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**The Soviet Strategic Culture:  
Implications for  
Limited Nuclear Operations**

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**Jack L. Snyder**

**A Project AIR FORCE report  
prepared for the  
United States Air Force**

**Rand**  
SANTA MONICA, CA 90406

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# **The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations**

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## PREFACE

This report was prepared in response to a request by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Headquarters, United States Air Force, for an examination of factors that might affect Soviet reactions to possible U.S. limited nuclear operations. The report makes no attempt to predict Soviet reactions. To do so would require situation-specific data that by definition cannot exist in advance, as well as insights into Soviet views regarding limited nuclear warfare that are probably as yet far from fully formed in the minds of the leadership. Instead, it seeks the more modest objectives of (1) providing a context for a better understanding of the intellectual, institutional, and strategic-cultural determinants that would bound the Soviet decisionmaking process in a crisis, and (2) speculating on the dominant behavioral propensities that would motivate—and constrain—the Soviet leaders during their efforts to cope with a situation where limited nuclear use by either side loomed as a possibility.

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## SUMMARY

In recent years the United States has increased the flexibility of its strategic targeting plans by developing preplanned, limited nuclear options as a supplement to the comparatively massive options that had previously existed. Proponents of strategic flexibility argue that limited options will diminish the chance of uncontrolled escalation if deterrence fails and increase the credibility of threats to use strategic nuclear weapons in response to city-sparing attacks or attacks on allies.

The assumption underlying the flexibility doctrine is that if deterrence fails, damage limitation can be best achieved by "intra-war deterrence," that is, by mutual restraint in the choice of targets and weapons. In view of the current mutual assured destruction relationship, it is assumed that the effectiveness of attempts to limit damage solely by unilateral means (disarming strikes, passive and active defenses) would be marginal at best.

However, intra-war restraint requires the cooperation of both parties. This report suggests that Soviet strategic thinking may be more favorably inclined toward unilateral damage limitation strategies than toward cooperative ones. Hence, American policymakers should not be sanguine about the likelihood that the Soviets would abide by American-formulated rules of intra-war restraint.

Neither Soviet nor American strategists are culture-free, preconception-free game theorists. Soviet and American doctrines have developed in different organizational, historical, and political contexts, and in response to different situational and technological constraints. As a result, the Soviets and Americans have asked somewhat different questions about the use of nuclear weapons and have developed answers that differ in significant respects.

It is useful to look at the Soviet approach to strategic thinking as a unique "strategic culture." Individuals are socialized into a distinctively Soviet mode of strategic thinking. As a result of this socialization process, a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns with regard to nuclear strategy has achieved a state of semipermanence that places them on the level of "culture" rather than mere "policy." Of course, attitudes may change as a result of changes in technology and the international environment. However, new problems are not assessed objectively. Rather, they are seen through the perceptual lens provided by the strategic culture.

The Soviet and American strategic cultures differ in the degree of emphasis they place on unilateral, as opposed to cooperative, damage limitation strategies. For a variety of historical and organizational reasons, the preponderance of Soviet thought on this question has shown a preference for the unilateral approach to damage limitation by means of unrestrained counterforce strikes. By identifying these historical and organizational factors, the strategic culture approach attempts to explain the origins and continuing vitality of attitudes and behavior that might otherwise seem to American observers inscrutable, wrong-headed, or peculiar.

It would be dangerous to assume that Soviet crisis decisionmakers will tailor their behavior to American notions of strategic rationality. Soviet criticism of the limited strategic options doctrine is consistent with deeply rooted patterns of Soviet strategic thought. However, there are trends that may lead the Soviets to take a

more sympathetic view of strategic flexibility in the future. Also, strategic culture is not the only important variable that might affect Soviet behavior in a deep nuclear crisis. Situational temptations and constraints undoubtedly carry great independent weight. The response to these temptations and constraints will be influenced, but not wholly determined, by strategic-cultural predispositions.

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## I. FLEXIBLE OPTIONS: WHY SOVIET ATTITUDES MATTER

In January 1974, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger announced that the United States had begun to increase the flexibility of its strategic targeting plans by developing preplanned limited nuclear options as a supplement to the comparatively massive options that had previously existed.<sup>1\*</sup> The rationale for this change was twofold. First, Schlesinger argued, the existence of selective nuclear options might "limit the chance of uncontrolled escalation" if deterrence failed. Second, increased flexibility would help "shore up deterrence across the entire spectrum of risk." In particular, Schlesinger claimed, the credibility of an American response to attacks on allies or a city-sparing attack on the United States might be enhanced by possession of selective options below the SIOP (Single Integrated Operations Plan) threshold.<sup>2</sup>

Two kinds of scenarios were invoked to illustrate the benefits of this policy change. The first postulated a Soviet counterforce strike that avoided targets near U.S. urban-industrial centers. Defense Department statements pointed out that massive U.S. retaliation against Soviet population and industry would be an inappropriate, if not suicidal, response to such an attack. In such a situation, a rational U.S. decisionmaker contemplating the Soviet Union's residual assured destruction capability would have only two options: to respond in a similarly limited fashion or do nothing.

This suicide-or-surrender scenario has probably been the most effective selling point for the selective-options policy. Even critics of the policy who see little sense in exchanging limited nuclear salvos find it hard to support suicide or surrender as alternatives. Moreover, the logic of the scenario seems to work independently of probable Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war. Even if the Soviets are unlikely to see a city-sparing preemptive strike as desirable, there remains a finite chance that such a situation might develop. To ward against this contingency, it costs us very little to have flexible options incorporated into the SAC (Strategic Air Command) operational repertoire.

Costs *could* be incurred, however, if actual U.S. declaratory policy or force posture had to be changed in order to support the selective-options doctrine. Some critics have argued that gratuitously announcing U.S. reluctance to use the SIOP might tempt the Soviets during a crisis and thereby increase the likelihood of war. Further opposition has focused on the issue of hard-target kill capability. Defenders of the selective-options policy have contended that American warhead accuracies must be improved to maintain the capability to fight (and hence deter) limited counterforce wars.<sup>3</sup> Opponents have argued that flexibility can be achieved without matching anticipated Soviet countersilo capabilities and that any marginal deterrent effect of being able to match the Soviets in silo-trading would be more than outweighed by the incentives for massive Soviet preemption that such a capability would create. Accordingly, they have questioned the wisdom of risking a destabili-

\* Notes are located at the end of sections.



zation of the deterrent balance by increasing U.S. hard-target kill capabilities to deter what they see as an esoteric and highly improbable form of war.

Game-theoretical speculation has not fully resolved the problem of dealing with such tradeoffs. It may be useful, therefore, to go beyond pure theory to an examination of Soviet attitudes to help decide how much weight should be given to various limited attack scenarios. If it is true that there is a tradeoff between deterring limited counterforce attacks and maintaining the stability of deterrence, it is of the utmost importance to examine Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war to evaluate better our own priorities.

The second kind of scenario postulates a Soviet conventional attack against NATO that cannot be turned back by conventional means alone. Schlesinger pointed out that we have long had "flexible options" based on tactical nuclear weapons to deter such attacks and to halt them if deterrence fails. Theater nuclear defense, however, is undesirable on at least two counts—first because it may be necessary to destroy Europe in order to save it, and second because such a defense concentrates all punishment on theater targets rather than against the Soviet homeland, whose threatened destruction might be necessary to give the Soviets sufficient incentive for a cease-fire. For these reasons, American policymakers have traditionally maintained that the U.S. strategic deterrent—not only NATO's theater nuclear forces—must be tied to the defense of Europe. Schlesinger argued that such "coupling" would only be credible if the United States could threaten limited strategic retaliation, because immediate massive retaliation would be suicidal and hence lack credibility as a response option. Schlesinger further hinted that the limited use of *strategic*, rather than tactical, weapons might be the nuclear option of first resort in a NATO contingency.<sup>4</sup> The essence of his argument maintained that if the goal is to stop the invasion without destroying America's allies in the process, why not induce the Soviets to halt by inflicting increments of pain on their own homeland?

This second scenario demonstrates even more convincingly than the first the need to assess Soviet attitudes toward controlled nuclear conflict. The rationality of using selective nuclear strikes to deter the Soviet Union from continuing an aggression depends, above all, on the probable Soviet response to such strikes. Will the Soviets agree to play according to the ill-understood and esoteric rules of intrawar deterrence—a notion that Soviet writings characterize as "abstract from life"? Or will they see any limited nuclear attack as voiding all rules of restraint, presaging inevitable escalation, and irresistibly signaling the need to unleash a "timely" and "crushing" preemptive blow? If the Soviets can be expected to respect American rules, limited options might provide an effective means of demonstrating resolve, inflicting pain, and coercing the opponent. If not, limited strategic strikes would be a foolhardy provocation.

These questions touch the heart of the problem of how to limit damage once deterrence fails. Western strategic thought has discussed two basic means of intrawar damage limitation. The first is *unilateral*. By passive and active defenses and particularly by attacks on the opponent's strategic forces, a country might reduce the damage it would sustain even in an unrestrained war. The second is *cooperative*. By mutual restraint through tacit or explicit agreement about the types of weapons that can be used and the types of targets that can be attacked, both countries might limit the damage that their populations sustained.

While U.S. strategic superiority was unambiguous and Soviet strategic forces were vulnerable, American strategists paid serious attention to the possibility of

unilateral damage limitation. Secretary McNamara's 1962 Ann Arbor speech tried to combine the unilateral and cooperative approaches. In effect, McNamara urged the Soviets to accept ground rules whereby they would forbear from destroying American cities while the United States gradually destroyed most of their retaliatory force.

Since the Soviet force has become more sizable and hardened, American strategists have tended to abandon the notion of unilateral damage limitation. While the United States might still be able to destroy some of the Soviet Union's strategic offensive capability, the portion that survived would now be more than sufficient for an assured destruction reprisal. This fact provides the basic rationale for the current U.S. selective targeting doctrine: Because damage limitation must now be a cooperative venture, it requires preservation of a mutual hostage relationship even *after* nuclear exchanges have begun.<sup>5</sup> This game will be a cruel one, however, if only one side is obeying the rules of restraint and cooperation. Therefore, it is crucial to consider Soviet attitudes toward controlled nuclear conflict when contemplating how (and whether) the United States should initiate the limited use of nuclear weapons.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, remarks to the Overseas Writers Association, January 10, 1974; Press Conference, January 24, 1974; and *Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1975*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 1974, pp. 3-5, 27-45.

<sup>2</sup> *Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1975*, pp. 5, 33.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Schlesinger's testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearings, Military Procurement, FY 1976*, 94th Cong., 1st Sess., February 5, 1975, Washington, D.C., pp. 47-49.

<sup>4</sup> BBC radio interview, October 24, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Although Schlesinger argued in favor of a limited counterforce capability, he made it clear that he was not seeking unilateral limitation of damage to populations. Rather, his objective was to enhance deterrence by making retaliation in kind possible and credible. He admitted that counterforce programs are not integral to the flexible-options doctrine.

## II. METHODOLOGY

When dealing with a subject such as Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war, the critical question is "How do we know what we know?" In the absence of reliable data, determining which indicators are valid and how to interpret them becomes a major part of the analytical task. Accordingly, the methodological section of this report, long as it is, may be its most useful and durable part. By comparison, the report's substantive conclusions about Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war are far more tentative.

### GENERIC RATIONAL MAN VERSUS SOVIET MAN

Two questions lie at the heart of the limited-nuclear-options dilemma. First, American strategists have asked: How can a prudent "generic man" use (or threaten to use) nuclear weapons in a way that furthers his political and military interests? Second, American strategists have asked: How can a prudent "generic man" use (or threaten) nuclear coercion in a crisis without provoking a disastrous response?

This report will speculate about the notionally prudent "Soviet man's" views on these questions and the implications these views may have for likely Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear conflict.

We assume that abstract armchair strategy cannot tell us everything we need to know about how the Soviets might react to limited nuclear strikes. Soviet leaders and strategists are not culture-free, preconception-free game theorists. Even if they were, game theory cannot prescribe a single best solution for problems that entail complex tradeoffs and vast uncertainties that can only be subjectively resolved.

No analytical approach to the question of Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war can be truly adequate. The age-old lament of nuclear strategists still holds: We have no truly relevant case studies to guide us. Moreover, it seems presumptuous to speculate about Soviet leaders' attitudes toward limited nuclear conflict when those attitudes are doubtless far from fully formed—and, in fact, can never be fully formed until the moment of decision has arrived.

Nonetheless, while keeping in mind the discrepancy between the complexity of the problem and the paucity of reliable data, we will be guided by the following assumption: It is enlightening to think of Soviet leaders not just as generic strategists who happen to be playing for the Red team, but as politicians and bureaucrats who have developed and been socialized into a strategic culture that is in many ways unique and who have exhibited distinctive stylistic predispositions in their past crisis behavior.

### VALIDITY PROBLEMS AND DATA ON SOVIET STRATEGY

Western analysts have traditionally been keenly attentive to developments in Soviet military doctrine in the hope that they might yield insights into Soviet plans

for the use of weapons in combat. Despite the energy expended in studying Soviet doctrine, however, many strategists place little confidence in such analysis. They feel that there is no way to know what Soviet doctrine for the employment of strategic forces "really is."

At first glance, doctrinal statements by Soviet military writers and political figures seem to be of limited value on two counts. On one hand, such material often seems hackneyed, unsophisticated, propagandistic, and devoid of serious analysis when compared with Western treatments of strategic issues. Operationally significant content seems irretrievably obscured by bombast and formulaic utterances. When Soviet writers assert that nuclear war can be won and that deterrence is an unacceptable bourgeois notion, can such statements be taken in any literal sense? Or are they merely code words for hidden meanings? If the latter, how can the relevant hidden meanings be discovered with so few textual clues?

