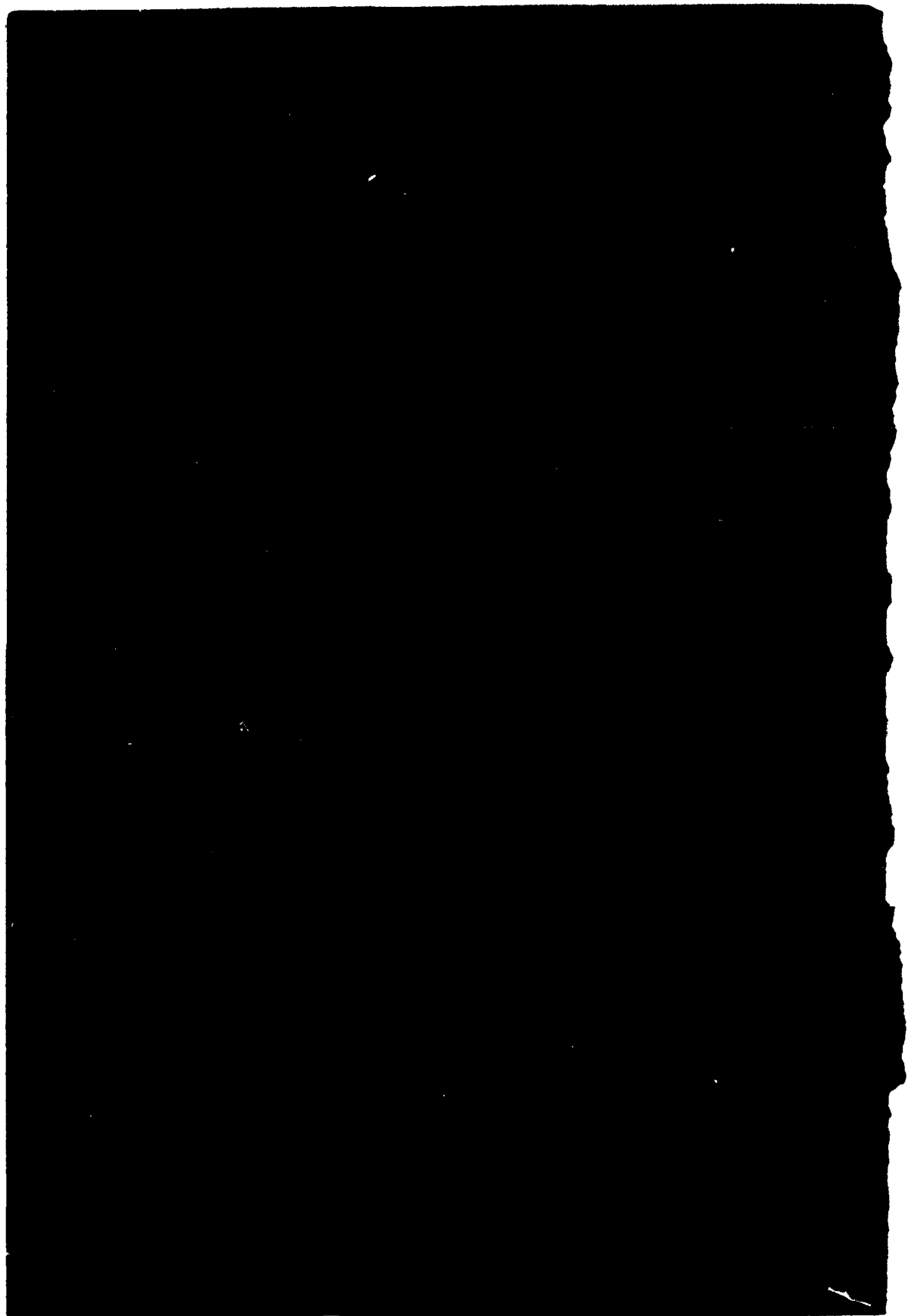


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The Soviet Military Leadership and the Question of Soviet Deployment Retreats

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PREFACE

This report examines the impact on Soviet civil-military relations of reducing certain Soviet conventional force deployments around the Soviet periphery. The study discusses the attitude Soviet military leaders are likely to display toward five hypothetical such deployment retreats, and evaluates the degree to which the Gorbachev leadership is likely to see varying political and economic considerations as reinforcing or contradicting military arguments in each case.

The report has been sponsored by the U.S. Air Force as part of an ongoing project on Soviet civil-military relations and the possibilities for policy change, within Project AIR FORCE's National Security Strategies Program. Earlier studies published in this project include:

Jeremy R. Azrael, *The Soviet Civilian Leadership and the Military High Command, 1976-1986*, R-3521-AF, June 1987.

Abraham S. Becker, *Ogarkov's Complaint and Gorbachev's Dilemma: The Soviet Defense Budget and Party-Military Conflict*, R-3541-AF, December 1987.

Francis Fukuyama, *Soviet Civil-Military Relations and the Power Projection Mission*, R-3504-AF, April 1987.

Edward L. Warner, Josephine Bonan, and Erma Packman, *Key Personnel and Organizations of the Soviet Military High Command*, N-2567-AF, April 1987.

The study is intended to be of assistance to Air Force officers and planners concerned with the future strategic environment. It should also be of interest to a wide range of readers interested in the alternatives now confronting Soviet foreign policy.



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SUMMARY

One of the many questions that have come to disturb the Soviet civil-military relationship in the Gorbachev era is the question of deployment retreat. **This is the issue of whether and how far the Soviet Union should reduce its existing conventional force deployments in various regions around the Soviet periphery for the sake of compensating foreign political or domestic economic advantages.**

At points around the borders of the USSR, a variety of countries confronted by contiguous Soviet military power since the end of World War II or by threatening Soviet forward deployments thereafter have long had fundamental grievances about Soviet policy that have never been satisfied. In principle, a radical shift in Soviet deployment policy to begin to meet these grievances might be expected to pay large political dividends. Many observers, both in the West and in Asia, have seen a model for such possible future Soviet retreats in Gorbachev's 1987 acceptance of the zero-zero global Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) principle, as he abandoned defense of a weapon system inherited from the past for the sake of anticipated tradeoffs, notably in disruptive effects on the Western alliance. Anticipation of a wave of further Soviet retreats has now been strengthened by the beginning of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Alternatively, it is widely conjectured that economic motives might stimulate Soviet deployment retreats. A large reduction in Soviet conventional forces—which would necessarily be reflected in deployment cuts—might be expected to be helpful to the Soviet economy and to Gorbachev's struggle to modernize that economy.

It seems clear that there is in fact now considerable contention within the Soviet elite over the linked issues of deployment retreat and unilateral or asymmetrical force reduction. In particular, there is evidence suggesting that **within the last year the question of a Soviet troop cut has become a real political issue. One Soviet military leader—Deputy Defense Minister Tretyak—has openly displayed alarm at the possibility of a unilateral force reduction on the model of the large Khrushchev-era cut of the late 1950s.**

This does not mean that analogous large, unilateral Soviet troop reductions are now likely. On the contrary, thus far the powerful political forces opposing such a cut still seem likely to outweigh those favoring sizeable unilateral reductions. But argument over this question is likely to go on as Gorbachev and his colleagues wrestle with the prob-

lem of how much change in the Soviet force posture—and how much geopolitical retreat—is required by the task of modernizing the Soviet economy.

As the internal debate proceeds, the attitude of the Soviet military leadership toward deployment retrenchment—and the degree of influence that the military will have on Politburo decisions—are likely to vary somewhat from case to case around the Soviet periphery.

— It is likely that military leaders are generally opposed to any large-scale unilateral cut affecting Soviet conventional forces globally. In confronting this issue, General Tretyak is probably voicing a sentiment widely shared in the military elite, which indeed remembers Khrushchev's troop cut with some bitterness. **One of the factors that will help determine the outcome will be the Politburo's sense of how badly the Soviet economy needs a major force reduction, and how much benefit it can actually obtain from such a reduction. But another factor will surely be the Soviet leadership's desire to secure compensating reductions from the West, its reluctance to weaken the force balance in the absence of compensation, and its internal debate over how much compensation to settle for.**

— So far as Europe is concerned, the Soviet military leadership seems well aware that local conventional force reductions are definitely on Gorbachev's agenda. But the Soviet elite appears deeply divided about the extent of Soviet concessions tolerable in any conventional force reduction agreement, and some of the many variables which Gorbachev must consider may tend to support military reservations and impose caution. On the whole, large-scale unilateral withdrawals from Europe involving a substantial portion of the Soviet forces deployed appear to be quite unlikely, especially at the outset of the new dialogue with the West. Smaller, essentially demonstrative unilateral withdrawals are much more possible, although even here the Soviets may wait upon the evolution of the dialogue to maximize the political effect. **The most important issue for the Politburo, however, is likely to be not Soviet unilateral actions, but rather the tolerable scope of future concessions regarding asymmetry in negotiated reductions.**

The opening Soviet propaganda position thus far has been to deny the existence of an overall asymmetry between the strength of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, but to acknowledge specific asymmetries in individual categories of weapons that are alleged to be broadly offsetting. The primary worry of the Soviet military leadership is the possibility of future Gorbachev retreats from this negotiating posture, on the model of Gorbachev's series of retreats during the INF negotia-

tions. Warsaw Pact commander Marshal Kulikov has appeared particularly eager to try to minimize the scope for such retreats. For the present, those in the military and civilian elite who feel this way have a powerful argument with which to delay Soviet decisions, in the felt need first to extensively test what the market will bear in negotiation with the West.

— The second largest Soviet conventional force deployments are in Siberia and the Far East, facing China. Soviet force reductions there are gradually becoming politically more possible over the long run, but will remain a highly contentious issue. For reasons discussed in this report, such reductions, if they ever come, will have to be essentially unilateral, and will also have to involve demobilization rather than transfers if they are to occur on a significant scale. Defense Minister Yazov and an unusual number of his senior subordinates have come to their present posts from recent service in the Far East, and they are likely to be highly sensitive to the local force needs they see imposed by geography and tenacious in resisting a major unilateral weakening of the Soviet position in the local force balance.

— In the case of the third largest Soviet conventional force deployment—Afghanistan—the attitudes of Soviet military leaders toward withdrawal are likely by now to be both more ambivalent and in any case less influential. Although there is still some remaining ambiguity about Soviet ultimate intentions, Afghanistan is the one case in which Soviet retreat has now begun. Gorbachev wishes to extricate the Soviet Union from this war because he sees it as an unacceptable political burden on his ambitious foreign policy and on his even more ambitious hopes to kindle the domestic enthusiasm needed to modernize the Soviet economy. The Soviet leadership hopes to avoid losing all influence in Afghanistan even after withdrawal, but is probably resigned to defeat of these hopes.

The military leadership for its part is frustrated by the war, embittered by the constraints imposed on it in pursuing the war, and concerned about harmful effects of the war upon the morale of the armed forces. On the other hand, military leaders are evidently also concerned that the prestige of the army will be further damaged by a withdrawal, and that in future years they will be blamed for the debacle. But they are also aware that this frustrating experience has reduced their leverage on Politburo choices on this issue.

— In the case of the much more limited Soviet military deployment in Indochina, at the naval and air base at Cam Ranh Bay, Soviet geopolitical retreat seems a fairly unlikely

possibility over the next few years, despite Gorbachev's offer to leave this base if the United States leaves its Philippine bases. The Soviet Union has not yet tried to put decisive pressure on Vietnam to meet China's terms regarding a settlement in Cambodia. Gorbachev has encouraged Vietnam to negotiate, but Hanoi has thus far treated negotiations as merely a new political front in its struggle to maintain hegemony in Cambodia, using talks to drive wedges among its opponents and to try to strengthen the legitimacy and bargaining position of the Phnom Penh regime it sponsors. Vietnam has made progress in this effort.

The caution Gorbachev has thus far shown in dealing with Hanoi is probably only partly because of Soviet military opinion, which is likely to be divided on the importance to be attached to the Cam Ranh facilities. The dominant forces in the General Staff, while valuing the Cam Ranh base, are unlikely to see it as a vital Soviet interest. Navy leaders may well disagree, but naval influence on the leadership has been increasingly weakened in this decade. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union by now has a heavy political investment in the advantageous geopolitical position it has acquired in Indochina, and reluctance to jeopardize this broad political advantage is probably a more important consideration for Gorbachev than the value he ascribes to the purely military benefits of Cam Ranh Bay. The Soviet leadership may also be reluctant to try to force Vietnam to yield control in Cambodia because Moscow may hope that China's terms for a settlement will eventually weaken.

— Finally, in the case of the Japanese Northern Territories—the four islands south of the Kuriles held and fortified by the USSR but claimed by Japan—there is still a strong alliance between military and political forces in the Soviet elite that have long been opposed to territorial concessions to Japan. There seems little chance that Gorbachev will convince the Soviet consensus to offer to return all four islands in dispute during the next decade. There is a greater chance that the Soviets will eventually make a formal, explicit offer to return the two least important of the islands, but such a solution remains unacceptable to Japan. Of all the possible Gorbachev retreats considered, surrender of the Northern Territories is likely to come last.

In sum, the role of the Soviet military in the policy struggle within the Soviet elite is likely to vary considerably from issue to issue. Overall, there is little doubt that military influence on the Soviet political leadership is now—on the average—considerably weaker than it was in the Brezhnev era. But this generalization is a poor guide to the extent of military influence on any given issue of foreign policy in which Soviet military forces are involved. The

circumstances surrounding each issue are all-important. In some cases the balance of political and economic arguments which the Politburo must consider may tend to outweigh military preferences, while in other cases nonmilitary considerations may reinforce a conservative military resistance to change. In still other cases, political considerations may have offsetting and ambiguous effects.

If, however, Soviet deployment retreats in various parts of the world do continue, they are likely to engender increasing political resistance in Moscow, resistance which will necessarily involve but not be limited to the military elite. The political costs to Gorbachev of external military concessions are likely to be cumulative, and opposition to concessions regarded as excessive is likely to become more outspoken as time goes on. This tendency was illustrated, in particular, in the highly unusual public warning about force reductions made by General Tret'yak in February 1988. There are differences within both the military and the civilian elites about the acceptability of specific concessions and retreats in various places. But if Gorbachev creates the impression that he is leading the Soviet Union by degrees into retreat all around the Soviet periphery, this is likely to galvanize a more generalized opposition.

Finally, the question of Soviet deployment concessions is likely to become increasingly interwoven with elite infighting over the nature, extent, and ultimate purpose of change inside the Soviet Union. Many in the elite will see military concessions as justifiable only to the extent that they are unavoidable to secure the Soviet Union the release from external pressure, the "breathing space," needed to accomplish modernization. Those who are the least committed to far-reaching internal change may tend to be the least convinced of the need for drastic external concessions to facilitate such change. And since it is the Soviet Union's global superpower position that Gorbachev is ultimately seeking to preserve through radical modernization, there is likely to be ongoing argument in the elite over external military concessions which some may see as needlessly sacrificing aspects of that inherited position.

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE ISSUE OF DEPLOYMENT RETRENCHMENT

Certain of the steps taken by the Gorbachev leadership in 1987 for the first time placed in question long-standing Western assumptions about Soviet deployment policies. Particularly important in this regard was the Soviet negotiating retreat to accept the zero-zero global Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) principle, as Gorbachev abandoned seemingly unchangeable Soviet positions inherited from the past for the sake of anticipated tradeoffs, notably in disruptive effects upon the Atlantic alliance. Many observers, both in the West and in Asia, have in consequence been led to ask what further military concessions Gorbachev might conceivably offer in the future about existing deployments in various regions around the Soviet periphery for the sake of compensating political advantage. Speculation of this kind has been further stimulated by Soviet public avowals of broad shifts in attitude on matters of principle, alleged changes that might, in theory, some day serve to justify major new Soviet deployment concessions.¹

The global list of hypothetical candidates for Soviet retreat is long because the list of enduring Soviet deployments that create anxiety or anger among the Soviet Union's neighbors is sizeable. At different points around the borders of the USSR, a variety of countries confronted by contiguous Soviet military power since the end of World War II or by threatening Soviet forward deployments during the years thereafter have long had fundamental grievances about Soviet policy that have never been satisfied. In principle, it might be supposed that a radical shift to begin to meet these grievances—on the model of the Soviet radical retreat on INF—would pay important political dividends for Soviet foreign policy.

