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The Scope of the Debate

Considering its far-reaching security implications, the INF Treaty signed by President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev in December 1987, and ratified this spring by the U.S. Senate, provoked a curiously muted debate. The contrast with SALT II is remarkable. There was no political football here; instead, Presidential candidates of all persuasions hastened to endorse it. Such opposition as emerged was focused not on issues of security, surely the ultimate test of any arms control agreement, but on whether the Treaty contained adequate provisions against Soviet subterfuge.

The widespread perception that the Treaty enhanced the security of the Western alliance was reinforced by the apparent lack of any overt military opposition. The sting was drawn from General Rogers' well-publicized remarks by the favorable testimony of his successor and of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Responsible leaders asserted that flexible response was alive and well.[1] They took quiet satisfaction in the fact that the Soviet theater nuclear inventory would suffer a disproportionate cut, implying a concession on the long cherished doctrine of military superiority.[2] Yet there was little hard assessment in the public domain to support an optimistic interpretation. Months later, analysis of the impact of the Treaty on NATO strategy is still, at best, sketchy, and we have yet to see from any authority an account of what the Treaty means in terms of Soviet military strategy and doctrine.

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A number of factors have combined to obscure and perhaps even overshadow the military case. Many see the Treaty primarily in political terms. They see the advent of *glasnost* as a historic opportunity to put the superpower relationship on a sounder footing. They do not reject the utility of nuclear weapons outright, but accept the consensus view that modern nuclear stockpiles are far in excess of any deterrent need and have become a cause of tension rather than a factor in stability. For these people, nuclear arms reductions are good per se. They hope that the INF Treaty will lead to more.

Others appear to acknowledge a military dimension although their thinking remains rooted in a strategic consensus that is now more than a decade old. They supported the deployment of Pershing and Cruise as the counter to a specific strategic problem (the decoupling effect of Soviet theater weapons) and now acclaim the Treaty, which supposedly removes that threat, as total vindication of the dual-track decision adopted by the NATO nations in December 1979.[3] Few military leaders found it easy to oppose this argument, having to explain what was wrong with the theater nuclear balance of pre-INF days which the Treaty allegedly restores and which was considered acceptable at the time. Yet certain nagging doubts remain. Was the Soviet INF deployment really designed to decouple (surely a Western intellectual construct) or did it serve some more tangible function in Soviet strategy? Was the theater nuclear balance of the mid-1970s indeed satisfactory? Has Soviet strategy (or perhaps equally important, our understanding of it) changed during the decade that since has elapsed?

There was a further, and influential, body of opinion which supported the Treaty, not for its intrinsic merits, but because it appeared to represent a triumph for diplomacy. The outcome, so their argument ran, demonstrated the wisdom of dealing with the Soviet Union from a position of strength.[4] They pointed to the numerous concessions made by the Kremlin during the course of negotiations-retreat on the issue of independent nuclear forces, on the principle of "equal security based on geographic factors," on linkage to SDI, on intrusive verification procedures.[5] They saw the inclusion of shorter range systems within the Treaty as a further victory for U.S. negotiators. They were interested in the technique rather than the product. No one warned them of Greeks bearing gifts.[6]

Arms Control and Asymmetric Strategies[7]

Now that we have it, if we are to satisfy ourselves that the INF Treaty is more than a series of tactical victories culminating in a strategic defeat, we must extend the debate beyond the issue of relative numbers and beyond

the techniques of the negotiating process to the military balance as it will exist in Europe when the Treaty is fully implemented.

However tempting it may be to judge the Treaty solely on the basis of its contribution to political détente, this is not enough. We may accept the general proposition that nuclear arms reductions may contribute to a more stable relationship between the superpowers, while remaining skeptical about the effect of the Treaty on the security of Europe. Security must be measured against a wider set of criteria than nuclear weapons alone, and hopes of reducing tension will prove illusory if either side perceives that the overall military balance has tilted against it.