Beyond this, the Soviets may be not only inscrutable, but also inveterate liars. If Khrushchev could for so long successfully dissemble the size of the Soviet strategic arsenal, it would seem much easier for the Soviets to lie about the employment doctrines for their forces. After all, Soviet defense planners have no Congress, free press, or garrulous bureaucrats to keep their public statements roughly in line with their private thoughts. For this reason, any discussion of Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war based only on the unmediated analysis of Soviet doctrinal statements on the subject would be inadequate.

Because analysis based solely on what the Soviets *say* seems like a house built on sand, many observers have instead tried to infer Soviet doctrine from what the Soviets *do*, namely, from the kinds of forces they build and the kinds of arms limitation agreements they make. Unfortunately, actions can be just as ambiguous as words. Some have argued that Soviet accession to the ABM Treaty in 1972 signaled acceptance of the notion of stable deterrence based on mutual vulnerability and consequent receptivity to the concept of intrawar deterrence after nuclear exchanges have begun. Others contend that the Soviets' eagerness for an ABM ban merely revealed their concern that their ABM would not work and ours would. Furthermore, examination of U.S. strategic posture and doctrine suggests that the relationship between the two can be frequently tenuous. Doctrines sometimes change while postures do not. Conversely, postures sometimes change while doctrines do not. Moreover, weapons systems frequently develop and *then* search for missions (sometimes passing through several in the course of their evolution). Bargaining chips get deployed, accuracy improves in part because of the momentum of technology, and so on. Most important, high-level policymakers (as opposed to professional strategic theoreticians) tend to feel that the appearance of superiority—or at least the appearance of equality—carries politico-psychological benefits regardless of whether a rationale can be developed for the use of these forces.<sup>1</sup>

## TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM AND MIRROR-IMAGING

Neither words nor deeds, in themselves, can offer a fully unambiguous key to the true nature of Soviet strategic thought. Faced with this frustration, many analysts retreat to the technological-determinist view that there is a natural logic inherent in weapons of mass destruction that will become apparent to anyone who

gives serious thought to the problem. It is frequently argued, for example, that *any* reasonable man will sooner or later come to realize the immutability of the universal principles of mutual deterrence and these will ultimately constrain his strategy. Accordingly, such an understanding is likely to offer a far better guide to Soviet strategy than Soviet declaratory statements. Indeed, where Soviet declaratory policy seems to stray from the inherent logic of nuclear weapons technology, it is argued, an analyst would be well-advised to reserve a large measure of skepticism.<sup>2</sup>

There is doubtless an element of truth in the technological-determinist argument. The Soviets themselves admit that the most significant factor leading to their renunciation of the doctrine of the inevitability of war has been the military-technical revolution. Like us, they have confronted the hard realities of modern weapons technology and accepted, at least for the time being, a deterrent relationship based on mutual societal vulnerability. (Whether they have gone on to accept the notion of stable deterrence as a *goal*, however, is much less certain. There is little evidence to suggest that the Soviets share what John Newhouse calls the "theological" belief that "killing weapons is bad; killing people is good."<sup>3</sup> There is also no reason to believe the Soviets feel obliged to accept such notions on the grounds that they are somehow inherent in the weapons and the situation they create.)

Two observations based on American experience may be pertinent. First, throughout the development of American strategic thought, there has been an active debate on such issues as stability versus counterforce, damage limitation by intrawar deterrence versus damage limitation by unilateral means, the inevitability of escalation versus the possibility of limited strategic war, and so on. Although the state of technological development has periodically influenced the course of these debates, technology has by no means dictated universally accepted, *prima facie* answers to these questions. Why, then, should we believe that Soviet debates on strategic issues have been any more constrained by the allegedly self-evident dictates of technology than our own?

Second, there is good reason to believe that abstract, game-theoretical conceptions of American strategy do not represent universal truths resulting from the direct communion of culture-free analysts with technology. It is far from axiomatic that "any player who had his wits about him" (to borrow Schelling's expression) would be equally attracted to the elegantly logical formulations of compellence, last clear chance, incremental coercion, and the like. American strategy has been developed in large part by civilian intellectuals and systems analysts who are by nature enamored of such concepts. Soviet strategy, by contrast, has been developed largely by professional military officers, whose natural inclination, one might suppose, would be oriented more toward military effectiveness than game-theoretical elegance. It is probably fair to say that the strategic thinking of American military professionals has also tended to focus more on considerations of military effectiveness and war-fighting than has the thinking of their civilian colleagues. Insofar as American military officers have gone on to develop a sophisticated understanding of esoteric, nonintuitive strategic notions, this may be attributable largely to the seeds planted by civilian strategists. In the Soviet Union there has traditionally been no autonomous source of civilian strategy aside from the off-the-cuff strategic analysis of the top political leadership. Even the latter has been rare since Khrushchev's time. Consequently, there has been no intellectual impetus to untrack Soviet

strategic thought from a relatively narrow (and bureaucratically self-serving) focus on military effectiveness and war-fighting.

On the specific subject of limited war, there are particularly strong reasons to believe that American thinking has been conditioned by historically unique circumstances. Three factors—the Korean and Vietnamese wars and NATO's "first-use" dilemma—have provoked extensive writings on the topics of controlled conflict and the manipulation of gradual escalation. The Soviets have had no similar impetus for immersing themselves in these issues.

Up to a point, modern weapons technology places obvious and, in many ways, similar constraints on Soviet and American strategic thought. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Soviet doctrine is a mirror image of "American" doctrine. Deduction from technology alone cannot resolve any of the interesting questions about Soviet attitudes toward controlled nuclear conflict. One must return to an inductive attack on Soviet-specific data.

### **VALIDITY, AMBIGUITY, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT**

Again the question arises, How can we analytically overcome the ambiguity of available data (words and deeds) concerning Soviet nuclear strategy?

Although mindful of the propaganda function of Soviet declaratory material (such as leadership speeches and military doctrinal writings), many analysts have defended the validity of insights gleaned from Soviet statements on strategic questions. Thomas Wolfe has argued that it is a characteristic of every modern government, even a totalitarian one, that it "needs to foster communication among its elites." As to publication of articles on military strategy and doctrine, this reflects the need to carry out "normal processes of professional military inquiry, policy formulation, and indoctrination of appropriate audiences, with no particular polemical significance."<sup>4</sup> Herbert Dinerstein shares this approach and bases his *War and the Soviet Union* largely on what the Soviets say about their doctrine. He notes that the Soviets themselves have on occasion stressed the need for more frank and innovative discussions of doctrinal issues. A 1954 article by Marshal P. A. Rotmistrov, for example, attacked the "Talmudic character" of much of the writing on Soviet military strategy, condemned the conservative publishing policy of the Military Publishing House, and gave effective impetus to the publication of a spate of innovative articles on strategic questions.<sup>5</sup> Western authors have also reported that Soviet military journals with restricted circulation discuss the same issues in much the same terms as do open publications.<sup>6</sup> This is strong evidence that, whatever the functions of Soviet military writings, external propaganda is not their sole purpose.

In addition to the validity problem, there is also the arcane and ambiguous nature of Soviet discourse on strategic questions. What is the operational significance of Soviet debates on the likelihood of war, the role of surprise, the probable length of a future war, or nuclear war as an "instrument of politics"? How are we to interpret Soviet denunciations of deterrence and limited war? Certainly, the face-value reading of disembodied doctrinal quotations is an inadequate approach to the problem.

The most successful Western interpreters of Soviet strategic thought have tried to place their raw data—doctrinal statements, negotiating positions, and evidence on force posture, deployment, and maneuvers—into a coherent political, historical, and organizational context. Within such a context, we can begin to understand *why* the Soviets are saying what they are saying and building the forces they are building. Embedded in a context that makes sense, data lose some of the ambiguity that plagues them when considered singly.

Context diminishes validity problems as well as ambiguity problems. Suppose, for example, a spokesman for the Soviet air defense forces argues that deterrence is a bourgeois notion and that war remains an instrument of politics that can be won despite the existence of nuclear weapons. At the same time, suppose the political leadership is considering whether to negotiate a ban on ballistic missile defenses. The knowledge of even this slight context does much to clarify the meaning of the argument and the purpose of its spokesman. If we know why a Soviet commentator might denounce a strategic concept (such as the notion of intrawar deterrence), we can better understand what he means by—and what his Soviet audience infers from—his denunciation.

Ideally, it would be useful to expand our context to include the whole period of the development of Soviet strategic thought. The first step would be to catalogue the factors that have influenced the development of Soviet forces and doctrine. Those factors unique to the Soviet experience would probably be the most enlightening. Among them are (1) unique aspects of the Soviet strategic position, especially the preponderance of conventional forces the Soviet Union has generally enjoyed in regions it is heavily committed to defend; (2) historical legacies, especially from World War II; (3) Marxist-Leninist modes of analyzing the strategic balance and the world "correlation of forces"; (4) the Soviet technical and economic base, especially its inferiority to that of its primary strategic competitor; (5) the "high politics" of leadership succession and resource allocation, broadly defined; and (6) the "low politics" of bureaucratic and professional interests and the effect of institutional arrangements on problem formulation and policy output.

Realistically, the development of a comprehensive sociology and intellectual history of Soviet strategic thought goes far beyond the scope of this report. Nonetheless, an effort will be made to sketch some of its main elements that bear on the issue of limited nuclear conflict.<sup>7</sup> The general goal will be to work toward the construction of a sociological whole that can provide a context to aid in the interpretation of Soviet strategic doctrine. More specifically, an intellectual history of Soviet strategic thought and a sense of the organizational and political context of Soviet defense decisionmaking will provide a firmer base for considering Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear options.

## **THE NOTION OF A SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE**

Strategic culture can be defined as the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy.<sup>8</sup> In the area of strategy, habitual behavior is largely cognitive behavior. This is true not only of the development of strategic

doctrines but also of the weapons acquisition process and of crisis decisionmaking, during which the possible use of nuclear weapons might be considered. Because analytic argumentation lies at the core of such behavior, this report will emphasize the cognitive component of the Soviet strategic culture. In particular, it will discuss the body of attitudes and beliefs that guides and circumscribes thought on strategic questions, influences the way strategic issues are formulated, and sets the vocabulary and conceptual parameters of strategic debate. Soviet strategy has been influenced by a number of factors unique to the Soviet historical experience. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that having confronted unique problems and having evolved in unique circumstances, the Soviet strategic culture would contain concepts that are in some respects unique.

Problems of continuity, change, and the adaptation of doctrine to new technologies take on new light when considered in a cultural context. We assume that strategic cultures, like cultures in general, change as objective conditions change. But we also assume a large residual degree of continuity. Individuals are socialized into a mode of strategic discourse and acquire a fund of strategic concepts that evolve only marginally over time. It is sometimes remarked, for example, that American academic strategists are locked into outmoded categories of thought, that they are too caught up in game-theoretic notions, and that they are unwilling to attack empirical issues such as the historical role of deterrence strategies in American foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

Culture is perpetuated not only by individuals but also by organizations. For example, the Soviet Union has continued to expend large amounts of resources on westward-oriented air defenses, when the rationale for these defenses has become more and more tenuous. The high priority assigned to air defense made sense in the late 1940s and 1950s, when penetrating bombers constituted the United States' sole means of strategic attack. The PVO Strany, a well-financed organization that is equal in the table of organization to other main branches of the armed forces, was created to carry out the air defense task. It was natural for the PVO to become the protector of the dogma of the necessity of air defense. In the 1960s, as the United States developed an independent assured destruction capability in its missile force (a threat against which there is currently no effective defense), the argument for large expenditures for air defense against bombers began to look increasingly dubious. Nevertheless, a case can almost always be made in support of a questionable program, particularly if there is a powerful organization that has a vested interest in doing so. One can imagine the PVO advancing the view that a workable ABM might lie just around the corner, making it advisable to maintain strong antibomber defenses as well. Armed with "the facts," such a lobby might carry considerable weight.<sup>10</sup>

In short, Soviet decisionmakers (and American decisionmakers, for that matter) do not characteristically approach issues posed by technological change as though they were culture-free systems analysts and game theoreticians. Pre-existing strategic notions can strongly influence doctrinal and organizational adaptation to new technologies. Rationales can outlive the conditions under which they were developed and to which they were most appropriate. This is especially true when the interests of large institutions are involved.



## STRATEGIC SUBCULTURES

"Subculture" is another useful notion. A strategic subculture will be defined as a subsection of the broader strategic community with reasonably distinct beliefs and attitudes on strategic issues, with a distinct and historically traceable analytical tradition, with characteristic institutional associations, and with more or less distinct patterns of socialization to the norms of the subculture. At the same time, members of subcultures are also members of the broader strategic culture. Thus, members of distinct subcultures within the general Soviet strategic culture are more likely to share fundamental outlooks with each other than with members of the American strategic culture. On particular issues, however, intervening variables may override this tendency. Role requirements of the professional military, for example, may lead to certain commonalities of outlook across cultures. The relative strength of such factors must be determined by empirical analysis.

On the most general plane, Western interpretations tend to see a dualism in Soviet strategic thinking, with one tendency—embodied in certain members of the political leadership and the research institutes of the Academy of Sciences—emphasizing deterrence, and the other—embodied in the military and perhaps in other elements of the political leadership—stressing war-fighting concepts and capabilities.