A partial inventory of the Soviet forward deployments that generated geopolitical debts would include:

— The important Soviet conventional force advantage the Soviets have maintained for forty years in Europe, including particularly the large forces forward deployed in East Germany. This force advantage has traditionally been preserved by the Soviet leaders primarily to attempt to intimidate Western Europe, and secondarily to assure control over Eastern Europe.

¹These assertions include allegations of a new Soviet recognition that Soviet security needs are dependent on the satisfaction of the security needs of others; of a new acceptance of the notion of "sufficiency" in defense; and of a new orientation toward defense rather than offense in theater warfare.

— The fifty-odd Soviet divisions and associated firepower that have been assembled around the northern frontiers of China since 1965, to deter, overawe, and exert pressure on the Peoples Republic of China (PRC).

— The Soviet forces that were deployed in Afghanistan in this decade to maintain a weak protege Communist regime, and that are now retreating.

— The Soviet bases that have been maintained at Cam Ranh Bay and Danang since 1979 for intelligence collection and for support of Soviet naval and air operations in the Pacific and the Indian ocean. These bases have been procured and retained as Hanoi's *quid pro quo* to Moscow for Soviet subsidization of the Vietnamese economy and Soviet backing for the Vietnamese effort to consolidate the conquest of Cambodia against the will of China and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

— Soviet retention and fortification of the Northern Territories, the four islands immediately south of the Kurile chain and immediately north of Hokkaido, which are claimed by Japan and which the Soviet Union has refused to return since the close of World War II.

In each of these cases, Soviet deployments were made for a combination of military and political reasons to be explored in more detail below. And in each case, a set of hypothetical benefits, of varying importance, can be visualized as a reward for Soviet withdrawal. What is at issue, therefore, is the future Soviet evaluation of the tradeoffs involved.

THE SOVIET MILITARY AND GORBACHEV'S CHOICES

One of the major factors that will condition Gorbachev's behavior in all such cases—but surely not the only one—will be the attitude of the Soviet military leadership regarding the prospect of such concessions. A mixture of divergent considerations is likely to affect Gorbachev's calculations in every case, and the discussion to follow seeks to determine the role of military views in this mixture. How forcefully is the present Soviet military leadership likely to argue against a given concession, and what other factors may serve to reinforce or to detract from such arguments in the minds of the ultimate arbiters, the Soviet political leadership?

This report will first examine the broad political framework within which all such issues are likely to be considered in Moscow, outlining the kind of general considerations that will probably enter into play in all cases. Next, the discussion will review the specific pros and cons,

from the Soviet perspective, of hypothetical major Soviet concessions on five selected issues: major asymmetrical Soviet conventional force reductions in Europe; a decision to carry out major unilateral reductions in the forces facing China; an Afghan withdrawal carried to the point of accepting loss of Soviet control in Kabul; a decision to alter Soviet policy regarding Vietnam and Cambodia to a degree that would jeopardize the Soviet position at Cam Ranh Bay; and a decision to return to Japan some or all of the Northern Territories. No attempt will be made here to draw net conclusions regarding any of these issues. Rather, the discussion will seek to establish the degree to which military views on each question are likely to be supported or opposed by other Soviet interests. A concluding section will then provide generalizations on the extent and limits of military influence on such issues in the Gorbachev era.

II. FACTORS AFFECTING SOVIET BEHAVIOR REGARDING DEPLOYMENTS

THE NATURE OF MILITARY VIEWS

One factor influencing Gorbachev's behavior will be the attitude that the professional military establishment adopts toward specific prospective military concessions. There is some ground to suppose, for reasons to be explored later, that military opposition to major concessions regarding existing deployments may not prove equally intense on all the issues delineated in Sec. I. It is also by no means certain that there will be a unanimous—or even overwhelmingly predominant—military view in all cases. It is readily conceivable that the institutional interests of different Soviet military services will affect judgments about the Soviet stake in certain of the Soviet peripheral military activities.

THE EXTENT OF MILITARY INFLUENCE

In those cases where there is a military consensus, there remains the even more important question of the degree of influence that the Politburo's military advisers will have upon its decisions about existing deployments. This question is now much more uncertain than was the case in the Brezhnev era. In the second half of the 1980s, a variety of evidence has accumulated pointing toward a reduction in the political status of the Soviet military establishment in comparison with the very privileged status it enjoyed through much of the Brezhnev regime. The evolution of this change has been registered cumulatively through a long series of events, beginning long before Gorbachev took power, but accelerating thereafter.

Among the steps taken along this path have been those resource allocation decisions, unwelcome to the military, adopted since the mid-1970s; the removal and transfer from Moscow of an overly assertive Chief of the General Staff, in 1984;¹ the symbolic downgrading of military representation on several leadership podiums since 1985; Gorbachev's apparent authorization of at least a modest erosion in the

¹See Jeremy R. Azrael, *The Soviet Civilian Leadership and the Military High Command, 1976-1986*, The RAND Corporation, R-3521-AF, June 1987.

General Staff's monopoly on military data;² the new emphasis he has placed on a declaratory stance professing belief in "sufficiency" in defense and claiming to favor reduction or elimination of the military hardware in Europe that facilitates offensive capabilities; his explicit upgrading of the importance of political and propaganda instruments of foreign policy relative to the military instrument; his seizure of a pretext in 1987 to purge the Minister of Defense and some other senior military figures; the growing harassment of military cadres he has sponsored under the rubric of "reconstruction"; and perhaps most significant of all, his willingness to allow the emergence of an atmosphere in which military values,³ the military's policies regarding draft deferment,⁴ and even Soviet military honor⁵ have become exposed to occa-

²At least a start has apparently been made in this direction with the 1986 appointment of Lt. Gen. Viktor Starodubov, formerly of the General Staff, to the International Department of the Central Committee, apparently to provide military expertise to the Department, particularly in regard to arms control issues. The International Department has traditionally played a central role in the use of sensitive information for foreign policy advisory purposes, but until recently has been precluded from doing so with military information, which has remained the exclusive preserve of the General Staff and the Defense Council. But the extent of the inroads which the International Department has been able to make in the secrets of the General Staff is obscure, and is probably indeed still very modest.

³The military press and Soviet military leaders have become increasingly vocal since the spring of 1987 in denouncing what they see as a growing antimilitary tendency in literature, in journalism, in television, and in historical writing. (See, for example, the polemics of Col. Gen. D. A. Volkogonov with what he termed "intellectual pacifists" in the Soviet Writers Union, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, May 6, 1987, and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 22, 1987). Such hostile writers are said to be encouraging the dissemination of pacifist attitudes in the population generally, and draft evasion by Soviet youth. Antimilitary writers also tap into what is evidently considerable popular resentment of military privileges. (See, for example, A. Khorev, "Echo of Malicious Talk," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, December 12, 1987.) In early 1988, Defense Minister Yazov lashed out quite bluntly against this trend in a televised discussion at the Ministry of Defense. (Moscow Television Service, January 16, 1988; *New York Times*, January 21, 1988.)

⁴In the spring of 1987, a Soviet newspaper published a round-table discussion in which the participants—all leading Soviet academics and scientists—directly attacked the policy of drafting first-year and second-year college students into the armed forces, denouncing the practice as harmful to the economy and the national interest. (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, May 13, 1987.) A few weeks later, Col. Gen. M. A. Gareyev, a deputy chief of the General Staff and a well-known military theorist, published a polemical response, defending the draft policy. (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, June 3, 1987.) In his January 1988 televised discussion at the Defense Ministry, Minister Yazov also alluded indignantly to the statements made at the May round table. Draft deferment policies had not previously been allowed to be challenged publicly.

⁵In the summer of 1987 several Soviet generals and colonels published an indignant denunciation of a *Novyy Mir* article that had depicted a regimental tank commander as having compelled subordinates to knock civilian vehicles blocking tank passage off a bridge and into a stream. The same *Novyy Mir* article had depicted a Soviet general as holding out to subordinates the prospect of medals if a city were taken sufficiently quickly to impress the high command, but as withholding the medals when the city was

sional public insult and insolent questioning at the hands of journalists and academics long hostile to the military but previously inhibited from showing it.⁶

Two political turning points in 1987 appear to have made the military establishment more vulnerable to explicit attacks by hostile intellectuals. One was the decision of the Soviet leadership, after the January 1987 Central Committee plenum, to insist that the military must also be exposed to the scouring involved in "reconstruction." This decision has facilitated unprecedented discussion—in both the military and nonmilitary press—of Soviet military problems and some discreditable Soviet military practices formerly treated with far more reticence, such as ethnic conflict in the armed forces and the widespread mistreatment of new recruits. Even more important, the early 1987 leadership decision has opened up the officer corps to the process of selective purging on grounds of corruption—and to the associated intimidation—which Gorbachev was already using against the regional party apparatus.

The other turning point was the penetration of Soviet airspace and landing in Red Square by a private West German aircraft in June 1987. This event immensely increased the military's political vulnerability and furnished a pretext for Gorbachev to purge the military leadership. In the aftermath, the insulting speech which Moscow party leader Yeltsin delivered to the leaders of the PVO Moscow Military District (*Krasnaya Zvezda*, June 17, 1987) became symbolic of the new relaxation of inhibitions in challenges to the military.⁷

captured, after fierce German resistance, a few hours past the politically-imposed deadline. (*Trud*, August 6, 1987.) Another Soviet officer denounced as "blasphemy" what he depicted as widespread recent claims that the Malaya Zemlya operation during World War II (associated with Brezhnev) had been unsuccessful and unnecessary, so that the heavy associated losses had been essentially in vain. (*Pravda*, November 23, 1987.)

⁶This behavior by antimilitary intellectuals had its precedents in more veiled attacks on the military and its values published earlier, during the period between Brezhnev's death and Gorbachev's assumption of power. Especially notable were two Aesopian articles by Fedor Burlatskiy, published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* on November 23, 1983, and June 20, 1984.

⁷The new atmosphere in Moscow was reflected in a broadcast comment made in January 1988 in Budapest by the outspoken Hungarian Central Committee secretary for international affairs Matyas Szuros. Referring to Brezhnev, Szuros—a former Hungarian Ambassador to Moscow—remarked that "it was very strange to me . . . that the CPSU General Secretary wanted at all costs to be a marshal. As a matter of fact, mirrored in this, as the ocean is in a drop, was his whole conception of the world today. Well, he did become a marshal, and there were rather important consequences of this and of his whole attitude. . . ." Whereas the Soviet military leaders had reasons of their own to resent Brezhnev's craving for marshal's rank, they would surely resent the intimation that this was an unworthy and dangerous ambition. (Budapest radio, January 25, 1988.)

Perhaps the most significant such challenge for the issue of deployment retreat has been the open questioning of past military decisions regarding deployments. Thus, in the wake of Gorbachev's February 1987 decision to accept a zero-zero INF formula even in the absence of U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) concessions, the prominent journalist Aleksandr Bovin published a widely reported essay asking for the first time why the decision to deploy the SS-20 missiles had been made in the first place.⁸ A week later, a General Staff official, Major General Yuri Lebedev, published a polemical reply.⁹ But the impudent question has not ceased to be raised. In May 1987, another Soviet journalist, arguing for more openness in discussion of Soviet foreign and defense policy, insisted that "it is not illogical" to demand to know why it had been necessary to deploy these missiles.¹⁰

More important, the Foreign Ministry has not hesitated to contradict the General Staff line that the SS-20 deployment decision was justified at the time and not discussable now. In an interview published in a Foreign Ministry organ in the fall of 1987, Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh made the following broad attack on the General Staff perspective—and on General Staff prerogatives regarding deployment decisionmaking:

A number of decisions have clearly not been optimal. . . . Somewhat different calculations could have been made, in my opinion, when our security goals on the European continent were being defined. **I feel that the effective development of our technology rather than political analysis influenced the adoption of some decisions.** Take medium range missiles, for instance. We had quite enough SS-4 and SS-5 missiles in Europe. Then we began to deploy SS-20s. Technically, they were more perfect. But the question is how they fitted into our military-strategic concept in the European theater. I repeat: **national interests must determine strategy, while strategy must determine political tactics and, to a certain extent, the technological development of the armed forces.**¹¹ (Emphasis added.)

⁸*Moscow News*, No. 10, March 15–22, 1987.

⁹*Moscow News*, No. 11, March 23–29, 1987.

¹⁰Aleksey Pankin, "New Thinking, Openness and the Soviet Peace Movement," *XX Century and Peace* (Moscow), No. 5, May 1987. Most such statements have been published in Soviet press organs directed at a Western audience, and it is likely that one of the purposes of the Gorbachev leadership in allowing such statements to appear has been a desire to impress that audience. It is highly unlikely, however, that the Soviet military leadership finds this rationalization reassuring, and there is abundant evidence that senior figures in the Ministry of Defense are in fact disturbed at the new trend in public discussion touching on military prerogatives. Some of this evidence is reviewed later in this report.

¹¹*New Times*, No. 46, November 23, 1987.

This public statement was a much more significant attack on the political interests of the General Staff than was the earlier Bovin article. It could be taken to imply a claim for a Foreign Ministry voice in weapons development decisions as well as for a greater voice in weapons deployment decisions. It seems unlikely that Bessmertnykh would have made such an explicit assault on the past decisions and present rights of the military leadership unless he had felt that he had the support of Foreign Minister Shevernadze, and probably behind Shevernadze, of Gorbachev himself. The Bessmertnykh statement appeared to reflect long-standing Foreign Ministry resentment of the prerogatives and pretensions of the Defense Ministry and the General Staff. As will be seen later in this report, the issue of the wisdom of past deployment decisions has also begun to surface in the wake of the recent evolution of Soviet policy on extrication from Afghanistan.

The question of modifications in the political status of the military institution has gradually become intertwined with the implications of the foreign policy changes carried out by the Gorbachev leadership—in particular, those foreign policy decisions of the recent past that have implied a Politburo willingness to override military misgivings in at least some specific cases for the sake of compensating political advantages. Some examples included the decision to adopt and then extend the Soviet unilateral nuclear test moratorium in 1985–1986; the evolution of Soviet policy under Gorbachev toward greater acceptance of intrusive verification measures long opposed by the Soviet military; and the decision to allow visits by selected Western delegations to the disputed Krasnoyarsk radar site, to one old Soviet chemical weapons factory, and to other radar sites questioned by the United States in the Standing Consultative Commission. Each of these decisions suggested some increase in the priority given to the effort to generate political pressure against American military programs, as against the priority traditionally assigned by the Soviet military to the protection of their own programs and the wall of secrecy associated with those programs.¹²

The most notable Gorbachev affront to military preferences to date, however, has probably involved the Soviet concessions rendered to secure an INF agreement. The terms of this agreement can be and indeed have been defended in Moscow on military grounds, as the only available way to secure the removal of NATO's Pershing IIs and cruise

¹²It must be emphasized, of course, that the change is a matter of degree. Soviet leaders have always sought to constrain U.S. military programs through political or diplomatic efforts, while protecting their own programs. To the extent that a tradeoff has been required between the two goals, primacy has traditionally been given to the second objective rather than to the first. This order of priorities does not yet seem to have been reversed, but has been rendered more nearly equal.

missiles threatening targets, particularly command and control targets, in the Soviet Union. It is also possible that some Soviet military leaders have accepted the argument, sometimes heard in the West, that the agreement was worth the cost in Soviet military hardware because of the damage done to the credibility of NATO strategy as a whole.

Nevertheless, it is likely that many Soviet military leaders thought the cost exorbitant, in view of the disparity between the number of Soviet and American intermediate-range weapons to be removed, and the even greater disparity with regard to the shorter-range missiles being eliminated. Gorbachev's consent to remove all SS-20s and short-range missiles down to a 500-kilometer range from Asia as well as from Europe was probably found particularly disturbing, since the Soviets lack the military manpower advantage vis-à-vis China which they have traditionally enjoyed in Europe, and for two decades have heavily relied upon their great advantage in firepower—including nuclear firepower—to make up the difference. On the whole, the INF agreement was probably seen by many in the military establishment as a dubious bargain, involving the sacrifice of useful concrete military assets mainly for the sake of conjectural future political rewards in Europe and Asia.