It will be as well too, to dispose of the idea, always prevalent at times of détente, that the Soviet Union is too conscious of the risks and limitations of military power to initiate a European war. Those who hold such views tend to see relations between states in overly static terms. They ignore the contradictions within the postwar European settlement (the division of Germany and the political status of Eastern Europe) and fail to ask themselves why such an unnatural condition has survived. They ignore the fact of Soviet military power and the limits that NATO strategy has so far successfully placed on it. Without continuing and effective restraint on that power, European governments will not avoid for long the need to adjust their foreign and perhaps also their domestic policies in favor of the Soviet Union.

We can form no judgment on the Treaty's impact on European security without acknowledging the fundamental asymmetry between the military strategies (and doctrines) of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Arms reductions may contribute to security when strategies are symmetrical, and there is an arguable symmetry between the strategic nuclear postures of the two superpowers, but in INF we have a case where nuclear weapons play a fundamentally different role in the operational concepts of the opposing sides. The enduring problem facing NATO planners has remained essentially unchanged throughout the 40-year history of the Alliance. It is a twofold problem. It is firstly how to counter a massive Soviet advantage in conventional power, and secondly how to compensate for a critical lack of defensive depth which leaves key political, economic, and military centers hostage to offensive action. The answer in the past has relied ultimately on the nuclear threat, and given the twofold nature of the problem, it is difficult to see any credible alternative.

The task facing Soviet strategists has been quite different. Soviet strength in the European theater has rested primarily on the conventional capability of its ground forces. However, to make these rationally usable, whether for political or military purposes, the military leadership has had to search for ways to neutralize NATO's nuclear threat. The grand strategy selected to achieve this objective has contained political as well as military elements

and has varied over time. The military component has embraced nuclear as well as conventional means. Nuclear weapons nevertheless have played, and continue to play, radically different roles in the operational strategies of both sides, and in terms of total security it appears highly improbable that INF will be evenhanded in its effects.

Flexible Response—Impact of the INF Treaty

The broad outlines of the NATO strategy of flexible response are well-known, even if the details remain hazy. Spokesmen rarely say much about it, preferring merely to correct misinterpretations rather than illuminate the truth and to rely on Soviet perceptions to fill the gaps. Their formulae usually aim to leave the Soviet Union with no doubt that NATO would respond, but with uncertainty as to the nature and timing of that response. They warn particularly against any interpretation of the strategy as a formal or predictable process of escalation, implying therefore that no one escalatory step or any one system is essential to its successful implementation.

If the Russians can supply the missing details, so can we. It is normally assumed that NATO's initial and, indeed, preferred response will be conventional. This is what chiefly distinguishes flexible response from the strategies which went before. The Alliance will thus use conventional means to counter and defeat limited or probing attacks. Nevertheless, because of the imbalances and defensive weaknesses already described, NATO would rely on its nuclear arsenal to deter, and if deterrence fails, to check any more formidable incursion. Supreme Allied commanders continue to warn that early recourse to nuclear weapons is likely.[8]

No nuclear threat can be entirely credible unless nuclear use can offer the prospect of positive advantage. Escalation must threaten the enemy with a military setback (usually called a strategy of denial) or it must induce him to halt his aggression by presenting the prospect of intolerable cost or risk. Nuclear denial certainly underlaid NATO thinking in the days when the Alliance enjoyed an effective monopoly of nuclear weapons in theater. Nuclear weapons could then be seen as compensating directly for conventional weakness. But this former advantage has long since been eroded by the growth of Soviet theater nuclear capability. Although NATO has never formally rejected the denial option, its credibility is open to question. The Western nuclear powers have come to rely increasingly, therefore, on a strategy directed primarily against the enemy's will, the application of psychological shock, and the opening of vistas of uncontrolled escalation. A plausible linkage between theater weapons and the central strategic arsenal of the United States is an important factor in reinforcing these perceptions.