The first tendency starts from the conviction that there can be no winner in a nuclear war. Deterrence credibility is taken for granted in view of the destructive power of modern weapons and the practical impossibility of defending against them. Moreover, nuclear weapons are held to be blind to the class principle, deterring capitalists and socialists alike. This line of argument has its roots in statements by Malenkov and Mikoyan in 1954. Although Khrushchev originally rejected such ideas, by 1956 he, too, accepted them as his own, basing his peaceful coexistence plank at the Twentieth CPSU Congress on the alleged fact of strategic stalemate.<sup>11</sup> In more recent years, a similarly consistent and outspoken Soviet proponent of the impossibility-of-victory viewpoint has been Foreign Minister Gromyko, who has contended that "only ignorant people or simple adventurists fail to realize what an armed conflict between the two social systems would mean. The world long ago reached the stage when the continuation of the arms race became madness."<sup>12</sup> One interpretation offered by Western writers portrays the current Soviet interest in SALT and détente as a direct offspring of this strain of Soviet thought and therefore reflective of a sincere desire to cap the arms race and stabilize the Soviet-American strategic relationship.<sup>13</sup>

The other tendency in Soviet strategic thought has stressed nuclear war-fighting strategy. The point of departure for this mode of thinking is the conviction that nuclear war can have winners and losers—certainly in relative terms and perhaps even in absolute terms. As in pre-nuclear strategy, effective deterrence becomes synonymous with superior war-fighting capability. Surprise, preemption, seizure of the initiative, passive civil defense, active air defense, and theater forces designed to operate in a nuclear environment are representative ingredients of this approach to strategic doctrine.

Not surprisingly, the most unambiguous proponents of this approach have been found in the Soviet military. Western histories of the development of this side of Soviet doctrine lay great stress on a series of articles appearing in *Voennaiia mysl'* and other journals in the 1950s by Marshal P. A. Rotmistrov and General N. A.

Talenskii.<sup>14</sup> These articles represented the Soviet military's first discernible effort to cope with the new doctrinal problems posed by nuclear weapons and set the tone for subsequent strategic debates.

Belief in the possibility of meaningful victory in nuclear war continued to appear as an accepted viewpoint in Soviet military writings throughout the 1960s. During SALT, according to John Newhouse, the Soviet negotiators—particularly the representatives of the Soviet military—were totally unresponsive to the concept of stabilizing the deterrent balance and yet showed keen interest in new insights on opportunities for the successful prosecution of a nuclear war.<sup>15</sup> The obvious implication conveyed by Newhouse and others is that one very influential strain in Soviet thinking views SALT merely as a ploy to slow American arms development while Soviet deployments continue unabated.<sup>16</sup>

Most Western writings see a profound tension between these dual strands of Soviet strategic thought, in that arms procurements aimed at enhancing war-fighting capability are almost certain to destabilize the deterrent balance, while serious arms control agreements aimed at enhancing stability are likely to curtail the very systems that are most desirable for a war-fighting strategy. Westerners observing these two trends in Soviet thought frequently depict them as an extreme analogue of the debate between proponents of stable deterrence (such as Herbert Scoville) and advocates of counterforce-cum-ABM strategies (such as Donald Brennan) in the United States.

Perhaps some Soviets share this feeling that the simultaneous pursuit of deterrence and war-fighting capability is a self-defeating search for mutually exclusive ends. However, General Talenskii represents one instance of a Soviet military figure who felt at home in both traditions and saw no contradiction between them. On one hand, he has written that "in our time . . . there is no more dangerous an illusion than the idea that thermonuclear war can still serve as an instrument of politics; that it is possible to achieve political aims through the use of nuclear power, and at the same time survive; and that it is possible to find acceptable forms of nuclear war."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, he has provided Soviet strategic literature with groundbreaking treatises on the decisive importance of strategic surprise and on the requirements for successful prosecution of a nuclear war.<sup>18</sup> In Talenskii's view, deterrence is not inconsistent with a war-fighting capability. After all, what could deter more effectively than an imposing offensive arsenal backed up by the best possible active and passive defenses? In this formulation, the key to effective deterrence lies primarily in strength and only incidentally in the Western concept of stability.

This underlying conceptual compatibility of two seemingly opposed Soviet doctrinal traditions has been largely overlooked by Western observers. It is wrong to dismiss such non-Western conceptions of the dynamics of deterrence simply because they seem unsophisticated by Western standards. The fact that a concept is unsophisticated does not by any means put it at a disadvantage in the struggle for the minds of policymakers. Moreover, although the two Soviet subcultures may be analytically and institutionally discrete, their members retain the ability to speak the same language and cooperate toward mutually desired goals. A June 1972 *Pravda* article by N. N. Inozemtsev, Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Academy of Sciences, provides a good case in point. Inozemtsev is generally associated with the "impossibility-of-victory" subculture.

Yet in the wake of the SALT I accords, he felt no compunction about writing a fence-mending article evidently aimed at reassuring the military that Soviet strategic policy would not drift in the direction of finite deterrence. Inozemtsev was unequivocal in his denunciation of what he termed the inhumane, bourgeois theory of the "balance of terror." The notion that such a theory could ensure peace and security, he said, "has always been alien to our state."<sup>19</sup>

Before leaving this discussion of strategic subcultures, we must briefly consider the important question of whose opinion counts. Staff members of the U.S.A. Institute may well publish books and articles on strategic questions, but if their ideas do not influence policy, they constitute little more than an obscure backwater of the larger Soviet strategic culture.

Of course, "who counts" can be discussed narrowly or broadly. In a restrictive sense, we can ask, for example, (1) who sits around the "ExCom" table when the national leadership is deciding how to respond to a limited nuclear strike, or (2) who has direct influence over weapons R&D and procurement decisions.

In a broader sense, we can ask who contributes to the development of the strategic concepts that define the problems, set the tone of debate, and sensitize policymakers to some issues more than others. Albert Wohlstetter never had his finger on the button or the budget, yet his analysis of the vulnerability problem in the 1950s and his contact with Secretary McNamara on the ABM issue profoundly influenced American strategy and weapons procurement policy. We can also ask about the views and habits of those organizations that design the flexible options, develop the hardware intended to carry them out, and execute the limited nuclear strikes if war actually comes. In a recent *World Politics* article, John Steinbruner noted that the U.S. organizations charged with designing and implementing the new selective options have traditionally been oriented toward designing and implementing a massive retaliatory response. As a result, he expressed concern that the limited political intentions of the leadership in ordering a limited nuclear strike could become dangerously skewed during the implementation process by the not-so-limited military views and habits of the bureaucracy.<sup>20</sup> We recall the scene where Secretary McNamara was impressing Chief of Naval Operations Anderson with the need to implement the Cuban blockade in a nonprovocative manner in view of the extraordinary risks of a direct superpower naval confrontation:

Sensing that Anderson was not moved by this logic, McNamara returned to the line of detailed questioning. Who would make the first interception? Were Russian-speaking officers on board? How would submarines be dealt with? At one point McNamara asked Anderson what he would do if a Soviet ship's captain refused to answer questions about his cargo. At that point the Navy man picked up the *Manual of Naval Regulations* and, waving it in McNamara's face, shouted, "It's all in there." To which McNamara replied, "I don't give a damn what John Paul Jones would have done. I want to know what you are going to do now." The encounter ended on Anderson's remark: "Now, Mr. Secretary, if you and your Deputy will go back to your offices, the Navy will run the blockade."<sup>21</sup>

Steinbruner stressed that this kind of problem is not only "a detail of implementation" but in fact constitutes an element of "fundamental policy formulation."<sup>22</sup> It can affect the planning of options, the structure of forces, and the flow of information to the top, as well as wartime implementation.

In short, the answer to "who counts" can include more people and organizations than one might at first imagine.

## A SOVIET STYLE OF CRISIS BEHAVIOR?

Analyzing Soviet strategic thought can provide one handle on the problem of Soviet attitudes toward controlled nuclear conflict. Searching for regularities in Soviet crisis behavior can provide another.

This report will not attempt a substantive discussion of the Soviet Union's crisis "style." It is clear, however, that the notions of a uniquely Soviet crisis style and a uniquely Soviet approach to strategic thought are elements in a broader conception of a Soviet strategic culture. Both bear directly on the question of a uniquely Soviet perspective on limited nuclear options. For this reason, the following discussion on methods of studying crisis style is included in the hope of stimulating research that might complement the present report on strategic thought.

Obviously, there are few (if any) historical examples of deep crises in which either superpower felt on the verge of using nuclear weapons. Still, it may be worthwhile to look at past crises that presented the Soviet leadership with decision problems that were structurally similar to the dilemmas posed by the limited use of nuclear weapons. We may be able to define a Soviet crisis decision style and determine whether this style is compatible with (or conducive to) thinking about flexible options. To clarify this approach, two questions need to be discussed. First, what would constitute a style conducive to flexible-options thinking? Second, what are structurally similar decision problems?

To begin, we might develop a representative taxonomy of limited nuclear conflict. On one plane, we can identify (1) strikes limited to a specific region or theater; (2) demonstration shots aimed at enhancing credibility, showing resolve, and demonstrating a willingness to compete in risk-taking; (3) graduated infliction of pain, such as slow-motion city-trading; (4) attritional counterforce attacks with city-avoidance; and (5) massive, preemptive counterforce attacks with city-avoidance. Should historical evidence indicate that the Soviets have been inclined to observe regional limitations on a conflict to avoid escalation, we might infer their inclination to also put regional boundaries on a nuclear conflict. Similarly, if the Soviets have been inclined to back up their diplomacy with symbolic demonstrations of force, this might indicate their readiness to think about using nuclear "shots across the bow" in a comparable way.

On another plane, limited nuclear strikes can be characterized as either first use (particularly in response to a deteriorating situation that conventional forces cannot reverse) or second use (in response to an adversary's limited nuclear strike). Thus, should the past record of Soviet crisis behavior reveal a penchant for trying to salvage hopelessly deteriorating situations through gradual escalation, then in extremis the Soviets might view the threat or use of a limited nuclear strike as a less miserable option than, say, letting the Israelis capture Damascus or Cairo. Alternatively, should history show the Soviets repeatedly cutting losses rather than risking escalation toward the nuclear threshold, we might instead expect the Soviets to, say, let Cairo fall if it could not be saved without resort to nuclear escalation.

In general, the following attitudes would seem theoretically conducive toward a disposition to contemplate the potential employment of limited nuclear options:

1. Attention to the finer points of coercive diplomacy and sensitivity to the tradeoff between avoiding war and suffering political defeat. Flexible op-

tions are, above all, measures for balancing these two interests, namely, for reducing the risk of physical devastation without having to sacrifice too much prestige or renege too much on political commitments in the process. The more keenly this tradeoff is felt, as it was by Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis, the more likely becomes the use of a flexible-options strategy. (It should be noted in passing that Khrushchev seemed rather less constrained by this tradeoff during the Cuban episode, weighing the immediate risk of war much more heavily than the loss of political prestige. For this reason, we may suppose, Khrushchev felt that a limited conflict strategy, trying to compromise between suicide and surrender, would not be worth the risk.)

2. Inclination to use a strategy of incremental escalation and graduated pressure. A concurrent attitude would be a disinclination toward the more extreme alternatives to incrementalism, such as capitulating or attempting a massive and decisive unilateral military solution.
3. A penchant for the symbolic, credibility-enhancing use of force.
4. Civilian control of decisions regarding the use of force, with a focus on broad political goals rather than on military suboptimizations.

Conversely, we can imagine an opposite syndrome antithetical to flexible-options thinking. In brief, it would resemble Stanley Hoffmann's characterization of the hallmarks of the traditional American foreign policy style: moralism, war as an all-or-nothing proposition, unconditional surrender as the only legitimate war aim, the dominance of the military in mapping out wartime goals and strategy, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

Behavioral analysis of the "stylistic" or "operational-code" genre has already made a great contribution to the field of Soviet studies. Sometimes, however, it has suffered from a tendency toward oversimplification.<sup>24</sup> One reductionist tendency of behavioral analysis has been to concoct a recipe list of overgeneralized axioms about Bolshevik behavior ("two steps forward, one step back"). The danger of this approach is the temptation it offers to apply these axioms indiscriminately to all cases in the belief that they constitute an all-purpose explanatory and predictive device. Such generalizations are only useful when tied to very specific situational contexts and viewed as cognitive propensities rather than as hard-and-fast rules for behavior that will be followed in every case.

Another questionable approach has been to pick a pair of adjectives like "reckless" and "cautious," try to evaluate Soviet behavior quantitatively in a number of historical cases according to these criteria, and then decide whether or not the Soviet leadership has been inclined to take reckless risks during the past thirty years.<sup>25</sup> Typically in such ventures too little thought has been given to the complexity of the concept of risk. During the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy thought the short-run risks of a blockade or even of an air strike would be tolerable in light of the extremely high long-term risks that he attributed to a do-nothing policy. Kennedy was playing to minimize his long-term risk of war, yet a behaviorist would classify him as having had a high propensity to take risks.<sup>26</sup> In fact, one could argue that statesmen almost always try to minimize their risks as they define them. Even a massive preemptive attack could be thought of as risk-minimizing if the alternative were to wait for a near-certain first strike by the opponent. Viewed in this light, the important distinction is generally not between reckless and cau-

tious, but among various strategies for minimizing risks (Kennedy's "coercive diplomacy cum crisis management," Khrushchev's "back down and cut your losses").

Because of the methodological necessity for simplifying, analysts of the quantitative school generally provide a highly schematic treatment of the context of risk-taking. Some of their distinctions, to be sure, are useful: intrabloc/interbloc; Soviet initiation/non-Soviet initiation; immediate risk ("last clear chance")/not-so-immediate risk; and so on. The most fertile material for speculation about Soviet attitudes toward controlled conflict, however, is likely to derive from more subtle connections between context and strategy, such as the relative stakes involved and the degree of each side's commitment of prestige; the local and strategic military balances; the Soviet leaders' assessment of U.S. intent (e.g., moderate versus immoderate goals); respect for and manipulation of thresholds; opportunities for coercive diplomacy and escalatory threats (and willingness to take advantage of them); preexisting levels of international tension; observance of tacit rules of confrontation; and the influence of different leadership personalities on all of the above.

