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Some insight into Soviet perceptions of its security interests, of the role of nuclear weapons in world politics, and of the European theater balance with respect to the worldwide balance can be gained by a careful consideration of the language used and the concepts included in Soviet public pronouncements. A rich source is the diplomatic and propaganda barrage loosed against NATO (and the Soviet public) before, during, and after NATO's 1979 decision regarding the deployment in Europe of a new generation of American long-range theater nuclear forces.

SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF THE THEATER NUCLEAR BALANCE IN EUROPE AND REACTIONS TO AMERICAN LRTNFS

by

Stephen M. Millett

On 6 October 1979, General Secretary L.I. Brezhnev launched a surprise diplomatic offensive against the West with a proposal to negotiate a theater nuclear arms control agreement for Europe. He offered in his speech at East Berlin to enter into immediate talks, but with the stipulation that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) must not upset the current balance of power in Europe by deploying a new generation of American-made long-range theater nuclear forces (LRTNFS). He warned Western Europe of very grave consequences to the security of the continent if NATO rejected his offer. As a gesture of his sincerity, Brezhnev also announced the unilateral Soviet withdrawal of 20,000 troops and 1,000 tanks from central Europe.

Brezhnev's speech commenced an intensive Soviet diplomatic and

propaganda campaign against NATO. The apparent objective was to discourage West European members of NATO from making a commitment at the minister's meeting on 12 December 1979 to deploy American *Pershing II* missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) beginning in 1983. In the course of the propaganda flow, Soviet spokesmen said more about nuclear weapons, strategy, and the strategic balance than on any other occasion. While it is true that much of what the Kremlin had to say was intended for foreign consumption, many of the Soviet pronouncements were aimed at the Soviet people through principally internal information organs. If the numerous statements are taken at face value, they reveal several consistently expressed views that offer insights into Soviet

4 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

perceptions of the theater nuclear balance in Europe and the relative security of the U.S.S.R. in relation to the United States and Western Europe.

The purpose of this paper is to recount the principal Soviet arguments against American LRTNFs and to review Soviet proposals to negotiate arms control of theater nuclear weapons. An attempt will be made to balance these Soviet views with Western perspectives and to suggest some Soviet motivations behind their propaganda and diplomatic offensive from October 1979 through January 1980.

Soviet Objections to American LRTNFs. The most frequently mentioned objection to the proposed new generation of American LRTNFs deployed in Western Europe was that the *Pershing IIs* and GLCMs were a qualitative escalation in the nuclear arms race that would dangerously upset the existing balance of power on the continent. This argument was made even before Brezhnev's speech.¹ The General Secretary, referring to the Western "supporters of the arms race," claimed that "Their objective is to break down the balance of forces as it has been built up in Europe and attempt to achieve military superiority for the NATO bloc."² He contended that in the past 10 years the Soviets had not increased their nuclear weapon carriers in the western region of the U.S.S.R.; on the contrary, the Soviets had actually reduced the number of medium-range missile-launching installations, the nuclear power of these missiles, and the number of bombers.³

Soviet spokesmen repeatedly argued that the Soviets had done nothing to warrant American escalation of the arms race in Europe. They contended that it was the "warmongers" of NATO who were pushing for a new "Euro-strategy" and who were striving for military superiority over the Soviet

Union in order to impose Western domination over the Socialist nations. A.P. Kirilenko, considered second only to Brezhnev in the Secretariat of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, made this point on the occasion of the anniversary of the October Revolution: "NATO strategists are persistently urging on the arms race, are striving to break up the approximate balance of forces that has been formed and to violate the principle of equal security of sides, and are seeking to gain military superiority for themselves."⁴

The substance of this Soviet view was elaborated in detail in an interview in the Hamburg magazine *Der Spiegel* with Vadim Zagladin, the First Deputy Chief of the International Department of the Central Committee, and Valentine Falin, First Deputy Chief of the International Information Department. Falin made a major issue of the American forward-based systems (FBS) around the Soviet Union that, he claimed, consisted of 1,500 "means of delivery" of nuclear weapons against the U.S.S.R. Zagladin added an apology for the Soviet SS-20, a new intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) that has caused great concern in NATO. He claimed that the SS-20 was not a qualitatively new weapon, but rather a replacement for older Soviet missiles of similar characteristics and mission. "The SS-20 is our answer to the U.S. 'forward-based forces' which, by the way, are modernized yearly," Zagladin said. "Our missiles have not changed the power ratio."⁵ Falin presented the Soviet definition of strategic weapons as any capable of hitting targets in the Soviet Union: "We regard U.S. weapons targeted on the Soviet Union—no matter where they are stationed, in the United States or in Western Europe or in Asia—as a threat to the Soviet national interest."⁶

