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Military Thinking:
How Do They
Add Up?

By David B. Rivkin, Jr.

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For over three years, possible changes in Soviet military thinking under Mikhail Gorbachev have been a subject of lively speculation among Western analysts. In assessing Soviet rhetoric on military policy, two important questions must be answered: are there any significant changes in Soviet military doctrine, and if so, are they leading to reduced production and less threatening development of Soviet weapons?

There are two schools of thought about Soviet military developments. The first posits that most of the new Soviet doctrinal themes either are designed to mislead the West or, even if sincere, would not have lasting impact, with the net result that, sooner or later, Moscow would revert to its old ways. In contrast, the second school is optimistic about both the sincerity of Soviet doctrinal innovations and their prospects of success in permanently transforming the nature of Soviet military policies. The predicted result is a more benign Soviet Union, presenting less of a security threat to Western interests. The reality of the changes in Soviet military thinking and of their implications for Western security, however, is far too complex to fit this simplistic analysis.

It is likely that future Soviet military forces and associated war plans will look quite different from those that Moscow has today, but just how different is far from clear. Although some changes in Soviet military thinking are very real indeed, there are numerous contradictory and competing tendencies evident in Soviet military affairs. This makes an assessment of the implications of these developments for U.S. policy an exceedingly difficult enterprise.

CAUSES OF CHANGE IN SOVIET MILITARY POLICY

As manifested in various official and semi-official pronouncements, it seems likely that the Kremlin is seeking to implement a potentially significant transformation of the Soviet military. Doctrinal writings are taken very seriously in the Soviet system. Indeed, the Soviet procurement of weapons systems and their deployment are not undertaken at random. Rather, they proceed according to an elaborate set of doctrinal guidelines.

Despite the secretive nature of the Soviet system, it would be difficult for Moscow to deliver one set of doctrinal messages in open channels and a completely different set to the military itself. Soviet deception on such a grand scale never has been attempted. Moreover, even a cursory examination of the ongoing Soviet doctrinal debates reveals the seriousness and even passion displayed by numerous Soviet participants. For example, many Soviet military writers' definitions of reasonable sufficiency differ little, if any, from previous

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Soviet descriptions of their military requirements, and they note the danger of underestimating the Western threat. In contrast, civilian commentators stress that Soviet military expenditures should be primarily determined by Soviet economic capabilities. It is difficult to believe that a staged debate could feature these attributes.

Constant Review. The notion that major changes are underway in Soviet military thinking is not, in itself, surprising. Indeed, the Soviets themselves have always stressed that their military planning is not timeless and is subject to constant review and revision. There is constant fine tuning of Soviet military doctrine, and from time to time, it has undergone fundamental transformation, referred to by the Soviet writers as a “revolution in military affairs.”

In the post-World War II period, such a revolution occurred during the years 1953-1960. It was primarily caused by several interrelated developments in military technologies – the advent of atomic/nuclear weapons, the invention of ballistic missiles, and last, but not least, the extraordinary progress in the field of cybernetics and computers. The synergistic impact of these developments was to usher in nuclear firepower, which could be delivered to anywhere in the world and reign supreme on any battlefield on which it was used. From that time on, the nature of deterrence was fundamentally transformed.

The consequences of that revolution, presided over by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, were radical indeed for the Soviet military establishment. For example, Khrushchev created the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) as a separate military service, and he disestablished the ground forces as a separate branch (a decision subsequently overturned by his successors). While a number of changes in the Soviet military planning took place during the 1960s to 1970s, these were not comparable to Khrushchev’s revolution in military affairs. By the late 1970s, however, tentative signs of a new doctrinal upheaval began to emerge.

The new Soviet revolution in military affairs is also being ushered in by a host of technological, political, and economic developments in two major categories: international factors and internal factors.