A final pitfall of the quantitative method is that it is likely to give as much weight to the invasion of Tibet as to the Cuban missile crisis and hence to ignore or gloss over the important matter of comparative crisis relevance. For learning about Soviet attitudes toward controlled nuclear conflict, the greater the possibility that nuclear weapons might have been used, the more relevant a crisis case study will be. Similarly, where particularly high stakes were at risk, as would have been the case in a potential nuclear-use situation, the greater validity a representative case example will have. Such important hierarchical distinctions tend to be missed in analytical approaches that deal with superpower conflict by indiscriminately lumping all Soviet-American showdowns in the generic category of crises.

A useful research goal would be to develop hypotheses about the Soviet behavioral style that operate on a higher level of specificity than the hypotheses of previous behavioral studies, that is, hypotheses that are more explicitly tied to specific contexts of action. When one is concerned with a very specific problem, such as Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war, it is especially important to avoid such overgeneralized hypotheses as "the Soviets are cautious," which, even if true, do not provide a very helpful grip on the problem.

## **PROBLEMS OF SYNTHESIS**

Finally, there remains the problem of melding crisis-behavior data with strategic-thought data. At this crucial juncture, there seems very little that any methodological sleight of hand can do to improve simple judicious reflection.

It might be useful to look for interaction and overlap between the two sets of data. Do Soviet strategic thought and crisis style both spring from broader, more fundamental notions about the use of force, the nature of the international system, and the world-historical process? In particular, do the notions of peaceful coexistence, optimism about the growth of progressive forces in the Third World, and assumptions about the shrinking base of imperialist exploitation influence Soviet diplomatic-military strategy? If so, does this suggest anything about the Soviets' propensity to engage in limited nuclear conflict? It might also be interesting to ask

whether strategic doctrine or force posture have been affected by learning from past crises. Conversely, has crisis behavior been influenced by strategic doctrine? In particular, have certain Soviet diplomatic options been foregone as a result of doctrinal reluctance to consider the coercive possibilities of limited nuclear threats?

In hazarding a judgment about the relationship between the Soviets' behavioral style and their propensity for limited nuclear conflict, there is little to suggest methodologically beyond a subjective adding up of the various pluses and minuses that may emerge from the strategic-thought and crisis-behavior data. In making such an effort, one would probably be wise to avoid the ultimately unanswerable question "Will the Soviets use limited nuclear options?" and instead to concentrate on the more modest questions (1) "Are the Soviets mentally prepared to *think* about flexible options?" and (2) "Are they sensitive to the kinds of strategic concerns that have preoccupied American policymakers and that have led to the U.S. adoption of flexible options, partly in order to help alleviate them?"

This digression on methodology has tried to suggest a way of making indirect evidence a little more revealing than it would normally be. It bears noting, however, that making indirect evidence more revealing in no way renders the evidence itself any less indirect than it was to begin with. Accordingly, all conclusions derived from such evidence should still be viewed with a large dose of circumspection.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A number of observers have pointed out that one of the attractions of the counterforce corollary to the flexible-options doctrine is that it provides an operational rationale for forces that are desired primarily for nonoperational reasons, such as to serve bureaucratic interests or maintain the appearance of strategic equality. See, for example, Lynn Etheridge Davis, *Limited Nuclear Options: Deterrence and the New American Doctrine*, Adelphi Paper No. 121, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1976, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Roman Kolkowicz et al., *The Soviet Union and Arms Control: A Superpower Dilemma*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1970, pp. 36-37. A corollary to this view is the notion that the primary impetus for change in Soviet strategic doctrine has been learning from the West. It is implied that Western strategy has been able to uncover immutable truths and adapt doctrine to changing technologies more rapidly than Soviet strategy, which is fettered by ideology and a closed, bureaucratized system of intellectual discourse. But even the Soviets eventually recognize the need, for example, to harden silos and develop an invulnerable submarine-based retaliatory force. Thus, Soviet doctrine (though not necessarily Soviet declaratory policy) at any given moment is likely to follow American doctrine with a time lag of about five years, according to this view.

<sup>3</sup> John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., New York, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1964, pp. 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union: Nuclear Weapons and the Revolution in Soviet Military and Political Thinking*, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, 1959, pp. 170-173.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age*, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, 1958, pp. 253-254.

<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, a number of observers of Soviet military policy have tried to place strategic developments in a political and organizational context, and we will draw heavily on their work. See, for example, Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads*, op. cit., and *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1970; Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union*; and Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1967.

<sup>8</sup> This parallels definitions of culture presented in Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Random House, Inc., New York, 1963, pp. 81-84.

<sup>9</sup> This is argued by Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence and American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1974, Part I.

<sup>10</sup> This issue is discussed by Thomas W. Wolfe, *The SALT Experience: Its Impact on U.S. and Soviet Strategic Policy and Decisionmaking*, The Rand Corporation, R-1686-PR, September 1975, p. 109. A possible analog in American experience might be the debate about the cost effectiveness of the Army and Naval Reserve and the Army National Guard.

<sup>11</sup> American analysts have argued that Khrushchev's tendency to overrate the absolute security provided by deterrence was directly tied to his decision to slash Soviet troop strength while deploying only the most minimal deterrent. See, for example, Raymond Garthoff, "Military Power in Soviet Policy," in John Erickson (ed.), *The Military-Technical Revolution*, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, 1966, p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> Kolkowicz et al., *The Soviet Union and Arms Control*, p. 47, quoting a speech at the United Nations General Assembly, October 3, 1968. Of course, some allowance must be made for a presumed functional division of labor in the articulation of Soviet strategic views. For example, Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry pronouncements may have somewhat different audiences and correspondingly different propagandistic and hortatory functions. This may account for the variation in their tone and content.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, "View A," in Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, p. 501.

<sup>14</sup> Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union*, passim; see especially pp. 9-10, 184-188.

<sup>15</sup> Compare the Soviets' nonchalant attitude about stability (why worry when you have submarines) to the development of their belated but allegedly avid interest in hard-point ABM defense, as well as their general lack of interest in limiting offensive systems (Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, pp. 175, 233-237).

<sup>16</sup> See "View B," in Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, p. 503.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Kolkowicz et al., *The Soviet Union and Arms Control*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union*, pp. 36 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Wolfe, *The SALT Experience*, p. 118.

<sup>20</sup> John Steinbruner, "Beyond Rational Deterrence: The Struggle for New Conceptions," *World Politics*, January 1976, p. 240.

<sup>21</sup> Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Little, Brown & Co., Inc., Boston, 1971, pp. 131-132.

<sup>22</sup> "Beyond Rational Deterrence," p. 240.

<sup>23</sup> Stanley Hoffman, *Gulliver's Troubles or the Setting of American Foreign Policy*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1968, Chap. 5.

<sup>24</sup> See Alexander George's sympathetic discussion of this problem in "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," in Erik P. Hoffman and Frederic J. Fleron (eds.), *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy*, Aldine-Atherton, New York, 1971, pp. 165-190. One behaviorist simplification may be useful: avoiding speculation about the roots or causes of the Soviet style of crisis behavior. For the purpose of discussing limited nuclear options, it may be sufficient to look for regular characteristics of behavior without trying to discover the causes of these regularities.

<sup>25</sup> See Jan F. Triska and David D. Finley, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1968, Chap. 9.

<sup>26</sup> At least according to the Triska and Finley criteria.



### III. SOVIET DECLARATORY VIEWS OF DETERRENCE AND LIMITED WAR

The current U.S. selective-options policy is an intellectual offspring of distinctively Western notions about deterrence, coercive diplomacy, and war. In particular, it is a product of thinking about the problem of nuclear war through conceptual filters focusing on deterrence stability and crisis management. Although assured destruction devotees may see the policy as antithetical to the achievement of stable deterrence, a fundamental assumption of U.S. flexible-options planning is the existence of a strategic balance so stable that sizable counterforce exchanges cannot undermine the deterrence of attacks on cities. In addition to these intellectual links to Western views of deterrence stability, the flexible-options policy also rests on such notions as (1) the control of escalation through the recognition of thresholds and target distinctions, (2) the willingness to compete in paid endurance and risk-taking, and (3) war termination by intrawar bargaining.

Soviet strategic commentators accept virtually none of these notions. In fact, the center of gravity of Soviet doctrinal discussions is decidedly hostile to this way of thinking. Although the Soviets are attentive to the requirements of maintaining the survivability of their *own* nuclear deterrent, they pay no homage whatsoever to the abstract concept of stability in the Western sense of maintaining a *mutual* assured destruction relationship. Thomas Wolfe points out that "the Soviets have at no time had a declaratory policy of restricting delivery accuracy in order to avoid posing a counterforce threat to the other side. At SALT I, the American negotiators apparently could not persuade the Soviets to agree that the mutual survivability of offensive forces is beneficial to the security of both parties."<sup>1</sup> To be sure, some civilian writers in the various research institutes of the Soviet Academy of Sciences have occasionally used the American phrase "to destabilize the strategic balance" (*destabilizirovat' strategicheskii balans*). However, they have taken it to denote a challenge to strategic parity rather than a threat to the survivability of retaliatory forces. In their lexicon, the Trident submarine is "destabilizing" notwithstanding the fact that it promises to enhance the survivability of the U.S. deterrent without threatening Soviet retaliatory forces.<sup>2</sup>

Soviet professional military writing on strategic questions diverges even more sharply from Western concepts. The SALT experience has had little substantive influence on the military's doctrinal writings and has led to no discernible Soviet doctrinal convergence toward American concepts. Though the protocol requirements of *détente* may have somewhat muted the traditionally vitriolic tone of articles appearing in Soviet military journals, the notions of "equal security" and stability of *any* kind appear rarely, if at all.<sup>3</sup>

To Western observers used to making a sharp distinction between deterrence and defense, it is striking that statements by the Soviet military tend to telescope the notions of (1) carrying out the deterrent threat to retaliate and (2) "repulsing," "blunting," "frustrating," or "breaking up" (e.g., preempting) an attack. Consistent with this blurring of the notions of deterrence and preemptive defense, Soviet military writings typically equate effective deterrence with superior war-fighting capability.

The political leaders' statements on strategic policy have been quite different in tone. The notion of equal security on the basis of strategic parity, for example, would seem to accommodate the idea that effective deterrence can be mutual and need not rest solely on superior war-fighting prowess. Yet the present Soviet leadership shows no signs of accepting the doctrine of finite or minimum deterrence. Numerous analysts have argued that Khrushchev's foreign policy failures taught Brezhnev and his colleagues a poignant lesson: An ambitious foreign policy supported only by a bare-bones military force is "adventuristic" because it defies the iron law that links the opportunities of socialism to the world "correlation of forces" (a large component of which is military). Furthermore, the Cuban missile crisis may have convinced them that trying to get by with a second-best strategic posture courts not only failure but destruction. As a result, the present Soviet leadership has sponsored the rapid and comprehensive buildup of Soviet strategic forces to a level roughly on a par with that of the United States. Brezhnev claims that this increase in Soviet military might has neutralized U.S. military power and thus helped create an international climate in which socialism and "progressive forces" can flourish.<sup>4</sup> By saying this, Brezhnev is in effect arguing that the United States is more deterred by the Soviet Union's current posture than by its previous minimum deterrent.

This point of view is, of course, similar to arguments currently being made in the United States about the need to maintain strategic forces second to none. However, there is a difference in nuance that is potentially significant. Schlesinger talked about the need to maintain the *appearance* of equality, since the Congressional liberals he was trying to convince were generally skeptical of the military value of what they saw as an overkill capability. As a result, the drift of the ensuing U.S. defense debate left the impression that were it not for the untutored perceptions of other nations, the United States could perhaps get by militarily with a smaller deterrent. By contrast, Brezhnev has primarily had to face criticism from the war-fighting end of the spectrum. As a result, the drift of the debate in the Soviet Union has left the impression that an equal posture is better than a minimum deterrent for *objective* military reasons—with the clear implication that outright superiority would be even better.<sup>5</sup>

If there is little convergence in Soviet and American writings on deterrence, there is even less complementarity in their statements on limited strategic war. Benjamin Lambeth has surveyed recent Soviet doctrinal writings on the controllability of escalation, the possibility of limitation in strategic nuclear conflict, and intrawar bargaining. His conclusions on these questions show some Soviet acceptance of the notion of limitations below the strategic nuclear threshold, but no acceptance of restraint once that threshold has been crossed.

