

The Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

214 Massachusetts Avenue N.E. Washington, D.C. 20002-4999 (202) 546-4400

RUSH!

2/13/91

Number

296

IN MOSCOW, HINTS OF SUPPORT FOR STRATEGIC DEFENSE

Evidence has been accumulating that Moscow is rethinking seriously its long opposition to strategic defense. The latest piece of evidence is the announcement last December, by Soviet Minister of Defense Dmitri Yazov, of the findings of a Ministry of Defense study on military reform. Yazov said that Soviet defense planners should place more emphasis on the threat posed by the proliferation of advanced weapons in the Third World, including ballistic missiles armed with chemical or nuclear warheads. The new awareness of the Third World missile threat could lead Moscow to field anti-missile defenses as a way to protect itself against this threat.

This Ministry of Defense report comes on the heels of a year-long debate inside the Soviet military in which some key experts have voiced support for strategic defenses. Iraq's extensive use of ballistic missiles against Israel and Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf war is likely to reinforce the views of Yazov and others who seek to focus Soviet attention on the Third World threat. If it develops further, the new Soviet interest in Third World missile threats could weaken Moscow's opposition to America's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), providing the basis for an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to deploy anti-missile defenses.

Throughout the Cold War the Soviet military planned primarily for a major war against the U.S. and the West. To confront America and its allies, Moscow sent billions of dollars worth of weapons to client states in the Third World. Among these were *Scud* and *SS-21 Scarab* ballistic missiles delivered to Iraq, North Korea, Syria, and other countries. Syria is thought to have received 18 *Scud* launchers from Moscow following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Iraq in the 1980s received the *Scuds* they are now using against Israel and Saudi Arabia. It is estimated that Iraq had between 60 and 75 launchers at the outset of the Persian Gulf war. It is these missiles and others that Moscow now is coming to view as threatening.

Fundamental Shift. In his Ministry of Defense report, Yazov states: "In analyzing the international situation in detail, it is easy to note that the center of international tension is shifting more and more toward Third World regions." Yazov again: "An expansion in the sphere of missile, chemical and, potentially, nuclear weapon presence in Third World regions is a destabilizing factor in international relations...." Yazov's view represents a fundamental shift in Soviet security policy. No longer does the Soviet military view America as the sole potential military adversary. To the list of dangers has been added Third World countries.

Yazov is not the only Soviet officer interested in the Third World missile threat. In a September 27 conversation in his Kremlin office with Heritage Foundation Senior Vice President Burton Yale Pines and Director for Foreign Policy and Defense Studies Kim Holmes, then Soviet Presidential Council member Yevgeny Primakov cited the Third World missile threat as the basis for U.S.-Soviet cooperation on anti-missile defenses. Then on October 15, a leader of the hard-line *Soyuz* ("Union" in Russian) faction of the Congress of People's Deputies, Colonel Viktor I. Alksnis, asked: "Will we

asked: "Will we [the Soviets] not need to create our own SDI in order to rule out the possibility of a strike against Soviet territory by, for example — Iraq if the situation is aggravated?" He then added: "I would like to touch on the issue of the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative. I am increasingly leaning toward the point of view of the Americans who, according to the information available to me, are primarily designing this system as a defense against an accidental nuclear attack."

Focus on the Defense and Space Talks. This new attitude could weaken Soviet opposition to SDI in arms control negotiations. Moscow and Washington have been engaged in negotiations over anti-missile defenses in Geneva since 1985. These are officially called the Defense and Space Talks (DST). The U.S. has sought to use them to reach an agreement with Moscow to allow both sides to deploy such defenses. Such deployments so far are restricted severely by the 1972 U.S.-Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Progress in DST has been blocked by Soviet attempts to use the talks to kill the SDI program. Moscow, for example, has insisted that the purpose of the DST talks is to impose even stricter prohibitions against testing anti-missile defenses than those imposed by the ABM Treaty now.

If the views of Yazov, Primakov, Alksnis, and others indicate the start of a shift in Soviet policy, the impasse in the DST negotiations can be broken. The Soviets could begin to recognize that anti-missile defenses are essential to maintaining security and stability. They seem beginning to understand that the Soviet (and American) vulnerability to missile strikes that is ensured by the ABM Treaty could invite missile attacks from Third World countries. Likewise, they seem beginning to understand that the lack of anti-missile defenses leaves the Soviet Union naked to accidental or unauthorized missile strikes. Soviet leaders are not alone in worrying about these Third World threats to peace and stability. American leaders share these concerns. This mutual appreciation of a danger can become the basis for a breakthrough at DST.

Leftists Discredited. For years American leftists have insisted that deploying anti-missile defenses would be destabilizing and impede arms control. It would be destabilizing, they argued, because it would upset the balance of terror that supposedly would prevent one side from attacking the other for fear of a devastating response. Keeping each side vulnerable to a terror attack is based, of course, on the assumption that ballistic missiles would be possessed by only a few countries and that the leaders of these countries would behave rationally. This assumption, as the Soviets are now realizing, is no longer valid.

As for SDI impeding arms control, the leftists pointed to Moscow's unwavering opposition to SDI. This argument too is collapsing as some Soviet leaders, including those in the military, no longer seem unalterably opposed to SDI. The old leftist boilerplate about SDI hampering security, stability, and arms control is being discredited and refuted by the Soviets themselves. As some Soviets are coming to realize, new foundations for ensuring both security and stability can be found in the deployment of anti-missile defenses that provide protection against Third World and accidental missile strikes.

Baker Spring
Policy Analyst