SELECTIVE NUCLEAR OPERATIONS AND SOVIET STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

In January 1974, Defense Secretary Schlesinger announced a major reorientation of U.S. nuclear targeting policy designed to supplement the "assured destruction" retaliatory strategy incorporated in the SIOP with an additional range of limited strike options suitable for deterring (or responding to) a Soviet attack below the spasm-war threshold.\(^1\) This policy shift, which had previously been under intense private deliberation within the U.S. government for some time and which was formalized by President Nixon in NSDM 242, was largely energized and inspired by two stimuli.\(^2\) The first was the dramatic surge in Soviet advanced strategic weapons development and deployment which became apparent in the aftermath of SALT I, a development which—with its prospective introduction of a large MIRVed ICBM inventory into the Soviet arsenal—portended an unprecedentedly rich Soviet menu of targeting options short of the all-out attack scenario envisaged by formal Soviet military doctrine and also threatened an eventual Soviet hard-target disarming capability against the U.S. ICBM force. The second was a growing disenchantment generally throughout the national security community with the near-exclusive U.S. reliance on the "assured destruction" formula and a growing perception of need within the government to provide the President

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with a greater breadth of nuclear targeting options than the rigid alternatives of implementing the full SIOP or doing nothing.

Even in the absence of the massive development by the Soviet Union of its new generation of ICBMs, there would doubtless have been strong pressures within the U.S. government to develop a capability for flexible nuclear employment. Throughout the Nixon administration, the President's annual foreign policy statements had contained repeated injunctions that the U.S. NCA must not be saddled with the single option of retaliating reflexively against Soviet cities in response to any Soviet nuclear initiative against CONUS. Moreover, there had existed mounting feelings within the national security community that such an exclusive option would not only be dangerously inappropriate to a sub-SIOP Soviet attack, but also would lack credibility as a deterrent at precisely the time it was most needed, namely, during an intense nuclear crisis in which the Soviets had core values at stake and strong incentives to preempt against the U.S. strategic posture. With the development and prospective deployment by the Soviet Union of its new MIRVed ICBMs, however, these perceived inadequacies of U.S. strategic policy became forcefully underscored, and the development of an adaptable U.S. strategic response capability increasingly departed the realm of the merely desirable and assumed the character of an urgent imperative.

As one might expect, this ongoing U.S. policy shift has met with sustained and unqualified hostility in the Soviet Union, whose public pronouncements on the subject have alternately described the Schlesinger strategy as anti-détente, contrary to the spirit of SALT, aimed at "legitimizing" the employment of nuclear weapons, and insensitive to the realities of nuclear warfare. Were these observations the sum total of Soviet commentary on the theme of targeting selectivity, the natural inclination would be to dismiss them as mere propaganda. Yet in broad effect if not precise content, similar attitudes are reflected throughout declaratory
Soviet military doctrine, a highly institutionalized body of official precepts on the probable character of a future nuclear war essentially unconnected to the current East-West dialogue on détente and ostensibly designed to prescribe basic "rules of engagement" for the Soviet armed forces in the event of such a war. This congruence of Soviet negative reactions to the Schlesinger strategy with many of the long-standing tenets of enunciated Soviet military philosophy makes it difficult to ignore the "Soviet factor" in the limited-options arena and warrants careful attention and consideration by U.S. strategic planners.

THE SOVIET VARIABLE IN CURRENT U.S. NUCLEAR PLANNING

Coming as it does at a time when the concept of limitation in strategic war remains largely anathema to known Soviet military thinking and practice, the current U.S. effort to develop a capability for controlled and selective nuclear targeting raises a critical question of practical feasibility. Even accepting the proposition that the U.S. NCA can maintain the cool self-discipline and organizational control necessary to implement a strategy of limited reprisal and fine-tuned diplomatic coercion under the heavy stresses of a deep nuclear crisis (a proposition which itself one must grant with considerable diffidence), to what end can such a strategy be put if the Soviet adversary has declared in advance that he will not be a party to any such doctrinal contrivance? Given the broad chasm which currently divides U.S. and Soviet declaratory perspectives on the possibility and acceptability of restraint in central nuclear war, might not any such U.S. efforts at controlled targeting be perilously analogous to sparring with an angered bear who would neither understand nor appreciate the fancy footwork and measured jabs, but instead would merely lash out with full force at the first available opening?