Lambeth reports that by 1967 "Soviet military writings had begun to move away from their rigid insistence on the impossibility of limitation and to reflect tentative signs of an emerging belief that, at least under some circumstances, a U.S.-Soviet military conflict could remain restricted to nonnuclear exchanges."<sup>6</sup> He further notes that recent writings have indicated a slight tendency toward Soviet recognition of threshold distinctions between conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear warfare. He adds, however, that

Within these three broad categories of conflict—theater nonnuclear war, theater nuclear war, and central nuclear war—the Soviets show no indica-

tion of endorsing any concept of restraint in the tempo and intensity of combat or any inclination to refrain from attacking certain target categories in the interests of collateral-damage avoidance or intrawar coercive diplomacy.<sup>7</sup>

In general, Soviet military writings reflect the long-standing notion that nuclear war (whether theater or intercontinental) will be waged with simultaneous strikes against the opponent's military forces, political-military command infrastructure, and economic-administrative centers. Lambeth finds no trace of Soviet interest in notions of intrawar bargaining. "On the contrary," he says, "they tend to regard the business of psychopolitical coercion largely as a peacetime or pre-crisis function to be fulfilled—to the extent possible—by the passive threat implications of Soviet strategic forces in being." Once the threshold is passed, it is the task of nuclear strikes to terminate the war by achieving military victory through massive, crippling strikes.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviets do not specify in their doctrinal writings how they would react to a U.S. limited nuclear strike. They do, however, insist that they will not obey American "rules" for limited strategic war. Soviet commentaries on the U.S. selective-options doctrine "have left no room for doubt that they take a decidedly jaundiced view of the strategy and continue to believe (or at least continue to wish us to *think* they believe) that a central nuclear war would brook no possibility of being restrained short of total effort by each side to achieve total victory."<sup>9</sup>

Criticism of the U.S. selective-options policy has come not just from military but also from civilian sources. Soviet civilian commentary on the flexibility doctrine has been highly attuned to its political ramifications. At its most fundamental level, the doctrine is portrayed as the latest in a long history of U.S. efforts to use strategies of limitation and flexibility to salvage the usability of military force in the service of imperialist exploitation. According to this analysis, the growth of Soviet military power has made it increasingly dangerous for the United States to try to gain political benefits from military threats. Soviet might has increasingly checkmated American military power and reduced the United States to a position of relative passivity in the international arena. Thus, "flexible response" and, more recently, "flexible options" represent attempts to break this deadlock by making the use of force safe, legitimate, and politically effective. According to the current line, it is beneficial for the Soviet Union to perpetuate the stalemated situation, because its main effect is to prevent American interference with the spontaneous development of "progressive," "anti-imperialist" forces in the Third World. In short, Soviet rejection of the flexible-options doctrine seems based as much on international political considerations as on military reasoning. Many of the denunciations of the flexibility concept have emanated from civilian analysts who otherwise seem notably "Westernized" in their general strategic outlook.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The SALT Experience*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> M. Mil'shtein and L. Semeiko, "S.Sh.A. i vopros o novykh vidakh oruzhiia massovogo unichtozheniia," *S.Sh.A. Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiia*, No. 5, May 1976, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> See Roger W. Barnett, "Trans-SALT: Soviet Strategic Doctrine," *ORBIS*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, Summer 1975, p. 533.

<sup>4</sup> This is the line adopted at the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth CPSU Congresses.

<sup>5</sup> The preceding comments on Soviet views regarding parity and superiority must be regarded as speculative. As the current public debate attests, available evidence on this issue is ambiguous and, as a result, more or less consistent with each of two radically different views of Soviet beliefs and intentions—and with variations and gradations between the extremes. At present, the contentions of the two sides in this debate are almost nonfalsifiable. If one assumes that the Soviet leadership sees its strategic forces as technically inferior, then new Soviet programs can be seen as resulting from a felt need to catch up or to compensate quantitatively for qualitative weakness. However, if one assumes that even the Soviets consider themselves ahead in the strategic competition, then their new programs appear more ominous. Unless one is willing to state categorically that technical realities are so unambiguous as to preclude one of these interpretations, this debate could be resolved only by a long period of more or less unilateral American restraint, which would conclusively test Soviet intentions. Of course, it can be argued that the potential costs of conducting such a test outweigh its potential benefits.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Selective Nuclear Operations and Soviet Strategy*. The Rand Corporation, P-5506, September 1975, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> The core of this analysis can be found in the Brezhnev speeches to the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth CPSU Congresses. As it applies to the flexible-options doctrine, see "O nekotorykh novykh tendentsiiakh v razvitii amerikanskikh voenno-strategicheskikh kontseptsii." S.Sh.A. *Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya*, No. 4, April 1976, pp. 122-126. For a review of Soviet commentary on the U.S. limited-options doctrine, see Wolfe, *The SALT Experience*, pp. 149 ff.

#### IV. IS THERE A DISTINCTIVE SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE?

A skeptic might see these apparent divergences as evidence less of an East-West asymmetry in strategic thought than of Soviet manipulation of a controlled press to enhance Moscow's deterrent and complicate Washington's strategic problems. Stalin's public deprecation of the importance of nuclear weapons throughout the period when the United States maintained its atomic monopoly constitutes one of the more vivid historical examples of use of military doctrinal statements to enhance the credibility of the Soviet Union's strategic position.<sup>1</sup> Viewed as an exercise in manipulation, recent Soviet denunciations of flexible options might be dismissed as hollow propaganda aimed at denying the United States a cheap means of enhancing its deterrent (and compellent) capabilities in Europe and elsewhere throughout the world.

This interpretation is particularly interesting because it coincides *precisely* with one of the principal reasons Soviet analysts commonly give for rejecting the current U.S. doctrine: The rules of the flexibility game are politically advantageous to the United States; therefore, the Soviet Union refuses to abide by them. On reflection, however, it seems uncharacteristically accommodating of the Soviets that they should be so transparent about the reasoning behind their manipulation. One would think that if manipulation were in fact their goal, they would hold closely the reasons for it to themselves. (Stalin, for example, did not feel compelled to announce that self-interest forbade him from acknowledging the self-evident advantages that possession of nuclear weapons gave to his rivals.)

Indeed, a nonmanipulative, nondeceitful interpretation seems more plausible. The Soviet leaders may simply feel that, having reached a position of strategic parity, they do not have to bow to anybody's attempt to force "alien doctrines" upon them.<sup>2</sup> Their public statements on strategy suggest that they are primarily attuned to such issues as the immediate political utility of a favorable balance of forces rather than to the conceptual esoterica of intrawar conflict theory. There is little reason to believe that they would embrace a doctrine that they viewed as politically disadvantageous and that their military advisers viewed as militarily questionable. Thus, the refusal to play by American rules is likely to represent something more than mere pretense.<sup>3</sup>

The following discussion of Soviet strategic thought will not ignore the manipulative, propagandistic, and hortatory functions of Soviet doctrine. It will, however, argue that Soviet commentary on strategic issues serves purposes other than these and accordingly provides legitimate material for analyzing Soviet attitudes when viewed in the broader context of Soviet and American force postures, domestic and organizational politics and processes, the international setting, and so on. In particular, we will argue that differences between Soviet and American statements on deterrence, escalation, and limited war reflect real differences in strategic thinking and bespeak the development of separate and distinct strategic cultures in the two countries. Our task is to explain why Soviet notions of strategic common sense are different from our own, and what this implies about Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear options. We may begin by examining those influences on the development of Soviet strategic thinking that are unique to the Soviet experience.

## **THE SOVIET UNION'S UNIQUE STRATEGIC SITUATION**

One reason why the strategic thought of the two superpowers has followed divergent paths is that the two countries have faced different strategic dilemmas.

### **The Conventional Imbalance in Europe**

To a remarkable extent, developments in American doctrine have centered on the problem posed by NATO's near-untenable military position in Europe. How can nuclear weaponry be used to shore up the deterrent capability of a weak conventional force in Europe without invoking the suicidal (and therefore incredible) threat of general nuclear war? This dilemma has led successive generations of American strategists to develop alternative schemes for tactical nuclear interdiction, flexible response, counterforce targeting, and related variations on the theme of limited theater nuclear war. In contrast, Soviet strategists have been blessed with a conventional preponderance in those areas they have been heavily committed to defending. Consequently, they have had no comparable impetus to concern themselves with the problems of the limited first use of nuclear weapons.

It might, of course, be argued that the very existence of Western doctrines on limited war gives Soviet strategists an incentive to consider the advantages of a restrained response doctrine of their own. If the United States is likely to answer Soviet conventional advances by means of a limited nuclear response, the Soviets' second-use dilemma would seem to parallel the first-use dilemma that has preoccupied NATO strategists. Despite this qualification, however, NATO politics and the uncertain credibility of the American nuclear umbrella over Europe have tended to make the problem of rational nuclear first use one of great political immediacy in the West, especially in the face of the Soviet conventional preponderance. This preponderance gives the Soviets a greater margin of control over the escalation of conflict in Europe, so that this hypothetical second-use dilemma may seem remote to them. Expressing a willingness to engage in limited nuclear exchanges would only serve to diminish this margin of control. In sum, the conventional imbalance in Europe provides the Soviets with no compelling incentives or requirements to develop a doctrine of limited theater nuclear war.

This U.S.-Soviet asymmetry in nuclear first-use incentives may, however, be steadily diminishing. As the Soviet Union has achieved not only Continental but global power status, it has acquired commitments that may be out of reach of its conventional preponderance. The problem of defending Cuba against American intervention provided Khrushchev with a particularly thorny first-use dilemma. Similarly, the Soviets may now be worrying about a contingency in which Israeli tanks might be at the gates of Cairo and Soviet conventional intervention would arrive too late. If the Soviets are forced to ponder a few problems of this type, they may become more and more convinced of the advantages of certain limited uses of nuclear weapons.

### **The Overlap of the European Theater and the Soviet Interior**

Perhaps Moscow's most salient disincentive for embracing the concept of a European tactical nuclear war is that it would take place in the Soviet Union's own front yard. It is not hard to imagine European theater nuclear exchanges rapidly

spilling over into attacks on logistical centers and troop concentrations in the Western USSR where the majority of Soviet population and industry is located. The Soviets would scarcely be inclined to relish this kind of limited war, with American forward-based systems (FBS) striking targets deep in the Soviet interior while the U.S. homeland remained an untouchable transoceanic sanctuary.

To help judge the saliency of this scenario for the Soviets, we may recall the positions taken by the Soviet and American delegates at the 1958 Geneva conference on surprise attacks. The Soviets saw the surprise attack as coming from U.S. forces based in Europe, whereas the Americans were interested only in intercontinental scenarios. This concern about the U.S. FBS threat may help to account for the historical development of the huge Soviet air-defense system. In fact, it may still provide a rationale for maintaining strong, westward-facing air defenses even though ABM has been banned.

In short, whereas the United States has tended to view limited nuclear war in Europe as a means of escaping a frightening commitment to provide a strategic umbrella for Western Europe, the Soviets have understandably viewed it as functionally comparable with intercontinental strategic war. There is little reason, therefore, to assume disingenuousness when the Soviets show reluctance to admit the benefits of such limitations and instead proclaim the likelihood of automatic escalation to the intercontinental nuclear level.

### **Asymmetries in Civil Defense and Natural Dispersal of Population and Industry**

Paul Nitze has recently argued that asymmetries in civil defense and urban/industrial dispersion favorable to the Soviet Union might make a war-fighting strategy based on unilateral damage limitation look rather attractive to the Soviets:

Today the Soviet Union has adopted programs that have much the same effect on the situation as an ABM program would have. And as the Soviet civil defense program becomes more effective it tends to destabilize the deterrent relationship for the same reason: The United States can then no longer hold as significant a proportion of the Soviet population as a hostage to deter a Soviet attack. Concurrently, Soviet industrial vulnerability has been reduced by deliberate policies, apparently adopted largely for military reasons, of locating three-quarters of new Soviet industry in small and medium-sized towns. The civil defense program also provides for evacuation of some industry and materials in time of crisis.

In sum, the ability of U.S. nuclear power to destroy without question the bulk of Soviet industry and a large proportion of the Soviet population is by no means as clear as it once was, even if one assumes most of U.S. striking power to be available and directed to this end.<sup>4</sup>

If Nitze has been so impressed by these asymmetries, it seems reasonable to assume that some Soviets may give these factors a nonnegligible role in their own strategic calculations. At the very least, it is conceivable that some Soviets are sufficiently impressed with such factors that, were they forced to choose between the relative risks of cooperative and unilateral damage limitation strategies, they would prefer to rely on the latter.<sup>5</sup>

### Debates on Strategic Inferiority

Soviet strategic debates during the formative period of the 1950s and early 1960s focused largely on the issue of Soviet strategic inferiority. The code issues for this debate were the likelihood of war, the benefits of surprise and preemption, nuclear war as an "instrument of policy," and the possibility of winning a nuclear war in a meaningful sense. Taken at face value, assertions by Soviet military theorists that war is likely, that surprise can be decisive, and that nuclear war can be won may sound extraordinarily aggressive. In the historical context of Soviet strategic inferiority, however, it becomes apparent that the operational meaning of such statements during the 1950s and early 1960s was that nuclear war could be *lost*, that the soft and minuscule Soviet deterrent was vulnerable to preemptive attack, and that such a posture increased the likelihood of war.

Commenting on these debates, George Quester has observed:

Rather than an endorsement of the mutual instability whereby whoever struck first would win, the Soviet stress on surprise might now simply have served as encouragement to Russian military personnel to be alert and proficient or, more importantly, as psychological reinforcement for demands for greater military appropriations. Suggestions that the enemy might "surprise" with his attack implied that one's government was not taking the threat seriously enough, not purchasing enough deterrent or defensive equipment.<sup>6</sup>

Pursuing a similar line of analysis, Herbert Dinerstein has sought to explain the doctrinal discussions of the 1950s as a reflection of internal infighting over the adequacy of Soviet strategic expenditures and the influence of this issue on the struggle for power within the Politburo.<sup>7</sup>

Leaders of the debate were divided as follows: Malenkov and Mikoyan argued that modern weapons of mass destruction had made nuclear war unthinkable and contended that a policy of *détente* was the only rational course for both the United States and the Soviet Union. Under modern conditions, even a minimal strategic force would suffice to deter war, thus freeing vast resources for the improvement of the people's standard of living. On the other side, Molotov, Khrushchev (before his 1956 promulgation of the doctrine of the noninevitability of war), and the bulk of the Soviet military argued against the adequacy of a low-budget, second-best strategic posture. Doctrinal writings on whether a nuclear war could be won stated that in view of the self-evident advantages of superiority and surprise, there could arise situations in which the United States might find a preventive war to be a rational policy option. Accommodation, appeasement, and *détente* would not guard against such an eventuality, and only a concerted effort to diminish the vulnerability of the Soviet deterrent and to improve its war-fighting capability could effectively decrease the likelihood of war.