The Soviets repeatedly pointed out that American calculations of the European balance tended to leave out

British and French nuclear deterrents as well as the American theater nuclear forces, like the *Poseidon* submarines off the European coast and the FB-111 fighter bombers. Mikhail A. Milshtein, a retired Soviet general and currently director of the Political-Military Department of the Institute of the USA and Canada, explained in an interview for *The New York Times* that in the 1950s the Soviet SS-4 and SS-5 medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs/IRBMs) were developed in order "to preserve the balance in this component [nuclear weapons] in the European theater, as a counterpoise to the nuclear systems of France and Britain and the American forward-based systems in Europe." He continued to rationalize the SS-20 as merely a modernized replacement that did not change the strategic balance, although Milshtein, like most Soviet spokesmen, rarely if ever discusses specific weapon characteristics, yields, or numbers. The deployment of new American LRTNFs, he contended, was a different matter: "The strategic situation will undergo a qualitative as well as quantitative" alteration. The general did not say explicitly but he was undoubtedly referring to the American cruise missiles, which the Soviets do not have yet and which the Soviets probably fear as much as the West Europeans do the SS-20.⁷

Soviet Foreign Minister A. A. Gromyko clashed precisely on the SS-20 issue with West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher in Bonn in late November. "The Soviet Union is operating on the principle that the existing balance is sufficient to guarantee full security," Gromyko proclaimed.⁸ Genscher disagreed publicly with his Russian counterpart; he argued that the deployment of over 100 SS-20s targeted against Western Europe had upset the continental balance and that the proposed new LRTNFs for NATO were necessary in

order to redress the balance that the Soviets had recently upset.⁹

The Soviet SS-20 (as it is called by NATO) was first deployed in 1977. In comparison with its earlier models, it is vastly superior. The 500 SS-4s were first deployed in western U.S.S.R. in 1959. They have a single one-megaton warhead. They have a fixed-sited launching base and a range of about 1,200 miles. The 90 SS-5s were first deployed in 1961. They are very much like the SS-4s, except they have a longer range of some 2,300 miles. (The distance from Moscow to London is about 1,500 miles.) The SS-20 has a range of 3,000 to 4,000 miles. It could be stationed east of the Urals and still hit targets in Western Europe. The SS-20 is a mobile missile with much greater survivability than the earlier missiles. It has three multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRVs) of 150 kilotons each. It is assumed that these warheads are considerably more accurate than the earlier models. The extended range, mobility, MIRVs, and the operational sophistication of the SS-20 have therefore caused a great alarm in NATO. Also of concern is the Soviet TU-22M *Backfire B* bomber, which was introduced in 1974. It is believed that about 50 *Backfires* are currently deployed against Western Europe. With a range of 5,500 miles, the *Backfire* might even reach targets in North America. The United States is particularly upset by this new bomber, and it had limited success placing any restraints on it in the SALT II Treaty.¹⁰

Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany raised the specter of Soviet nuclear superiority in Europe as early as May 1977 at the summit of NATO heads of government. He warned that in a few years there would be strategic parity between the United States and the U.S.S.R. that would depreciate the political and military reliance of NATO on the American strategic nuclear deterrent. "... We must maintain the

6 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

balance of the full range of deterrence strategy," he asserted in a major address in the following October. Schmidt mentioned increases in tactical nuclear weapons and conventional forces, but he did not specifically mention LRTNFs.¹¹

A year later Presidential advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski traveled to Europe to discuss the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II and theater nuclear arms for Europe. President Carter discussed these issues with Schmidt, Prime Minister James Callaghan, and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in January 1979. Because SALT II would not cover the SS-20 and place only moderate limits on the *Backfire* bomber, Carter recognized a mission for American LRTNFs in order to close the "deterrent gap" in Europe. The President apparently insisted on careful political preparation for the decision to deploy LRTNFs in order to avoid a repeat of the embarrassment caused by the neutron bomb controversy in 1977-1978. The decision would have to be virtually unanimous by all the members of NATO at the joint ministers meeting on 12 December 1979.¹²