Having said this, it is important not to exaggerate the extent of the change that has taken place in the interplay between the civilian and military leaderships over deployments. There is good reason to believe that even in the Brezhnev era, military preferences regarding important deployment issues were overruled by the Politburo on occasion.¹³ By the same token, there is also reason to believe that military attitudes on issues affecting the security of the Soviet Union have remained a weighty element in the mixture of factors conditioning Politburo attitudes under Gorbachev.¹⁴ If there has been a change in

¹³For example, in the late 1970s, when the creation of the new Theater of Military Operations in the Far East was being prepared, the Brezhnev leadership clearly declined—no doubt for budgetary reasons—to accede to the likely desire of some military leaders to enlarge the Soviet buildup facing China.

¹⁴A striking case in point today is Soviet military behavior toward Sweden. The systematic violation of Swedish territorial waters by Soviet submarines practiced by the USSR for over a decade has not been halted in the Gorbachev era, despite its inconsistency with the Soviet détente campaign in Western Europe and with Soviet assertions about the advent of "new thinking." In view of the publicity this matter has received in recent years, the issue has certainly long ago been brought to the attention of the Soviet political leadership. It must be supposed that the reasons—primarily military—for continuing such anomalous behavior have been found compelling by the Gorbachev leadership. More precisely, it appears that the adverse political consequences—particularly in Western countries outside Sweden—have not yet been important enough to be found compelling. A forthcoming study by Gordon McCormick will treat these issues.

The strong influence of military attitudes on aspects of Soviet behavior continues to surface from time to time in other Soviet actions. An example in 1987 was the test firing

military influence over party decisions on such issues, it is clearly a matter of degree, heavily dependent on particulars.

THE WEIGHT OF NONMILITARY CONSIDERATIONS

The Gorbachev leadership's decisions on deployment retrenchment issues are thus likely to depend on the net impact of those political and economic factors that are superimposed on military considerations. In certain cases to be examined below, such reasons for contemplating military concessions may now be deemed by the leadership to have increased in importance. In other cases, however, the implications of nonmilitary considerations may be much more ambiguous in the eyes of the leadership, or may even reinforce military objections to major changes in policy regarding deployments. In all cases, the weighing of opposing factors is likely to be highly subjective, and a matter of ongoing dispute in the Soviet elite.

of a Soviet missile to within a few hundred miles of Hawaii, a step which evoked considerable resentment in the United States.

III. FIVE RETRENCHMENT CANDIDATES: THE MIXTURE OF CONSIDERATIONS

CONVENTIONAL FORCES IN EUROPE

The broad policy question here for the Soviet Union concerns how much asymmetry in Soviet force reduction is tolerable—whether in unilateral cuts or in negotiated mutual but unequal reductions—for the sake of the anticipated military, economic, and political payoff. On this fundamental issue, there is fragmentary evidence to suggest considerable disagreement in the elite, and recalcitrance on the part of the military leadership.

The Question of Unilateral Withdrawals

For the last several years, and particularly since the advent of Gorbachev, the Soviet regime has apparently sought—without committing the Soviet Union to anything—to arouse expectations in the West about the possibility of some unilateral Soviet conventional reductions in Europe. Through occasional use of planted rumors and private suggestions, the Soviets have evidently attempted to manipulate such expectations to “stir the pot” in Western Europe and to assist the Soviet peace campaign by enhancing Gorbachev’s conciliatory image. Those in the regime who sponsor this effort evidently expect it to increase domestic popular pressures on Western governments to adopt a more forthcoming negotiating posture regarding Western reductions, and more generally to inhibit Western defense expenditures. In addition, such hints about possible unilateral **conventional** reductions are apparently disseminated to add to the political pressure in the West for further cuts in **nuclear** weapons in Europe.

During the year before Gorbachev took office, a British periodical published two interviews with an unidentified Soviet colonel alleged to be “a former Army officer who now works as an adviser on international and defense affairs” in Moscow. In the first interview, this individual—presumably in fact a representative of a Soviet intelligence service—asserted that

In the interest of building confidence and easing international tension, we could afford to reduce our forces somewhat—on both the European and the Chinese fronts. . . . A gradual unilateral reduction, spread over five or ten years, of the order of 50 percent. At the same

time resources should be switched from tanks to anti-tank weaponry, which is cheaper and more effective. So that the quantitative reduction of our forces would not undermine, but on the contrary enhance, their defensive capacity.¹

In the second interview, the same individual recalled the precedent of "the massive reduction of the size of the Army carried out by Khrushchev," asserting that "there is an enormous unused potential for taking unilateral steps." As one example of such a step, he proposed Soviet unilateral creation of a nuclear-free zone on the Soviet side of the East-West border in Central Europe "to a depth of 50 km in the first instance." He also proposed that the Soviets unilaterally "create on our side of the border in the North our half of the Nordic Nuclear-Free Zone."²

Two years later, in the wake of Gorbachev's initial major INF concessions, widespread rumors about an impending Soviet announcement of token unilateral Soviet troop withdrawals surfaced in the West on the eve of Gorbachev's visits to Prague in April 1987 and to a Warsaw Pact meeting in East Berlin six weeks later. On the first occasion, the rumors focused on the possibility of Soviet withdrawal of some divisions from Czechoslovakia; on the second, on the chance of some such withdrawals from East Germany. Although much of this speculation was self-generated in both cases, East European sources, at least some of whom are likely to have been encouraged by the Soviets, appear to have played a role in fostering it. Similar rumors appeared in the West again on the eve of Gorbachev's December 1987 journey to the summit meeting with the United States in Washington. In all three cases, no such Gorbachev announcement materialized.

But although the notion of unilateral Soviet withdrawals seems to have been used on occasion in Soviet propaganda efforts in the West for manipulative purposes, some members of the Soviet elite do appear to take the idea seriously, and have now seized the opportunity for more open discussion created by Gorbachev to press the issue in a fashion that others in the elite probably do not welcome.

¹*Détente* (Leeds), October 1984, pp. 2-3. Gerhard Wettig has pointed out that also in 1984, another "pseudonymous Soviet official, Viktor Girshfel'd, talked about sufficient defense and advocated both less reliance on offensive armaments and willingness for unilateral troop withdrawals." (S. Shenfield, "The USSR: Viktor Girshfel'd and the Concept of 'Sufficient Defense,'" *ADIU Report*, University of Sussex, January-February 1984, p. 10, cited in Wettig, "Sufficiency in Defense—A New Guideline for the Soviet Military Posture?" *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 372/87, September 23, 1987.)

²*Détente* (Leeds), No. 2, February 1985, pp. 2-4. In view of the Soviet Union's heavy dependence on its nuclear facilities in the Kola peninsula, the last suggestion was ill-advised, since it probably detracted from the credibility of the interview even with its intended audience.

The most explicit and extensive justification of the concept of unilateral Soviet troop cuts to appear in the Soviet press under Gorbachev was published in a Soviet Foreign Ministry journal in October 1987. United States and Canada (USAC) Institute deputy director Vitaliy Zhurkin and two colleagues asserted that "it would be a mistake to regard the bilateral process of reducing armaments as the only possible way." Zhurkin recalled that

In the initial years after the end of World War II the Soviet Union demobilized about 8.5 million men. In 1955-58 the Soviet armed forces were unilaterally reduced by 2,140,000, and in 1960 there was a decision to make a further cut of 1.2 million, but its implementation was later suspended.

Furthermore, according to Zhurkin,

These unilateral measures, despite their scale . . . by no means weakened the international positions of the USSR. On the contrary, the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s were marked by a rapid growth of the prestige and influence of the Soviet Union . . . Nor did these measures undermine the security of the USSR. For they were accompanied by a broad peace offensive which made it virtually impossible for the West to bring additional military pressure to bear on our country.³

Later in the article, Zhurkin and his colleagues directly attacked the notion of seeking "to build up armed strength with the aim of balancing the combined forces of all potential adversaries," calling this a "totally unrealistic task." This assertion, which they said applied to both the Soviet Union's strategic nuclear matchups and to its conventional regional balances, was tacit condemnation of a long-standing global deployment goal which Soviet leaders had publicly defended in the late 1970s and had vainly sought to get the West to legitimize.⁴ Here again, the implication was that the Soviet Union could safely accept less favorable conventional force ratios against one or more of its regional adversaries than had been thought necessary in the past.

Although these statements appeared in a journal directed at foreign elites and were certainly intended in part to impress a Western audi-

³Vitaliy Zhurkin, Sergey Karaganov, and Andrey Kortunov, "Reasonable Sufficiency—Or How To Break the Vicious Circle," *New Times*, No. 40, October 12, 1987. Many of the arguments in this article were reproduced verbatim with some elaboration in an article Zhurkin and his two colleagues published in the organ of the USAC Institute some weeks later. (V. V. Zhurkin, S. A. Karaganov, and A. V. Kortunov, "On a Reasonable Sufficiency," *SShA: Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya*, No. 12, December 1987 (signed to press 18 November 1987).)

⁴See statements by Boris Ponomarev on April 25, 1978 (TASS, April 25, 1978), and by Andrey Kirilenko on February 27, 1979 (*Pravda*, February 28, 1979).

ence,⁵ their thrust was nevertheless highly controversial in the Soviet context, and they carried polemical overtones. Whatever the reception given Zhurkin's statements outside the country, it seems clear that at home, many Soviet military leaders are concerned at the surfacing of arguments that could be used to justify more unilateralism and a greater degree of asymmetry in future Soviet conventional force reduction than they consider safe for the Soviet Union.

There is now solid evidence of this military concern over the party leadership's decision to allow Zhurkin to air his arguments for Soviet unilateral force cuts. In February 1988, Deputy Defense Minister and air defense commander Ivan Tretyak seized the occasion of a Soviet Army Day interview to contradict Zhurkin's contentions about the beneficial nature of Khrushchev's troop cut.⁶ Tretyak declared:

We shouldn't be lured by apparent benefits. I'm saying that because we've already had sorry experiences of this kind. At the end of the 50s the USSR reduced its army unilaterally by 1.2 million men. The economists estimated that this enabled us to double the size of old-age pensions and to set up 100 house-building plants. On the surface it looked rather convincing. But only on the surface. As a professional military man, I'll tell you that the step was a rash one, it dealt a terrible blow at our defense capacity, and at our officer personnel. At the time skilled personnel, with tremendous combat know-how, left the army. The army officer lost prestige in the eyes of young people. To be honest, we are still feeling this. Therefore, any changes in our army should be considered a thousand times over before they are decided upon. Temporary benefits are a great lure. But I repeat once again—the most important thing is to have a reliable defense. If we were not so strong, then imperialism would not have resisted an attempt to change the world of today. The principle of sufficient defense is unshakable. We must have as much force as

⁵Zhurkin has now been named to head a new European Institute; and his articles, like many Gorbachev-era statements about the new, purely defensive orientation of Soviet military doctrine, are couched in language calculated to appeal to that segment of West European opinion, particularly in the socialist parties of northern Europe, that had espoused a "purely defensive defense" for NATO that would significantly weaken NATO's ability to respond to a Warsaw Pact attack. As noted above, however, the fact that Zhurkin's statements have this external function which all members of the Soviet elite can endorse does not prevent them from also having an internal function which is highly controversial.

⁶Tretyak was also responding, more directly, to the evidence supplied by a Soviet economist in early February regarding the concrete economic benefits achieved by the Khrushchev troop cuts. The economist, V. M. Krivosheyev, had reinforced Zhurkin's arguments by declaring:

In the late fifties, the Soviet Union unilaterally reduced its armed forces by 1.2 million men. This made it possible to build 100 major house-building complexes. In a comparatively short space of time, housing construction was doubled in the country and the old-age pension was doubled. (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, February 3, 1988; cited in Notra Trulock, Kerry Hines, and Anne Herr, *Soviet Military Thought in Transition: Implications for the Long-Term Military Competition*, Pacific-Sierra Research Corporation, PSR Report No. 1831, May 1988.)

is necessary to guarantee reliably the security of the USSR and our allies.⁷

It seems unlikely that Tretyak would have made so strong and so unusual a statement on this sensitive subject unless he felt he had support on the matter from others in the Defense Ministry.⁸

In sum, it thus seems likely that a debate has been going on behind the scenes, and that some of the leaders of the Soviet Ministry of Defense have become genuinely exercised about the possibility that the arguments put forward by civilians like Zhurkin might gain some measure of acceptance by the Gorbachev leadership. It is also quite possible, of course, that such alarm would be displayed even if unilateral cuts or asymmetrical concessions of only a rather modest nature—insufficient to satisfy NATO's requirements for an agreement—were under consideration by the Politburo.

The Roster of Politburo Considerations

Despite the evidence of diminished military leverage in the Soviet decisionmaking process, there is reason to expect that military concerns will remain an important consideration in the mixture of factors that will ultimately determine how **much** unilateralism or asymmetry in conventional force reduction the Gorbachev Politburo will in the end accept. The limits of acceptable concessions are likely to remain uncertain to the leadership itself for some time because of the many variables in play.

One very important but intangible consideration the Soviets must weigh is the extent of the general political benefits for Soviet influence in Western Europe that may be anticipated from Soviet conventional force concessions, whether these involve unilateral withdrawals or acceptance of asymmetrical negotiating tradeoffs. Such hypothetical

⁷*Moscow News*, No. 8, February 28–March 6, 1988. The Soviet military's resentful attitude toward Krushchev—and concern about his example for Soviet policy today—was also displayed in a full-page article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on May 21, 1988, which attacked Krushchev for neglecting the needs of the military. The article cited a secret meeting that took place in the Kremlin soon after Krushchev's ouster, at which senior party leader Mikhail Suslov and Defense Minister Malinovskiy were said to have criticized Krushchev for his "crusade" against the Soviet military.

⁸Other military leaders have attacked the notion of unilateral Soviet reductions in Europe, albeit never yet in so vehemently polemical a fashion. For example, two months before the Tretyak interview, Chief of the General Staff Marshal Akhromeyev declared that "defense adequacy cannot be viewed one-sidedly, irrespective of the balance of armed forces taking shape. It would, furthermore, be a mistake to regard it as one-sided disarmament and unilateral reduction of our defense efforts." This line is of course consistent with the official Soviet negotiating posture toward the West. (Marshal Sergey Akhromeyev, "The Doctrine of Averting War and Defending Peace and Socialism," *World Marxist Review*, Vol. 30, No. 12, 1987, p. 43.)

benefits can be visualized under many headings: for example, the exacerbation of the multiple fissures existing in NATO, the growth of political resistance to military spending and force upgrading, the growth of neutralist tendencies in West Germany, the growth of impediments to French-German military cooperation, and the growth of pressure in both America and Europe for a reduction of the U.S. military presence in Europe. The larger (and more painful) the prospective Soviet concessions, the greater would be the possibility that such a weakening of the ties binding the West together would occur on a significant scale; on the other hand, however, the smaller such concessions are—and the easier they thus are to coordinate in the Soviet elite—the less would be the chance of major Soviet political profit in the West. On the whole, because of the intrinsic uncertainty about the value to be attached to this factor, it is likely to be a particularly disputatious issue in the elite.

Second, the Soviet leaders must of course make assumptions about the extent of the reciprocal concessions that might eventually be elicited from the West in renewed conventional arms negotiations. The fear of preempting and forgoing part of a *quid pro quo* that might some day be obtained through bargaining over force reductions from existing levels is likely to be used as an argument by those in the Soviet elite who wish to minimize Soviet unilateral force reduction gestures. On the other hand, others in the elite are likely to argue that such gestures could serve a "pump priming" function in stimulating Western concessions through the political effect on Western populations.

A third basic ingredient is, of course, the nature of Politburo beliefs about Soviet minimal force needs in Europe. The Soviet military will surely make its biggest input into the discussion here. But much will depend on the extent to which recent Soviet public assertions about a fundamental reevaluation of military doctrine—allegedly scaling down military needs to defensive purposes only—will in fact be translated into new Soviet operational planning in Europe with diminished conventional force requirements.