In the main, one can discern two opposing views on this question. One school, largely composed of supporters of the current U.S. nuclear
policy guidance, maintains that whatever the Soviets may say in their declaratory pronouncements, they remain governed by a keen instinct for self-preservation and, like all reasonable men, will unhesitatingly cast aside their avowed doctrinal preconceptions in favor of real-time improvisation if a nuclear crisis (and U.S. behavior in it) should suggest that as an appropriate course of action. The opposite school, containing an admixture of hesitant sympathizers and outright critics of the Schlesinger strategy, espouses a substantially gloomier view. Whatever the objective merits of limitation as an abstract strategic principle, its adherents assert, Soviet military doctrine is a fact of life that has to be accounted for. While it may not rigidly predetermine Soviet behavior in a crisis, they maintain, it is nonetheless an important indicator of general Soviet strategic dispositions, imbued as it is with a rich legacy of historical experience and practice. At best, this school maintains, a U.S. strategy of calculated limited nuclear employment is likely to be provocative and induce the Soviets during a crisis into escalatory actions they might prefer to avoid. At worst, it risks misreading Soviet norms of strategic behavior and leading the U.S. into a military cul de sac in which unrestrained nuclear devastation would be the inexorable result. 3

Which of these two schools of thought is closer to the mark must obviously remain a moot question in the absence of an actual nuclear crisis against which to test the opposing hypotheses. A case can be made, however, that the nature of Soviet behavior in any confrontation in which U.S. limited nuclear weapons employment might be exercised is far too complex a question to permit any single pat answer or categorical prediction, and that in fact both hypotheses contain important grains of truth. As we shall see in more detail presently, there is no doubt that Soviet military doctrine stands at almost total variance with the expressed concepts and intentions of the emerging Schlesinger strategy, and that the
U.S. development of limited nuclear options has evoked uniformly negative reactions from Soviet commentators. Indeed, of all the conceptual and weaponry asymmetries that currently obtain in the U.S.-Soviet strategic confrontation, the one which rests on the question of targeting limitation and intrawar "crisis management" seems to be the most dominant and irreconcilable.

At the same time, there is equally no doubt that the Soviet Union possesses an abundant and growing array of military capabilities, including the weapons systems and command-and-control wherewithal necessary for conducting nuclear operations below the spasm-war level. Moreover, notwithstanding the disdain reflected in Soviet military pronouncements regarding the admissibility and practicality of limitation in nuclear warfare, Soviet political leaders retain the intellectual capacity for improvisation in crises, and in such circumstances in which they would have incentives for limitation, there is no prima facie reason for believing that they would be precommitted by--or feel obligated to follow--the rigid edicts of their publicly articulated nuclear doctrine.

The critical question for U.S. nuclear planners, therefore, is not so much how Soviet doctrine differs from the current thrust of U.S. policy as it is to what extent this doctrinal asymmetry has operational significance that might affect (and possibly limit) U.S. options in a possible crisis. Obviously, how and to what degree Soviet doctrine would govern actual Soviet behavior in such a crisis is another thorny question that does not lend itself to pat answers in the abstract. Undoubtedly it would depend on the nature of the crisis, the relative stakes involved, the relative risk-taking propensities of the two sides, which side crossed the nuclear threshold first (against which targets and with what intensity), and a host of similar contingent circumstances. It bears noting at the outset, however, that Soviet military doctrine serves many functions besides prescribing war-waging strategies for the Soviet political-military leadership.
Accordingly, it may not reflect a fully accurate picture of how the Soviets would actually comport themselves on the novel and bewildering terrain of a future nuclear contest of wills where not only the integrity of Soviet military philosophy but also Soviet survival lay at stake.

In the discussion that follows, we cannot explore in detail the wide variety of force-application modalities available to the Soviet Union, nor probe deeply into the various conceivable escalation scenarios that could seriously challenge the validity of Soviet doctrine and induce the Soviet leadership to contemplate alternative options. We will, however, lay out some preliminary benchmarks for such an analysis by looking at various features of the Soviet military scene that suggest the Soviets may not be as firmly committed to SIOP-scale operations as one might gather from a superficial reading of their strategic literature. Before doing so, let us first take a closer look at the Soviet doctrinal treatment of limitation in nuclear war as it has evolved over the past decade and at Soviet public reactions thus far to the Schlesinger strategy.

SOVIET DOCTRINAL VIEWS ON THE QUESTION OF TARGETING RESTRAINT

Soviet doctrinal commentary on the theme of limitation in modern warfare has origins running back to the early 1960s, when the United States under Secretary McNamara's tutelage was developing its "flexible response" policy for the NATO environment and experimenting with a strategy of "city-avoidance" for the contingency of central nuclear war. At that time, Soviet military writings tended to be uncompromising and categorical in their insistence that any direct military collision between the superpowers would inevitably escalate rapidly to the level of global nuclear exchanges. In the case of a potential theater war in Europe, the Soviet position held that the pressures for crossing the nuclear threshold would be so compelling that any possibility of a carefully controlled conventional "pause" or an extended nonnuclear war of attrition was simply out of the question. On
the matter of targeting restraint in intercontinental nuclear warfare, Soviet military commentary was even more adamant, not only in its rejection of the possibility of such restraint but also in its outright refusal even to countenance the idea of limitation as an acceptable strategic concept in principle. Soviet political-military spokesmen took every opportunity to heap scorn on McNamara's "no-cities" strategy, variously depicting it as a cynical U.S. ploy to "legalize" nuclear war and as a clever but hopeless effort to provide the U.S. with the key to a quick and easy victory. In a doctrinal refrain which left no doubt that the Soviets would have no part of any such scheme, Soviet military writings uniformly espoused the contrapuntal proposition that any global nuclear conflict would inevitably constitute the decisive clash between the opposing social systems, in which Soviet strategic power would be fully mobilized and employed with the ultimate goal of achieving total victory. The Soviet scenario for that conflict, in clear contrast to the stylized image of graduated reprisal reflected in the McNamara strategy, envisaged a massive Soviet preemptive blow simultaneously against U.S. military and economic-administrative resources, with a view toward seizing and maintaining the initiative, "breaking up" and "frustrating" the U.S. attack, and stunning the U.S. into incapacity and eventual surrender.5