The argument between the U.S.S.R. and the West over LRTNFs illustrates the divergence of perceptions of the

theater nuclear balance in Europe. The Soviets apparently believe that their new systems, the SS-20 and the *Backfire* bomber, were necessary to counteract existing imbalances caused by American tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, the British nuclear arsenal of 64 *Polaris A3* missiles and 98 nuclear bomb-carrying aircraft, the French *force de frappe* of 18 missiles, 64 sea-launched missiles, and 33 *Mirage-IVA* aircraft. In addition, the United States has assigned three nuclear submarines (with 48 *Poseidon C3* missiles with 480 MIRVs) to NATO military command. Indeed, the Soviets count LRTNFs differently from the West and exaggerate Western numbers while refusing to give numbers for the U.S.S.R. (See Tables I and II.) Citing their historical experiences in this century, the Soviets cannot feel secure with equal or less defense than their potential enemies. In Soviet military arithmetic more forces is better and most is the best. On the other hand, Soviet numerical and recent technical advantages pose a serious threat to Western Europe. The West fears that the Soviets could neutralize Western Europe by threatening to attack it while precluding American nuclear response because of the massive Soviet strategic arsenal. Without its own modernized

**TABLE I—A SOVIET PERCEPTION OF NATO'S
NUCLEAR THREAT TO THE U.S.S.R.**

UNITED STATES

384 Tactical Aircraft in Europe

292 Tactical Aircraft from Carriers

5 Nuclear Submarines with 500 Poseidon Warheads

UNITED KINGDOM AND FRANCE

300 Nuclear Vehicles

U.S.S.R.

[No Numbers Provided]

From Leonid Zamyatin, "The World Needs Military Detente," *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 26 December 1979, p. 14.

TABLE II—A WESTERN PERCEPTION OF LONG-RANGE NUCLEAR BALANCE IN EUROPE

Country	Weapon System	Delivery Launchers	Total Warheads	Approx. Range (Statute Miles)	
U.S.	3 <i>Lafayette</i> -class SSBNs	48 <i>Poseidon</i> C3 SLBMs	480 MIRVs	2,880	
U.S.	FB-111 E/F Bombers	156	312	3,000	
U.K.	4 <i>Resolution</i> -class SSBNs	64 <i>Polaris</i> A3 SLBMs	192 MRVs	2,880	
U.K.	<i>Vulcan</i> B-2 Bombers	48	96	4,000	
U.K.	<i>Buccaneer</i> Bombers	50	50	2,300	
France	4 SSBNs	64 M-2 & M-20 SLBMs	64	3,000	
France	<i>Mirage</i> IVA Bomber	33	33	2,000	
France	SSBS S-2 IRBMs	18	18	1,875	
U.S.S.R.	SS-20 IRBM	120	360 MIRVs	3-4,000	
U.S.S.R.	SS-5 IRBM	90	90	2,300	
U.S.S.R.	SS-4 MRBM	500	500	1,200	
U.S.S.R.	6 G-I Class SSBNs	18 SS-N-4 SLBMs	18	1,200	
U.S.S.R.	13 G-II Class SSBNs	7 H-II Class SLBMs	60 SS-N-5	60	2,300
U.S.S.R.	TU-22 <i>Blinder</i> Bomber	136	272	1,750	
U.S.S.R.	TU-16 <i>Badger</i> Bomber	318	636	1,650	
U.S.S.R.	TU-22M <i>Backfire</i> Bomber	50	200	5,500	

From *The Military Balance, 1979-1980* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1979), pp. 5-30, 86-91, 114-119; Robert Metzger and Paul Doty, "Arms Control Enters the Gray Area," *International Security*, Winter 1978-79, pp. 17-52. Operational numbers could be half to two-thirds of the maximum figures given here.