This remains extremely problematical. In their December SShA article, Zhurkin and his colleagues in fact professed to believe that "operational strategy (clearly even tactics, especially in Europe)" must be brought "into full conformity with the officially declared defensive character of the military doctrines."⁹ While the Soviet military leadership and many others in the Soviet elite will enthusiastically endorse the application of this dictum to NATO doctrines they have castigated as "offensive" (such as Follow-On Forces Attack), it is much less clear

⁹Zhurkin, Karaganov, and Kortunov, *op. cit.*

that they will apply the same enthusiasm to a radical change in Soviet operational planning in Europe. Even assuming that Gorbachev does in fact wish to see the General Staff make such a radical planning change—itsself far from certain—it is even more unclear how far military officials will respond in practice to assumptions foisted on them to which many if not all of them are likely to be unsympathetic. The myriad technical details involved provide extensive opportunity for foot-dragging through surreptitious retention of worst-case assumptions.

Moreover, it is worth noting that Deputy Defense Minister Tretyak, in his earlier-mentioned polemic against the precedent set by the Khrushchev troop cut, cited the principle of "sufficient defense" as the crowning reason **not** to reduce Soviet armed strength. To the same end, Tretyak in that interview also had the following to say about the offense and the "new thinking" about defense:

As before, our war operations remain mostly defensive. But you'll agree that if you only defend yourself, you'll probably not smash the enemy. So, the troops have also to be well versed in the art of attack. This aspect of our doctrine is completely distorted in the West. . . . But I repeat that the army must be able to do **everything** in order to fulfill its duty to society.¹⁰ (Emphasis added.)

Tretyak, like other Soviet military leaders who have made similar assertions, appeared to be implying that this need to maintain an offensive capability could only reinforce the argument against Soviet unilateral reductions.¹¹ Since this attitude appears to be widely shared by his colleagues, it seems safe to conclude that any serious effort by Gorbachev to force through a radical change in Soviet "operational strategy" linked to a drastic reevaluation of force ratios needed in Europe will meet with intense resistance.

A fourth factor concerns Politburo assumptions about the effects that Western economic, political, and demographic constraints are likely to have on the NATO force posture over the next decade in the absence of a conventional arms reduction agreement with the Soviet Union. Expectations on this score are obviously relevant to the judgments made on the previous point, but the answers are also likely to be ambiguous and contentious in Moscow. Military planners will almost certainly strenuously resist suggestions that objective pressures can be expected to bring about a net diminution of NATO capabilities.

¹⁰*Moscow News*, No. 8, February 28–March 6, 1988.

¹¹For further discussion, see Gerhard Wettig, "Sufficiency in Defense—A New Guideline for the Soviet Military Posture?" *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 372/87, September 23, 1987; and Robert Legvold, "Gorbachev's New Approach to Conventional Arms Control," *The Harriman Institute Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1988.

Moreover, even optimistic Soviet assumptions on this matter may have contradictory implications for Soviet policy regarding conventional arms reduction in Europe. An expectation that NATO will have difficulty maintaining existing force levels can reinforce arguments for reduced Soviet force needs—and thus serve to justify Soviet concessions. But others may argue that the same expectation obviates the need for radical concessions, on the ground that NATO will eventually be driven by circumstances to make the best bargain it can get.

A fifth consideration is the Soviet economic dimension: that is, the extent to which the Gorbachev Politburo believes—or rejects—the proposition that the demands of the Soviet economy require large cuts in Soviet conventional forces, and that the economy can in fact make major and effective use of the savings that would result from such cuts. This complex issue, an important part of the equation for Soviet policymakers, is being explored in some detail separately in other RAND studies sponsored by Project AIR FORCE. In general, the preliminary results of this research suggest, first, that manpower and labor constraints will probably not exert nearly as much pressure on Soviet leaders to make force reductions as many in the West suppose,¹² and second, that other economic considerations nevertheless could possibly make such reductions attractive to the Soviet leadership, although these considerations are sufficiently ambiguous to be susceptible to differing subjective interpretations by leaders with differing preconceptions.¹³

Finally, there are the Soviet leadership's judgments as to the extent that Soviet forces stationed in Eastern Europe can be drawn down without risking undesirable consequences in the East European states. The issue is not confined to the question of the force levels required to subdue an outright East European revolt, although some in the Soviet elite may have misgivings on that score. The reintroduction of Soviet reinforcements into Eastern Europe to cope with a major revolt after such forces had previously been withdrawn under an arms control agreement with the West—in violation of such an agreement—would raise complexities for the Soviet Union that did not exist when troops were sent into Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. (For one thing, under some circumstances such a step in violation of a treaty of mutual withdrawal might be construed as threatening in the West, and evoke an international crisis including deployment responses.) Although this consideration would almost certainly not deter the Soviet Union from taking such action if deemed necessary to prevent an East

¹²Steven Popper, research in progress.

¹³Abraham Becker, research in progress.

European state from leaving the Warsaw Pact, many in the Soviet elite will be reluctant even to appear to grant the West a *droit de regard* over Soviet flexibility in moving forces back into Eastern Europe for policing purposes.¹⁴

Probably more important for Gorbachev than this extreme contingency, however, is the question of the psychological effects on Eastern Europe of a major Soviet force reduction. The question here is whether significant Soviet troop withdrawals will tend to dilute the efficacy of Soviet political controls in Eastern Europe, encouraging the self-assertion of some regimes or placing others under increased popular pressures with anti-Soviet implications. Large Soviet troop reductions in Eastern Europe might be more likely to have unsettling political effects because they would follow the demonstrative Soviet removal of INF systems and could suggest an ongoing process of decline in the Soviet force presence. The danger that a visible and significant reduction in the Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe might embolden forces of disaffection inside and outside the East European regimes is compounded by the fact that any such force reduction would take place against a background featuring generational change in East European leaderships, increasing economic difficulties in almost all the East European states, and the atmosphere of ferment being generated in the Soviet Union and diffused into Eastern Europe by *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and a more permissive Soviet posture toward diversity in the bloc. Again, however, assumptions as to the seriousness of this danger are likely to be highly subjective, and will differ from individual to individual within the Soviet leadership.

Possible Military Arguments Against Reductions

The Politburo is thus faced by the need to balance multiple considerations, many either innately uncertain or pointing in different directions. It is against this background that Politburo members will hear the Soviet military leadership voice its conservative prejudices. One may conjecture that the arguments military leaders would privately use in seeking to minimize unilateral reductions or asymmetrical Soviet force concessions would probably include the following:

First, it will surely be argued that major concessions are dangerous because for some time there has been an adverse secular trend in the relative weight of combat which East European forces can realistically

¹⁴From this point of view, some may regard a unilateral reduction as paradoxically preferable to any agreement that granted the West even a nominal say about Soviet troop deployment rights in Eastern Europe.

be expected to bear.¹⁵ This long-term trend is increasing the proportion of combat responsibility which the USSR's own forces in Europe must bear and thus increasing over time the marginal military price to be paid for every Soviet soldier withdrawn. The adverse trend in East European combat effectiveness is driven, above all, by the growing obsolescence of much of the East European weapons and equipment in comparison with the equipment of both NATO and the Soviet Union. Any reservations the Soviets may have centering on the question of East European morale are superimposed on the fact of hardware obsolescence.

Second, the Soviet military leadership is likely to argue that NATO's efforts to develop the ability to use new technologies to hinder Soviet ability to reinforce rapidly from European Russia has also placed a premium on Soviet forces forward deployed. A number of Soviet military leaders—including both Marshal Ogarkov and Marshal Akhromeyev—have for years professed a degree of concern about such NATO new technology programs that may seem excessive to some in the West.¹⁶ (On the other hand, others in the Soviet elite may contend that there are compensating factors that can help enhance the relative strength of Soviet forces deployed in East Europe and thus make it more possible to reduce those forces. One such factor, it may be argued, is technological improvement in Soviet weaponry, manifested, for example, in the installation of reactive armor and deployment of new tank types. Another is the possibility that new changes in the organization of Soviet forces deployed may enhance their combat efficiency.)

Third, some in the Soviet military will probably point to French behavior as an additional argument for caution regarding Soviet unilateral or asymmetrical concessions. Although the General Staff has almost certainly all along taken a worst-case view of France's likely role in a European war, Soviet military leaders can cite the adverse trend of France's increasing quiet cooperation in NATO planning over the last decade as solidifying this estimate. The recent evolution of overt French policy regarding cooperation with West Germany will surely be cited as reinforcing this view, particularly by raising the possibility of a future peacetime forward deployment of French forces in Germany. This factor, it will be said, also increases the danger to the

¹⁵I am grateful to Ross Johnson for thoughts on this subject. For a judgment at the beginning of the 1980s, see A. Ross Johnson, "The Warsaw Pact: Soviet Military Policy in Eastern Europe," pp. 275-283, in Sara Meiklejohn Terry (ed.), *Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1984.

¹⁶See Lt. Col. Michael J. Sterling, *Soviet Reactions to NATO's Emerging Technologies*, The RAND Corporation, N-2294-AF, August 1985.

Soviet Union of any unilateral weakening of Soviet forward deployments. (Others in the Soviet elite, however, may contend that a political campaign tied to dramatized Soviet concessions offers the best hope of inhibiting the further development of West German military cooperation with France.)

Unilateral Cuts Versus Asymmetrical Negotiated Reductions

The complexity of the considerations outlined above appears to give the Gorbachev leadership reason for caution in its behavior in the initial stages of new force reduction negotiations. Large-scale unilateral withdrawals involving a substantial portion of the Soviet forces deployed appear to be quite unlikely, especially at the outset of the new dialogue with the West. Smaller, essentially demonstrative unilateral withdrawals involving no more than three or four divisions are much more possible.¹⁷ Even here, however, there may be a Soviet propensity to wait upon the evolution of the dialogue so that any unilateral gestures may be timed to have the maximum effect upon the negotiation process.¹⁸

In the near and middle term, however, the most important issue for the Politburo is likely to be not Soviet unilateral actions, but rather the tolerable pace and scope of retreats regarding asymmetry in negotiated reductions. The opening Soviet position thus far has been to deny the existence of an overall asymmetry between the strength of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, but to acknowledge specific asymmetries in individual categories of weapons that are alleged to be broadly offsetting. This contention is being used at the outset to support a demand for completely offsetting reductions in different types of

¹⁷In early June 1988, the U.S. State Department announced the existence of evidence that the Soviet Union was contemplating withdrawal of some or all of the four Soviet divisions in Hungary. (*New York Times*, July 9, 1988.) Soviet spokesmen immediately denied the intention to make a unilateral withdrawal of any sort. (*Washington Post*, July 13, 1988.) Nevertheless, an eventual unilateral force withdrawal of some kind from Hungary might have special attractions for the Soviet leadership as a choice for a token "pump-priming" effort to influence Western attitudes toward conventional force reductions. From the General Staff perspective, the forces stationed in Hungary are of secondary military significance, since they are not part of the central front. Consequently, it would probably be less difficult for Gorbachev to secure agreement in Moscow to remove them than it would be to remove comparable forces in East Germany. By the same token, however, the political profit the Soviets might hope to obtain from this step in the most important political arena, West Germany, would probably be commensurately smaller.

¹⁸The Soviets may also be influenced toward caution in the timing and execution of such a gesture because of the limited political impact in the West of the one precedent: Brezhnev's claim to have unilaterally withdrawn 20,000 troops and 1000 tanks from East Germany in 1979-1980.

weapons, a demand which in the view of many in the West would, if accepted, aggravate existing NATO overall disadvantages vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact.¹⁹

The first move by the Soviet bloc toward formalizing this demand for offsetting reductions was made in November 1987, when Polish party leader Jaruzelski stated that the Warsaw Pact was prepared to negotiate reductions in its tank forces in return for cuts in NATO's bomber aircraft based in Western Europe.²⁰ However, the notion of offsetting reductions seemed at first to be vaguely superimposed on and poorly reconciled with the earlier formula put forward in the June 1986 "Budapest appeal," which had called for stage-by-stage equivalent reductions of armed forces, conventional weapons, and tactical nuclear weapons from the Atlantic to the Urals down to 25 percent of the present levels by 1990.²¹

Although the notion of weapons tradeoffs—e.g., tanks versus aircraft—had been raised on a modest scale in the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) arena before, the new Soviet propaganda emphasis on such tradeoffs seemed to imply that they would somehow be integrated in sweeping fashion with the grandiose proposals of the Budapest appeal. It was not until June 1988 that this happened, when the Soviets began to surface an overarching concept for conventional force cuts involving both large-scale weapons tradeoffs and large-scale manpower reductions. Such an umbrella notion, still rather broad and vague, was provided in a proposal formally presented to President Reagan at the Moscow summit meeting in early June, briefed by the Soviets to the Western press three weeks later, and finally published as a Warsaw Pact statement in mid-July.²²

¹⁹The implications of this Soviet position are rendered still more grave by the parallel Soviet demand for reduction of tactical nuclear systems, or of dual-purpose systems, a divisive issue between West Germany and its allies. Acceptance of this demand, in addition to creating various adverse political consequences for the Alliance, might require even greater asymmetries in Soviet conventional reductions to avoid inflicting a net loss on NATO's overall position in the military balance.

²⁰*Washington Post*, November 12, 1987.

²¹For a useful rundown of the Soviet conventional arms control program, including the proposals of the "Budapest appeal," the vague Soviet suggestions for talks on offsetting asymmetries, and various additional proposals for central European "zones" or "corridors" for reduction of deployment of weapons of one sort or another, see G. Stakh, "Program of European Disarmament," *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, No. 10, October 1987, pp. 92-100.

²²The Soviet proposal envisaged a three-phase process: first, an exchange of data to identify imbalances and asymmetries in both men and types of equipment, followed by elimination of such agreed asymmetries through mutual unilateral cuts to levels as yet unspecified; second, a reduction of 500,000 men from each side's forces; and third, the "restructuring" of the remaining forces on each side to render them incapable of attack and capable only of "defensive operations." (*New York Times*, June 24, 1988; *Pravda*,

In the long run, the decisive question, for the West and for the Soviet military, is whether, if the Gorbachev leadership eventually begins to retreat—as it retreated during the INF negotiations—to accept some genuine asymmetry in conventional force reduction, how far such a retreat may ultimately extend. A central concern of the General Staff is likely to be whether in the fullness of time, Gorbachev might retreat so far as to accept very large asymmetrical reductions in the categories of greater concern to NATO, such as divisional equivalents, tanks, and artillery, without receiving compensation (or obtaining no more than token compensation) in the categories in which the Soviet Union now claims NATO to have an advantage, above all tactical air support.

Kulikov's Gambit and the Emerging Soviet Initial Position

In this connection, it is noteworthy that at least one senior Soviet military leader has apparently wished to take out additional "insurance" against the possibility of future slippage in the Soviet negotiating position. On 22 February 1987, Warsaw Pact commander Marshal Kulikov made a statement in a published interview with *Trud* that contained two striking differences with the depiction of aspects of the conventional force balance subsequently adhered to by other Soviet military leaders—and by Kulikov himself. This statement was the first voiced personally by any Soviet military leader assessing which side had the advantage in certain major categories. Kulikov declared:

There is balance in conventional arms in Europe. If we look at total manpower and the number of combat-ready divisions and antitank means the advantage clearly lies with the NATO Allied Armed Forces. There is approximate equality in terms of the amount of artillery and armor. The Warsaw Pact has slightly more tactical aircraft—if we include air defense aircraft.

July 16, 1988.) Under this scheme, although the offsetting weapons cuts would supposedly be unilateral by each side, any such cuts would appear to be driven and predetermined by the outcome of bargaining over the facts about specific aspects of the force balance.

It is noteworthy, however, that even after formalizing in this way the notion of large-scale tradeoffs of different kinds of weapons, Gorbachev has proved willing to depart from this concept to seek momentary political gain. Thus in July 1988 he offered to make "analogous" reductions in Soviet aircraft based in Eastern Europe if NATO would refrain from a planned redeployment of 72 F-16s from Spain to Italy. This proposal was evidently aimed at complicating Italy's political decision to accept the aircraft and impeding NATO's ability in the future to bring American aircraft reinforcements to Europe. This gambit was inconsistent with the notion, which the Soviets were simultaneously urging, that weapons reductions could only be carried out successfully if they served to reduce existing asymmetries. (*Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 1988.)