Khrushchev's position in the debate shifted with the winds of expediency, but its secular drift was in the direction of reliance on a minimum deterrent. At first, Khrushchev allied himself with Molotov and the military until Malenkov was discredited and removed from the premiership. He then moved toward the Malenkov line at the Twentieth CPSU Congress by stressing peaceful coexistence and the avoidability of war. Khrushchev was already making small cuts into the military budget, but he could not yet afford to alienate the conservatives and the military if he wanted to remain in power.



Khrushchev consolidated his position in 1957 with the defeat of the "Anti-Party Group" and the ouster of the "Bonapartist" Zhukov as Minister of Defense. Thus strengthened, he gradually unfolded his plans to reduce military expenditures drastically in order to finance his intended revitalization of agriculture and industry. This culminated in his January 1960 Supreme Soviet speech announcing plans to reduce Soviet military manpower by a third and to improve cost-effectiveness by adopting nuclear tactics for all theater operations. In general, military programs would take a second place behind economic needs in the competition for scarce resources.

To rationalize this reduced posture, Khrushchev argued the following points:

1. Not only is war not inevitable, it is not even likely. "The general trend is toward reduction of tension in international relations."
2. The present deterrent is adequate. "Never in the whole history of the Soviet state has the defense of our country been so reliably secured against . . . encroachments from outside as at present."
3. The balance of terror is not delicate. "Modern means of waging war do not give any country the advantage of surprise attack."<sup>8</sup>

At the time Khrushchev was unveiling these arguments, the Soviet strategic deterrent consisted of a handful of soft-site, nonstorable liquid-fueled ICBMs and a small intercontinental bomber force (which Khrushchev himself scoffs in his memoirs).<sup>9</sup> The Soviet deterrent still rested largely on the "hostage Europe" strategy, which Khrushchev seemed to be jeopardizing by his troop reductions. Khrushchev apparently believed that the effectiveness of this most minimal of minimum deterrents could be bolstered by cultivating the myth of a missile gap, which would carry the Soviet Union through until a more respectable deterrent could be gradually acquired.

In sum, the formative years of Soviet strategic doctrine coincided with a period of profound Soviet strategic inferiority. Moreover, throughout this period a strong and often dominant segment of the political leadership failed to share the military's concern about the dangers of this inferior position. As a result, the principal task of military writing was to press the case for a larger strategic budget by presenting the specter of the "losability" of a nuclear war. It can also be argued that the Soviet deterrent during much of this period was so weak and vulnerable that the military's concern was genuine and not only self-serving pretense.

The dispute between conflicting analyses of the requirements of deterrence reached a critical point with Khrushchev's 1960 Supreme Soviet speech. If carried out, Khrushchev's proposals would have undermined the conventional preponderance that had traditionally helped compensate for Soviet strategic weakness, while offering no assurances of a counterbalancing speedup in the ICBM program. A large segment of the military resisted Khrushchev's troop reduction program and his strategic theories in general. Their opposition received a boost when the United States publicly exposed the missile gap ruse, baring the full extent of Soviet strategic weakness. Furthermore, it is far from clear that the military were pleased by Khrushchev's decision to redress the balance as cheaply as possible by introducing vulnerable IRBMs into Cuba. Michel Tatu speculates that Marshal Moskalenko was dismissed as commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces because of his presumed opposition to the adventuristic and militarily unsound Cuban scheme.<sup>10</sup>

The Cuban missiles were, of course, ultimately sent home. Meanwhile, despite some dramatic tests of high-yield nuclear warheads, deployment of Soviet intercontinental delivery systems was proceeding at a crawl. By contrast, the United States was on the verge of large-scale deployment of the invulnerable Minuteman and Polaris systems, and Secretary McNamara was increasingly promoting the feasibility and attractiveness of a counterforce strategy.

In view of these grim realities and the First Secretary's cavalier disdain for the military's predicament, it is not surprising that many Soviet military theorists were preoccupied with problems of strategic war-fighting—not because they themselves were embarked on acquiring such a capability, but because they may have feared the United States was perilously close to achieving it. Although these fears may have peaked during the early 1960s, they were also endemic throughout the 1950s if the foregoing interpretation of Soviet doctrinal disputes is correct. Thus, the Soviet strategic culture began to take form during a time when strategic inferiority and the uncertain outcome of internal budgetary politics made the possibility of America's achieving a war-winning capability a live issue. In these circumstances, a fund of strategic concepts was developed that focused on war-fighting capability. These concepts reoccur, remarkably often, in the Soviet military's basic vocabulary in discussing strategic issues to this day.

There is, of course, no reason why a preoccupation with problems of vulnerability and inferiority should have led to *exclusive* Soviet fascination with strategies of unilateral damage limitation and effective war-fighting. In the United States, concern about the problem of mutual vulnerability (a kind of "mutual inferiority") took two directions: on one hand, to an interest in counterforce damage-limiting strategies, and on the other hand, to a school of thought stressing stability through mutual invulnerability of second-strike forces. That the latter perspective was never fully developed in Soviet military discourse is probably not so much a result of the Soviets' historical position of inferiority *per se* as a reflection of the manner in which the Soviet debate on the implications of inferiority evolved. The fact that this debate was carried out through the writings of military officers—and was thus more likely to reflect military values than the professorial biases embodied in much of American strategy—may be particularly important.

It might seem strange that the preoccupations of historical debates on vulnerability and inferiority should continue to influence Soviet strategic thinking after these conditions have largely disappeared. At least three factors, however, can be identified that may have helped perpetuate the Soviet military's fixation on war-fighting strategies despite the passing of those large-scale Soviet vulnerabilities that made war-fighting issues a cause for such fearful preoccupation. First, the failure of Khrushchev's Berlin and Cuba ventures tended to discredit the view that a minimum deterrent was adequate and reinforced the notion that tangible benefits could be derived from a superior nuclear war-fighting capability. Second, the Soviet military establishment maintains a strong institutional and budgetary interest in keeping alive old beliefs about the crucial importance of war-fighting superiority. Third, the creeping vulnerability of fixed land-based missiles—not to mention the continuing vulnerability of command and control systems—provides a goal to work for and a seemingly meaningful criterion for success in the pursuit of superiority.

Thus, current Soviet strategic thought remains heavily burdened with the intellectual residue from an earlier, formative stage in the development of the Soviet strategic culture. This burden, such as it is, appears to be a very active

fascination with unilateral damage-limiting strategies and one that bodes ill for Soviet acceptance of the cooperative damage-limiting strategy envisioned by the U.S. selective-options doctrine.

## THE HISTORICAL LEGACY

Another influence on the development of Soviet strategic thought is the country's historical legacy. Two important aspects of this legacy are the lessons the Soviets learned during World War II and the background of Soviet Party-military relations under Stalin.

### The Lessons of World War II

Numerous analysts have suggested that a Russian's threshold of "unacceptable damage to the homeland" may be quite different from an American's, partly because Americans have never had the experience of a devastating war fought on their territory. This is not to say that Russians are more indifferent to the pain of war than are Americans.<sup>11</sup> It is merely to suggest that the Soviets' subconscious, historically conditioned standard of "unthinkable destruction" may differ from our own. This may be a factor in the process that leads them to view unilateral strategies for damage limitation as thinkable options.

Similarly, "the rude experience of Russian history"<sup>12</sup> may help explain the Soviets' distrust of cooperative strategies of intrawar deterrence and their preference for strategic self-reliance. General Talenskii puts this point in a most explicit way:

History has taught the Soviet Union to depend mainly on itself in ensuring its security. . . . The Soviet people will hardly believe that a potential aggressor will use humane methods of warfare, and will strike only at military objectives, etc. The experience of the last war, especially its aerial bombardments and in particular the combat use of the first atomic bombs, is all proof to the contrary. That is why the Soviet Union attaches importance to making as invulnerable as possible not only its nuclear-rocket deterrent but also its cities and vital centers, that is, creating a reliable defense system for the greatest number of people. . . .

When the security of a state is based only on mutual deterrence with the aid of powerful nuclear rockets it is directly dependent on the goodwill and designs of the other side, which is a highly subjective and indefinite factor.<sup>13</sup>

History shows, Talenskii continues, that leaders tend to underrate their opponents and to believe that damage will be acceptable. "If that is so," he argues, "can we afford to rely only on deterrence through the threat of a nuclear-rocket force?" Talenskii goes on to quote a Western commentator asserting the inherent instability of nuclear deterrence—and concludes that in such conditions, the Soviet Union is obliged "to make its defenses dependent chiefly on its own possibilities, and not only on mutual deterrence, that is, on the goodwill of the other side."<sup>14</sup>

One caveat must be added here. Such historical lessons are never sufficient in themselves as explanatory factors. In particular, they are vulnerable to the test of opposite consequences. Khrushchev and Malenkov lived through the same World War II experience as did the more conservative Soviet generals and marshals, yet

the former gravitated toward minimum deterrence while the latter pressed the case for war-fighting strategies and capabilities. Historical lessons thus have to be seen as establishing a latent propensity in the majority of observers, a propensity that may or may not achieve fruition depending on other factors (such as political or organizational self-interest) that influence the observer's judgment.

### **The Soviet Military under Stalin**

The historical background of Soviet Party-military relations under Stalin provides a useful key for understanding the vehemence and defensiveness with which the Soviet military have fought subsequent encroachments on their interests. Stalin's wholesale purge of the officer corps in the late 1930s, his postwar treatment of Zhukov and other war heroes, and his attempt to belittle the military's role in winning the "Great Patriotic War" taught the Soviet military to distrust the political leadership.<sup>15</sup> Stalin's decisions on doctrine and force posture—particularly his postwar effort to dissolve tank armies into mixed, mechanized units—were deeply resented.<sup>16</sup> After Stalin's death, the military attempted to reestablish their prerogatives in the field of strategic doctrine and to reclaim their rightful share of the credit for defeating Germany.

Viewed against this background of encroachment, resentment, and reaction, it is not surprising that some elements of the military viewed Khrushchev's doctrinal pronouncements and budget-reduction proposals as the latest skirmish in an ongoing struggle for greater professional autonomy. Spokesmen for the interests of the Soviet armored forces displayed this attitude most noticeably, but resentment and defensiveness were also prevalent in other branches of the armed forces, few of which (besides the Strategic Rocket Forces) promised to benefit from Khrushchev's austerity program.

In short, the Soviet military had suffered encroachments under Stalin when they could not resist. Under a much weaker Khrushchev, they were determined not to let the political leaders get away with such encroachments again. The effect of this historical pattern of civil-military relations on the development of Soviet strategic doctrine is a subject to which we may now turn.

### **THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN THE SOVIET POLICY PROCESS**

The Soviet strategic culture has been heavily influenced by the willingness of the military to seek a dominant position in the promulgation of strategic doctrine and a significant voice in decisions on force posture. In the post-Khrushchev era, this influence has been strengthened by the general sympathy of the political leadership to the military's outlook and by the Politburo's willingness to seek accommodation and compromise when its views have differed from the military's. It will be argued that this situation has been conducive to the propagation of a Soviet conventional wisdom that once strategic nuclear exchanges begin, the best strategy is one of unrestricted war-fighting rather than intrawar deterrence.

In both the United States and the Soviet Union, the military establishment and the political leadership are likely to disagree about the precise location of the border between their respective spheres of authority. In the United States, this

gray area is comparatively narrow, and the rules of bureaucratic combat between civilian and military interests are reasonably well-defined. In the Soviet Union, this disputed zone now also seems to be narrowing, but the memory of intolerable encroachments still lingers in both camps. The military can remember the abuses of the Stalin era and the antipathy that Khrushchev had for his generals. The political leadership, for its part, can ponder the assertiveness of Marshal Zhukov and the perennial struggle to gain the military's full acquiescence to the system of institutionalized political control. In short, the border between political and military spheres of authority in the Soviet Union has been—and to an extent remains—inconclusively defined. In the absence of clear, mutually accepted boundaries against encroachment, anxieties and ambitions have been fostered on both sides.

Tactics for dealing with this situation have varied, with confrontation being the predominant mode during Khrushchev's later years and accommodation being the preferred approach under Brezhnev and the collective leadership. The military have evidently done well in defending their interests and asserting their perceived rights using both strategies. Their successes, moreover, have influenced the development of Soviet strategic thought, policy, and culture in two ways. Overtly, the military's willingness to argue vehemently and convincingly—and, if necessary, to engage in political and bureaucratic battles—on behalf of their views and prerogatives have given them considerable weight in formulating strategic doctrine and policy. More indirectly, the military's near-monopoly on both military-technical information and the systematic development of formal military doctrines and strategies has given them considerable power over the way in which strategic issues are formulated. These indirect influences will be discussed first.