LRTNFs, the West felt caught in a "gap in the escalation spectrum." As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned in September 1979: "If there is no theater nuclear establishment on the continent of Europe, we are writing the script for selective blackmail in which our allies will be threatened, and in which we will be forced into a decision whereby we can respond only with a strategy that has no military purpose but only the aim of destruction of populations."¹³

The second Soviet objection to American LRTNFs was that they posed a dangerous new threat to the U.S.S.R. Minister of Defense D.F. Ustinov was the leading spokesman of this view. He asserted that the proposed missiles represented a shift in American strategic doctrine in favor of a preemptive, counterforce attack upon Soviet missiles aimed at the United States.¹⁴ Ustinov's logic was repeated in commentaries in *Krasnaya zvezda* (*Red Star*), the official organ of the Ministry

8 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

of Defense, and in *Pravda*.¹⁵ The commentators accused the United States of shifting the nuclear battlefield to Europe in order to minimize damage to North America and attempting to strike Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) aimed at the United States. Falin emphasized this point in his interview with *Der Spiegel*: "Strategic systems need about 25 to 30 minutes to reach the Soviet Union coming from the United States. . . . The weapon that is supposed to come to Europe as some so-called modernization, such as the *Pershing II*, needs only four minutes from the time it is launched until it hits its target in the Soviet Union."¹⁶

At the same time that Gromyko met with Genscher in Bonn, "an authoritative Russian" was reported to have told "a leading West German politician" that the Soviets viewed the proposed LRTNFs as even a greater threat to Soviet security than Operation Barbarossa in 1941. The German asked whether Moscow viewed Schmidt the same as Adolph Hitler. The Soviet responded "no" but the nature of the threat was nonetheless grave.¹⁷

It was Kissinger who raised the possibility, even desirability, that the new LRTNFs might be counterforce weapons. But counterforce against which Soviet military targets? Troop and tank concentrations, military command and supply centers, airfields, SS-20s, or ICBM silos? The answers depend upon technical characteristics and highly secret planning for the American LRTNFs. The 108 planned *Pershing II* missiles will be mobile, will have a single warhead, and will have a range of about 1,000 miles. They have a 30 minute order-to-fire to arrival on target response time. The 464 planned GLCMs (four missiles per carrier) are also mobile and also will have a single warhead (at least initially). They will have ranges of 1,500 miles, but their nonlinear flight path gives them an

effective range of only 1,000 miles. They will have an order-to-fire to target-impact time of 2 or 3 hours. Neither system is expected to reach as far as Moscow. The relatively small number of these missiles that will be deployed by the mid-1980s does not appear (from the Western point of view) to pose a serious counterforce threat to 1398 Soviet ICBMs, 710 MRBMs/IRBMs, and 1028 sea-launched missiles. But undoubtedly, the American LRTNFs do indeed present a new nuclear threat to the Soviet Union, as indeed they are intended to do.¹⁸

The third Soviet argument against American LRTNFs was that they violated the agreements made by Carter and Brezhnev at the Vienna Summit in June 1979. Falin made this point as early as 14 October. He argued that the LRTNFs were strategic launchers as they could hit targets in the Soviet Union, and therefore the United States was circumventing the SALT II Treaty by increasing its total number of strategic weapons.¹⁹

Sergei Losev, director general of TASS, made this same argument in a letter to *The New York Times*. He asserted that the U.S. missiles would upset the balance of power in Europe and violate "the principle of equality and equal security." "From this standpoint," he wrote, "the plans for deploying new American medium-range missiles in Western Europe intended for strategic purposes and capable of hitting targets in the territory of the Soviet Union up to the Volga represent an attempt by the Pentagon to get around the strict SALT II limitations from the back door and gain unilateral military advantages in favor of the United States."²⁰

The only Politburo member who made an issue out of SALT II in the context of LRTNFs was Foreign Minister Gromyko. Brezhnev, Kirilenko, and Ustinov mentioned that the American LRTNFs would upset the

balance in Europe and they alluded to the principle of equal security, but they never specifically mentioned the SALT II Treaty in this context. Gromyko, however, did raise this issue in Bonn on 23 November. Most Soviet spokesmen likely stayed away from this polemic as the treaty had yet to be ratified, it did not specifically include theater nuclear weapons, and any negative comments about SALT might be considered uncomplimentary to Brezhnev.