Clearly, Allied commanders will retain a spectrum of systems capable of implementing this threat, including artillery-delivered weapons, dual-capable aircraft, many with the range necessary for deep strike missions, as well as theater-assigned strategic systems (Poseidon and Polaris) whose ambiguity serves such a crucial purpose in linking the theater to the strategic arsenal of the United States. The continued viability of flexible response rests heavily on the credibility of these systems. But credibility is not an absolute term. We should not be asking whether credible options remain, but whether those options are more or *less* credible than those which preceded them. And here lies the nub of the problem. Short-range or battlefield systems threaten to provoke a nuclear war in the heart of Europe and to place the burden on the innocent rather than on the aggressor. Reliance on such weapons is a divisive issue, hence, West German *angst* regarding current modernization proposals.[9] Strategic systems assigned to the theater commander and the independent deterrents of Britain and France, because of their ambiguity or because they represent a final guarantee of security, might be held in reserve for some ultimate contingency. Soviet leaders could come to question whether either of these weapon categories would be used. The value of intermediate systems, including those with range necessary to place Soviet targets at risk, is thus clear. The INF Treaty has not eliminated NATO capability in this area but it has significantly reduced it. In the event of war, the nuclear powers could find themselves short of options in this key area.

Soviet perceptions are not the only issue. We must be concerned too with the will of decision makers to implement their threat. This arms reduction measure has advanced the moment at which National Command Authorities would have to consider the employment of strategic systems. We are moving slowly but perceptibly in the direction of self-deterrence.

The Fundamentals of Soviet Military Strategy and Doctrine

The development of military strategy is a dynamic process, and analysts can point convincingly to a number of phases in the evolution of Soviet strategic thought as leaders have grappled with the political, economic, and technological factors of the day. However, at a time when some claim to detect a revolution in Soviet military strategy, and when speculation about "non-offensive defense" is rife, it is important to recognize too, the constants of Soviet strategy, that compendium of doctrine and historical experience that successive generations of Soviet strategists have carried in their knapsacks.

Perhaps the first point to recall is that Soviet strategists have never lost faith in the conventional offensive as a means of achieving decisive goals in a theater of war. While Western thinkers have tended to

compartmentalize nuclear and conventional operations, and have even (for a time) questioned the very utility of conventional forces in the nuclear age, their Soviet counterparts have never shared these perspectives. Conventional ground operations and nuclear strikes were not mutually exclusive, but part of, as Sokolovskii put it, "a single continuous process of war."[10] A nuclear strike by the enemy might prove decisive in its own right; nuclear use on the battlefield would clearly complicate ground operations; but a fatalistic acceptance of these facts was not enough. The situation called for solutions. In the European context this meant practical measures both to isolate the strategic nuclear capability of the United States and to neutralize theater-deployed nuclear systems.

Development of Soviet strategic nuclear capability would play an important part in meeting the first of these requirements. Total assurance was in the nature of things illusory. Nevertheless, survivable strategic forces would remove a U.S. intervention at the strategic level from the framework of rational policy. In practical terms, that was all that could be done.

In the context of ground operations in a theater of war, the Soviet military leadership made determined efforts to ensure the survival of conventional forces on the nuclear battlefield. Additionally, operational doctrine focused on the exploitation of nuclear firepower by maneuver formations, but these measures were not in themselves sufficient. Nuclear war would be short and decisive, offering manifest advantages to the side that struck first. Military doctrine therefore came to demand the decisive laydown of nuclear fires that would "anticipate" (if not preempt) a NATO decision.[11] Despite its evident problems and risks, this strategy has survived at least as an option for countering the NATO theater nuclear threat.

The INF Treaty may tell us something about the role of this strategy (the decisive use of nuclear weapons in theater) in current Soviet thinking. The Soviet Union retains an impressive theater nuclear capability including systems capable of striking to the full depth of the enemy rear, but their post-INF force structure appears less effective for the kind of mission envisaged. The loss of intermediate and shorter range missiles, most of them mobile, the majority highly accurate, and all virtually immune to defensive countermeasures, indicates a genuine reduction in capability. If this strategic option was the target of the INF negotiations, and if it was the right target, then, from the Western perspective the Treaty may be judged a success.

Yet Soviet military leaders have long since concluded that the decisive use of nuclear weapons in the European theater was less than acceptable as a means towards their objectives and a strategy of last resort. They have therefore searched for alternative methods for countering the nuclear threat—methods that would be less likely to engage the strategic forces of the United States, of the independent nuclear powers, as well as surviving

forward deployed systems. The search took them back to their strategic roots, to the theories of mass, tempo, and deep penetration by maneuver forces, developed by Frunze and Tukachevskii, and tested in the Second World War.