Important Trends. Under the category of external factors, Soviet analysts describe a range of changes in the international environment, which have an impact on Soviet military planning. These include such technological changes as the advent of systems featuring artificial intelligence, progress in low observables/stealth technology, miniaturization of military systems, creation of new conventional weapons whose level of lethality approached that heretofore belonging only to nuclear weapons, increase in the range and accuracy with which firepower can be dispensed on the battlefield, and the potential introduction of weapons systems based on new physical principles. Obviously, not all of these changes have been taking place at once. Rather, they represent trends likely to evolve in future decades. For the Soviet analysts, however these trends are important and merit timely adjustments in Soviet military thinking. The reason for this is the profound Soviet conviction that a military posture that does not incorporate the latest achievements of science and technology cannot serve as a sound basis for security and that, given the long lead time involved in developing modern weapon systems, it is essential to identify emerging technological trends in advance.

In addition to purely technological changes, the Soviets manifest considerable concern about the evolution of Western military thought and planning. In particular, they are aware of the U.S. and NATO’s growing emphasis on devising operational and technological

counters to the erstwhile Soviet blitzkrieg strategy and of Western efforts to devise “competitive strategies,” designed to exploit areas of Soviet weakness. Specifically, the Soviets fret about such U.S. doctrinal initiatives as Air-Land Battle, Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA), and Counterair 90, which appear designed to attack Soviet formations and military assets throughout Eastern Europe and Western Russia. Insofar as the present Soviet military strategy for winning a war against NATO is heavily dependent upon the timely arrival of Soviet reinforcements, these U.S. initiatives threaten the viability of Soviet strategy. This is because should NATO field weapons systems capable of destroying Soviet second echelon units or even delaying their introduction into battle, the frontline Soviet units would be unable to sustain the tempo of their offensive movement and would be in danger of being routed.

Complicating Warfare. The Soviets also are concerned about the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). In their view, SDI constitutes a major military challenge to Soviet strategy. And since SDI promises to harness a number of key technologies with a range of military and civilian applications, it also presents Moscow with broad technological, scientific, and political challenges as well. To be sure, SDI and other U.S. and NATO doctrinal innovations have not been yet fully implemented. They have encountered considerable bureaucratic and political opposition both in the U.S. and in other NATO countries, and the prospects of securing the necessary levels of budgetary and political support for them are far from certain. This fact is well known to Soviet planners. Yet the Soviets still appear to believe that enough changes would take place to make warfare infinitely more complicated and much more dependent on the quality of the forces involved. These developments also require a major adjustment in Soviet military thinking.

The Soviets are also well aware of the current sorry state of the Soviet economy and society. Economic, demographic, and social problems threaten to undermine the hard won Soviet superpower status and to relegate it to the ranks of a second-class power. From the military standpoint, the problem is far more serious than the simple matter of economic constraints on Soviet defense spending. Rather, it is the inability of the Soviet economy to master production of high quality goods, precision manufacturing, or secure the rapid tempo of technological innovation that are the primary obstacles to the ability of the Soviet military to field new sophisticated weapons systems needed for 21st century battlefields.

Unreliable Allies. Moscow is also troubled by the economic and political trends in Eastern Europe which, among other things, may increase the unreliability of its Warsaw Pact allies. Especially disquieting to Soviet military planners is the inability of the Soviet society and educational system to provide enough highly educated and trained personnel to man the new weapons systems. Changing demographic trends and the decline in the birth rate of Russians and other Slavs in the Soviet Union further contribute to the potential manpower shortfall.

Soviet military and political leaders appear to have concluded that these economic and manpower bottlenecks be fixed only if there is a fundamental restructuring of the Soviet society and economy. Yet restructuring, even under the best of circumstances, is likely to be a lengthy process. In the interim, the Soviet military can clearly benefit from slowing down the tempo of the technological and military competition with the West.

SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE – OLD AND NEW THEMES

The origin of the former Soviet military doctrine dates back to the first revolution in Soviet military affairs of the 1950s to 1960s. Prior to this time, Soviet military doctrine emphasized that the so-called permanently operating factors (for example, the quantity and quality of men under arms, the stability of the rear guard, the economic strength and moral spirit of country) determined whether a war was won or lost; nuclear weapons and surprise attacks were not considered decisive. Moscow was alleged to be certain to prevail in any conflict with the West because of its superiority in these permanently operating factors. But with the death of Stalin, the growing number of nuclear weapons in the Soviet arsenal resulted in a shift to a doctrine that emphasized nuclear weapons and preparing the Soviet armed forces for a global all-out nuclear war with the West.

By the second half of the 1960s, the Soviet military doctrine underwent some change. At that time, NATO had adopted the “flexible response” strategy, which seemed to rule out NATO’s immediate massive nuclear response to conventional attack in Europe. Soviet military planners began to claim that, while nuclear escalation in an East-West conflict was still likely, it was not inevitable. Local wars were likely to remain conventional, it was theorized, and even a European conflict was likely to begin with a conventional phase. As a result, Soviet military thinking began to feature a full panoply of conventional and nuclear warfighting options. For example, Moscow conducted a series of military exercises simulating a European war, which began with a conventional phase and even remained conventional for the duration of the conflict. By the late 1970s, the Soviets began to deemphasize, at least at the declaratory level, the nuclear aspects of their strategy, stressing that nuclear war was unwinnable and that nuclear superiority was unattainable.

Fine Tuning Options. By the early 1980s, professional Soviet military officers began to consider a range of doctrinal innovations. It is important to emphasize that these reviews did not result in any significant operational changes in the Soviet military. Initially, these were gradual departures. They apparently resulted from a Soviet assessment of changes in military technology, such as the growing lethality of precision-guided conventional munitions, and of the evolving capabilities of their potential adversaries, including the U.S. maritime strategy, which threatened to put at risk key Soviet nuclear assets.

In many instances, the changes were more a matter of nuance and emphasis, rather than entirely new themes in Soviet military planning. Indeed, given the complexity and evolution of Soviet military doctrine, it would be virtually impossible to devise something completely new. Thus, for example, Soviet interest in fine tuning their conventional warfighting options, including an ability to wage high quality, decentralized combat, which became a major theme of Soviet military planning in the early 1980s, dates back at least to the late 1960s. Likewise, the apparent Soviet interest in deemphasizing nuclear warfighting, another major feature of the new Soviet military doctrine, dates back at least to a 1977 speech by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Nevertheless, as nuanced and gradual as these changes might have been, they began, in the early 1980s, to modify the nature of Soviet military thinking.

In the conventional area, the Soviets began to emphasize the ever growing scope of military operations. According to Soviet Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, in contrast to past wars,

which featured armies and fronts, future conflicts would involve strategic operations spanning entire theaters and continents. For example, a war in Europe could be expected to escalate into fighting across the entire Eurasian continent, including naval engagements in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. In response to these views, the Soviet military began to emphasize quality, rather than quantity, in their military forces. This implied greater emphasis on operations by smaller units, battalions, and regiments and deemphasis of the erstwhile Soviet divisional level warfare, as well as the enhancement of the range of options available to unit commanders. These commanders, instead of merely executing detailed attack plans provided by their superiors, would be given more leeway and tactical flexibility.

Different Kind of War. As the 1980s progressed, other doctrinal innovations followed. The Soviet military began considering the advisability of a major restructuring of their military forces arrayed against NATO. The traditional Soviet approach was to cram as much military capability as possible forward near the borders of NATO nations such as West Germany, giving the Warsaw Pact the capability to break rapidly through NATO defenses, seize NATO territory with speed and decisiveness, and hopefully, prevent NATO from resorting to nuclear weapons. The Soviets, however, began to realize that potential proliferation of long-range strike systems in the NATO arsenal made forward-deployed Soviet forces vulnerable to destruction. Moreover, the unambiguous offensive emphasis of Soviet forces was a major impetus for Western military spending.