The fourth Soviet objection was that the American missiles endangered the policy of détente. Brezhnev warned in his East Berlin speech that "The realization of the NATO plans would inevitably aggravate the situation in Europe and to a great extent would poison the international atmosphere as a whole." He specifically warned Bonn that it could not expect to continue the advantages of détente and allow the United States to deploy new missiles on its soil.²² The Soviet-East German communiqué at the end of Brezhnev's visit stated that "A new turn in the spiraling of the arms race would render a severe blow to détente and would enhance the risk of nuclear war."²³ This same theme was repeated by Kirilenko in Moscow, by B.N. Ponomarev in Rome, by Gromyko in Bonn, and by a lengthy editorial in *Pravda*.²⁴

Closely related to the warning that the American LRTNFs threatened détente was the Soviet threat that these missiles posed a security threat to the countries in which they would be based. Brezhnev alluded to the fact that West Germany would be a prime target for Soviet counterforce weapons aimed at the American LRTNFs.²⁵ This warning was repeated in *Pravda* and *Krasnaya zvezda*.²⁶

To complement the threat of striking at nuclear weapons in Western Europe, the Soviets offered reassurances that they would never use nuclear weapons against other nations that did not station nuclear weapons on their soil

and did not sanction the deployment of nuclear arms in other countries. This pledge was apparently an appeal to Norway and Denmark, which do not permit nuclear weapons on their soil, to vote against the LRTNF question and an appeal to Belgium and the Netherlands to follow the example of their Nordic allies. This may have also been an attempt to undermine the policy of the Schmidt government, as it had said that it would not accept American LRTNFs if other NATO countries did not.²⁷

An attempt to inflame West European and Russian public opinion was made by Lt. Gen. Nikolai Chervov of the Soviet General Staff, whose commentary on Soviet television was widely circulated abroad by the Novosti press agency. He claimed that the Americans planned to put neutron bombs on their new missiles. He further asserted that the missiles would have MIRVs. American spokesmen responded that the warheads for the new LRTNFs were designed for enhanced blast and reduced radiation, the opposite effects of the neutron bomb. They further stressed that the *Pershing II* would have a single warhead, although they left open the option of MIRVs for the GLCMs after expiration of the protocol to the SALT II Treaty.²⁸

The above has been a brief review of Soviet statements to explain to the domestic Soviet public and to the West European and American audience why Moscow so vigorously opposed American LRTNFs. Some of the arguments probably reflect accurately some deeply felt views on Soviet security interests, while some seemed aimed at inflaming public opinion. The next section of this paper will briefly recount the Soviet diplomatic offensive against NATO.

Soviet Diplomatic Offensive Against NATO. Besides its efforts to undermine Western support for the

10 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

American medium-range missiles, the Kremlin was determined to do what it could through diplomatic channels to prevent NATO's approval of them on 12 December 1979. The Soviet "carrot" was the offer to begin immediately arms control negotiations on theater nuclear weapons and to expedite talks on conventional arms reductions. The Soviet "stick" was the threat that the Soviets would further build up their own theater nuclear forces to counteract the American missiles.

If Moscow meant seriously to negotiate on theater nuclear weapons, it confused the West with conflicting signals. Soviet spokesmen said at times that they would not negotiate if NATO voted in December for the deployment of the American missiles. At other times, the Soviets said that they would not negotiate if NATO approved *and* deployed the missiles—a difference of 4 years from 1979 to 1983.

Brezhnev said in his East Berlin speech that the Soviet Union was prepared to reduce its number of "medium-range nuclear means" (*sredstvo*) deployed in western U.S.S.R., "but, of course, only in the event that there is no additional deployment of medium-range means in Western Europe."²⁹ The General Secretary was very vague in his use of the term *sredstvo*, which literally means "medium things." Was he offering to negotiate on the SS-20s, or only on the aged SS-4s and SS-5s? His mention of western U.S.S.R. suggests that it was the older missiles he meant to trade away, as the SS-20s have an extended range and can be stationed beyond the Urals. Brezhnev also suggested that the negotiations had to take place before 1983, not necessarily before December 1979.

Another question raised by Brezhnev's remarks was whether he meant that the negotiations should be within the SALT process or separately in a multinational arms control forum that

would include the West Europeans. Craig Whitney of *The New York Times* reported from Moscow that the Kremlin was prepared to negotiate with Schmidt if Carter "fails to be a partner in détente," and that the Kremlin wanted to talk directly with the West Europeans if the U.S. Government delayed or killed the SALT II Treaty.³⁰ Henry Brandon of the *Washington Star* reported that he had been told in Moscow that the Soviets would seek arms control negotiations with the West Europeans separately from the Americans if the U.S. Senate rejected the SALT II Treaty and thereby destroyed the whole SALT process.³¹

