparing for future war finds expression in military doctrine, which the Soviets use as a guide to defense planning. The doctrine describes the character of a probable future war, outlines basic strategy for the war, and indicates the kind of force structure needed to fight the war envisioned. The doctrine is not a war plan that defines specific missions of units or a blueprint that dictates precise numbers and types of weapons. We are not privy to either Soviet war plans or detailed blueprints. But we have good information on official military doctrine and on trends in Soviet thinking that may influence the shape of that doctrine in the future.

3. Of course, the conclusions drawn in Soviet military doctrine for force structure do not necessarily mean that commensurate policy decisions will be taken. There is a continuing competition for Soviet resources among military requirements as well as between them and important non-military programs. Whether one or another military program is selected

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will depend upon the interaction of at least these factors: the force of argument which various interest groups bring to bear on the political leadership;* the leadership's assessment of the international situation in general and the strategic power balance in particular; the regime's commitment to various internal non-military programs; the degree of confidence Soviet leaders have in deceptive measures, such as secrecy and propaganda, to substitute for actual military goods.**

Ferment in Soviet Military Thinking

4. Official doctrine in its current state is, characteristically, a compromise between the competing interests in the Soviet bureaucracy. It is primarily a product of the competition between Khrushchev's ideas and the prevailing military viewpoints, the latter arising out of debate among the military officers.*** This accounts for the tortuous development of

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*A Soviet admiral with experience in military planning wrote

that the development of weapons systems in the USSR up until this time has been mainly determined by the parochial interests of each branch of the armed forces. He wrote that there has been little objective research on the optimum means of performing main strategic tasks, on the selection of the optimum weapon system for performing these tasks, or on the development of operational doctrines for the weapons systems selected.

**Thus, in the 7 November October Revolution parade, the USSR exhibited a ballistic missile which IZVESTIYA claimed "can be fired from any position both above and below the water." A tentative analysis of observer reports indicates that the missile is too long to be used in any known Soviet submarine unless a stage were removed.

***A recent Soviet Defense Ministry book on military strategy, obscuring Khrushchev's role as a principal framer of doctrine, notes that military doctrine is "not thought out or compiled by a single person or group of persons," but is an expression of generally accepted views among the state leaders on questions of national defense. (Military strategy is said to be subordinate to military doctrine: "While military doctrine defines principal positions, strategy works out from these positions concrete problems.")

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the official doctrine between January 1960 and the present. Current doctrine is, as it has been since 1960, an amalgam of the competing viewpoints. It bears Khrushchev's strong imprint, notably his emphasis on nuclear/rocket weapons, but it also registers successes by the military, who after much persevering, managed to retrieve some previously discarded ideas bearing on the older arms of service, as well as to get authorization for new concepts.

5. Khrushchev did not inherit the role of military pundit from Stalin. He appropriated it. In the years immediately following Stalin's death, a modus operandi was reached whereby questions of war and peace were designated the exclusive preserve of the political leadership; and questions of military doctrine, the prerogative of the officer corps. In the years 1953-55, a revolution in military doctrine took place that originated with the military and was almost entirely carried out by them. But by fall 1957, Khrushchev, fresh from crushing his political enemies, stood firmly at the helm of power. At that time, the new super-long-range-rocket was test-fired, symbolizing for him the end of U.S. vulnerability to attack from abroad. Then the party chief made the first of a long series of inroads into the military's province of military science.* He

*One of his first major trespasses was indirect: his viewpoint was carried in a very important RED STAR article in September 1957, which was signed by Marshal Vershinin, and which was the first ever to make a direct assessment of the relative military strength of the USSR and the United States. Only many months later did Khrushchev reveal, in private discussion with an American statesman, that he had actually been the author of the Vershinin article. Moreover, one might conjecture that Marshal Zhukov was fired from his CPSU Presidium and Defense Ministry posts in October 1957 not so much because of the steps he had taken over a long span of time to erode party controls over the army, as because of his opposition to Khrushchev's obtruding into the military's sphere of competence.