At a press conference a week later, Chief of the General Staff Akhromeyev made a public statement which also spoke of offsetting asymmetries within an overall conventional parity, but which differed from Kulikov in two key respects: the portrayal of the existing balance in total number of troops, and in tanks. The assessment of aspects of the force balance made in these Kulikov and Akhromeyev statements and in a subsequent Kulikov statement are compared in Table 1.

It would appear that Kulikov made the first high-level public assessment of this kind at a moment when the Soviet General Staff and the political leadership were still thrashing out an agreed public position as a baseline for future dealings with the West about supposed offsetting asymmetries.²³ Kulikov seems to have been particularly concerned to

Table 1
FORCE BALANCE STATEMENTS

Aspect	Kulikov 22 February 87	Akhromeyev 2 March 87 ^a	Kulikov 2 April 87 ^b
Number of troops	NATO advantage	"Virtually absolute" balance	"Approximately the same" ^c
Combat-ready divisions	NATO advantage	—	NATO has "superior number"
Tanks	"Approximate equality in armor"	Warsaw Pact has "more tanks"	WP has "certain advantage in armor, primarily tanks"
Artillery	"Approximate equality"	—	"Approximately the same"
Antitank weapons	NATO advantage	NATO has "much more"	NATO is superior in numbers
Fighter-bombers	Warsaw Pact "slight advantage" in the two categories combined	NATO has more "fighter-bombers and bombers"	NATO is superior in fighter-bomber numbers
Interceptors		Warsaw Pact has more	—

^aMoscow radio domestic service, March 2, 1987.

^bInterview subsequently published in DANAS (Zagreb), April 14, 1987.

^cAlthough since the Kulikov retreat the Soviets generally no longer assert a claim on their own that NATO has numerical superiority over the Warsaw Pact, they are quite willing to cite Western sources who have said this. See, for example, interview with Col. Gen. Nikolay Chervov in *Bratislava Pravda*, December 8, 1987, quoting a statement attributed to French Admiral Sanguinetti.

²³It may be relevant that Kulikov made his initial public statement on this issue on 22 February; Gorbachev announced a reversal of the Soviet position on INF (removing

have the Soviet Union stake out an opening position regarding tanks and artillery—two categories in which the Warsaw Pact has a notorious advantage—that might help to minimize whatever subsequent asymmetrical concessions the Soviet leadership might later be inclined to make regarding these weapons.

If this was the case, he was only partly successful: his claim regarding the balance in artillery was accepted and retained in the standard Soviet position, but his claim regarding armor was not.²⁴ (Indeed, if it had been accepted, there would be little for the Soviets to offer in negotiation about offsetting asymmetries.) At the same time, an early decision was made to emphasize antitank weapons and tactical air (as distinguished from interceptors) as two of the main categories in which the Soviet Union would seek compensation for any asymmetrical reduction in tanks. Finally, the Soviet Union retreated very slightly from Kulikov's extravagant claim that NATO held an advantage in both numbers of men and numbers of combat-ready divisions,²⁵ but retained a position intended to imply the unreasonableness of any demand for large asymmetrical Soviet reductions in divisional equivalents. By April, Kulikov was conforming fully to the details of the agreed Soviet line, in partial contradiction to his February statement. In general, the Soviet leadership appears to have agreed with the marshals on the need for an opening formula that would leave a great deal of "reserve" for any subsequent Soviet concessions, albeit not as much so as at least one of the marshals evidently desired.

Beyond this, the Soviet negotiating strategy appears to be still evolving, and will probably continue to do so for many months. The Soviet

SDI as an obstacle to a zero-zero INF treaty) on 28 February, six days later; and Akhromeyev made his initial public statement correcting Kulikov on specifics of the conventional European balance two days after that, on 2 March. The sequence suggests that a regime decision in principle to make the key Soviet retreat on INF—which suddenly made an eventual agreement to dismantle the SS-20s much more possible—may have touched off a scramble among the marshals to publicly define in greater detail Soviet assumptions about the conventional force balance. In this reading, Kulikov sought to preempt the issue by going public before the Gorbachev announcement was issued.

²⁴Some Soviets do, however, temper acknowledgment of Warsaw Pact superiority in total numbers of tanks by stressing the balance in modern tanks, where they imply the balance is more favorable to the West.

²⁵The Soviets are handicapped in insisting on the credibility of this line because of their past willingness to make MBFR proposals that were modestly asymmetrical. On rare occasion, Soviet analysts in fact depart from the line to acknowledge this circumstance. Thus, in one round table discussion published in *New Times* in July 1987, a retired major general now employed at IMEMO, Vadim I. Makarevskiy, stated: "Of course, a certain disproportion does exist. That is why at the Vienna talks on the reduction of armaments and armed forces in central Europe we have proposed that the U.S. forces be reduced by 13,000 and ours by 20,000." This hint that an overall numerical imbalance favoring the Warsaw Pact does in fact exist was quickly contradicted by the USAC Institute's former general Milshteyn. (*New Times*, No. 27, July 13, 1987.)

leaders have probably not yet fixed the ultimate limits of Soviet concessions. These will probably be determined by future Soviet experience in the bargaining process with the West, on the one hand, and the evolution of the struggle over Soviet force requirements that has now begun in the Soviet elite, on the other.

THE SOVIET FORCES FACING CHINA

The Soviet forces that have been assembled in Asia over the last two decades to confront China represent the second largest Soviet regional deployment. In view of the improvement in aspects of Sino-Soviet relations that has taken place in the 1980s, it is quite possible that the Gorbachev leadership has begun to examine the implications of a future reduction in these deployments. Indeed, it would appear that the Soviet Union has sought to imply to China—without explicitly promising—the possibility of eventual Soviet force reductions in the Far East as an inducement for Chinese conciliation of the USSR.²⁶ But the pros and cons of such a decision are at least as complex for the Soviets in Asia as they are in Europe. Moreover, the issue is conditioned, for both military and political leaders, by realities that are considerably different from those facing the Soviets in Europe. Some of these differences may be viewed by some Soviets as arguing for major reductions. Others, in contrast, may seem to indicate a need for great continued caution.

²⁶To this end, the Soviet leaders have called attention to conciliatory military gestures they have made toward China, both as an inducement for Chinese concessions and as a talisman of possible future Soviet concessions. Thus, in February 1988, Defense Minister Yazov asserted:

The Soviet Union has not built up its grouping of ground forces in the Far East for several years. Moreover, their numbers along the Soviet-Chinese border have been reduced, and some of our troops have been withdrawn from Mongolia. We are showing restraint also in conducting exercises with troops, and we are not increasing their number and scale. (*Krasnaya Zvezda*, February 23, 1988.)

Yazov's allusion to reduction of Soviet forces along the Sino-Soviet border apparently refers to some local thinning out and transfer inland of border contingents, and not to any transfer of forces from Asia. Out of the five Soviet divisions previously stationed in Mongolia, one division and supporting units have indeed been removed, in a token gesture carried out in the spring of 1987, but press reports allege that they have been moved to neighboring Siberia, where they thus still confront China.

The View in the Soviet Political Elite

As in the European case, we will begin with several of the opposing arguments that are likely to occur to the Politburo, and then proceed to the professional military point of view.

1. To begin with, some in the Soviet elite—traditionally, a submerged minority of academics—have felt for a long time that the Soviet buildup against China was always excessive for Soviet needs. Under present conditions in the Soviet Union, this minority now feels a trifle less inhibited from expressing its point of view, if only in very general terms. Thus, certain of the heretical statements about Soviet force needs made by Aleksandr Zhurkin in his earlier-cited October 1987 *New Times* article are couched in terms that apply to Soviet forces opposite China as well as to those deployed in Europe. The emergence of this perspective in print for the first time has coincided with Gorbachev's retirement of two of the most adamant and abrasive of Brezhnev's senior civilian specialists on China, Oleg Rakhmanin of the Central Committee apparatus and Mikhail Kapitsa of the Foreign Ministry.

2. In addition, it is possible that others in the elite who did endorse the necessity of the buildup in the past may nevertheless now be impressed by the improvement of the Chinese demeanor toward the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and see a greatly reduced danger to the USSR from China since the firefights of 1969. Those who feel this way may therefore believe that a gradual, systematic Soviet force reduction would no longer be dangerous, and would go far in consolidating the improvement of relations that has taken place to date. If a Sino-Soviet summit materializes, it will strengthen that view.

3. Some, moreover, may further contend that such a reduction would sooner or later bring in its wake a major change in Chinese policy that has been a Soviet desire for a long time: the dissolution of the present loose Chinese security connection with the United States, and a shift in the Chinese posture in the Sino-Soviet-American triangle, if not back to the pro-Soviet alignment of the 1950s, then at least toward a more truly equidistant position in the triangle than is now the case.²⁷

²⁷Those who see such an opportunity may point to increased bilateral friction in 1987 between China and the United States on several issues, such as the question of Silkworm missile deliveries to Iran or the reaction of the U.S. Congress to Chinese suppression of Tibetan resistance to Chinese rule. In addition, they can cite increasingly vocal Chinese unhappiness at the growth of Japanese military spending, which is strongly encouraged by the United States, and at the appearance of what China considers other manifestations of alleged Japanese militarist sentiment. Optimists in the Soviet elite can draw from these phenomena the conclusion that the Chinese-American relationship is gradually cooling as the Sino-Soviet atmosphere gradually improves, and that a major Soviet unilateral force withdrawal can accelerate this trend.

If this goal were deemed realistic, it would be a powerful attraction for the Gorbachev leadership.

4. Some may believe that a sizeable reduction in the Soviet armed forces would render important help to the Soviet economy, and may also believe that the forces facing China are the safest available candidate for such reductions. As noted earlier, the issue of the degree to which the Soviet economy needs and can utilize such reductions will be explored in another RAND study.

The Gorbachev leadership, however, must also take into consideration factors that are less encouraging.

5. Any such Soviet force reductions will in the end probably have to be essentially unilateral. Although Gorbachev in his July 1986 Vladivostok speech tersely called for negotiations with China on mutual force reductions, the Chinese to date have shown no interest in this suggestion. Because of the great asymmetry in the forces deployed, this is likely to continue to be the case. In contrast to the Soviet dealings with Western Europe, the Soviets cannot cite categories of weaponry deployed in Asia in which the Chinese can be claimed to have an advantage. Nor does China offer a comparable target audience for Soviet arguments for force tradeoffs. Unlike NATO, the Chinese opponent does not represent an international coalition with diverse interests subject to propaganda manipulation and political wedge-driving. Consequently, unlike the case in Europe, there can be little Soviet hope that major Soviet conventional force reductions can be carried out in Asia without serious adverse effects on the present local force balance. The issue, therefore, is whether the anticipated political and economic rewards are worth this cost.

6. The leadership consensus is likely to believe that major unilateral Soviet withdrawals would in any event be highly imprudent until China accepts the legitimacy of the Sino-Soviet frontiers. This objection may be removed if the present Sino-Soviet border negotiations are ultimately successful; however, despite a promising beginning, they still have a long way to go.

7. Major Soviet ground force transfers from Asia to Europe might, under present circumstances, be prejudicial to Soviet chances of success in conventional force negotiations with NATO. On the other hand, any large-scale transfers carried out **after** a conventional arms agreement had been reached in Europe—particularly if that agreement covered the zone from the Atlantic to the Urals, as the Soviets propose—would be considered by the West a flagrant violation of the European agreement. Consequently, geography and Soviet geopolitical interests in pursuing the peace campaign in Europe together seem to dictate that the large conventional force withdrawals from Asia, in

addition to being unilateral, must result in large-scale demobilization rather than transfers. Although some in the Soviet leadership may in the end willingly accept that conclusion, some may find this constraint unwelcome.

8. Soviet force deployments facing China, in addition to serving the traditional primary purpose of constraining Chinese behavior along Soviet borders, for many years have also served a secondary geopolitical purpose: to deter, and to be seen by all concerned as deterring, Chinese military responses to the actions of Soviet clients and allies to China's south. At the time of the Chinese attack on Vietnam in early 1979, Chinese concern about the Soviet force posture in the north was one of the major reasons why Beijing felt it necessary to keep this incursion limited and brief.²⁸ Hanoi has almost certainly regarded this deterrent function of the Soviet force posture vis-à-vis China as one of the major benefits it receives from the alliance with the Soviet Union, even if it has never publicly acknowledged that fact. A major drawdown of Soviet forces facing China while the war in Cambodia continues and major Chinese forces continue to be deployed near Vietnam might therefore create serious complications for the Soviet relationship with Vietnam. This consideration would probably lose most of its force if a settlement acceptable to China were to be reached in Cambodia, but the achievement of such a settlement still seems fairly distant.

9. Some in the leadership may have considerable uncertainty about the extent of the Chinese shift in the Sino-Soviet-U.S. triangle that may be expected to follow a Soviet force drawdown in Asia. The Chinese have made it clear that despite their desire to expand economic relations with the USSR, they also believe their modernization program will continue to require the preservation of their much greater economic dealings with the West, and above all with Japan and the United States. This consideration may be interpreted in Moscow as imposing limits on the extent to which the Chinese can be expected to distance themselves from the United States even after a major Soviet force withdrawal. Meanwhile, the Soviets must expect that Chinese rivalry with the Soviet Union for influence over such places as Mongolia, the Korean peninsula, and especially Indochina is likely to endure.

²⁸Earlier, during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, the Soviets had reason to believe that their force disposition on the Sino-Soviet border was one of the factors inhibiting Chinese behavior, despite the deep Chinese concern about the possibility that India would follow up its conquest of East Pakistan with an attack on West Pakistan. (See Harry Gelman, *The Soviet Far East Buildup and Soviet Risk-Taking Against China*, The RAND Corporation, R-2943-AF, August 1982, pp. 53-69.)

10. A final leadership reservation may stem from concern over the long-term implications of Chinese growth rates, coupled with ongoing uncertainty about the continuity of Chinese policy toward the Soviet Union over the long run.

The Chinese economy has been growing much faster than that of the USSR over the last decade, albeit from a much lower base of development, and many specialists in the West expect a major growth discrepancy to endure despite Gorbachev's efforts to overcome Soviet economic stagnation. Whatever conclusions are drawn from these trends,²⁹ it seems likely in any case that China within the next two decades will be in a position to deploy armed forces that are much more formidable than those it possesses today, should it so choose. At the same time, China will remain a massive neighbor with a huge population facing thinly populated Soviet territories across thousands of kilometers of frontiers. Meanwhile, despite the striking improvement in the Chinese demeanor toward the Soviet Union over the last six years and the moderate inclinations of the present Chinese leadership, the volatility of Chinese foreign policy over the last four decades may leave nagging doubts for some in Moscow about the future. In sum, even if it were deemed safe today, how long would it remain safe to leave relatively empty Siberia and the isolated Soviet Far East without their present military insurance?

The Military Perspective

Whatever the relative merits Politburo members may see in the opposing arguments just summarized, there seems reason to believe that the Soviet military leadership will seek to reinforce the arguments for caution.

A number of senior members of that leadership have come to their present positions after fairly recent service in the Far East Theater of Military Operations (TVD).³⁰ Their experience in the Far East TVD

²⁹Some Western economists suggest there is a nonnegligible possibility that Chinese GNP could exceed that of the USSR by 2010. Nevertheless, Chinese per capita income and technological level even then would almost certainly remain well behind the Soviet Union. (See *Discriminate Deterrence: Report of the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., January 1988, pp. 6-7.)

³⁰Far East experience has for years been reasonably prominent in the Soviet military leadership, simply because Far Eastern posts have become important steps in the career ladder for senior officers. But men with relatively recent service in the Far East seem particularly conspicuous in the Ministry of Defense today. The two most recent commanders of the Far East TVD (Army Generals V. L. Govorov and I. M. Tretyak) have become Deputy Ministers of Defense, while the last Far East Military District Commander, Army General D. T. Yazov, was catapulted by Gorbachev into the high command within the last eighteen months, first as Deputy Defense Minister and then as

took place under peculiar circumstances. This high command was established³¹ less than a decade ago at a time when both the political and military leadership of the Soviet Union perceived—and announced—a growing threat to the Soviet Union in Asia from the prospect of Sino-American-Japanese military cooperation against the USSR. Marshal Ogarkov as Chief of the General Staff was particularly outspoken in warning against that threat through the early 1980s. One of the main purposes of the high command from the outset was to provide greater coherence and coordination for the Soviet forces in Siberia and the Far East, mostly directed against China, in the face of this new supposed threat.