A front page editorial in *Pravda* on 24 October elaborated on Brezhnev's offer to negotiate arms control for Europe. "We are prepared to reduce the number of medium-range nuclear weapons in the western regions of our country if no more of these weapons are deployed in Western Europe," it declared. It further stated that the negotiations would be within the context of SALT III with the United States.³² This editorial was a literal interpretation of Brezhnev's speech. The same line was repeated by Vadimir Alexeyev of *Novosti* in a letter to the *Washington Star* on 31 October.³³

The Soviet position, however, hardened on 6 November when *Pravda* printed a call for immediate negotiations by Brezhnev. Referring to the possible positive outcome of such talks, he said, "There will be greater chances for such results if no decisions are made regarding the production and deployment in Western Europe of the above-mentioned weapons [American IRTNFs] before the outcome of these negotiations. On the contrary, these chances will be broken if these decisions are adopted in NATO."³⁴ For the first time, the Kremlin had strongly suggested that the negotiations had to begin before 12 December, a highly unlikely condition to be fulfilled in such short time.

The exact Soviet position was ambiguous and contradictory. In mid-November Zagladin was quoted by the East German newspaper *Die Wahrheit* as saying that Moscow wanted to negotiate on LRTNFs even if NATO did approve the new missiles in December, although such a decision would greatly complicate the talks.³⁵ Gromyko, however, gave a different impression at a press conference in Bonn on 23 November. According to his translator, the Foreign Minister said that if NATO decided for LRTNFs then "there can be no negotiations." The official Soviet transcript, however, read differently: "If it [NATO] should come to such a decision, if our proposals for immediate negotiations should be rejected, *the basis for negotiations would be destroyed*. It would not exist. When we say we must begin negotiations immediately, we meant it must begin without a decision having been made on production and stationing...."³⁶

The Soviets further confused the West in the communiqué of the Warsaw Pact foreign ministers on 6 December: "The acceptance of a proposal on the production and deployment of new types of American-made missiles in Western Europe and the realization of this proposal would destroy the basis for negotiations."³⁷ This pronouncement sounded as though the Soviets were holding out their offer to negotiate to 1983.

The Soviet outburst of condemnation after NATO's approval of the American missiles was predictable. What was surprising was Moscow's flat rejection of NATO's counterproposal to discuss theater nuclear arms control. The *TASS* report from Brussels said that the NATO decision would "destroy the very foundation for further talks" and that what NATO had proposed were "talks that are conceived on an absolutely different basis from the one proposed by the USSR."³⁸ Losev used even

stronger words; he stated that the NATO decision had "killed the basis for talks on medium-range weapons."³⁹ Zagladin, however, sounded more moderate. He said that negotiations were still possible if the West did not deploy the LRTNFs and did not try to "negotiate from strength" (which the Soviets interpret as an imposed *diktat*).⁴⁰ Nonetheless, on 3 January 1980, just days after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan had begun, Moscow sent a sharply worded reply to NATO's offer to negotiate that asserted that the decision of 12 December had "destroyed the basis for negotiations."⁴¹

Finally, the Soviets persistently said that they would respond to any American LRTNFs in Europe by increasing their own arsenal of such weapons. Brezhnev mentioned this in his East Berlin speech and it was repeated frequently by Ustinov, Ponomarev, and Gen. V.F. Tolubkov, the commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces, as well as several other authorities.⁴²

Soviet spokesmen said relatively little about the NATO decision during the first few months of 1980, except to cite it in passing as one indicator that the West had abandoned the policy of détente and that Carter was threatening a return to the cold war. The political consultative committee of the Warsaw Pact issued a statement on 15 May 1980 that echoed what Moscow had been preaching for months: negotiations on LRTNFs were still possible if NATO revoked its decision, or agreed to suspend the implementation of the decision pending the outcome of negotiations.⁴³

Moscow renewed its propaganda offensive against the new American LRTNFs in July with proposals that some Westerners interpreted as a softening of the Soviet position. Following his visit to Moscow, Chancellor Schmidt announced that the Soviets would not insist that NATO had

12 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

to reverse its December decision before negotiations began, but the talks must include all American "forward based systems." Furthermore, Moscow would not insist that the SALT II Treaty had to be ratified by the United States before talks commenced, but it would have to go into official operation before accords could be concluded on arms control in Europe.⁴⁴