The Soviet military began to consider the possibility of conducting a different kind of war. If Moscow thinned out its forward-deployed forces, it could concentrate during the first phase of a conflict on destroying NATO airpower, long-range strike weapons, and nuclear systems. During this phase, Soviet forces would remain dispersed and eschew large-scale offensive operations. In this way, the destruction of Soviet forces could be minimized. Once these key NATO assets were neutralized, Soviet ground forces could go on the offensive. At that time, they also would be able to mass together more readily because they would not have to be concerned about NATO conventional and tactical nuclear firepower. This massing of forces would bring a greater combat weight to bear on NATO's defenses.

New Types of Formations. In conjunction with rethinking its overall force posture, the Soviets explored the possibility of evolving a mix of forces featuring a more balanced composition of armor, mobile infantry, and strike systems. Moscow also has emphasized development of forces capable of greater endurance and versatility, trained to execute both offensive and defensive operations. In some cases, the Soviets appear to have progressed beyond doctrinal and theoretical discussions and introduced actual changes into their troop training, exercise, and even force structure. Example: there has been evidence that Moscow has been experimenting with the introduction of such new types of formations as air assault brigades and unified army corps. These formations would enable the Soviets to carry out swift and flexible maneuvers against NATO.

With respect to nuclear weapons, change and doctrinal ferment have been somewhat less drastic. There is no evidence that the Soviet military is any less serious about nuclear warfighting options than it has been in the past. Soviet nuclear forces have been steadily improving in quality, diversity, endurance, and flexibility. Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF), which are composed of long-range, land-based ballistic missiles, appear to have lost their premier status among Soviet military services. Yet, far from being a sign of Soviet neglect of

nuclear warfighting, this change is attributable primarily to the Soviet decision to bolster their air and naval nuclear forces. The end result is a more capable Soviet nuclear triad. Moscow also has accelerated investment in strategic defense and appears to be seeking a more balanced offense/defense mix of strategic weapons.

From Nuclear to Conventional. Yet despite the growth in Soviet nuclear capabilities, the Soviet military appears to have embraced the notion that nuclear weapons might play an ever smaller role in the future, both in peacetime and wartime. In part, this change reflects the Soviet realization, dating back to the late 1970s, that technological trends, such as the growing hard-target potential of SLBMs, advent of “stealthy” air-breathing systems, U.S. nuclear force modernization, and the growth in third party nuclear forces in such nations as Britain, France, and China, seriously complicate Soviet nuclear warfighting options. More specifically, the Soviet military seems to believe that, while nuclear warfighting options are useful to maintain, the prospects of limiting damage from a nuclear exchange to acceptable levels are quite slim. The Soviet military also appears to believe that the Soviet’s own military objectives can be best obtained on a conventional battlefield. The Soviets also maintain that the nuclear threshold is rising and that NATO’s ability and willingness to use nuclear weapons is increasingly doubtful.

Not surprisingly, these changes in Soviet military thinking have not been adopted without resistance and debate pitting different segments of the Soviet military establishment against each other. For example, there is evidence that several key Strategic Rocket Force commanders have fought against the diminution in the SRF’s status and its subordination to the unified Soviet strategic nuclear forces. There had also been a vigorous debate involving such senior Soviet naval officers as Sergei Gorshkov, then the commander-in-chief of the Soviet navy, and his close associate Admiral Vladimir Chernavin, formerly Gorshkov’s second in command, over such subjects as the degree of naval autonomy in the Soviet military establishment and the navy’s role in peacetime and war. The ground and air forces also have not been immune from disagreements. Example: Ogarkov and his supporters advocated primary reliance on new high-technology systems, while more traditional officers argued in favor of retaining old and proven systems such as tanks, while proceeding to develop more advanced weapons. Overall, however, there are broad areas of consensus over new military doctrines in the Soviet military establishment.