However, with the cessation of Chinese calls for a worldwide united front against the Soviet Union a year or two after the establishment of the high command, and the subsequent gradual improvement in the Sino-Soviet atmosphere, the Soviet political leadership has almost certainly seen the threat of a Sino-U.S.-Japan alliance as rapidly receding. With the growth of the Soviet effort to reduce tensions with China, statements by military leaders directly referring to any Chinese military threat have disappeared; they have probably been banned during the Gorbachev era. (Indeed, as already noted, Defense Minister Yazov in February 1988 was used as the spokesman to sum up publicly those conciliatory gestures in the force posture facing China which the Gorbachev leadership has thus far ordained.) Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that Soviet military commanders are convinced that the Chinese inclination to combine with the United States against the Soviet Union has ended. *Red Star* has taken pointed notice—albeit without comment—of the mutual visits by U.S. and Chinese military leaders in recent years, and of such events as the visit of U.S. naval ships to China in 1986. The Soviet military leadership probably is also particularly sensitive to less publicized aspects of the loose Sino-American security relationship that have endured for the last decade despite Beijing's various points of friction with Washington.

Aside from this general tendency toward a conservative bias about Chinese behavior—which perhaps may not impress the Gorbachev leadership—Soviet military leaders familiar with the problems of the Far East TVD will probably have more specific objections to offer.

Minister. No fewer than six of Yazov's Deputy Ministers all held senior posts or commands in the Far East during the 1970s. Several other officers have simultaneously moved from other command positions in the Far East to prominent Moscow posts in the General Staff or the services.

³¹In fact, reestablished, since such a command had existed in different historical periods before, when the need had been deemed sufficiently great.

First, they will surely rehearse familiar arguments about the extraordinary length and vulnerability of Soviet lines of supply and reinforcement to the Far East, which place a premium in any crisis on forces in being. Although this problem will be mitigated somewhat with the completion of construction of the Baykel-Amur Mainline (BAM, the second Siberian rail line), it undoubtedly remains an important consideration.³²

Second, they will probably point once more to the special vulnerability of some of the largest cities in the Soviet Far East, notably Khabarovsk and Vladivostok, because of their proximity to China. This circumstance, they will presumably claim, continues to require a margin of safety that can only be provided by strong local forces forward deployed.

Third, they will note that the average manning level of Soviet units deployed in the east is on the whole already somewhat lower than the average manning level of forces in the west. Consequently, mobilization of units to full strength under crisis conditions must overcome a relatively greater shortfall in Asia than in Europe. At the same time, it is presumably difficult to count on filling out Soviet units in Asia by relying upon the manpower resources of thinly populated Siberia. Almost inevitably, sizeable manpower reserves west of the Urals will be required to complete mobilization in Asia. Therefore, large drawdowns from already-understrength units in Asia would in a subsequent crisis place a proportionately heavier burden on Soviet reserves, mobilization machinery, and transportation facilities than comparable drawdowns in Europe.

Finally, Soviet military officials will point to the fact that the more deeply that cuts are made in Soviet forces in Asia, the more such cuts will necessarily have to affect one particular subcommand: the Far East Military District. This easternmost military district has both the largest concentration of divisions of any military district in the Far East TVD and the largest number of divisions in relatively high levels of readiness. This is so for a good reason. The most important part of this military district, in Primorskiy Kray, is a narrow, isolated salient, sandwiched between Manchuria and the ocean, with no possibility of defense in depth, and therefore heavily dependent upon fortifications and adequate forces-in-being for protection. The large Soviet city and naval base of Vladivostok is particularly vulnerable because it is at the

³²Although there is rail traffic on several sections of the BAM, the line is not fully operational, nor will it be for several years more. There are still no passenger trains running between the eastern and western terminals, since much work remains to be done, including the completion of key tunnels. From a military point of view, the additional measure of security which the BAM will give the Far East lies mainly in the future.

bottom of this salient. At the same time, Soviet divisions in the military district are necessarily dual-purpose, facing China on one side and Japan and U.S. forces in the Far East on the other. Minister of Defense Yazov until December 1986 was commander of this military district and is likely to be particularly sensitive to these realities and consequently particularly tenacious in striving to resist a major weakening of the defenses of the district.

Five years ago, a well-connected Soviet researcher privately remarked, when asked whether the Soviets were likely to respond to improvements in the Sino-Soviet atmosphere with major force reductions, that on the contrary, certain Soviet generals with whom he was acquainted felt that more, rather than less, Soviet military strength was now required in the Far East.³³ These attitudes are likely to have endured in the military leadership, despite its changes in personnel. In view of ongoing improvements in Chinese force modernization, deployment, and training, Soviet commanders are not likely to believe that the well-advertised Chinese troop cut in recent years has diminished the fundamental problem created for the Soviet Union in the Far East by the inevitable numerical inferiority of Soviet forces. Soviet military leaders are also likely to feel that the Soviet firepower advantage that is traditionally relied upon to offset the manpower disadvantage has to some degree been reduced by the Gorbachev agreement to remove both SS-20s and some shorter-range missiles from Asia as part of the INF agreement. This change, it will be argued, will add to the dangers inherent in any significant unilateral step that would diminish the conventional portion of the Soviet regional firepower advantage.

In sum, the military perspective on major unilateral reductions in Asia, like the military attitude toward major asymmetrical force cuts in Europe, is very likely to be strongly negative. The earlier-noted warnings by Deputy Defense Minister Tretyak against a new Soviet troop cut are not region-specific, and seem to be aimed against reductions that would affect the Soviet force posture in Asia fully as much as such reductions in Europe. The fact that the opponent in Europe is more formidable than the forces opposing the Soviet Union in Asia is likely to be offset, in the minds of Soviet military planners, by the much greater burden placed on the Soviet Union in the Far East by geography. The General Staff's ability to influence the Politburo on this score, however, will remain dependent upon the balance among those other considerations, mentioned earlier, which the political leadership must weigh.

³³Personal conversation.

In this connection, two major variables will probably be pivotal in deciding whether the Gorbachev leadership will eventually move to override military arguments. One is the question of a Sino-Soviet border settlement; the other is the issue of a settlement in Cambodia.

WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

The issue of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan has, of course, all along been quite different from those considered thus far. The forces deployed were significantly smaller than those in Europe or the Far East. Unlike the major deployments in the east and west, the forces that were sent to Afghanistan were outside the traditional Soviet bloc, not placed in garrison within customary borders opposite major national adversaries of the Soviet Union, but instead engaged in a long, frustrating, unsuccessful colonial war of conquest in a neighboring third world country. The question at stake was not a transfer or demobilization of forces already inside the Soviet Union or its East European buffer, but the return of an expeditionary force to the Soviet Union. Finally, there was no prospect of any purely military compensation, as there is in Europe; and the forces involved were not large enough to make a significant difference to the Soviet economy if demobilized.

But the pressures on the Soviet leaders to withdraw from Afghanistan were more severe and urgent than are their inducements to accept large asymmetrical cuts in their forces in Europe or to make large unilateral withdrawals from the Far East. The circumstances suggest that in this case, the views of the Soviet military leadership, while by no means insignificant, have probably been a somewhat less important consideration for the Politburo than they are regarding force cuts in Europe or the Far East.

We shall once again first consider the pros and cons of retreat from Afghanistan from the perspective of Gorbachev and his colleagues, as they moved toward acceptance of retreat in late 1987 and early 1988, and then turn to some judgments about the military leadership's perspective.

The Political Balance Sheet

By the end of 1987, Gorbachev appears to have wished to extricate Soviet forces from Afghanistan for several reasons.

First, not only had the war dragged on far longer than was originally anticipated, but the trends in the struggle had begun to deteriorate.

The influx of certain modern weapons supplied by the United States to the resistance since 1986—particularly surface-to-air Stingers—is generally believed to have had highly adverse consequences for Soviet combat effectiveness. This trend apparently could only have been reversed by a multiplication of the Soviet forces committed to the war, or a vast increase in Soviet military pressure on Pakistan. Gorbachev evidently ruled out both expedients for reasons of both foreign and domestic policy.

Second, experience had shown that neither the internal coherence and reliability of the Afghan Communist party nor the ability of that party to expand its narrow base of political support in the country were likely to improve significantly while Afghanistan remained at war and under Soviet occupation.

Third, trends in the United States suggested that there was an unusually broad American consensus behind support for the Afghan opposition that was not likely to disappear so long as Soviet troops remained in the country. Gorbachev apparently received personal confirmation of this fact during his December 1987 summit visit to Washington.

Fourth, continuation of the war was apparently seen by Gorbachev as a heavy burden on his foreign policy. This was not because foreign criticism of Soviet behavior in Afghanistan had significantly increased in recent years. On the contrary, the adverse external reaction inevitably became somewhat attenuated with the passage of time, especially in comparison with the situation in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet invasion. The war was politically more costly to Gorbachev abroad because the political aims of his foreign policy were different from and more ambitious than those of his predecessors. Prosecution of the war was detrimental to Gorbachev's new global peace campaign—his worldwide effort to portray his leadership as fundamentally different from that of his predecessors, more moderate and reasonable and imbued with "new thinking" that rejected expansionist ambitions. In particular, the war was harmful to his efforts to promote his image of the Soviet Union and to advance promising peace offensives in Western Europe, the United States, and China.

Fifth, Gorbachev apparently believed the domestic consequences of the war for the Soviet Union to be significant. This, again, is not to suggest that domestic opposition to the war existed on a scale resembling the scope of the American domestic opposition to the Vietnam war, or could bring comparable political pressure to bear on the leadership. Rather, Gorbachev evidently felt the Soviet population's widespread unhappiness with the war was quite harmful for his efforts to enlist the enthusiasm and support—and willingness to sacrifice—

that are essential for his extremely difficult struggle to modernize the Soviet economy. In this sense, the war has indeed been a "bleeding wound," as Gorbachev has declared. As in the case of Soviet foreign policy goals, the incentives to retreat in Afghanistan have been increased by the ambitious nature of Gorbachev's domestic goals.

Finally, Gorbachev no doubt anticipates that an end to Soviet participation in the Afghan war will bring a variety of specific rewards for the Soviet Union. He may feel that it will facilitate Soviet efforts to improve relations with the Arab world, and at the same time remove at least one obstacle for a future Soviet effort to mend fences with Iran. It would permit an expansion of recent Soviet efforts to improve dealings with Pakistan, while leaving U.S. future relations with Pakistan more vulnerable than before to domestic American concerns about Pakistan's nuclear policy. It would give considerable impetus to the Soviet peace campaign in the West, and it would also remove one of the "three obstacles" China has posed as hindering a further improvement of Sino-Soviet relations.

Meanwhile, Gorbachev evidently expects that the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan will inevitably exacerbate differences among the Afghan opposition groups. Indeed, conflict among those groups, endemic throughout the war, apparently increased somewhat as the prospect of Soviet departure approached. Moreover, Gorbachev has had some reason to believe that Soviet withdrawal will gradually bring to the surface conflicts of purpose between the United States and some of the fundamentalist mujahideen forces, particularly those supported by Iran. Gorbachev no doubt hopes that the growth of these divisive factors will give the Kabul Communist regime a greater chance to survive than might otherwise be expected.

Opposed to all this, the Soviet leadership has been acutely aware of the heavy costs that may be associated with a withdrawal from Afghanistan.

First, many observers in the West believe that the Afghan Communist party cannot maintain hegemony in Kabul for long in the absence of Soviet troop support. The Soviet Union for a long time sought to build insurance against this eventuality by trying to foster a coalition regime in which the Communists would retain a key role. As the military situation deteriorated and the pressures on Gorbachev to withdraw became more urgent, the chances of success in creating such a regime prior to a Soviet withdrawal grew more and more remote. Therefore, when the decision to withdraw in 1988 was finally made, the Soviet leadership abandoned—in fact, repudiated—the notion of creating a coalition government beforehand. The Soviets now insisted, instead, that the makeup of an Afghan regime must be left to the subsequent decision of "the Afghans themselves."

Gorbachev evidently hopes that this will mean, in practice, a prolonged anarchical civil war in which Afghan rebel factions will fight each other as much as the Kabul Communist regime, while that regime, retaining either open or covert Soviet hardware and financial assistance, will at least be able to maintain its position in the capital, and will use that central position advantageously in any subsequent protracted bargaining over a settlement with the rebels.³⁴ But Gorbachev is surely aware that this scenario has grave flaws, particularly in the assumption that the Communists can long maintain themselves in Kabul. Among other things, such an isolated Communist government in Kabul could find it difficult to maintain control of sufficient territory and roads to supply food to the city. It is now obvious that at least some of Gorbachev's military advisers have been warning him about these grim prospects. Although Soviet public statements since the withdrawal began in May 1988 have generally professed optimism about the future of the Kabul regime after withdrawal, in July one knowledgeable Soviet military observer publicly dissented, declaring that he did "not have confidence" in the Afghan army and its ability to hold off the insurgents.³⁵

An alternative available to the USSR will be to leave behind a corps of a few thousand military and KGB advisers—such as the Soviet Union maintained in Afghanistan between the April 1978 coup and the December 1979 invasion—to buttress Afghan army units and to try to shore up Communist control of Kabul against the expected mujahideen onslaught. After the agreement on Soviet withdrawal was signed in Geneva and the Soviet withdrawal subsequently began in May 1988, the Kabul regime was at pains to announce publicly that Soviet

³⁴This optimistic scenario attributed to the USSR was depicted thus by one pessimistic Western observer: "Soviet troop withdrawal will leave behind a puppet Government whose ministries are laced with Soviet 'advisers.' This regime has international recognition. It also has a well-trained army, years of military supplies, and a Soviet-created air force. It has a powerful secret police with close ties with the KGB. It has the prospect of unending Soviet-bloc economic assistance. The Afghan resistance will find itself alone, without the U.S. military assistance that has kept it fighting. It will be under pressure to join a Communist-dominated government. If it does not, the world will shake its finger, call them naughty, and turn away." (A. M. Rosenthal, "The Great Game Goes On," *New York Times*, February 12, 1988.)

³⁵Major General Kim M. Tsagolov, a former senior military advisor in Afghanistan, was quoted as having told the Soviet weekly journal *Ogonyok* that he expected the present Kabul government to collapse if it encountered military defeats after the Soviet withdrawal, and that the most likely initial outcome was a fundamentalist Islamic regime in Kabul. Tsagolov was said to have charged that Soviet officials had repeatedly exaggerated victories won by the Afghan government and had also overdramatized the accomplishments of Soviet troops. He asserted that the Afghan army was weak because the regime in Kabul had always lacked popular support and had underestimated the threat of the internal armed opposition. (*Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1988).

military advisers would in fact remain,³⁶ and the Soviet Union felt obliged to confirm this statement and to insist that this would be consistent with the withdrawal agreement.³⁷ The size of the advisory corps that Gorbachev will leave behind, however, remains uncertain. In general, the usefulness of this expedient for Gorbachev is questionable. The more sizeable and visible any remaining Soviet military presence, the more likely it will be that this presence will gravely dilute the external and internal benefits which Gorbachev hopes to obtain through withdrawing. At the same time, the chance that a Soviet advisory corps will make a significant difference to the ultimate outcome is itself highly uncertain, in view of the possibility of further rapid erosion of the Communist regime and its army.³⁸

In sum, Gorbachev must be aware of the strong possibility that despite all the safeguards he has sought to create, Soviet withdrawal will open the way for the eventual ascendancy in Afghanistan of forces hostile to the Soviet Union. This prospect has, of course, all along served as a major inhibition against Soviet withdrawal. Whatever the immediate circumstances and nominal arrangements surrounding a withdrawal, such an end result would make it clear to all in the Soviet elite that the Soviet Union had accepted a decisive defeat. The recriminations and other internal political repercussions of this result within the Soviet Union might be substantial,³⁹ although it could be possible to mitigate this effect by ensuring that all members of the leadership endorsed and shared responsibility for a decision to withdraw.

Second, the Soviet leaders may have some concern that the triumph of fundamentalist Moslem forces in Afghanistan could pose future problems for internal Soviet stability in view of the susceptibility of Moslem populations in Soviet Central Asia. At the outset of the war, the Soviets appear to have exaggerated their concern on this score when they cited the issue as justification for their original invasion. Nevertheless, the external threat of Moslem fundamentalism appears to have become a more serious problem as the war has gone on, partic-

³⁶*New York Times*, April 29, 1988.