Whether this image of nuclear war (and the inadmissibility of limitation in it) reflected real Soviet attitudes and planning assumptions or mere propaganda is not a question that lends itself to any simple and definitive answer. In all probability, it contained elements of both ingredients along with a heavy sprinkling of genuine uncertainty about the sort of escalation dynamics which the still-embryonic nuclear-missile era actually portended. Certainly the Soviet declaratory repudiation of McNamara's city-avoidance notions had a substantial political-manipulative function, at least in effect if not design: by placing the United States on advance notice that it could not count on Soviet cooperation in observing
its Marquis of Queensberry-like code of nuclear conduct, the Soviet doctrinal line served to heighten U.S. uncertainty about the practicability of its strategy and thereby helped to enhance the deterrent value of the Soviet nuclear posture. The same could be said of the Soviet declaratory insistence on the near-certainty of escalation to the nuclear level in a European theater engagement, a doctrinal stance which had the effect of throwing a monkey wrench into many of McNamara's more subtle calculations regarding the possibility of carefully controlled force application short of the nuclear firebreak and obliging U.S. strategists to base their "worst-case" contingency plans on the least common denominator dictated by enunciated Soviet military intentions.

It is important to remember, however, that at the time these doctrinal themes were being given expression, Soviet conventional forces had been reduced to near-austerity levels in the wake of Khrushchev's single-minded emphasis on building up the recently constituted Strategic Rocket Forces. Moreover, the Soviet strategic arsenal was not only vastly inferior numerically to that of the United States but also consisted of cumbersome and slow-reacting ICBMs and IRBMs deployed in highly vulnerable soft-site configurations. Given this primitive and inflexible strategic capability, the Soviets plainly lacked the wherewithal for underwriting the sort of sophisticated strategic targeting concepts envisaged by the McNamara policy and had every reason to refrain from attempting to compete with the United States on the latter's terms. Outnumbered and outclassed as they were by the emerging U.S. MINUTEMAN and POLARIS inventory, and burdened as they were by a strategic force possessing virtually no prelaunch survivability, the Soviets probably genuinely believed that a preemptive strategy against U.S. value resources represented the only credible option for deterrence available to them, for the simple reason that it constituted the only employment mode in which they could count on their force to perform with reasonable confidence.
By 1967, however, Soviet military writings had begun to move away from their rigid insistence on the impossibility of limitation and to reflect tentative signs of an emerging belief that, at least under some circumstances, a U.S.-Soviet military conflict could remain restricted to nonnuclear exchanges. This was a time, it may be recalled, when the Soviet Union under the new Brezhnev-Kosygin regime was well along in a program of intensive strategic force improvement designed to eradicate once and for all the inadequacies of the nuclear posture bequeathed to it by Khrushchev. With their ongoing acquisition in large numbers of silo-deployed SS-9 and SS-11 ICBMs and their impending acquisition of an SLBM force incorporating the SS-N-6 in YANKEE-class nuclear submarines, the Soviets had finally come to acquire a survivable nuclear arsenal which lacked the hair-trigger character of its predecessor and could conceivably be withheld for a time during a gradually intensifying U.S.-Soviet crisis without running the risk of being destroyed by a sudden U.S. disarming attempt. Moreover, by this time the U.S. had abandoned its brief flirtation with the city-avoidance strategy (along with its implicit counterforce first-strike underpinnings) and had retrenched largely to a deterrence-only policy based on the threat of "assured destruction" retaliation. Additionally, by 1967 the U.S. had become fully preoccupied with the Vietnam war and for all practical purposes indisposed to upgrade its strategic capabilities beyond the programmed force-levels laid down in the early 1960s.

In this environment of essential strategic stalemate and U.S. embroilment in Southeast Asia, further highlighted by disarray in NATO and growing Soviet conventional capabilities opposite Western Europe, Soviet military writings and pronouncements began to exude an unprecedented tone of self-confidence and tended to show a new-found willingness to embrace the possibility of restraint in direct superpower confrontations. Elaborations on the preemptive attack theme, while hardly dropped from the rhetoric of Soviet strategic discourse altogether, began to appear with sharply diminished
insistence and frequency and came to be complemented by increasing Soviet commentary on the alternative theme of retaliation. More important, Soviet doctrinal writings began for the first time to suggest that a theater conflict need not "inevitably" escalate to the nuclear level and also to instruct the Soviet forces to prepare for contingencies involving solely the employment of nonnuclear weapons.