GORBACHEV’S NEW DEFENSE THINKING

Most Soviet military doctrinal innovations preceded Gorbachev’s tenure and have little to do with Gorbachev’s domestic and economic reforms.

Gorbachev, however, has encouraged a modest reduction in military secrecy and a greater and more open discussion of military matters and problems in the media. For example, more data are available about Soviet military budgets and training accidents. Gorbachev also appears intent on changing the organizational arrangements for developing Soviet military policy. Not content with only promoting those military leaders willing to support him, Gorbachev has opted to increase the influence of the Communist Party Central Committee and the research institutes of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in analyzing military matters. For example, the International Department of the Central Committee, headed by Valentin Falin, has acquired a new arms control staff, and additional

military experts were placed in other Central Committee departments and on Gorbachev's personal staff. Meanwhile, Soviet research institutes have been publishing often provocative articles on military issues, which challenge many traditional elements of Soviet military doctrine. One article, for example, suggested that capability to wage large-scale offensive operations is destabilizing and that the Soviet posture toward NATO should be optimized for defensive actions. While the Soviet General Staff remains a key player in the formulation of Soviet military policies, it no longer enjoys a near total monopoly of military expertise.

In addition to these organizational changes, Gorbachev has also introduced a number of new substantive concepts, collectively referred to as the "new thinking." According to Soviet writers, the inception of this new thinking dates back to the April 1985 Plenum of the Central Committee, and it was further developed and elaborated during the 26th Party Congress in February 1986. The Soviets claim that this new thinking has been translated into a new Soviet military doctrine, which has been developed by the Defense Council (a key national security decision-making body comprised of key Politburo members and top military leaders) over the last two years.

Avoiding War. The new military doctrine, as enunciated by such Soviet notables as Gorbachev, chief of the general staff Sergei Akhromeyev, and Defense Minister Dimitri Yazov, features such themes as reasonable sufficiency, defensive defense (also described as nonprovocative defense), primacy of political means in guaranteeing one's security, and emphasis on avoidance of war as the key objective of Soviet military doctrine. It declared that war, whether conventional or nuclear, is no longer a viable instrument of policy. The new Soviet military doctrine is also connected with a number of declaratory themes in Soviet foreign policy, such as the stress on the mutuality of security, the declaration that the Soviets no longer view international relations as a form of class struggle (or believe that capitalism is about to perish in the foreseeable future), the allegation that the competition between East and West must take more civilized and benign forms, and the claim that Moscow has altered its erstwhile assessment of the West as being implacably hostile and relentlessly aggressive to the Soviet Union.

However, just as in the case of many doctrinal innovations developed by the Soviet military, many tenets of Gorbachev's new thinking are not entirely new. For example, the war avoidance theme can be traced as far back as Stalin's succession and the Malenkov-Khrushchev struggle in the mid-1950s, when both Malenkov and Khrushchev revised the Soviet doctrine and claimed that a military conflict with the West was not inevitable. This change was attributable to the sobering impact of Soviet nuclear forces on the imperialists. Since that time, Soviet writings invariably have mentioned that the Soviet military might was the key guarantee of preserving peace. Thus, Gorbachev's so-called innovations in this area are at most a matter of emphasis or a rephrasing of a rather traditional doctrinal theme.

THE EVOLUTION OF NEW SOVIET MILITARY DOCTRINE – TENSIONS AND DEBATES

The degree of tension and conflict between Soviet political leaders and the military should not be overestimated. To begin with, the military is prepared to live with resource constraints. They know well that the Soviet economy has serious problems and that, without

major economic reforms, the Soviet Union would not be able to support a first-class military establishment in the 21st century.

Seeking the Military's Blessing. The Soviet military leaders probably feel that there is a certain minimum level of defense spending that is necessary to guarantee Soviet security. Gorbachev, however, does not appear intent on instituting large-scale cuts in Soviet defense expenditures. Thus, as long as the Soviet military feels that Gorbachev's economic reforms are likely to succeed in the long run, they can be expected to support his defense funding decisions.