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gradually stepped up his efforts to influence changes in doctrine (and force structure), directly contradicting established military positions in a number of instances. He capped his presumptions in January 1960, with the announcement of a new military doctrine that contained some bitter pills for the officer corps to swallow.

6. Downgrading the importance of conventional forces on the grounds that nuclear/missile firepower is the determinant of the country's military might, Khrushchev succeeded in foisting upon the military a severe unilateral troop reduction program. He also tried to saddle the military with a rigid doctrine of excessive reliance on nuclear weapons. Had he had his way entirely, the Soviet forces might have been structured as an inflexible, nuclear annihilating force. But the military, over a period of time and with the help of fortuitous circumstances,* succeeded in impressing the political leadership with the importance of maintaining a greater degree of doctrinal and operational flexibility. Their position was capsulized in the heavily publicized "combined forces" slogan, and later the "mass armies" slogan. The suspension of the troop cut and the emphasis which Malinovsky's October 1961 presentation of the official military doctrine placed on large, versatile forces vindicated the positions which the military had long espoused.

7. Among the military officers themselves, strategic doctrine has become a lively and argumentative field of professional study. Khrushchev's bold reformulation of doctrine in January 1960 had an electrifying effect on the thinking of Soviet officers. His remarks brought into question the viability and applicability to future war conditions of many of the established military tenets and procedures. At the direction of the Defense Ministry, vigorous controversial discussions on a wide range of military questions were held in both open and closed forums. The military literature burgeoned consequently to an unprecedented degree with differing viewpoints on how future war will be waged and on ways to prepare for it.

*See R.S.M. #2 of 3 October 1962 for a discussion of the "fortuitous circumstances" and other reasons for the changes in Soviet defense policy and doctrine, 1960-61.

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8. Egged on by their leaders, the military have been striving to perceive, comprehend and then to integrate into strategic and tactical doctrines the implications of the sundry nuclear/missile weapons being placed at their disposal. They have been trying to bridge the long existing gap, as several Soviet writers have put it, between Soviet military theory and developments in nuclear weapons and their means of delivery. In this effort, they have hashed over such questions as the relative roles and composition of nuclear and conventional forces, the nature of combat in future war, its probable duration, alternative attack strategies, the effects of the first nuclear attack, and a host of substrategic matters such as positional warfare, the organization of field forces, and the use of tactical nuclears in various types of operations.

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9. Debate on questions of strategic consequence, to be sure, has not gone unbridled. Common assumptions are made about who the probable enemy will be, on what scale the war will be fought, and what the basic weapons in the war will be. Questions of such extreme sensitivity as the weapons, role, and mission of the intercontinental attack forces of the USSR have not been discussed in much detail.

10. Early in the debate, in 1960, sharp dichotomy was apparent in the strategic thought of the military discussants. One distinct tendency was to resist changing time-tested principles and practices and to rely heavily on the lessons of World War II. Adherents of this school emphasized the limitations on modern weapons; they imagined a future war as likely to be protracted and not unlike World War II in a number of respects. Though they expected the massive use of nuclear weapons, they believed that even under these conditions a general war would entail ground combat on a mass scale and multi-million man armies. The opposite tendency was to strive for a complete break with past conceptions of warfare. Those inclined in this direction felt that the changes in doctrine have not kept pace with developments in technology; and they urged the adoption of bold new concepts for future war that give an almost exclusive combat role to nuclear missile weapons. Among this group were officers who maintained that a future war will have a rapid, blitzkrieg character; that it is not necessary to have a multimillion

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man army for waging war; and that the basic function of ground troops should not be extended combat but occupation of enemy territory. As the debate developed and fresh official military positions were elaborated, the opposing schools have tended to move closer together, the sharpness of their differences on strategic questions having diminished.