To be sure, this doctrinal shift came nowhere close to embracing the elaborate gradations of conflict envisaged by prevailing Western strategic thinking, and plainly did not constitute anything approaching a Soviet acceptance of the "conventional-emphasis" principle that dominated U.S. theater-war planning. As far as the question of intercontinental nuclear war was concerned, Soviet military writings continued to assert that the engagement would represent the ultimate cataclysm for the West, in which no quarter would be given by the Soviet armed forces and in which all available nuclear forces would be brought to bear against the United States homeland in a "crushing blow" that would result in resounding Soviet victory. Even at the lower level of theater warfare in Europe, Soviet doctrinal commentary continued to dwell predominantly on nuclear operations, with heavy stress on the themes of surprise, initiative, concentration of fire, and continuity of the offensive to victory. The overall tenor of these Soviet writings, to be sure, reflected little expectation that a superpower conflict could remain limited for long. Yet it represented all the same an important advance in its tentative intimations that such limitation lay within the realm of the possible, at least as long as the Soviet conventional campaign remained clearly on the offensive and the U.S. and NATO remained deterred from crossing the nuclear threshold.

With few modifications and only slight shifts in relative emphasis, these perspectives on nuclear war and associated questions of limitation continue to constitute the bulk of publicly articulated Soviet military doctrine today. Soviet writings now seem more disposed than before to
admit threshold distinctions between theater and intercontinental nuclear war and between conventional and nuclear operations within the theater-war context. They also seem prepared to accept the possibility of threshold restraints within each of these categories as long as the Soviet side remains ahead and the U.S. has the good sense not to escalate. Yet within these three broad categories of conflict—theater nonnuclear war, theater nuclear war, and central nuclear war—the Soviets show no indication of endorsing any concept of restraint in the tempo and intensity of combat or any inclination to refrain from attacking certain target categories in the interests of collateral-damage avoidance or intrawar coercive diplomacy. Of course, the Soviet Union—no less than the United States—labors under an obvious constraint imposed by the determinate number of nuclear weapons and delivery systems it has available at any moment.

Insofar as the disparity between that fixed number and the much larger array of potential aim points it might wish to cover oblige Soviet military planners to adhere to some set of targeting priorities, it naturally follows that Soviet force-application doctrine adheres, at least in some trivial and superficial sense, to a criterion of "selectivity." Yet it should be emphasized that this notion of "selectivity" bears no conceptual relationship whatever to the concepts of escalation control and crisis "reversibility" that lie at the heart of contemporary U.S. nuclear planning. Soviet military writings continue to assert that in any nuclear engagement, theater or global, Soviet nuclear forces will strike simultaneously at the strategic capabilities, political-military command infrastructure, and economic-administrative centers of the adversary. Moreover, they reveal no trace of interest in the notions of intrawar bargaining, graduated escalation, and crisis management which play a heavy role in current U.S. strategic theorizing. On the contrary, they tend to regard the business of psychopolitical coercion largely as a peacetime or pre-crisis function to be fulfilled—to the extent possible—by the passive threat implications
of Soviet strategic forces in being. Once the nuclear threshold is
crossed, Soviet military doctrine continues to posit—as it has throughout
the past decade—that the role of nuclear weapons is the simple and unam-
biguous attainment of military victory, a task to be achieved not by
slow-motion counterforce targeting, selective attacks on vital military
or economic resources of the enemy, or any other limited schemes to
influence his strategic behavior, but rather through the massive applica-
tion of nuclear force on all targets necessary to destroy his war-waging
ability and his capacity for collective strategic action.6

SOVIET REACTIONS TO THE SCHLESINGER STRATEGY

This persistent unwillingness to accommodate the notion of restrained
targeting in nuclear war has been faithfully echoed in the public Soviet
commentary that has been voiced thus far on the new Schlesinger policy of
selective nuclear options. Much of this Soviet commentary, as noted at
the outset, has been openly polemical in nature and inclined to portray the
U.S. policy as evidence of a rear-guard attempt by the U.S. defense estab-
lishment to undermine SALT and détente. Initial Soviet pronouncements on
the subject tended to distort the actual intent of the policy and to pre-
sent it simply as a convenient rationalization for higher U.S. military
budgets and improved strategic weaponry. Subsequent commentators saw it
as a device aimed at torpedoing the U.S.-Soviet agreement on the prevention
of nuclear war by "forcing through the idea that in one form or another
nuclear war is still conceivable."7 Some depicted it as a transparent
attempt to bully the Soviet Union at SALT.8 Others portrayed it as a
strained effort by the U.S. to achieve by tough talk what was ostensibly
unattainable through strategic force deployments, namely, the intimidation
of the Soviet Union in international diplomacy.9