### **The Military's Monopoly on Doctrinal Elaboration and Technical Information**

Western commentators on the strategic arms talks have stressed the Soviet military's apparent monopoly on military-technical information and the implications this monopoly has for Soviet strategic policy.<sup>17</sup> There is persuasive evidence that the military jealously guard this monopoly. John Newhouse has reported the following now-classic anecdote from an early SALT I session:

The Americans . . . were struck by the ignorance of the Soviet civilian delegates about their own weapons; even Semenov, heading the delegation, knew little about the numbers and characteristics of Soviet strategic weapons. The Americans, of course, did know and discoursed fluently about the military hardware of both sides, much to the annoyance of the military members of the Soviet delegation: At one point, Colonel-General Nikolai Ogarkov, who was listed as the second-ranking Soviet delegate but who is also the First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, took aside an American delegate and urged that he and others discontinue talking so specifically about Soviet military hardware; such matters, he said, need not concern his civilian colleagues.<sup>18</sup>

Historically, the military's monopoly on expertise has extended not only to hardware but also to the elaboration of strategic doctrine. And understandably, their perspective on strategic problems has tended to follow the "narrow logic of military efficiency."<sup>19</sup> As a rough generalization, it is probably true that Soviet military professionals have been poorly attuned to the political and diplomatic

aspects of the use of force. Their judgments on strategy and tactics have been largely motivated by operational considerations and military suboptimizations—by the problems of waging and winning a no-holds-barred conflict.<sup>20</sup>

This professional preoccupation with war-fighting naturally leads to an appreciation of the benefits of superiority and skepticism regarding the idea of finite deterrence. V. V. Larionov, a retired Soviet military officer on the U.S.A. Institute staff, observes:

One cannot discount the fact that professional military men, who on the whole are not accustomed to the notion of "surplus forces," act in the United States as the most competent experts in evaluating the degree of sufficiency.<sup>21</sup>

Larionov undoubtedly knows that this applies a fortiori to the Soviet Union. Soviet military formulations of deterrence requirements habitually highlight the necessity of being able to *defeat* the aggressor in order to discourage his attack. Defense Minister Malinovskii's 1962 criteria remain typical:

To instill doubts about the outcome of a war planned by the aggressor, to frustrate his criminal designs in embryo, and if war becomes a reality, to defeat the aggressor decisively.<sup>22</sup>

The tendency to concentrate on war-fighting and military effectiveness rather than on diplomatic context has also led military professionals to chafe under politically imposed limitations on the use of force. MacArthur's protestations against the strategy of "half-war" fought "in a piecemeal way" are typical of American military advice on how to conduct foreign interventions.<sup>23</sup> Soviet military writings also emphasize the frustrating contradictions of limited war. Sokolovskii's *Military Strategy* places particular emphasis on the practical problems of command and control, intelligence, and decisionmaking that would bedevil military commanders in a limited nuclear war: who is observing what thresholds, what are the real effects of nuclear detonations, can we afford to withhold vulnerable forces, what should be done about time-urgent military targets situated near urban areas, and so on. The general tone of his argument seems to imply that a reasonable commander will err on the side of militarily effective (i.e., not-too-limited) actions. In any case, Sokolovskii clearly recognizes that limited nuclear war presents difficulties and ambiguities for military decisionmakers that are absent in the more straightforward world of all-out combat.<sup>24</sup>

Flexible options are thus of limited interest when judged by the criterion of optimal military effectiveness. It is primarily through pondering the problem of the rational use of force in a deep military-diplomatic crisis that one begins to appreciate the attractions of a flexible strategy. There is little evidence that Soviet military professionals who write on doctrinal topics are caught up in such ponderings.

Apart from the intellectual bias of military professionals toward doctrines stressing the criterion of military efficiency, there are also more concrete bureaucratic and budgetary interests that have influenced Soviet doctrine. One obvious example of the influence of bureaucratic conservatism on doctrine is the tank generals' successful defense of the value of heavy "breakthrough" tanks against Khrushchev's advocacy of cheap, light "exploitation" tanks. Of course, one might argue that such doctrinal rationalizations are crassly concocted for the purpose of selling the merits of weapons actually preferred on nonstrategic grounds and ac-

cordingly have little effect on operational strategies. However, because the tank forces' rationale for heavy armor was far from implausible, it seems more likely that the self-serving doctrinal justifications were sincerely believed. It is hardly a revelation to point out that people can be sincere in equating their own organizational interests with those of the nation.

Numerous observers have noted the connection between the organizational interests of the Soviet ground forces and post-Khrushchev doctrinal discussions on the possibility of large nonnuclear wars. Comparable Soviet organizational interests in limited nuclear war doctrines are more difficult to imagine. Lynn Davis makes the point that one of the reasons for the U.S. military's responsiveness to flexible-options thinking is that their counterforce elements bolster the case for increased weapons R&D and procurement.<sup>25</sup> However, the U.S. military view flexible options as an improvement on the doctrine of assured destruction, whereas the Soviet military could only view it as a step down from all-out war-fighting doctrines. Small-scale counterforce as an element of a limited-options strategy can only rationalize *some* weapons programs. A doctrine of unilateral damage limitation through war-fighting, by contrast, can rationalize *any* and *every* program.

Sovietologists have recently devoted considerable attention to signs that the military's monopoly on strategic-technical and doctrinal expertise may be eroding. Some speculate that as a result of the SALT experience, civilians in the Party Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the research institutes, and Brezhnev's personal staff have improved their technical knowledge and deepened their conceptual understanding of strategic issues. The research institutes have evoked particular interest, in part because of the comparative abundance of information about them.

The strategic literature produced by the U.S.A. Institute and the Institute for World Economy and International Relations differs notably from the writing of active-duty military professionals, as attested by G. A. Arbatov's assertion that "the further accumulation of military power is not accompanied by an increase in political power." Such statements have raised hopes among many in the West that the institutes might represent an emergent locus of liberal "counter-cultural" strategic analysis in the USSR.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, the *institutchiki* share few of the military's hard-line doctrinal beliefs and bureaucratic interests. What is less clear is the actual degree of policy influence they enjoy. The directors of these two institutes, G. A. Arbatov and N. N. Inozemtsev, are high Party officials who reportedly have regular access to the top leadership. It is known that Arbatov has been used to transmit Soviet back-channel SALT communications.<sup>27</sup> As the Soviet Union's most prominent Americanologist, he may also be a valued source of information for a rather parochial political elite. (One thinks of the role Llewelyn Thompson and Charles Bohlen played as the ExCom's Kremlinologists during the Cuban missile crisis.)

The importance of the institutes themselves, as opposed to the personal importance of their directors, is less evident. Matthew Gallagher and Karl Spielmann speculate that Kosygin made himself a patron of the U.S.A. Institute to cultivate an alternative, nonbureaucratic source of policy-relevant information.<sup>28</sup> Wolfe reports signs that the institutes' publications were consciously used by the political leadership as a vehicle to counter the military's veiled attacks on Soviet SALT policy in 1973-1974.<sup>29</sup> It is conceivable that the circulation of personnel through the

institutes and into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the SALT delegation may give intellectual developments at the institutes some policy influence. At the very least, the institutes may provide an opportunity for civilian analysts to share in the military and technical knowledge of the retired officers who serve on institute staffs.

With specific regard to limited nuclear options, the institutes have taken a leading role in the condemnation of the U.S. selective targeting strategy. At the same time, institute publications have displayed a fair degree of sensitivity to problems of the rational political use of force, coercive diplomacy, escalation strategies, and so on.<sup>30</sup> Because this mode of analysis has much in common with flexible-options thinking, one might speculate that the *institutchiki* would be more readily converted to the flexibility doctrine than would the officers of the general staff. Whether such a conversion would seriously affect Soviet contingency planning, however, remains doubtful in view of the persistent military dominance in such matters.

### **Military-Political Conflict and Cooperation on Strategic Issues in the Post-Khrushchev Period**

In the wake of the Cuban missile crisis and especially after the demise of Khrushchev, a new era of more cooperative Party-military relations began to emerge. Whereas Khrushchev viewed the "thick-headed types you find wearing uniforms" primarily as saboteurs of his ambitious plans for economic development,<sup>31</sup> the post-Khrushchev leadership seems to share many of the military's values and policy preferences.

As most vividly suggested by the massive Soviet arms buildup that has been under way throughout the past decade, the current Soviet leaders apparently agree with the military that increases in military strength do render tangible diplomatic and security benefits. They also seem, however, more attuned to economic opportunity costs than the military. This situation sets the parameters for a mixed game of conflict and cooperation between the military and the political leadership. The way this game is played out under conditions of collective leadership has important implications for Soviet strategic policy, including the likelihood of the Soviets' developing options for the limited use of nuclear weapons.

Brezhnev's "collective leadership" style tends to reflect a predominance of consensus and compromise tactics. These are often seen as the guiding principles not only of relations within the Politburo but also between the Politburo and large institutions. From observing Khrushchev's mistakes, the present oligarchs have learned that it can be politically disastrous to alienate Party, military, and governmental bureaucracies. It is a matter of simple precaution, therefore, to share responsibility by arriving at a Politburo-wide consensus on any decision that is likely to impinge on organizational interests.<sup>32</sup> Because a significant number of the present members of the Politburo have either direct ties to national security bureaucracies or a history of sympathy for military viewpoints, one can imagine the difficulty of building a consensus on any issue in the face of firm military opposition. For this reason, being generous on defense appropriations is the safe course in Soviet politics.<sup>33</sup>

The military viewpoint makes itself heard not only through sympathizers within the Politburo but also directly in the Defense Council, a body that includes



representatives of the military, the government, and the Party leadership. It is likely that this body plays a determining role in formulating all but the broadest outlines of Soviet defense policy. For example, during the final SALT I negotiations in Moscow, L. V. Smirnov, Chairman of the Military-Industrial Commission and a presumed member of the Defense Council, seems to have been delegated broad authority to work out specific provisions of the interim agreement. If this degree of delegated authority is typical, the Defense Council would seem to be a very powerful group, in which the point of view of the uniformed military and their presumed allies in the defense industries is well represented. In short, as Marshall Shulman has observed, "It is clear that the military services are a formidable element in Soviet politics and that their interests have to be accommodated in the process of compromise by which the consensus leadership is maintained."<sup>34</sup>

Even if this conclusion is granted, however, whether it bears on Soviet attitudes toward the limited use of nuclear weapons in a deep crisis remains unclear. It is one thing to say that the necessities of consensus politics *in peacetime* incline the political leadership toward accommodating the military's preference for a strategic posture suited to massive counterforce warfare. It is another thing to say that the leaders' choice of a strategy *in wartime* will reflect similar deference to military views. The latter is a conceptually distinct question that warrants separate attention. Along these lines, a few arguments can be advanced that suggest that the political leadership will not spontaneously generate radically new strategic doctrines—nor will the bureaucracy implement them—in the heat of a deep crisis.

**Strategic Culture and Shared Images.** Morton Halperin points out that a key to effectiveness in a bureaucratic-political world of consensus formation and interest accommodation is the ability to defer to "shared images." Questioning conventional wisdoms (such as the preference for damage limitation through war-fighting instead of intrawar deterrence) only makes the consensus formation process on concrete issues more difficult. Conversely, internalizing the conventional wisdoms of the organization makes a political actor more effective.<sup>35</sup> Thus, if we envision the Soviet political leaders as being only marginally concerned with the fine points of operational doctrine and force posture, it seems reasonable that they would tend to adapt themselves to the thinking of military professionals on these matters, especially if such adaptation facilitated the consensus-building process. If the concept of a strategic culture has any meaning, it should suggest that a decade of accommodating the military's preference for a war-fighting posture has led to the internalization of some shared images of strategic rationality that will not easily be put aside in a moment of crisis. However, continuing signs of debate between military and nonmilitary spokesmen on some strategic issues indicate that the leadership's acceptance of the military's strategic concepts is not complete.

**Force Posture as a Constraint on Real-Time Doctrinal Innovation.** One way the influence of military preferences can carry over from peacetime policy-making into crisis decisionmaking is through the constraints imposed by the existing force posture. It can be argued that the doctrinal predispositions of the military have had a significant effect on Soviet force structure choices, both overtly in the SALT consensus-building process and more subtly through control of the weapons development bureaucracy. The existing force posture may be inherently biased toward some strategies and away from others. With regard to limited theater nuclear war, Alain Enthoven and Wayne Smith observe:

Rather than building large numbers of short-range, low-yield systems that would be very vulnerable and useful only for killing discrete, well-located targets, the Soviets have emphasized higher-yield, mobile tactical missiles primarily useful for terrain or blanketing fires. . . . Indeed, the Soviet force structure raises serious doubts about their *capability* to fight a limited tactical nuclear war, much less one in which collateral damage and civilian casualties are kept to low levels.<sup>36</sup>

Similar questions can be raised on the strategic level. For example, how severely does the deployment of higher-yield, lower-accuracy warheads constrain the Soviet Union's ability to limit collateral damage resulting from counterforce strikes? How does the Soviets' choice to deploy a high proportion of their megatonnage in increasingly vulnerable, fixed sites affect their ability (or disposition) to withhold ICBM forces once hostilities have begun?<sup>37</sup>

**Military Advice and Bureaucratic Implementation as Constraints on Real-Time Doctrinal Innovation.** Halperin has pointed out that military organizations can insinuate their preferences into the crisis decisions of the political leadership by the character of the professional-technical advice they offer (e.g., estimates of the effectiveness of a surgical air strike and figures on antisubmarine warfare kill probabilities).<sup>38</sup> Applying this notion to the Soviet case, it is interesting that the most recent edition of Sokolovskii's *Military Strategy* describes the collateral-damage problem connected with limited counterforce strikes as intractable.<sup>39</sup> If this is an accurate reflection of the advice the Soviet leaders would receive in a nuclear crisis, its negative implications for real-time Soviet improvisation of a flexible-options strategy are clear. Even if the political leaders did decide to try a limited-options strategy, the preferences and habits of the military bureaucracy that would implement the limited strikes might tend to compromise the leaders' original intent. In short, the possibility of the leadership's conceptualizing, defining, and enforcing in real time all the necessary limitations on targets, weapons, and collateral damage involved in a strategy of controlled nuclear conflict remains problematic.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For elaboration, see George H. Quester, "On the Identification of Real and Pretended Communist Military Doctrine," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. X, No. 2, June 1966, pp. 172-179.