The broad outlines of this strategy, updated for the nuclear age in the form of the theater strategic operation, have received considerable attention from Western analysts.[12] The threat of escalation is addressed in two ways. Firstly, the ground offensive will be designed to achieve rates of advance so rapid that theater objectives will fall before the opponent can use his nuclear forces to rational advantage. Soviet military leaders have concentrated for decades on developing the mobility, firepower, and battle management techniques needed to make this operation feasible without recourse to nuclear weapons. Secondly, they will seek and maintain a posture of escalation dominance. This has involved both the prewar deployment of superior numbers of theater nuclear systems (an explanation for INF deployments that is more firmly rooted in Soviet military thought than Western notions of decoupling) and from the onset of war would involve a combined arms conventional air operation with the specific objective to further and perhaps decisively alter the nuclear correlation of forces in their favor. No assessment of the INF Treaty can be complete without considering its impact on this operational strategy.

The Theater Strategic Operations—Impact of the INF Treaty

No doubt, during the course of INF negotiations, the Soviet General Staff provided the leadership with detailed estimates on how the Treaty would affect the viability of their preferred strategy and doctrine. We can only speculate on their findings, but some general conclusions suggest themselves.

They will have noted firstly that the United States has agreed to destroy nearly 500 of its most modern forward deployed systems, and especially those most difficult to counter either by offensive or defensive means. Clearly NATO retains alternative systems to support its strategy of flexible response, including some capable of threatening targets deep in Soviet territory. Nevertheless, Soviet leaders must take satisfaction in the fact that the agreement has successfully confined NATO theater nuclear capability to systems which are more vulnerable to the conventional air operation and which are more easily countered by conventional air defenses. The threat has been made more manageable.

Soviet officials may well be disappointed that the Treaty places no formal restrictions on alternatives or substitutes. NATO (indeed either party) can, in theory, strengthen its inventory of dual-capable aircraft or assign a theater role to sea-based forces. France and Great Britain have been quick to enter preliminary talks on a joint stand-off missile for their strike aircraft. The

Soviet Union has already made its policy abundantly clear. During a visit to Bonn early in 1988, Soviet Foreign Minister Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze described such moves as "unacceptable."[13] This must be seen as the opening of a crescendo of Soviet propaganda on such issues. Western governments will not find it easy to evade this onslaught. In an era of supposed détente, which they have done so much to foster, their constituents will not readily understand why one set of weapons should be destroyed, only to be replaced by another. The Western alliance has lowered the cost of aggression; it will not be easy to restore it.

It is relevant to ask at this point what the West has received in return for this generous concession. Some will claim that the Soviet Union has accepted a reduction in its former capability to wage decisive nuclear war. It must be left to advocates of this view to explain how an operation of this kind is relevant to Soviet strategic objectives. It will be more to the point to inquire how the Treaty has affected Soviet ability to conduct the theater strategic operation, and within that general concept to hamper or restrict an effective nuclear response. It does nothing to limit Soviet ability to launch and conduct a *blitzkrieg*; and operational tempo, it will be recalled, was one of the ways in which they sought to circumvent the nuclear threat. What about the other—the correlation of nuclear forces designed to secure escalation dominance?

On a superficial level, it would seem that the Soviet Union has surrendered a favorable correlation of forces based on theater-deployed intermediate and shorter range missiles. This impression is misleading. Any realistic measure of the theater nuclear balance is much more complex than that, and it is the post-treaty correlation of forces that is relevant to our analysis, not what went before. Clearly, the new balance will be less amenable to simplistic comparisons than the one which preceded it. We are no longer dealing with convenient entities like missiles, with known characteristics and high probabilities of survival and penetration; we are dealing instead with dual-capable systems and with delicate assumptions about tasking, basing, and vulnerability to offensive and defensive attrition. The new nuclear correlation will be more ambiguous than its predecessor and will offer less scope for impressing (or intimidating) neighboring states.