Beyond such obvious distortions by Soviet publicists for propaganda
effect, most Soviet presentations of the Schlesinger strategy have tended
to depict it in reasonably straightforward and accurate terms. A Radio
Moscow commentator citing an Associated Press report, for example, observed
that the U.S. selective targeting policy essentially "boils down to this:
after the two sides exchange a few strikes on specific military targets,
strong pressure will be brought to bear on political leaders to show
discretion."10 Although the commentator hastened to add his view that the
better part of discretion would be the avoidance of such an occurrence in
the first place and that the U.S. policy was, at bottom, "utterly incom-
patible with the lofty goal of saving mankind from a nuclear holocaust,"
his adumbration of the escalation-control aspect of U.S. nuclear policy
was a reasonable approximation of reality.

In general, Soviet commentary on the U.S. retargeting effort has
been relatively low-key, doubtless in careful obeisance to the self-imposed
constraints that have been put on Soviet outspokenness by Moscow's policy
of détente. This commentary has further taken pains to draw a distinction
between the U.S. administration and the U.S. defense establishment and
has sought to isolate the Pentagon as the singular culprit in attempting to
foist off a retrograde strategy on an American government which, committed
as it claims to be to détente, should have the good judgment to know better.
Finally, Soviet criticism of the strategy has tended to strike a chord of
analytical detachment rather than display the sort of animated counter-
posturing that characterized much of the Soviet response to the McNamara
policy. During the early 1960s, the Soviet reaction to U.S. discussions
of counterforce and city-avoidance essentially took the militant tack
that "the policy is bankrupt because we won't have any part of it, and the
U.S. had better understand that should it start a nuclear war, we will
respond with a devastating and decisive counterblow delivered in good time."
By contrast, Soviet commentary on the current U.S. development of strategic
selectivity generally has followed the more moderate and didactic line that
"the policy is bankrupt because it is insensitive to the realities of
nuclear war and rests on the dangerous misconception that strategic exchanges between the two superpowers' homelands can be subjected to firmly controlled orchestration in the intense heat of battle."\textsuperscript{11} Whether this comparatively measured treatment of the Schlesinger strategy reflects an underlying Soviet reluctance to malign the United States while simultaneously speaking the soothing language of détente or, relatedly, suggests a calculated effort by the Soviet leadership—in view of its own massive strategic arms improvement program—to avoid placing itself in a position of being the pot calling the kettle black is difficult to say. Probably it is indicative to some degree of both considerations, and may additionally reflect a conscious decision by the Soviet leaders to hold the line on extensive public treatment of the emerging U.S. strategy while they privately try to figure out what it is all about and what it implies for Soviet strategic planning. Whatever the explanation, the Soviets have left no room for doubt that they take a decidedly jaundiced view of the strategy and continue to believe (or at least continue to wish us to think they believe) that a central nuclear war would brook no possibility of being restrained short of total effort by each side to achieve total victory.

**POSSIBLE PRIVATE SOVIET THINKING AND PLANNING**

States do not always mean what they say, say what they mean, or reveal all of their intentions and contingency plans. Given the closed and secretive nature of Soviet society, this observation applies to the Soviet Union with particular force. To be sure, it would be foolhardy to dismiss Soviet military doctrine and declaratory commentary out of hand as mere public posturing. While they may not represent a precise forecast of how the Soviets would actually behave in a nuclear war, and indeed may not even remotely reflect the way the Soviet leadership would react with its feet to the fire in a real nuclear crisis, they surely tell us something
about the general strategic mind-set the Soviets would bring into such a situation and, as such, cast important light on the basic premises and planning assumptions they would use as a point of departure for whatever improvisation they might contemplate. It is important to bear in mind that Soviet military doctrine, whatever its apparent rigidities and ambiguities, is not primarily a propaganda contrivance designed to intimidate or deceive the West but an important body of functional operating principles intended, along with other organizational and political determinants, to help lend coherence and direction to Soviet force-structure and contingency planning. Also, to the extent that it reflects a long tradition of actual Soviet military performance and style in past wars, it cannot help but contain some indicators, however fragmentary, of the way Soviet military leaders and planners actually think.

The same can be said, though necessarily with somewhat more diffidence and discrimination, about Soviet public discussions of the Schlesinger retargeting strategy. Although these discussions have had an obvious polemical and propaganda function, they have not been radically different from the sort of parallel criticisms of the strategy that have been voiced by various nominally "expert" Western strategic analysts. And insofar as much of the Soviet commentary on the strategy has come from serious Soviet professional specialists on political-military and arms control matters who presumably have minds and opinions of their own, there is no obvious reason for concluding that it does not reflect the genuine convictions of those who produce it, even if it is of questionable value as a guide to the inner thoughts of authoritative Soviet planners and decisionmakers.