³⁷*Pravda*, May 16, 1988.

³⁸At least one of the several considerations that led the Soviet leaders to order an invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was the fact that despite the Soviet military advisory presence, the trends in the war against the guerrillas were growing more adverse.

³⁹In the fall of 1986, one Soviet academic insisted to the author that such a result would constitute a personal political setback to Gorbachev of major dimensions, and therefore would be intolerable.

ularly in the last couple of years, and it could become still more important under the new circumstances that might follow a Soviet pullout.⁴⁰

This issue has the potential to create acute political problems for Gorbachev, because some in the Soviet Union are already publicly holding up a standard of Soviet security against this threat which Gorbachev may find it difficult to fulfill in the aftermath of the Afghan withdrawal. Thus in February 1988 the pro-military writer Aleksandr Prokhanov claimed that although the main Soviet purposes in Afghanistan were not attained, one Soviet war aim had been met:

Despite everything that was not achieved, Iran-type fundamentalism is no longer possible in the country. . . . The threat of the emergence on the USSR's borders of an extremist Muslim regime prepared to take its propaganda and practice onto the territory of our Central Asian republics—that threat will not be fulfilled.⁴¹

Since the Soviet leaders can hardly have great confidence in this flat assertion, its publication is politically provocative, because it raises expectations about the consequences of the withdrawal whose disappointment can be attributed to the architect of the withdrawal. As already noted, by July 1988 one Soviet military authority—General Tsagolov—was publicly contradicting Prokhanov, and was asserting that Islamic fundamentalism might indeed come to power in Afghanistan. In the event that a subversive Moslim regime does materialize in Kabul, recriminations in Moscow are likely to multiply.

Finally, the Soviet leadership must be concerned about the effects of withdrawal upon their other third world clients. Many regimes and movements now associated to one degree or another with the Soviet Union would be disturbed at what they would perceive as Gorbachev's willingness to sacrifice the Kabul regime, and would inevitably raise questions about the future constancy of Soviet behavior toward themselves. The damage done to Soviet prestige in this respect would to some degree counterbalance the external benefits obtained in other respects. In the past, concern over this prospect had probably been another factor inhibiting Soviet movement toward withdrawal.

⁴⁰In late 1987, the head of the Tadjik KGB stated that in 1986–1987 “dozens of trials” had been held in Tadjikistan of “ringleaders—unofficial Muslim clerics who not only fanned religious sentiments but also called for a ‘jihad’ against the existing system.” They were said to have set the “goal of infiltrating party, Soviet, and law enforcement organs in order to facilitate the implementation of hostile designs,” including, in particular, mass draft evasion. (Speech by V. V. Petkel, *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* (Dushambe), December 30, 1987.)

⁴¹*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, February 17, 1988.

The Military Perspective

There can be little doubt that the Soviet military leadership by now regards the Afghan war as a frustrating and humiliating experience. The one professional benefit which the Soviet armed forces have obtained from the war has been the opportunity to test new weapons, develop new tactics, and provide combat experience to thousands of officers who have lacked such experience since World War II. But the war has been harmful to the military establishment in other specific respects:

- It has fostered distrust of military judgment by the party leadership, particularly in view of the overly optimistic expectations military leaders apparently created at the outset. It is widely believed, for example, that in the months preceding the December 1979 invasion, General Pavlovskiy, commander of Soviet ground forces, provided an unrealistic estimate of prospects for suppressing the resistance, and particularly of the degree to which the Soviet Union could count on the Afghan Communist army after an invasion.⁴²

- The war has had seriously adverse effects on the prestige of the armed forces among the Soviet population. The growing malaise fostered at home by the unpopularity of the stalemated conflict has surely contributed to the vulnerability of the military establishment to the sniping from hostile intellectuals that has emerged in the Gorbachev era. As noted earlier, Minister Yazov and other Soviet military leaders have shown acute sensitivity to this changed atmosphere.

At the same time, Soviet lack of success in Afghanistan has also had adverse consequences for Soviet military prestige abroad. Certainly, many foreign observers who shared the original Soviet expectation of a quick suppression of the resistance have since been led to revise their judgments about Soviet capabilities in some circumstances. Particularly humiliating for the Soviet military is the widespread impression that the Soviet Union, a superpower, was forced to restrict air and helicopter operations—and thus to relinquish the initiative—because of inability to deal with a few hundred modern weapons in the hands of undisciplined tribesmen. Regime sensitivity to this matter of Soviet military prestige apparently was largely responsible for the decision in early 1988 to give major publicity to the effort to relieve the city of Khowst, at the same time that the Soviet leaders began speaking more concretely about an intention to withdraw from Afghanistan. The leadership seemed to perceive a need to demonstrate a military victory,

⁴²See Francis Fukuyama, *Soviet Civil-Military Relations and the Power Projection Mission*, The RAND Corporation, R-3504-AF, April 1987, pp. 53-55.

however minor and ephemeral, as cover for a coming withdrawal that might constitute a major military defeat.

— In addition, Soviet military commanders are likely to believe that the war in Afghanistan has been detrimental to the morale of the Soviet armed forces. It has dramatized and accentuated long-existing tensions between new and veteran recruits, and it has apparently served to increase the spread of drug usage in the armed forces. In this sense, the war is probably believed to be a debilitating factor.

— Finally, the war has to some extent aggravated the manpower problem faced by the Soviet military leadership. In a period when Soviet forces deployed in different theaters have been more and more thinly stretched by competing demands, and when total manpower allocated for the military can no longer be allowed to grow as it has in the past, the 115,000 men sent to Afghanistan are probably seen in the General Staff as a subtraction from resources needed elsewhere—most notably, from the reserves of the forces deployed against Western Europe.

But despite all these reasons in principle to welcome an end to the war, there is also little doubt that many in the Soviet military leadership will react with some bitterness to Soviet withdrawal, particularly if circumstances ultimately make it difficult to disguise the fact of Soviet defeat.

— The Soviet marshals, like their American counterparts during the Vietnam war, are likely to believe that they were forced to fight the war under unworkable constraints, since they were denied both sufficient resources to overwhelm the mujahideen and sufficient freedom of action to inhibit the adversary's use of Pakistan as sanctuary and support base.⁴³ Forced to fight the war under these constraints and for purposes determined in the first place by their party superiors, they doubtless see themselves as scapegoats for the leadership failures of others. They no doubt also fear that in the years following a Soviet withdrawal they may be exposed to insulting questions about their performance in Afghanistan and about the wisdom of their pre-invasion recommendations, just as they have been forced to reply to unprecedented public questions about the wisdom of the deployment of the SS-20 missiles since the decision was made to withdraw them. And above all, they will see withdrawal under present circumstances as a

⁴³Some observers have contended that the logistical infrastructure the Soviets created in Afghanistan could not have supported a much larger combat force. But it seems likely that given sufficient priority and sufficient investment, this problem would have been overcome. In point of fact, all concerned in the decision to invade Afghanistan appear to have gravely underestimated the scope of the task, and the consensus that endorsed the invasion never became a consensus to enlarge the commitment beyond the framework originally envisaged.

tacit admission that all the Soviet blood shed in Afghanistan was in vain.⁴⁴

— In addition, the Soviet military leadership may have given the Politburo one concrete security concern as a reason for caution about withdrawal. During the last few years, the mujahideen on several occasions have staged small, hit-and-run military raids into the Soviet Union, which have evoked draconian reprisals. Some marshals are likely to have argued that under the conditions of near-anarchy that may evolve in Afghanistan after a Soviet withdrawal, the Soviet borderland may again be exposed to sporadic attacks.⁴⁵

In sum, the military leaders of the Soviet Union are likely to have mixed emotions about the Soviet withdrawal. While they are painfully aware of the harm that the war has done to their professional interests, they are also probably reluctant to have the Soviet Union appear to confirm defeat through withdrawal, and probably concerned as well about the eventual consequences of an Afghan debacle for their domestic position. But they are also aware that frustrating experience has reduced their leverage on Politburo choices on this issue. This leverage has also been weakened by the 1987 dismissal of Defense Minister Marshal S. L. Sokolov, who for several years had personal responsibility for the Afghan war effort and who very probably felt a personal vested interest in avoiding a Soviet retreat from Afghanistan that would confirm his failure.

⁴⁴Although Marshal Akhromeyev, responding to a provocative question by Western journalists in 1987, insisted that the Soviet deployment into Afghanistan had not been a mistake (*New York Times*, October 30, 1987), the Soviet military leaders are evidently now well aware that they cannot maintain this pretense in the wake of a withdrawal. The new posture taken by the military and its defenders was displayed by the aforementioned Aleksandr Prokhanov, a favorite of Minister Yazov, in his February 1988 article. Prokhanov denied that the departure of Soviet troops represented a defeat, and denied that they had been "sent in in vain," but acknowledged that "an incorrect prediction was made." Errors, he said, had been made "by specialists in Islam, diplomats, politicians, the military." The blame was thus appropriately diffused. (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, February 17, 1988.)

In the spring of 1988, the Soviet Central Committee was reported to have adopted a document formally confirming that the Afghanistan invasion had been a mistake, but apparently avoiding specific allocations of blame. (*New York Times*, June 17, 1988.)

⁴⁵The earlier-mentioned head of the Tadjik KGB also declared, in his statement of December 1987, that the "dushman gangs are stepping up their activity in provinces bordering the USSR. The enemy is trying to transfer armed forms of struggle to Soviet territory. That is why in March and April this year, on the special services' direct instructions, the dushmans carried out armed actions on the border and on the territory of Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab Oblasts." He went on to note that the KGB and its border guards had been charged with suppressing such raids. (V. V. Petkel, *Kommunist Tadzhikistara*, December 30, 1987.)

Prospects

Between 1979 and 1988, the evolution of events in Afghanistan, changing leadership personalities, and shifting foreign and domestic priorities have produced a cumulative change in Politburo attitudes regarding the relative costs and benefits of persevering versus withdrawing, and this shift has now overridden any objections of the Soviet military leaders. To be sure, although it has accepted the necessity of military withdrawal, the Gorbachev leadership evidently is still not prepared to sacrifice all Soviet interests in Afghanistan without a struggle.

The Soviet leaders have thus sought to create conditions for the withdrawal period that might protect the security and prestige of the Soviet forces withdrawing and possibly also preserve a political foothold for Soviet influence in Afghanistan after the withdrawal. They will presumably do their best to try to forestall the crumbling of the Afghan Communist regime and army during the withdrawal period. To the same end, they will presumably withdraw last those few Soviet elite units which have been doing the bulk of the fighting, and which will thus serve as both a rear guard for the withdrawing forces and a protective screen for the Afghan regime during the transition period. They apparently intend to vary the rate of withdrawal, slowing it down when deemed necessary to protect the morale and bargaining power of the Kabul regime and the security of the retreating Soviet forces.⁴⁶ Along the same line, they have already begun an extensive, coordinated new Soviet effort to try to tie Afghanistan's northern provinces economically to the USSR and to purchase the allegiance of local leaders in those provinces.⁴⁷ And they may hope that eventually the

⁴⁶In July 1988, the late Pakistan President Zia asserted that the Soviet Union had not only ceased withdrawing its forces, but had brought back 10,000 Soviet troops to defend Kabul. (*Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1988.) The Soviet government had previously publicly indicated that it might slow the withdrawal if Pakistan and the United States continued to aid the Afghan resistance. (*Washington Post*, May 29, 1988.) Soviet Chief of the General Staff Akhromeyev, however, sharply denied Zia's assertion, and claimed that the withdrawal would proceed. (*New York Times*, July 25, 1988.) Subsequently, Zia retracted his charge. While further zigs and zags in the process of withdrawal are quite possible, it appears on the whole unlikely that the Soviet leadership can afford the political cost of reneging on the decision to withdraw.

⁴⁷In December 1987, a Moscow meeting chaired by Politburo member Yegor Ligachev was held in the Central Committee to coordinate expansion of what was apparently a large-scale, emergency program of economic *sheftsvo*—or *patronage*—for Afghanistan, to which all Soviet regions and republic were required to contribute. The decision to expand this emergency program may well have been one consequence of a decision to withdraw Soviet forces from the country. Subsequently, in March 1988, the Afghan regime announced creation of a new province in northern Afghanistan bordering the Soviet Union, in the area which contains most of Afghanistan's gas and oil reserves. These events have prompted some speculation in the West that the Soviets may intend,

growth of conflicts among the mujahideen and between the mujahideen and the Pakistan government will enable the Kabul regime with its Soviet advisers to maintain an advantageous bargaining position as the nucleus of a future coalition.

But if these efforts and hopes should fail, and if Gorbachev in the end should find himself obliged to settle for more adverse terms of extrication from Afghanistan, the Soviet military leadership is not likely to be able to influence his colleagues to prevent it.

CAM RANH BAY AND VIETNAMESE WITHDRAWAL FROM CAMBODIA

The questions raised for the Soviet political and military leaderships by the war in Cambodia are, once again, significantly different from those the Soviet Union faces in Afghanistan.

In Indochina the issue of Soviet military retreat does not arise directly, but only as a possible byproduct of future Soviet behavior affecting Vietnam's interests. In this case, what is at stake is not a ground force presence, but the naval, air, and intelligence facilities which Vietnam has allowed the USSR to build up at Cam Ranh Bay and Danang as a *quid pro quo* for Soviet massive subsidization of the Vietnamese economy, Soviet underwriting of the Vietnamese war of conquest in Cambodia, and Soviet deterrence of China, which vehemently opposes Vietnamese aims in that war.

Of the three major powers whose interests intersected in Indochina twenty years ago, the Soviet Union has displaced successively both the United States and the PRC. The United States has accepted this geopolitical defeat, but China emphatically has not, and Soviet and Chinese interests today clash more openly in Indochina than anywhere else in the world. While the USSR underwrites Hanoi's protégé regime in Phnom Penh, China supports its principal military opponent, the Khmer Rouge, through resupply via Thailand.

The Cam Ranh Bay and Danang facilities and the Soviet privileged position in Indochina which they symbolize are not at risk for the Soviet Union so long as the USSR maintains its threefold support for Vietnam. This support is politically costly for the USSR, however. Soviet backing for Vietnam's war of aggression has contributed to the general weakness of Moscow's political position in East Asia over the last decade. More particularly, China has demanded that the Soviet leaders place sufficient pressure on Vietnam to force Hanoi to

if Kabul should fall, to set up a buffer zone adjoining the Soviet Union. (*New York Times*, April 1, May 20, 1988; RFE/Radio Liberty *Soviet-East European Report*, Vol. V, No. 24, May 20, 1988.)

relinquish control of Cambodia and withdraw from the country.⁴⁸ The PRC has made this demand, in fact, the most important prerequisite for the further improvement of Sino-Soviet relations along lines Gorbachev has been seeking: for example, it is the prerequisite for a Gorbachev-Deng Xiaoping summit.

This does not mean that the Chinese are adverse in principle to any compromise in Cambodia, but it does mean that it is difficult to envision a settlement that would not entail major political losses of influence for either China or Vietnam at the hands of the other. There is some reason to suppose, for example, that the PRC may be willing to support a settlement which enforced exile upon hated Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot, and which gave the Khmer Rouge a less than dominant position—on paper—in a coalition government headed by Prince Sihanouk.⁴⁹ But the Chinese are highly unlikely to abandon all support for the Khmer Rouge—the principal military opposition to the Vietnamese-sponsored regime in Cambodia—or to accept any settlement which allowed Cambodian military forces and military personalities obedient to Hanoi to remain as the key instruments of power in a coalition government.⁵⁰ In any other kind of settlement, however, the enemies of Vietnam are likely to gain practical military ascendancy in Cambodia, since the Khmer Rouge are at present the only significant military force alternative to the Vietnamese and their Cambodian puppets now existing in Cambodia.