We may be certain, however, that the Soviet General Staff has done its homework, and in all necessary detail. Such calculations are the bread and butter of Soviet military decisionmaking. We can be confident too that on the basis of systems deployed, on reinforcement rates, on relative vulnerability (the scarcity and exposure of NATO bases compares unfavorably with Soviet options for dispersal and defense in depth), on the relative strengths of the opposing air-defense systems, the correlation remains firmly in their favor. But our concern must be less with any

theoretical pre-war force comparisons than with the effect of the Treaty on Soviet ability at the outset of war to alter the theater nuclear equation decisively in their favor. The means to this objective is, as we have seen, the conventional air operation, and the INF Treaty affects it not one jot. To the extent that NATO intermediate range missiles may have been targeted against components of the air operation, its prospects for success may even have been enhanced.

This article seeks to evaluate the INF Treaty in terms of its impact on the military strategies of both sides. These strategies are not symmetrical; nuclear weapons have a markedly different role to play in each of them. The Treaty has not had an equal effect on the two parties. For all the claims to the contrary, the Treaty has reduced the capability of NATO nuclear forces—central to the strategy of flexible response—and has weakened the credibility of their use. Given the ultimate dependence of flexible response on the nuclear threat, we must conclude that the Soviet Union has dealt effectively with NATO's strategic doctrine. In contrast, the Treaty has done nothing to restrict the centerpiece of Soviet strategy, the conventional forces designed to support the theater strategic operation, and the associated capabilities to counter the Western nuclear threat. Whatever the merits of the Treaty in a wider context, it must be judged to have failed on the crucial test of its contribution to the security of NATO. We have the right to expect a sophisticated understanding of strategic issues from Western leaders. We must hope that future arms reduction measures will aim at the right target and address the real issue that divides Europe—the conventional military power of the Soviet Union and its allies.

Notes

1. Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci told the Senate Armed Services Committee on 25 January 1988: "The INF Treaty preserves intact NATO's strategy of flexible response as a credible framework for deterring aggression and intimidation."

2. See for instance Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine, "The Impact of Arms Control on the Balance of Nuclear and Conventional Forces," *RUSI*, December 1987, pp. 8-12.

3. Paul H. Nitze, "Beyond the Summit: Next Steps in Arms Control," *Department of State Bulletin*, February 1988, pp. 81-84.

4. See for instance U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz' testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 27 January 1988.

5. For a comprehensive assessment see John A. Adam, "Ways to Verify the US-Soviet Arms Pact," *IEEE Spectrum*, February 1988, pp. 30-34.

6. David Owen, formerly U.K. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, may be an honorable exception. See his "Moscow's Nuclear Endgame," *The Times*, (London), 29 January 1988, p. 14.

7. Asymmetry should not be confused with the current vogue term "competitive strategy." Whereas competitive strategies claim to address only enemy weaknesses, an asymmetric strategy may more properly address his strengths.

8. A recent warning was made by General John R. Galvin, USA, in an ABC News interview on 2 March 1988.

9. See Josef Joffe, "Germany's Singular Condition," *The Times*, (London), 26 February 1988, p. 14.

10. V.D. Sokolovskii, *Soviet Military Strategy*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: The RAND Corporation), 1963, p. 305.

11. Soviet thinking is perhaps best illustrated by Marshal Malinovskii's remarks to the 22nd Congress of the CPSU. "[the] main problem is considered to be the working out of means for reliably repelling a nuclear surprise attact and breaking up the aggressive plans of the enemy by dealing him a crushing blow in time." Quoted in L. Goure, "Notes on the second edition of Sokolovskii," *RAND memo RM-3972*, 1964, p. 65.

12. For an unclassified summary of Soviet operational thought see John G. Hines and Phillip A. Peterson, "The Soviet Conventional Offensive in Europe," *Military Review*, April 1984, pp. 1-19. For a description of the Soviet Air Operation, see Phillip A. Peterson and John R. Clark, "Soviet Air and Antiair Operations," *Air University Review*, March-April 1985, pp. 36-54; see also M. McGwire, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution), 1987, chap. 4, pp. 67-89.

13. See "Diplomacy of Insolence," *The Times* (London), 23 January 1988, p. 11.