The military also undoubtedly appreciates the advantage of Gorbachev's new foreign policy, which promises to weaken support in the West for military spending and thus result in diminished Western defense efforts. Overall, it appears that the Soviet military has given its conditional blessing to Gorbachev and his reforms. This consensus, however, is premised on the assumption that Gorbachev does not intend to micromanage the Soviet military establishment or to dictate the development of Soviet military thought. In essence, the Soviet military is prepared to live with temporary resource constraints and to accommodate itself to Gorbachev's arms control proposals, so long as its professional autonomy can be retained.

It is unlikely that the Soviet military would be disappointed. In contrast to Khrushchev, Gorbachev does not appear interested in intervening unduly in the development of Soviet military thought. In fact, it appears that Gorbachev has not even developed a coherent and comprehensive set of views on military matters; rather, his doctrinal innovations are coming out piecemeal and are driven largely by the imperatives of economic reform.

Doctrinal Heresies. Despite this relative harmony, there are multiple ongoing disagreements and debates over various Soviet military issues. These debates are difficult to interpret; gone are the relatively simple days of "red hawks" and "red doves." Instead, there is a variety of pronouncements emanating from numerous civilian, military, and party sources, making it difficult to assess how authoritative they really are. The problem is complicated by the fact that the advent of *glasnost* has contributed to the diversity of opinions on security issues, resulting in the public elaboration of such unusual stances as the rejection not only of the first nuclear use, but even of the second nuclear retaliatory strike.

Not surprisingly, the Soviet military vehemently attacks such doctrinal heresies, leading some Western analysts to believe that serious debates over these matters are going on. In reality, however, the advocacy by some Soviet civilians of radical notions and vigorous rebuttals of them by the military do not amount to a debate. These are mostly a rhetorical flash in the pan.

The other three areas of possible substantive disagreement include the concepts of reasonable sufficiency, defensive defense, and the relationship between political/arms control measures and military requirements. In fact, the resolution of disputes with regard to these three key issues will largely determine the thrust of Soviet military doctrine and strategy in the 1990s and beyond.

According to the new Soviet military doctrine, reasonable sufficiency constitutes the conceptual basis for Soviet military development. Moreover, it was officially adopted as such by all Warsaw Pact countries during the May 1987 Warsaw Pact meeting. The concept

of reasonable sufficiency, while universally praised and mentioned in virtually every Soviet statement, is rather vague and has been given different definitions.

Civilian vs. Military Thinkers. The civilian writers have been claiming that reasonable sufficiency means that the Soviet Union should not let the U.S. set the rules of the military competition, that Moscow does not have to respond to all Western military initiatives, and that the Soviet Union does not require military forces capable of neutralizing all of its potential adversaries. In contrast, the military has been equating reasonable sufficiency with the maintenance of overall military parity between the Soviet Union and the West and has been stressing the danger of falling behind in military capabilities.

With regard to defensive defense, another key component of the new Soviet military doctrine, the civilian writers have been struggling to develop notions of a military force capable of defending Soviet territory, but incapable of going over on the offensive against the enemy. Obviously, such notions are very much anathema to the entire post-World War II thrust of Soviet military planning. To be sure, the Soviet military is prepared to eliminate some of its present capabilities for a blitzkrieg against NATO. They feel that a more balanced posture, featuring a better mix of offensive and defensive options, capable of defeating NATO in a matter of weeks, rather than days, is more sound from a military technical standpoint and more likely to lull the West into a false sense of security. Yet, in contrast to civilian writers, the Soviet military also stresses that offense is an indispensable component of military operations and that defense alone is insufficient to reliably protect Soviet security. It is unclear how these two contrasting versions of defensive defense can be reconciled.