In mid-August Brezhnev sent a letter to Carter and other Western leaders denouncing American reluctance to begin LRTNF negotiations. A month later, Secretary of State Edmund Muskie announced that the United States and the Soviet Union would begin such talks in October in Geneva. The first round quickly led nowhere with sharp disagreement over what weapon systems should be included in negotiations.⁴⁵

In short, it is difficult to see exactly what Moscow was trying to accomplish by its confusing offers to negotiate. It offered little incentive to NATO to talk before deciding to deploy American missiles. Indeed, the Soviet offers looked to some Westerners as nothing more than maneuvers to prevent or delay as long as possible the introduction of American missiles, at no cost to Moscow. Perhaps the Soviets never meant their proposals seriously, using them only as propaganda. Or perhaps the Kremlin did want to negotiate, but it was terribly awkward in presenting its intentions to the West. Maybe the Soviets saw ambiguity as flexibility to handle future problems as they occurred. Or maybe the contradictions of Soviet spokesmen reflect internal disagreements in the Kremlin over how and when to deal with the West. It is too early now to know for sure.

Possible Motivations for Soviet Protests. The principal motivation for the Soviet diplomatic and propaganda campaign against NATO was most likely the obvious one: to preempt by

nonviolent means a weapon system designed to hit, from relatively short range, targets in the Socialist Motherland. The Soviets are extremely unhappy about a new nuclear threat to its cities and military forces on top of existing American strategic and tactical nuclear forces, British and French nuclear deterrents, and Chinese nuclear forces in the East. The Soviets probably saw two means of confronting the challenge of the American LRTNFs: a diplomatic offensive to start arms control negotiations in order to delay or even prevent the NATO commitment to deploy LRTNFs and a propaganda campaign aimed at Western public opinion much the same as the Soviet campaign against the neutron bomb in 1977-78. Both Washington and Bonn were acutely sensitive to the Soviet attempt to disrupt their plans for American medium-range missiles. Carter therefore dismissed Brezhnev's speech of 6 October as worth little: "What he's offering, in effect, is to continue their [Soviet] own rate of modernization as it has been, provided we don't modernize at all. . . . I think it's an effort designated to disarm the willingness or eagerness of our allies adequately to defend themselves."⁴⁶

Besides the fact that the American missiles could hit targets in the Soviet Union, the Soviets may have feared them because they would be stationed in West Germany. The original NATO plan was to place all 108 *Pershing IIs* and 96 of 464 GLCMs in West Germany.⁴⁷ The Soviets have a historic paranoia about the Germans and they have vigorously opposed West German "re-armament," especially the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Chancellor Schmidt, however, tried to defuse the anti-German aspect of the LRTNF controversy by insisting that the Americans have total control of these missiles (no "two-key" system of weapon sharing) and that the missiles had to be stationed in some country in

addition to West Germany. This is perhaps why the Soviets tried so hard to get Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy to back off from endorsing the American LRTNFs. Schmidt also demanded that the West pursue arms control talks with the Soviets, but while the American missiles were being readied, not before.⁴⁸

A second reason for the Soviet offensive was a fear of an LRTNF arms race in the 1980s. The cost of the SS-20s and *Backfire* bombers must have been great, and the Soviets no doubt dreaded seeing their defensive investment eroded by American medium-range missiles. By the mid-1980s, the Soviets will have to accept parity (as defined by NATO) of LRTNFs or build up its own medium-range systems at great expense. The economics of defense is of very great concern to the Kremlin. The Soviets experienced their slowest industrial growth in 1979 since 1950. Even though they have significantly outspent the United States in defense during the 1970s, the Soviet resources for security are hardly unlimited. They reduced declared military spending in the 1980 budget. The Soviets will be hard pressed to spend large amounts on an LRTNF arms race and modernize further their strategic forces as well as address very serious industrial and agricultural problems.⁴⁹

A third reason was to raise once again Moscow's anxiety about American forward-based systems (FBS). The Soviets have made the argument since 1969 that strategic weapons are those that can hit targets in the U.S.S.R. regardless of where they originate. They wanted to include American FBS in SALT I, but the Americans ardently refused to consider their tactical nuclear carriers under any strategic nuclear launcher ceilings. The Nixon-Brezhnev agreement of 20 May 1971 excluded the FBS issue from SALT I. This may have been a significant and politically difficult concession for Brezhnev to

have made. The Soviets raised the matter again early in SALT II. The rather high ceilings of the Vladivostok Accords of 1974 were probably in part a compensation by the Americans to the Soviets for not including FBS in SALT II. Here again, Brezhnev may have made an unpopular concession with his own camp. In 1979, the Soviets in their campaign against the American middle-range missiles put the West on notice that the FBS would have to be addressed squarely in SALT III or any other nuclear arms control forum.⁵⁰