11. There could also be distinguished in the controversy a very small minority of officers who might be said to constitute an "unrestrained war" school. This group has urged extreme reliance of nuclears, put great emphasis on high yield warheads, and advocated mass annihilation of the enemy on a country-busting scale. Official military thinking thus far has rejected this extreme view, at least as regards the European theater. But this view may have found acceptance as the most feasible strategy for war in the American theater. (More on this later.) The "unrestrained war" view, as applied by its exponents to future war in general, was most forcefully advanced in early 1960--soon after Khrushchev's 14 January speech on future war--and appears to have been an effort to take Khrushchev's strategy to its logical conclusion. This conception of how future war should be waged virtually rules out the possibility of real victory for either side. They would have war be so destructive that it would be unfeasible from a military point of view. For this reason, they paradoxically emerge as "no war" advocates, whose whole concern is with deterring war. This, it seems, is Khrushchev's philosophy in a nut shell. It springs from his long dalliance with nuclear missile weapons, which in previous years brought him into conflict with Soviet military leaders; his self-esteemed deftness in using nuclear blackmail in support of foreign policy objectives; and his confidence in his "no-war" program of peaceful competition as the best road to the expansion of Soviet-Communist influence.

12. Most of the military spokesmen could be said to favor "restrained war" in a broad sense. All, of course, expect future war to involve the use of nuclears on a large scale. But they eschew country-busting with regard to Europe, urging restraint, discrimination and deliberation in the use of nuclears. Their task, as they see it, is to make war feasible or manageable. For their professional purposes they assume that war will occur, and they draw up a theory of war and a doctrine for preparing for it that will permit them to wage war effectively, minimize their own losses, survive as a great

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power, and preserve a part of the world to preside over. Thus their insistence on a major combat role for enormous ground forces, equipped with tactical nuclears and conventional weapons.

13. The official Soviet conception of political and military war aims, however, is incompatible with the notion of a "controlled war" in the sense currently in use in the United States. That is, the doctrinal emphasis on "decisive political and military goals" and "total victory"--which is said to make "any sort of compromise almost impossible"--tends to preclude the possibility of continued bargaining and deterrence in the course of a future general war. This conception of total victory is ideological in origin: it springs from assumptions about the "irreconcilable contradictions between the socialist and capitalist systems." Whether it is also an operative military estimate of the Soviet General Staff that the opposing sides will strive for total victory is still a matter for conjecture. (In the mass propaganda, U.S. statements on a strategy for controlling a possible future war have been derided and held up as evidence of a U.S. desire to make war feasible.) In any case it is not improbable that Soviet military thinking might, at some point in the future, follow the U.S. pattern of thought on controlled war. Soviet military thinking in the past has, albeit belatedly, adjusted to changes in U.S. strategic doctrine. And the idea of a controlled war has only recently gained currency in official circles in this country.

14. Summing up, there appears to be a fundamental conflict of interests between the Khrushchev circle and the bulk of the officer corps. There is first of all an important difference in focus between them. Khrushchev and his coterie tend to concentrate on peacetime military requirements, the most important of which is deterrence. The military, by and large, tend to focus on wartime requirements, which may be substantially greater than peacetime needs. Thus, while Khrushchev may be confident that there will not be a future general war and reason that the USSR needs

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only to build up its strategic forces for deterrence of the West, the military, if only for professional reasons, do not share that confidence and tend to argue for a real war-winning capability. The USSR probably cannot undertake the creation of a true war-winning capability without gravely curtailing the program of peaceful economic competition with the West.*

Official Strategic Doctrine for General War

15. Official Soviet strategic thought has not been moving in a full circle to its pre-1960 state, as one might suppose in the light of traditionalist amendments to Khrushchev's new military course, but has been making spiral-like advances forward. There has been no change in the assumptions, made about the general character of future war as outlined by Khrushchev in January 1960: war will inevitably involve the massive use of nuclear weapons; it will be global in scope and involve a clash of coalitions; it will begin, most likely, by surprise attack and will develop almost simultaneously along fronts and in the rear areas of the combatant countries, and it will result in unprecedented destruction. Also, the massive retaliation doctrine has in essence been retained.