Having said all this, however, we must take care to avoid indiscriminately accepting Soviet doctrinal and policy pronouncements at face value. As noted earlier, Soviet military doctrine has other purposes besides simply prescribing "ground rules" for observance by the Soviet armed forces in combat. It also has the functions, among other things, of (a) providing
bureaucratic rationales for the various Soviet services to invoke in their quest for military budgetary allocations, (b) imparting a sense of continued mission, morale, and purpose to Soviet soldiers in an era of deterrence where wars are ideally supposed to be avoided rather than fought, and (c) projecting a credible external image of Soviet military prowess and toughness and thereby enhancing the deterrent and psychopolitical value of Soviet power in Western perceptions. Moreover, while it doubtless comprises an important conceptual framework for Soviet contingency planning (surely, for example, there must exist somewhere in the General Staff a Soviet equivalent of the U.S. SIOP that accords with the principles of Soviet strategic doctrine), it neither represents necessarily the full range of Soviet military plans and options nor obligates the Soviet political leaders to adhere to its edicts dogmatically.

As for the published Soviet reactions to the Schlesinger strategy, it should be noted that these have uniformly emanated from Soviet civilian publicists and commentators, not professional military officers, and have uniformly appeared in media that have substantial internal or external propaganda functions. Moreover, they have typically employed the language and logic used by U.S. critics of the strategy and, as one hypothesis, may perhaps be explained as an exercise in ventriloquy more than as a reflection of idiosyncratic Soviet thinking. Finally, they have focused exclusively on American strategic policy and have remained conspicuously mute regarding the possible existence of an evolving Soviet policy on the question of targeting selectivity. Soviet professional military writings, for their part, have followed a parallel track with similar effect: although they have not addressed the Schlesinger strategy at all, they have also maintained a Sphinx-like silence on the theme of limited strategic nuclear options generally.

This silence as to the possible existence of a Soviet policy regarding controlled nuclear targeting, however, should not automatically be interpreted as a sign of Soviet uninterest. Indeed, it may well be an indication
of precisely the opposite. In their emphatic and prolific treatment of
the massive-exchange variant of intercontinental nuclear war, Soviet
strategic writings during the past several years have not, it should be
pointed out, explicitly rejected all other possible variants but have
merely slighted them (or appeared to slight them) through selective
inattention. That is to say, rather than categorically foreclosing the
possibility of targeting restraint by direct repudiation, they have
simply elected to ignore the question altogether. If it is a valid
hypothesis that the constraints of Soviet secrecy are likely to inhibit
Soviet military spokesmen from discussing the fine details of their stra-
tegic concepts and planning assumptions with the volubility and candor
that one finds, for example, in Secretary Schlesinger's current Defense
Department posture statement, then there is a powerful presumptive case
to be made that the public record of Soviet strategic doctrine is but the
tip of a very large iceberg which we should only accept as a partial repre-
sentation of the overall Soviet image of nuclear war.

What lies beneath the surface obviously is one of the central ques-
tions facing U.S. strategic analysts and one whose answers will weigh
heavily in determining the ultimate practicability of evolving U.S. stra-
tegic concepts. It is equally obvious, however, that the question is an
exceedingly difficult—if not practically impossible—one to resolve with
confidence, for the twin reasons (a) that the Soviet leaders do not make
it a habit to disclose the specifics of their contingency plans and nuclear
force-application options, and more important (b) that the Soviet leaders
themselves probably have no clear idea of what strategic decisions they
would make in a future nuclear crisis.

All the same, notwithstanding the heavy-handed themes enunciated in
open Soviet military writings, there are valid reasons for suspecting that
in their private thinking and planning, Soviet political and military
leaders are closely attuned to the issue of strategic targeting selectivity
and are fully prepared, both intellectually and operationally, to wage less
than insensate strategic offensive warfare should they conclude that the exigencies of the moment warranted that as a preferred course of action.