<sup>2</sup> This line is argued by G. A. Trofimenko, "Problems of Strengthening Peace and Security in Soviet-American Relations," *S.Sh.A. Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya*, No. 9, September 1974, p. 18. Trofimenko contrasts "traditional U.S. military-technical policy" with the "traditions and principles" of Soviet policy in the context of a discussion of the U.S. selective targeting doctrine.

<sup>3</sup> As a final addendum on the subject of "real" and "pretended" military doctrine, Robert Jervis points out some anomalies that develop if we establish American criteria for Soviet strategic interests and then assume that Soviet doctrine is always a manipulation aimed at maximizing these interests. For example, under Khrushchev the Soviets maintained a preponderance of conventional forces in Europe. Despite this, Khrushchev vigorously argued that conventional war in Europe would automatically escalate to nuclear holocaust. This kind of declaratory policy seems foolish to a game theorist. Why would Khrushchev gratuitously divest himself of the opportunity to increase the credibility of his compelling threats on the Berlin question? The apparent anomaly is explained when we remember that Khrushchev was trying to convince internal opponents to approve smaller, nuclearized theater forces as a means of saving manpower and resources. Thus, in some cases Soviet doctrine is inexplicable in manipulative terms, yet yields readily to other types of analysis that stress nonstrategic factors. See Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Paul H. Nitze, "Assuring Strategic Stability in an Era of Détente," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 2, January 1976, p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> This argument should not be overemphasized. It merely established the *plausibility* of the Soviets' subscribing to this outlook, not the likelihood of it. Indeed, if there is truth in the familiar contention that each side generally overestimates the efficacy of its opponent's strategic programs and underestimates its own, then the Soviets may not share Nitze's view.

<sup>6</sup> George H. Quester, *Nuclear Diplomacy: The First Twenty-Five Years*, Dunellen Company, New York, 1970, p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> *War and the Soviet Union*, Chaps. IV and V, especially pp. 91, 166.

<sup>8</sup> Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party*, p. 150. Some qualifications of the second point are required. Plans for the deployment of second-generation strategic systems and the development of third-generation systems were underway at this time. However, they were not, at this point, crash programs, which Khrushchev's opponents may have considered necessary.

<sup>9</sup> *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, Bantam Books, Inc., New York, 1976, pp. 39-40.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin*, The Viking Press, Inc., New York, 1968, pp. 236-237.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, one might argue that Soviet strategy has shown *more* sensitivity to the pain of war than has our own, in that it has rejected as inhumane the notion of the assured and senseless destruction of cities.

<sup>12</sup> The phrase is Thomas Wolfe's, *Military Power and Soviet Policy*, The Rand Corporation, P-5388, March 1975, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> N. Talenskii, "Anti-Missile Systems and Disarmament," in Erickson (ed.), *The Military-Technical Revolution*, pp. 227, 225.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226, emphasis deleted.

<sup>15</sup> See Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Military Policy: A Historical Analysis*, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, 1966, p. 43. Khrushchev describes the military's displeasure at the demotion of Admiral Kuznetsov (*Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, p. 27).

<sup>16</sup> Nikolai Galay, "Tank Forces in the Soviet Army," *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR*, Vol. I, No. 7, October 1954, pp. 3-15.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Wolfe remarks that "although there may have come into being small pools of such expertise supervised by Brezhnev's personal secretariat or the Central Committee staff... [there is little to suggest] that the political leadership has seen fit to interpose an independent analytical filter between itself and inputs from the military command." *The SALT Experience*, p. 245. Newhouse makes a similar point in *Cold Dawn*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>18</sup> *Cold Dawn*, p. 192.

<sup>19</sup> The expression is James L. Foster's, from "The Lessons of War: Vietnam in Historical Perspective," doctoral dissertation, M.I.T., September 1975, p. 84.

<sup>20</sup> Soviet professional military writers perennially cite Clausewitz and Lenin on war as a continuation of politics. However, the conclusions about doctrine and force posture drawn from this "political" perspective are usually indistinguishable from those conclusions that might have been derived from strictly military considerations. Therefore, it can be argued that the latter is the operative factor.

<sup>21</sup> From an article on the attitudes of the U.S. military in S.Sh.A. *Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologua*, No. 3, March 1970, quoted in Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> *Kommunist*, No. 7, May 1962, p. 15, quoted in Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, p. 136.

<sup>23</sup> Testimony of General Douglas MacArthur, U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearings, "Military Situation in the Far East," 82d Cong., 1st Sess., 1951, Part I*, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> Marshal V. D. Sokolovskii (ed.), *Military Strategy*, 3d ed., trans. H. F. Scott, Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., New York, 1976, pp. 67-69.

<sup>25</sup> *Limited Nuclear Options*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> G. A. Arbatov, "On Soviet-American Relations," *Kommunist*, No. 3, February 1973, p. 104, cited in Wolfe, *Military Power and Soviet Policy*, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, p. 204.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew Gallagher and Karl Spielmann, *Soviet Decisionmaking for Defense*, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, 1972, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> *The SALT Experience*, pp. 154 ff.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, "O nekotorykh novykh tendentsiakh..." p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Marshall D. Shulman, "SALT and the Soviet Union," in Mason Willrich and John Rhineland (eds.), *SALT: The Moscow Agreements and Beyond*, The Free Press, New York, 1974, p. 114.

<sup>33</sup> This point is elaborated in Gallagher and Spielmann, *Soviet Decisionmaking for Defense*, p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> Shulman, "SALT and the Soviet Union," p. 113.

<sup>35</sup> Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1971, pp. 150 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961-1969*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 127.

<sup>37</sup> Just as certain strategic systems may now entail a bias against flexible-options thinking, future developments may involve the opposite bias. For example, the Soviets may acquire some of the capabilities required for flexible-options strategies while pursuing other ends, such as retargeting or withholding a portion of their forces as a strategic reserve. Whether acquisition of the concepts would follow acquisition of the capabilities is, of course, uncertain.

<sup>38</sup> *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, pp. 144, 147-148.

<sup>39</sup> *Military Strategy*, pp. 59-60.

## V. CONCLUSION

The preceding section has argued that there exists a distinctively Soviet strategic culture, which conditions Soviet strategic thought and behavior. Unique historical experiences, distinctive political and institutional relationships, and a preoccupation with strategic dilemmas different from those that have preoccupied the United States have combined to produce a unique mix of strategic beliefs and a unique pattern of strategic behavior based on these beliefs. The term "culture" is used to suggest that these beliefs tend to be perpetuated by the socialization of individuals into a distinctive mode of thinking. Thus, viewed from a strategic-cultural perspective, changes in Soviet strategic thought will not occur as direct responses to the changing strategic environment but indirectly, in a way mediated by preexisting cultural beliefs.

One difference between the Soviet and American strategic cultures is the degree of relative emphasis placed on unilateral, as opposed to cooperative, damage-limiting strategies in the event deterrence fails. For a variety of reasons, the preponderance of Soviet thought on this question has shown a preference for the unilateral approach to damage limitation by means of unrestrained counterforce strikes and, where technically feasible, passive and active defenses. By contrast, U.S. thinking has increasingly moved toward the cooperative strategy of mutual restraint and intrawar deterrence. The strategic-cultural approach tends to support the view that the divergence of Soviet declaratory policy from American thinking does not represent a devious attempt at manipulation but rather a genuine difference in outlook. By identifying concrete historical experiences and organizational influences that have molded Soviet strategic thought, the strategic-cultural approach helps explain the origins and continuing vitality of Soviet attitudes that superficially appear to American observers inscrutable, wrong-headed, or peculiar.

The foregoing discussion has pointed to the professional military as the principal repository of strategic orthodoxy and as a key force in determining the content of Soviet strategic culture. The professional biases and bureaucratic interests of the Soviet military are not conducive to the development of flexible-options thinking. To the extent that the military maintain a key position in the development of Soviet strategic policies, there is likely to be resistance to any drift away from reliance on the unilateral, war-fighting approach to damage limitation.

The Soviet strategic culture is not, however, a monolith. In addition to the orthodox military viewpoint, there also exists a countervailing strategic subculture, whose existence can be discerned in the writings and speeches of the Foreign Minister and other government officials, some analysts at research institutions, and various journalists. This subculture questions some of the assumptions of the mainstream orthodoxy, doubting the possibility of meaningful victory in nuclear war and the utility of ever-larger strategic forces. The present analysis has largely disregarded this subculture. Intellectually, this strain of strategic analysis was virtually discredited in the eyes of the Soviet political leadership after the disastrous Khrushchev experience. Institutionally, it has not taken root in any organization that has sufficient bureaucratic or political strength to have an independent voice in policymaking. Most important for the development of Soviet attitudes on

limited nuclear options, those officials and commentators who sometimes disagree with the formulations of military writers have also been at the forefront of the attacks on the U.S. selective-options doctrine. On the limited nuclear options issue, at least, Soviet opinion *does* seem to be monolithic.

The strategic policies of the political leadership since the demise of Khrushchev have generally been compatible with the orthodox military viewpoint. Although it is difficult to divine the leaders' innermost thoughts on operational strategy, their force procurement policies seem consistent with the military's preference for counterforce war-fighting doctrines. To some extent, this may represent a genuinely shared outlook on strategic questions. In part, it may also represent an expedient accommodation to the views of a strong and indispensable institutional interest group.

Conversely, the military's strategic views are tied to professional biases and bureaucratic interests that the political leaders generally do not share. Thus, even if we assume that the current leaders have internalized a strategic culture whose content has been determined primarily by the military, it is conceivable that changing conditions may lead future leaders to adopt strategic views that are unorthodox according to current Soviet military standards. For example, as Soviet commitments become more global and extend beyond the reach of Soviet conventional preponderance, the leadership may discover compelling incentives to develop certain types of limited nuclear options to deal with their own first-use dilemma. Moreover, as the Soviet economy becomes less and less efficient, future leaders may eschew the goal of the credible strategic war-fighting capability and seek instead a doctrine that could rationalize a more affordable strategic posture. If changes in weapons technology make the military's quest for a unilateral damage-limiting capability even more futile than it already is, the political leaders may come to realize that scientific developments have made their strategic doctrines obsolete. However, the strategic-cultural approach would caution that such adjustments to changing conditions would most likely be evolutionary, not revolutionary. For example, the realization that the ABM would not work may have been a minor blow to orthodox Soviet strategy, but it has apparently not led the military or the political leaders to forsake the large-scale deployment of counterforce weapons, the most plausible military rationale for which is an attempt at unilateral damage limitation.<sup>1</sup> If the failure of the ABM has eroded strategic orthodoxy in the Soviet Union, the effects of this erosion are as yet difficult to discern in policy outputs.

It would be dangerous to assume that Soviet crisis decisionmakers will be willing to tailor their behavior to American notions of strategic rationality. Admittedly, Soviet denunciations of the limited-options doctrine may be motivated in part by a desire to deny the United States a low-cost means of enhancing the credibility of its strategic commitment to Europe. Beyond this, however, Soviet criticism of limited strategic war and intrawar deterrence is consistent with embedded patterns of Soviet strategic thought. These patterns are the organic outgrowth of more than two decades of strategic policymaking and have achieved a state of semipermanence that puts them on the level of "culture" rather than mere "policy." Although these patterns are most deeply rooted in the thinking of the professional military, they are also reflected in the policies approved by the political leadership. Counter-cultural strategic analysis is not well-developed in the Soviet Union and has been in retreat since the Cuban missile crisis. As a result, there has been no discernible effort to explore the advantages of flexible-options strategies. Based on what is

visible to the outside observer, Soviet crisis decisionmakers would appear intellectually unprepared for real-time improvisation of a doctrine of intrawar restraint.

It would be wrong, however, to think that this is the last and definitive word on Soviet attitudes toward limited strategic options. The content of a strategic culture is not cast in concrete for all time. More important, strategic doctrine is not the only important strategic-cultural variable that might affect Soviet behavior in a deep nuclear crisis. Crisis behavioral style, which was not examined in this report, might also provide clues regarding the likelihood that the Soviet leaders would employ nuclear weapons in a limited mode. Finally, the specific characteristics of a given crisis situation would undoubtedly affect the inclination of the Soviet decisionmakers to use nuclear weapons in a limited mode. The notions of strategic culture, strategic doctrine, and crisis style do not posit a rigid code of behavior. Rather, they suggest that the evaluation of the rationality of alternative courses of action *in a specific situation* will reflect, in part, stylistic and cultural predispositions. This does not deny the independent significance of the situation. The game-theoretical perspective is useful in providing the insight that some situations may offer decisionmakers particularly great temptations to adopt a limited nuclear strategy. The strategic-cultural approach merely states that, because of deep-seated beliefs and attitudes, Soviet decisionmakers would probably be less attuned to these temptations than would their American counterparts.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Other rationales, which are basically nonmilitary or only partially military, are also conceivable, however. For example, the Soviet leadership may feel that it needs to deploy high-yield MIRVs in order to appear equal in counterforce capability to American high-accuracy MIRVs. This does not *necessarily* imply a belief that unilateral damage limitation is possible or that the ability to compete in silo-trading is particularly meaningful in military terms. Rather it could rest on a less definable politico-psychological calculation. If such a rationale seems implausible, it should be remembered that precisely this kind of argument has been used to help rationalize American counterforce programs. In short, one should admit the limitations of the argument that Soviet heavy missile programs constitute evidence of the existence of any particular strategic-cultural predisposition.

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