16. The changes effected in Khrushchev's new course comply with these basic assumptions. The decision to have large ground forces was made out of consideration of the nuclear war requirements and the problem of correcting the perceived general strategic imbalance. The decision did not share the rationale of the U.S. decisions to strengthen its conventional forces--i.e., that this was needed for fighting local wars. Nor did it indicate a changed Soviet estimate on the impossibility, given the present correlation of forces, of a conventional or near-conventional general war. Despite the new emphasis given the older branches of service in the doctrine, there has been no trace of thought that a future general war might be limited to the use of conventional forces. That a future general war will "inevitably" involve the massive

*A recent Defense Ministry book on military strategy made the telling observation that "No country, however wealthy it may be, can afford to keep in peacetime the forces needed to attain the basic aims of the initial period of a future general war."

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use of nuclear/missile weapons is and (barring a disarmament agreement) almost certainly will continue to be, the guiding concept underlying contemporary Soviet military doctrine during the coming years.

17. The forward look of official doctrine, as modified in 1961, is especially evident in the greater emphasis now placed on the effects of the first strike and the initial phase of war on the outcome of the war. There is good open evidence that Soviet military planners have developed a strategy designed in the first place to end the war in the shortest possible time, primarily by means of massive nuclear strikes.* It is also plain that the USSR continues to hedge against this strategy by planning simultaneously for a possible protracted war on the Eurasian continent. Thus, calculated to finish the war in the shortest possible time, the doctrine is predicated upon the assumption that the strategic missile forces will play the decisive and principal role in the war. But considering the possibility that the strategic missile forces might fail to conclude the war in the short run, the doctrine calls for the maintenance of other types of forces equipped with nuclear weapons and operating as combined arms which would be prepared to wage extended war.

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18. A conclusion which the Soviets have drawn from the adjudged possible decisiveness of the first all-out attack is that it is of paramount importance to deny the enemy the opportunity to strike first. Hence, preparedness for dealing with an attempted enemy surprise attack has been made the pivotal problem in military planning and training. And the USSR has added to its strategic concepts for future war the doctrine of pre-emptive attack.

*Thus, a recent Defense Ministry book on strategy stated that (a) strategic means can "often" attain decisive results in the war as a whole without the employment of tactical and operational forces; (b) a country subjected to heavy nuclear attack may out of necessity capitulate even though its military forces in the field are still intact; and (c) the initial period of a general nuclear war will definitely be the main and decisive one.

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19. Pre-emption is not a strategy for a premeditated war, but a meaningful course of action in the event deterrence fails or is thought to have failed. The doctrine of pre-emption does not replace the doctrine of deterrence but is intended to reinforce it in view of reduced Soviet confidence in its deterrent capability. It is in effect, strike-first-if-necessary-and-if-possible doctrine. It is designed not so much to vanquish with certainty a probable enemy as to blunt substantially the enemy's attack forces in order to permit the USSR to survive the initial nuclear phase of a future war. Put another way, the USSR has sought the doctrine out of a feeling not of strength but of relative weakness. The Soviets were also strongly motivated to adopt the doctrine out of consideration of (1) the importance of speed and initiative in the use of nuclears; (2) the possible decisiveness of the first massed nuclear attack; (3) the growing size and power of U.S. long-range attack forces; (4) the disclosed U.S. awareness of the small size and vulnerability of the Soviet long-range attack forces; and (5) the diminishing degree of secrecy protecting the deployed Soviet strategic rockets.