To begin with, there is the hard fact of the currently emerging Soviet force posture of fourth-generation MIRVed ICBMs, whose surfeit of potential RV strength and prospective delivery accuracy and targeting flexibility promise to permit strategic operations far more sophisticated than anything presently discussed in published Soviet doctrinal writings.13 To note only the most obvious of these potential targeting options, the Soviets are progressively moving toward the point where they may be able to implement a high-confidence disarming attack against the U.S. MINUTEMAN force solely with around 500 MIRVed SS-18s, leaving a residual force of 1000 SS-17s and SS-19s (along with a fully alerted and undepleted SLBM fleet) for carrying out selective strikes against other targets in CONUS and elsewhere or for providing a credible intrawar deterrent against U.S. countervalue retaliation with its surviving elements of the Triad. Indeed, it is in large measure an abiding concern with this specter of an initiatory Soviet selective nuclear attack that has sparked questioning of the appropriateness of the U.S. SIOP in such a situation and driven the U.S. defense community to develop an additional set of more flexible and purposeful strategic response options. Although there is no firm evidence that the Soviet military establishment is actively planning for such a contingency, the idea of withholding certain strategic forces for intrawar coercion has been tantalizingly suggested in an observation by the Soviet naval commander-in-chief, Admiral Gorshkov, that "missile-carrying submarines, owing to their great survivability in comparison to land-based launch installations, are an even more effective means of deterrence" than ICBMs.14 There is also the reported fact, noted by Secretary Schlesinger in recent Congressional testimony, that "in their exercises the Soviets have indicated far greater interest in the notions of controlled nuclear war and nonnuclear war than has ever before been reflected in Soviet doctrine."15 Lastly, to
mention only two more of a whole range of imaginable possibilities, the Soviets currently have the capability to wage successfully a massive and rapid-tempo theater nuclear war against NATO while retaining their central strategic forces for deterring a U.S. escalation to the intercontinental-war threshold, and are within reaching distance of acquiring (with their prospective ocean-surveillance satellite system, SS-NX-13 anti-shipping SLBM, and BACKFIRE bomber now entering Soviet naval air regiments) a weapons package capable of attacking and destroying U.S. carrier task forces and other naval units at sea, either massively or through slow attrition, while withholding attacks against land-based military targets in CONUS and NATO.

At the conceptual level, there are also traces which suggest that Soviet military planners may be less firmly wedded to their enunciated doctrinal line than one might surmise from a superficial reading. Soviet General Staff Chief Kulikov not long ago lent his authority to a common refrain of the Soviet doctrinal literature that successful leadership and control in modern warfare call not only for "confidence and persistence, but also the clear substantiation of decisions and frequently boldness in making the necessary amendments in a rapidly changing situation." More recently, Soviet Defense Minister Grechko added his own imprimatur to this proposition when he observed, during a disquisition on the contemporary relevance of Soviet experiences during World War II, that the supremacy of Soviet military art was "displayed by the fact that during the war the Soviet command implemented its plans increasingly flexibly and efficiently, and was more far-sighted in its plans and more facile and resolute in the means of implementing them." In concluding his point, he went on to note that "the active, creative style of Soviet military thought was shown by innovation and the quest for forms and methods of conducting military operations according most fully with the conditions of the war. . . ."

While such pronouncements tell us little about how the Soviet forces would translate these ideals of flexibility and innovation into action, they at
least have the effect of conveying the impression that in the Soviet High Command's view, Soviet military doctrine is anything but doctrinaire.

CONCLUSIONS

What all this adds up to is extraordinarily difficult to say with certitude. Doubtless it would be premature to conclude, as some Western analysts seem to have done, that the Soviet leaders have fully adopted a strategy of flexible response roughly analogous to that of the U.S. and assimilated it into their contingency planning and weapons acquisition criteria. There are simply too many persistent stylistic differences between Soviet and American strategic philosophies to permit, at least yet, such a sweeping generalization. There is no evidence whatever, for example, to indicate that the Soviets have even the remotest sympathies for such U.S. concepts as "threats that leave something to chance" and the symbolic employment of nuclear weapons as demonstrations of resolve and means of exerting psychopolitical leverage. For them, the idea of nuclear demonstration is most likely regarded as the height of strategic foolishness, since it implies a grave escalation in the means of inflicting violence without producing any tangible military gain, and further risks giving the other side every incentive to respond massively while he still has the strategic nuclear resources to do so. Nuclear crises, moreover, appear to be regarded by them as things to be avoided unless one seriously means business and has the most vital interests at stake, in which case they become not events to be played at with various sorts of nuclear "experimentation" but critical challenges to be decisively met by the most direct and forceful measures available.

At the same time, it is probably a fair presumption simply on grounds of logic that Soviet strategic thought and contingency planning are currently in a state of profound ferment and transition, even though visible signs of this may be few and far between. The Soviet Union is currently in the process of acquiring the most substantial and diversified strategic posture
in its history as a nuclear power, and its leaders are scarcely likely to be unmindful of its rich potential for carrying out a wide variety of military operations. The following remark made by a senior Soviet military theoretician, while studiously ambiguous, may be highly relevant and instructive in this regard: "Military matters have marched sharply forward under the scientific and technical revolution, and the foreign policy functions of our armed forces have changed. All this has required, and continues to require, the introduction of the appropriate changes to the content of military doctrine and to the system of views on questions of war."^19