The principal Soviet motivation for opposing LRTNFs in NATO as attributed by some Westerners was to weaken NATO militarily and politically. It is unlikely that this was Moscow's principal objective; after all, the Soviets had a legitimate security concern about the American missiles. Yet, whatever damage could be done to NATO preparedness and unity would have also been of considerable security value to the Kremlin. The Carter administration made a major issue of NATO unity during the LRTNF controversy, and thereby risked losing face if the decision of 12 December had come out differently.

The NATO decision must have been a serious disappointment for Moscow, although the result was not a total victory for Washington. That Italy stood firmly for the new missiles and offered to station them on its soil, with virtually no effective opposition from the Italian Communist Party, was surely a blow to Moscow. That Belgium and the Netherlands requested more time to make up their minds and that Norway and Denmark were unenthusiastic about the decision must have been of some satisfaction to the Soviets. On the other hand, that Schmidt overwhelmed the left wing of his own Social Democratic Party and emerged from the dispute even stronger than before had to have been a major reversal for Moscow. All in all, the effect of the

14 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Soviet propaganda campaign was to strengthen the cohesion of NATO (for a while) rather than weaken it.⁵¹

Finally, there may have been some domestic Soviet political reasons behind the substance and procedures of the diplomatic offensive against NATO. Why did Brezhnev wait as late as 6 October to make his offer to negotiate on LRTNFs? He could have made his offer at Vienna in June, or even earlier. Kevin Klose reported from Moscow that there may have been opposition in the Kremlin to Brezhnev's initiative.⁵² It seems most unlikely that there would have been outspoken opposition to the General Secretary, but there may have been those leaders who felt that Brezhnev was pursuing détente too hard, too long. For certain, Brezhnev put his personal reputation on the line during the LRTNF controversy, just as he had with the SALT II Treaty, and the result must have been an embarrassment for him. The NATO decision along with other Soviet frustrations in 1979, may have done much to weaken the policy of détente in the Kremlin. The Soviets have said that the NATO decision was one of several reasons why they sent troops into Afghanistan in late December.⁵³

Conclusions. The Soviets were deeply concerned about the prospects of NATO approving the deployment of American LRTNFs at its ministerial meeting of 12 December 1979. Brezhnev himself took a leading role in the Soviet diplomatic and propaganda offensive against the West, and four other members of the Politburo made public comments on the matter. The Soviet statements reviewed in this paper reflect a persistent and well directed propaganda campaign aimed at both the Soviet audience and Western public opinion. Yet the word "propaganda" should not necessarily mean that the Soviets were lying or misrepresenting their beliefs. The language and

concepts of Soviet public pronouncements can offer accurate insights into Soviet perceptions of its security interests, of the role of nuclear weapons in world politics, and of the European theater balance in respect to the worldwide balance.

The controversy over the proposed American LRTNFs was a major confrontation between the U.S.S.R. and the North Atlantic alliance. Because NATO did approve the deployment of the American missiles beginning in 1983, Washington viewed the decision as a major diplomatic victory. Whether or not Moscow viewed the incident as a major defeat, the result was a potentially damaging blow to the Western policy of détente with the Communist bloc begun by Willy Brandt in 1969. The question remaining is whether the decision for American LRTNFs will lessen the chance of nuclear war in the long run. The Western view was that the LRTNFs would further Western deterrence of Soviet provocations against Europe by raising the potential risk and cost to the Soviets. They also viewed the new missiles as a further bond linking the United States to the security of Europe rather than further "decoupling" European and American weapon systems and defense interests. Finally, the Western leaders believed that

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



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NATO force modernization would improve the odds of meaningful arms control negotiations, inasmuch as the new missiles would offer incentives to the Soviets to reach equitable accords. This paper has shown that Soviet perceptions of the LRTNFs are

radically different from those of the West. It remains to be seen whether the Western leaders were accurate in their assessments. The critical period is 1980 to 1983, from the time of the commitment to American LRTNFs to earliest deployment.

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16 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

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