20. The fact the Soviet regime has settled on a doctrine of pre-emption does not necessarily mean that the leadership is of one mind on the size and type of forces needed to achieve an effective pre-emptive action. There has, in fact, been recent evidence that controversy and indecision continue in Soviet ruling circles on important defense questions. (In the spring and summer of this year, a number of open military sources made thinly veiled pleas for greater increments to the Soviet strategic forces.) The question of what kind and size of force structure to buy turns on the need to deal with the U.S. threat from continental U.S. and Polaris submarines; the threat emanating from Europe presents no real problem for Soviet strategy. The Soviets have developed a war-winning type of strategy and a massive versatile capability for dealing with Europe; but they have not yet, to our knowledge, worked out a comprehensive war-winning strategy for dealing with the threat from the American continent.

Theater Warfare

21. Though the Soviets speak in terms of the war being waged on a global scale, they have evidently developed a theater warfare doctrine which is really applicable only to the Eurasian theater. The focus of discussion in [redacted]

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~~TOP SECRET~~ open Soviet military materials has been on a nuclear war in the European theater, with only a generalized treatment of strategic attack against the continental U.S. The strategic concept which Soviet officialdom has adopted for the European theater represents the moderate "military viewpoint" which had long resisted the logic of Khrushchev's new military course and, for the time being, successfully obstructed it. The extant official concept for war in Europe rejects the extreme minority argument for knocking out whole countries with area-devastating, large-yield attacks. It calls instead for a major combatant role for multimillion man armies "saturated" with tactical nuclears as well as conventional arms to follow up the strikes of strategic rocket forces and aviation.

22. The paradox here is inescapable. On the one hand, Soviet officialdom has rejected the extreme recommendations that the USSR adopt a country-busting policy for Europe and radically reorganize the country's forces (that is, severely cut back or even eliminate the conventional arms of service). On the other hand, current doctrine calls for ending the war in the "shortest possible time" primarily by means of strategic nuclear strikes. More important, the country's strategic forces for attack against Europe have been overdeveloped to the degree that they could (as Malinovsky once boasted) reduce whole countries to "radioactive deserts." It is no wonder then that with such a capability Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders could not see the logic of the military argument that multimillion man armies will play a major combat role in a future war. Also, while the regime's decision to suspend the troop cut plan in 1961 was taken at least in part as a demonstration of Soviet power with the aim of righting the imbalance in the general strategic situation, the retention of a larger standing army may have the effect of watering down the Soviet strategic missile threat of area annihilation in Europe.

23. According to the strategic operational concept for Soviet theater forces, the combined arms attack against NATO forces would be launched simultaneously with or immediately after a strategic attack against the U.S., strategic NATO bases, and other European targets that would contribute to the immediate strategic aims of the war. The concept calls for the rapid advance of Soviet forces across Western Europe with the aim of gaining control of the European continent in

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the first few weeks of the war. The strategy at the same time provides for measures to prevent NATO from being re-inforced from the outside. This involves the interdiction of sea lanes, the destruction of Western task forces and port facilities, and--presumably--continued attacks against residual long-range Western retaliatory capabilities.

24. The ground war envisaged will be predominantly one of rapid maneuver. In the Soviet concept there will probably not be any continuous fronts; combat operations will develop along separate axes; deep breakthroughs by troop groupings of both sides will eliminate the linear front and the mass use of nuclears will cause large gaps between major military formations. While the vastly expanded scope of operations will involve the use of large ground forces, nuclear war conditions will see fewer fronts, the number of armies in a front will be "somewhat smaller" than in World War II, and the size of military units will be smaller than in the past.

25. The traditional military stress on the need to occupy the enemy's territory has survived the criticism of the proponents of high yield weapons. According to the prevailing strategic doctrine, it will not be enough to destroy the enemy's means of nuclear attack and to disorganize his rear. For the attainment of the "decisive" political and military aims of the Soviet allies in war, it will also be necessary to smash completely the surviving enemy armed forces, deprive him of his strategic positions, liquidate his military bases, and occupy strategically important areas on his territory. Such strategic tasks, according to the doctrine, can only be accomplished with the use of numerous ground forces.