Whatever these changes may be, we would probably be best advised to regard them not as emulative reactions to the Schlesinger retargeting policy or as mirror-images of contemporary American strategic concepts, but rather as uniquely "Soviet" responses to the changing potential of Soviet strategic power, conceived and formulated in a highly idiosyncratic Soviet frame of reference and heavily infused throughout with uniquely Soviet strategic perceptions and priorities. It is a time-worn axiom of military practice that one plays the game of war on one's own terms rather than on those of the adversary, however intellectually attractive they may appear, and that one tailors one's strategies and contingency plans in accordance with one's own strengths and interests rather than in conformity with some "objective" set of preferred military standards. It is highly unlikely that evolving Soviet strategic concepts bear any significant resemblance to those that currently inform U.S. nuclear planning. The emerging Soviet image of a "limited nuclear operation," if it exists, may very well envisage a massive and rapidly executed preemptive theater nuclear blitz against NATO, coupled with a simultaneous countermilitary attack against all interesting targets in CONUS while holding U.S. cities as hostages with a large residual nuclear force to deter the United States from retaliating against the Soviet ZI. This is plainly a far cry from the sort of selectivity envisaged by the Schlesinger strategy, but it is
also a far cry from Soviet military doctrine as we presently know it and constitutes a potential threat that is well worth worrying about.

In any event, whatever track contemporary Soviet military thinking may be running on, there is no question that the Soviet Union is acquiring the strategic nuclear wherewithal to do—or threaten to do—things far beyond anything presently addressed in the Soviet military literature. As a consequence, the evolving Soviet military scene warrants the most careful and reflective scrutiny by Western strategic analysts in the years ahead, with a view toward better understanding the diverse opportunities afforded by Soviet strategic power, the sort of situations that might provide a context for those opportunities to be tested, the conceptual and technical constraints that might act to inhibit Soviet flexibility, and perhaps most of all, the continued Soviet vulnerabilities that might usefully be exploited by countervailing U.S. and NATO capabilities and strategies.

2. For reasons of convenience, the following discussion will refer to the new U.S. targeting policy as the Schlesinger strategy. It should be noted, however, that while the policy is indeed being implemented under the aegis of Secretary Schlesinger and bears his strong intellectual imprint throughout, its genesis and development substantially predate his arrival in office. For a brief background discussion on the evolution of the policy leading up to NSDM 242, see George Sherman, "Nuclear Strategy and Schlesinger," Washington Star-News, April 15, 1974.

3. The essence of this concern has been succinctly stated by David Holloway in his observation that it takes two sides to play the game of limitation, and that recent Soviet negative reactions to the Schlesinger retargeting policy raise serious questions as to whether we can count on Soviet compliance ("Soviet Strategists Attack Schlesinger," The New Scientist, November 5, 1974, p. 707). It is worth noting, however, that despite its attempt to develop a capability for flexible nuclear response, the U.S. still retains both the hardware requisites and SIOP-scale attack options to play the massive-war game envisaged by Soviet military doctrine. A point frequently overlooked by doubters is that the development of strategic targeting selectivity in no way commits us to limited nuclear employment, nor requires an expectation on our
part that the Soviets will comply with the norm of restraint. The purpose of the policy, rather, is to provide in advance the capability to cope with a nuclear shooting engagement that unexpectedly occurs and which happily (if one can use that word in this context) appears amenable to restraints aimed at turning the situation around before everything goes up in flames. It is definitely not intended, as many of the more outspoken critics have alleged, to allow us to go out on the warpath actively seeking opportunities for employing nuclear weapons, any more than life preservers aboard ocean liners are intended to allow passengers to jump overboard whenever the idea strikes their fancy.


6. For an unusually hard-hitting Soviet commentary which explicitly rejects the alleged impossibility of victory in nuclear war and confidently asserts that in such a war the Soviet Union would decisively prevail, see Rear Admiral V. Shelyag, "Two World Outlooks, Two Views on War," Krasnaja zvëzda, February 7, 1974.


10. V. Volgin, Radio Moscow, April 9, 1974.

11. The most elaborate Soviet development of this theme to date may be found in M. Milhstein and L. Semeiko, "The Problem of the Inadmissibility of a Nuclear Conflict: On New Approaches in the United States," SSHA: Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya, No. 11, October 1974. See also L. Semeiko, "New Forms But the Same Essence as Before," Krasnaja zvëzda, April 8, 1975.


14. Quoted in E. T. Wooldridge, Jr., "The Gorshkov Papers: Soviet Naval Doctrine for the Nuclear Age," ORBIS, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Winter 1975, p. 1167. As a cautionary note against running too far with this inference, however, it is worth pointing out the alternative possibility that Gorshkov's comment may have been principally motivated by a bureaucratic desire on his part to justify a larger place for the SLBM force in the allocation of Soviet military missions and budgets.


18. For an argument which, despite its studied cautiousness, comes close to representing this view, see C. G. Jacobsen, "The Emergence of a Soviet Doctrine of Flexible Response?" Atlantic Community Quarterly, Vol. XII, No. 2, Summer 1974, pp. 233-238. A rather more conservative approach to the subject which provides an excellent treatment of evolving Soviet strategic developments and options yet reserves judgment on the question of where they may be pointing is offered in William R. Van Cleave, Soviet Doctrine and Strategy: A Developing American View (working paper prepared for a conference at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Ebenhausen, West Germany, 1975).