Requiring U.S. Concessions. Last, but not least, there is the issue of the relationship between arms control and unilateral Soviet military efforts. So far, the Soviet military has been strongly supportive of Gorbachev's arms control policies. They understand just as well as Gorbachev does the value of soothing Western decision makers. In all encounters with their American counterparts, such senior Soviet military leaders as Yazov and Akhromeyev have emphasized the fact that they are prepared to take steps to alleviate the oft-stated U.S. concerns about particular facets of the Soviet military posture. In return, however, they expect a similar treatment, that is, "if we humor you, you should be prepared to humor us." (You want our tanks, we want your aircraft.) In that regard, the Soviet military indicates that the process of restructuring Soviet military forces, ostensibly to comply with the requirements of the new military doctrine, would be a long process and would require major U.S. concessions. In contrast, Soviet civilian writers seem to emphasize faster, more unilateral Soviet actions. So far, however, the tension between these two positions is entirely theoretical.

The INF Treaty, pending START deal, Soviet position on strategic defense, and Soviet proposals for conventional arms control are not only good public relations, they also are fully congruent with Soviet military policies. Thus the INF Treaty has accomplished a longstanding objective of denying NATO reliable options for attacking Soviet territory with nuclear weapons without resorting to central strategic systems and has contributed to the overall denuclearization of European defenses. The Soviet negotiating position on SDI is fully compatible with the Soviet objective of delaying and constructing SDI, if not killing it outright. Meanwhile, in START, the kinds of reductions currently envisioned would not

interfere with the present Soviet nuclear weapons policy, and might, in some areas, further shift the nuclear balance in the Soviet favor.

Arms Control Strategy. As far as conventional arms control is concerned, Soviet proposals presented by Gorbachev over the last two years would further shift the balance on the ground in the Soviet favor and contribute to NATO's final denuclearization by eliminating battlefield and short-range nuclear systems. The Soviets also indicated a strong interest in using the conventional arms control process to curtail U.S. naval operations and forces and in reducing U.S. forward-deployed airpower. An equally strong Soviet desire is to curtail large-scale NATO exercises.

In exchange, the Soviets appear willing to eliminate some of their armor, thin out their forward-deployed units in Europe, and reduce their capability for the prompt initiation of large-scale offensive operations. Yet these changes, if implemented, would leave Moscow with an ability to launch an offensive against NATO within two weeks after the outbreak of conflict, while reducing precisely those NATO assets (air and naval power) that could be used to slow down Soviet mobilization and secure the arrival of U.S. reinforcements. Thus, the net impact of current Soviet conventional arms control proposals is highly advantageous to the Soviet Union. Consequently, despite oft-repeated Western speculation about the Soviet military's opposition to Gorbachev's arms control schemes, harmony appears to reign between Soviet security requirements, as defined by the military, and Soviet political and foreign policy imperatives, as enunciated by Gorbachev.

Weighing Political Benefits and Military Risks. Whether or not this harmony will last depends, to a large extent, on Western actions. Should the U.S. and NATO clearly outline proposals that seriously cut into Soviet nuclear and conventional muscle and hold firm at the negotiating table, the Soviet leaders might have to face a choice between military and political requirements. Indeed, it is conceivable to envision cuts in Soviet nuclear arsenals that go beyond the present START guidelines or some conventional arms control regimes that would give pause to the Soviet military. If and when the Soviet civilian leaders decide to embrace them, there is likely to be a major debate whether the alleged political benefits of such agreements outweigh the military risks. There are no indications at present, though, that anything of this nature is in the offing.

The end result of the new ongoing revolution in Soviet military affairs is far from clear. Many specific issues remain unresolved, and there are a number of conflicting and contradictory trends in Soviet doctrinal developments. Not surprisingly, we have witnessed a number of debates involving various elements of the Soviet military establishment and pitting, in some instances, Soviet civilian and military leaders against each other. Extrapolating from all the evidence available at this time, however, it is likely that the relative harmony between the Soviet military and party leaders will be maintained and that the new Soviet military doctrine and policy will produce much more capable and sophisticated Soviet military forces.