26. As regards the American theater, there seems to be neither a comprehensive doctrine nor an existing or planned capability for waging war against the continental U.S. After the long-range ground, air or submarine missile strikes have been delivered. The theater warfare concept for Europe, which entails a major role for the ground forces, is not applicable to the U.S. theater. The war envisaged against the U.S. is, in effect, a war quite different from the projected European war. We cannot say with certainty whether the Soviets have really faced up to the question of continuing the war against the U.S. after the initial nuclear exchange or whether they have deferred making decisions on this difficult question. Argument can be brought to bear on behalf

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of either conclusion. But we are inclined to think that the problem has not yet been resolved by the Soviets.

27. Had Soviet military planners thought out the problem, they might have concluded that there is no alternative to the strategy of breaking the back of the U.S. in the strategic attack phase of the war, and that there was hence no need to elaborate a doctrine for waging ground warfare in North America. This reasoning, in turn, suggests that they might have adopted the view of the extremists (and Khrushchev) who called for knocking the U.S. out of the war with an area-devastating, large yield attack that would destroy the command and control of U.S. forces, severely damage its industry, and crush the will to resist.

28. On the other hand, the likelihood that the Soviet strategists have not yet resolved the problem of carrying on a war against America is suggested by the complaints of some senior military officers that the American theater has been neglected in Soviet thinking and military preparations. In point of fact, only a handful of contributors to the open Soviet military materials have even raised the question about what to do with regard to carrying the war to the U.S. after the long-range attack. Proceeding from the assumption that the war would be lengthy, an admiral wrote that it is naive to expect that it will be limited to Europe; that the "liberation" of Europe alone will lead to downfall of imperialist camp; and that it will only be necessary to drop some H-bombs, with no need to land troops on transoceanic countries.

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29. Another Soviet flag officer, with a background in military planning, was similarly exercised over the alleged failure to come to grips with the U.S. theater problem. he voiced pessimism about the possibility of developing a large-scale surface or underwater transoceanic transport capability. "Calculations show that if we wanted to," he said, "we could create such forces no earlier than 15 or 20 years from now, and this is clearly useless." This course would be useless, he said, because in ten years, the international situation will have changed so radically as to make the threat of war virtually non-existent.* The only realistic possibility for a transoceanic transport capability, in his view, lay in the creation of an autonomous air

*Political leaders often assert this.

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element--to be used not only for the direct job of transport by air, but also for screening whatever transportation is carried out by sea. Because such aircraft are needed for other purposes as well, he concluded, "all efforts should be made toward its creation, the more so because we cannot permit the Americans to outstrip us in this field."

30. Whether or not the recommendation for a substantial buildup in the air transportation has been or will be adopted is a matter for further study and conjecture. If such a program is undertaken, that fact will be an important indicator of Soviet intentions and strategy. In any event, it seems, we can rule out the possibility of any Soviet effort to develop a large surface or underwater transport capability in the coming decade.

31. Without a transoceanic transport capability, the Soviets may (1) continue to postpone making the critical decisions (if they have not already made them); (2) rely on a deterrent/pre-emptive strategy of area-annihilation by means of a relatively modest number of very large yield weapons (backed up by substantial active defense systems); or (3) compete with the U.S. in the size and types of strategic forces, emphasizing counterforce (pre-emption) and active defense as well as a capability to retaliate. (Making the third choice, the Soviets could hope for a state of mutual deterrence in the form of a long-range nuclear standoff after an initial strategic nuclear exchange, while making Europe the effective battlefield in the war.)

32. Whichever course is followed, Soviet strategic planning will of course determine to a great degree the configuration of Soviet forces in coming years. We are likely to see increasing attention being turned in Soviet military thinking to the problem of the main enemy across the sea. For one thing, Soviet confidence in the deterrent effect of the "hostage Europe" strategy has declined in recent years. At the same time, we have observed a growing emphasis on the forces capable of bringing Soviet military power to bear directly on the U.S. in the form of multiplication of ICBMs and the development of a long-range, submarine-launched missile capability.

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