One way out of this dilemma might be a settlement that provided for the insertion into Cambodia of an international military force in which Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union and their various close sympathizers would not be represented but which would be large enough to predominate over both the Khmer Rouge and the military forces of the present Cambodian regime. During his December 1987 negotiations in Paris, Sihanouk proposed the creation of such a force and suggested several countries that might take part, including France. Subsequently,

⁴⁸China continues to denounce Hanoi's announcements of intention to withdraw its forces from Cambodia as insincere. In July 1988, the PRC charged, for example:

It is . . . deceptive to pretend that the command of the Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea will be withdrawn and the remaining Vietnamese forces placed under the direction of Phnom Penh. Vietnam is reported to be re-designating its remaining troops in Kampuchea as troops of the Heng Samrin regime in an attempt to leave them in Kampuchea forever. The troops will wear the uniform of the Heng Samrin regime. (*Beijing Review*, July 11-18, 1988.)

⁴⁹See Keyes Beech, "A Settlement in Cambodia?" *Washington Post*, June 1, 1988.

⁵⁰Thus, Chinese broadcasts to Cambodia in July 1988 were asserting that Vietnam was seeking through negotiations "to create a government with the group of Heng Samrin as the main actor, a government that Vietnam can keep under control as before." The Vietnamese, said the PRC, "have played many tricks," and "this has led some people to have blurred vision." (Beijing radio, July 11, 12, 1988, in *FBIS Daily Report-China*, July 14, 1988, pp. 11-13.)

Sihanouk obtained at least temporary approval for this notion from the anti-Vietnamese coalition,⁵¹ but Vietnam thus far has been unwilling to consider it. And although at least one Soviet writer has indicated interest in the international force suggestion,⁵² the Soviet government has remained generally silent on the issue, evidently because it is unwilling to confront Hanoi on the matter.⁵³

The Soviet problem has been that massive Soviet pressure on Vietnam sufficient to accommodate China's wishes could well incur such resentment as to jeopardize the Soviet geopolitical advantage in Indochina, and with it, the base at Cam Ranh Bay. As earlier noted, the Vietnamese are probably already considerably disturbed by the Soviet decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, which is being interpreted in many quarters as symptomatic of a general shift in Soviet behavior that could presage a reduction in Soviet support for Hanoi.⁵⁴ Vietnamese anxiety and anger are likely to have been exacerbated by the Soviet Union's failure to give Vietnam more than lukewarm political support after a Sino-Vietnamese naval clash near the disputed Spratly Islands early in 1988. Under these circumstances, the Vietnamese are likely to react strongly to any Soviet suggestions regarding Cambodia considered to reflect a desire to betray Vietnamese interests in order to propitiate China.

The response of the Soviet leadership thus far has been to temporize. While maintaining and even increasing his economic assistance

⁵¹*New York Times*, July 2, 8, 9, 1988. The Khmer Rouge, however, have also shown great reluctance to see an independent military force enter Cambodia.

⁵²This is Aleksandr Bovin, whose preferences have often gone well beyond official Soviet policy in many areas. In a Moscow radio round table on July 10, 1988, Bovin noted that "so far Hanoi is very cool" toward the notion of an international force in Cambodia, but added that "at least it is being discussed," and that "this is an interesting turn of events."

⁵³A Soviet broadcast to Cambodia on July 11, 1988, in fact leaned in the other direction, and insisted that "the people's power in Cambodia has been strengthened . . . [and] present-day Cambodia is capable of taking care of the defense of its own independence." The implication was that no outside force was needed or desirable, and that the present Cambodian regime would supply whatever military force was needed. (*FBIS Daily Report—Soviet Union*, July 13, 1988, p. 34.)

⁵⁴A Hungarian radio commentator made a rather frank suggestion to this effect in a February 1988 broadcast. Noting that the Soviet announcement of intention to withdraw from Afghanistan represents "a criticism of the policy of the previous leadership toward Afghanistan," he added:

As regards a comparison with other crisis regions, I think that events move along parallel lines. After all, to take another example in Asia—the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea, which can also not be divorced from the policy of the earlier Soviet leadership—we see that there are also very intensive negotiations under way regarding Kampuchea. Though the Soviet Union does not exert direct pressure on Vietnam, Vietnam must take into consideration the fact that with the changes in Soviet foreign policy, the entire international background of the Cambodian question has changed. (Budapest domestic service radio, February 14, 1988, in *FBIS—East Europe*, February 16, 1988, p. 21.)

to Vietnam, Gorbachev has apparently strongly encouraged Hanoi to start negotiations regarding the future of Cambodia, and a new Vietnamese leadership, anxious to escape its international isolation, has been willing to do so. Hanoi has therefore seized upon the desire for negotiations shown by Prince Sihanouk, titular leader of the anti-Vietnamese Cambodian resistance coalition, and has allowed a series of talks to begin between the coalition and Hun Sen, premier of the Vietnamese-backed regime in Phnom Penh.

Thus far, however, Hanoi has evidently regarded these talks mainly as a device with which to strive to drive wedges among its opponents—that is, to exacerbate differences between Sihanouk and his Cambodian coalition partners, between Sihanouk and China, and among the ASEAN states. Hanoi indeed appears to have had some initial success in this endeavor, which seems aimed at strengthening the legitimacy and bargaining position of the Phnom Penh regime. In short, Vietnam has thus far treated the negotiations as a new, political front in its struggle to maintain hegemony in Cambodia. Because there are important divisions and weaknesses in the anti-Vietnam coalition, and because the military struggle in Cambodia has also recently been going fairly well for Vietnam, the Hanoi leadership does not yet seem even to have begun to consider a settlement that would surrender the essence of control in Phnom Penh. Vietnam may well hope that the continuation of favorable trends will eventually render this question moot. For similar reasons, the Soviet Union, while urging Vietnam to try to settle its differences with China, does not yet seem to have been willing to place decisive pressure on Vietnam to meet China's terms. Indeed, so long as Vietnam's political offensive appears to be making progress without major concessions, it will be difficult for the Soviets to argue for such concessions.

The issue, therefore, is whether—if Vietnam is ultimately disappointed in its hope of further political and military gains that might produce a settlement legitimizing its advantage in Cambodia—time may bring a change in Gorbachev's behavior toward Vietnam. If time elapses and the negotiations remain fruitless, the anti-Vietnam international coalition does not begin to collapse, and Hanoi is unable to carry out its public promises of complete withdrawal from Cambodia because the Phnom Penh regime still cannot maintain itself militarily, how far will the base at Cam Ranh Bay then inhibit Gorbachev from pressing Vietnam for concessions to China? The opposing considerations on this matter are now much more complex than they were earlier in the decade.

The Changing Political Calculus

In the first place, there is evidence to suggest that at least some important figures in Gorbachev's party apparatus no longer assign the same value to the military facilities at Cam Ranh Bay—as **facilities**—that the dominant forces in the apparat perceived five years ago. In the spring of 1983, Ivan Kovalenko, deputy chief of the Central Committee's International Department, made statements during a visit to the United States that made it clear that he was highly envious of the continuing American advantage in naval reach and basing facilities, and that he regarded Cam Ranh as a valuable step forward in the Soviet effort to compete with the global presence of the United States.⁵⁵

Although Kovalenko is still in place today, the advent of Gorbachev has brought important changes in the Soviet party apparat. The heads of both the International Department and the Socialist Countries Department of the Central Committee have been replaced. In early 1987, a prominent Soviet academic, when reminded of Kovalenko's 1983 statements aggressively defending the Soviet right to a base at Cam Ranh Bay, asserted that Kovalenko no longer "had it all his own way" on this matter.⁵⁶ And in May 1987, a younger apparatchik who is now a sector head in the Socialist Countries Department insisted that some Americans "greatly exaggerate" the value the Soviet Union assigns to the Cam Ranh facilities and the leverage it exerts on Soviet foreign policy.⁵⁷ It is plausible that some in the apparat do now feel this way, in view of Gorbachev's heightened stress on the importance of political instruments for the expansion of Soviet influence, in contrast to Brezhnev's relatively greater stress on the military instrument.

On the other hand, Cam Ranh Bay has ironically been given a new political importance for the Soviets by Gorbachev's peace campaign in the Far East, and by his propaganda offensive against the American bases in the Philippines. Gorbachev in July 1986 hinted that the Soviet Union might be willing to depart voluntarily from Cam Ranh Bay if the United States were to leave the Philippine bases.⁵⁸ The tacit suggestion of a trade has since been made explicit by Soviet academics in private conversation on many occasions, and finally by Gorbachev himself in September 1988. The Soviets are of course well aware that the Philippine bases are much more important to the United States than Cam Ranh Bay is to the Soviet Union, and they apparently

⁵⁵Personal conversation with the author.

⁵⁶Personal conversation with the author.

⁵⁷Personal conversation with the author.

⁵⁸Speech in Vladivostok, reported in *Pravda*, July 30, 1986.

believe that the offer of a trade serves them well by reinforcing the political attack on the American bases.

More broadly, the Soviet leaders seem to feel that the Soviet naval presence in the Western Pacific which Cam Ranh Bay helps support is an important factor in the ongoing Soviet campaign to undermine East Asian political support for the American naval presence. Because growing Soviet naval operations out of Cam Ranh Bay create a local impression of growing superpower naval competition, they tend to strengthen demands for the creation of "nuclear-free zones," a tendency that is much more harmful to U.S. interests than to Soviet interests, since Pacific naval operations are more important to America than to the USSR.⁵⁹

In sum, the Soviet leadership's attitude toward Cam Ranh Bay today is probably somewhat ambivalent. Gorbachev indeed may not regard the military uses the Soviet Union obtains from this base as having overriding importance for Soviet interests. However, he probably does see the Soviet presence at Cam Ranh Bay as feeding Asian concerns about superpower competition that indirectly help Soviet interests. More important than either consideration is the symbolic importance the base has acquired for the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship as a whole. The Soviet Union by now has a heavy political and economic investment in the advantageous geopolitical position it has acquired in Indochina, and reluctance to sacrifice this broad political advantage is probably a more important inhibition for Gorbachev than is the need to retain the Cam Ranh Bay base.

The Military Viewpoint

The central point to be made about the Soviet military leadership's attitude toward the military facilities at Cam Ranh Bay and Danang is that loss of the facilities would probably not be quite as painful to the high command as any of the other potential Soviet retreats discussed in this paper.

This is not to say that the military leadership does not value the Cam Ranh base and would not regret its loss. On the contrary, the base is surely regarded as a major convenience for Soviet naval operations in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean, for submarine repair, and for intelligence collection against both American and Chinese facilities

⁵⁹On the other hand, it is also true that the United States seeks to build political support for its naval operations in the Pacific by citing the dangers created by the Soviet presence at Cam Ranh Bay. In recent years, this American argument seems to have been counterbalanced by fears about the superpower competition in the region.

and operations in the Pacific. And many in the military leadership would probably agree that the significance of the Soviet position at Cam Ranh Bay might be further enhanced if autonomous political trends in the Philippines should ever result in the expulsion of the United States from its Philippine bases.

But however useful the Cam Ranh facilities, the dominant forces in the military leadership would surely see their loss as less damaging to the national security than major highly asymmetrical Soviet reductions in Europe, or major unilateral troop withdrawals from the Far East, or a withdrawal from Afghanistan that resulted in consolidation of a new hostile regime adjoining Soviet Central Asia, or sacrifice of the disputed islands south of the Kuriles to Japan. These four retreats would each be seen as affecting the immediate security of Soviet frontiers, whereas departure from Cam Ranh Bay would signify only the loss of a distant outpost. In this sense, Cam Ranh Bay has always been a military luxury for the Soviet Union.

Moreover, the General Staff has probably long recognized that Cam Ranh Bay, like some other Soviet distant positions scattered around the world, would be indefensible in the event of war. The essential vulnerability and secondary military importance of the Soviet position in Vietnam has probably been reflected in Soviet war planning, which of necessity must give highest priority in Asia to the defense of Soviet facilities in the Soviet Far East, that is, in northeast Asia.

It is plausible to suppose, however, that the leadership of the Soviet navy, while accepting the primacy of the mission of protecting the Soviet Far East, has all along attached greater importance to Cam Ranh Bay than have the dominant forces in the General Staff. Such a view would be consistent with Admiral Gorshkov's ambitious claims for the role of the Soviet navy in promoting the interests of the Soviet state in distant waters. Even Gorshkov's successor, Admiral Chernavin, who has been far more restrained in this respect, could have some difference of view with the marshals regarding the Cam Ranh base, especially since he is a submarine officer who may give special weight to the value of the submarine repair facilities there.⁶⁰

⁶⁰On Navy Day in July 1987, Chernavin was asked by a Soviet journalist about an alleged U.S. contention that the Soviet Union was a land power that "had no right to create a powerful fleet," and about accusations that the USSR was conducting naval expansion in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Chernavin replied that it was the United States that was building up in the area, and that "to parry any potential threat by the U.S. fleet, Soviet warships are forced to sail the sea and ocean areas from which the United States does or could threaten the Soviet Union." Chernavin insisted that "this fully applies to our Pacific Fleet and to the presence of a small detachment of Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean." He then went on to talk at some length about the U.S. naval threat to the Asian shores of the Soviet Union. It would appear likely that this familiar

Nevertheless, the Soviet navy as an institution has been on the defensive within the Soviet military establishment since long before Gorshkov's retirement in 1985. Under the pressure of economic constraints on the growth of the military budget and the marshals' perception of new competitive investment needs for conventional ground forces imposed by global technological developments, the navy's claims regarding mission and resources have clearly been downgraded in the 1980s. This shift in priority, most visible to the West in the slowing of some naval building programs and a decline in ship-days at sea, is also likely to have been reflected in the subordination of naval views regarding the relative importance of Cam Ranh Bay.

On the whole, it seems unlikely that the Soviet military leadership would deem it appropriate to expend its political capital with the Politburo—badly needed for more important issues—in prolonged resistance to a decision to sacrifice Cam Ranh Bay, should the Gorbachev leadership ever become inclined to do so. Thus both the military lobby for this base and those political functionaries who are its strongest supporters in the Central Committee apparat appear to have lost some ground in recent years.

Consequences for Soviet Policy

Over the near term, however, these changes in the Soviet attitude toward Cam Ranh Bay are not likely to make a great deal of difference for Soviet behavior regarding the negotiations over Cambodia. It appears improbable that Gorbachev will wish to take major political risks in his relationship with Vietnam in a period when Hanoi is still exploring the possibilities offered by diplomacy to weaken and split its opponents, to shore up the position of its protégés in Phnom Penh, and to escape its own international isolation. The Soviets are particularly likely to remain cautious in pressing Hanoi to make concessions because some in the Soviet leadership may see a possibility that China itself may eventually be induced to retreat from its tough line toward Vietnam if Hanoi makes progress in isolating China on the issue of the role of the Khmer Rouge in a Cambodian settlement. And if Vietnam **should** eventually succeed in forcing China to accept an unwelcome settlement in Cambodia, the Soviets could reasonably expect sufficient tension to remain in the Vietnamese-Chinese relationship to preserve

argument on behalf of Soviet naval resources and facilities in the Far East is being used not only in external propaganda, but also in internal debate. (*Moskovskaya Pravda*, July 26, 1987.)

Hanoi's strategic as well as economic dependence on the USSR.⁶¹ Beyond this, the trend of Chinese behavior toward the Soviet Union in this decade—in gradually watering down other supposedly firm prerequisites for improvement in Sino-Soviet relations—may encourage some in the Soviet leadership to feel that the Soviet relationship with Beijing may continue to improve sufficiently for Soviet purposes even if the Chinese demands regarding Indochina remain unsatisfied. For example, the Soviets may hope that the PRC will eventually consent to a Sino-Soviet summit meeting even if no settlement in Cambodia materializes.

In short, both Moscow and Hanoi over the short term appear to be seeking to “have the cake and eat it, too” in dealing with the choices they face over Cambodia. In the longer term, however, the pressures on the Soviet Union for policy change could grow if prolonged negotiations with Sihanouk do not alter the stalemate, and if China does not weaken its demands on Gorbachev over the Cambodian issue.

THE “NORTHERN TERRITORIES” CLAIMED BY JAPAN

The issue of the so-called “Northern Territories” has increasingly come to dominate the Soviet-Japanese relationship over the last two decades. Of the five cases considered, this is the one in which Soviet retreat appears most difficult, for both political and military reasons. Major change, if it comes, will probably be the longest delayed.

The Territories are four islands⁶² north of Hokkaido, occupied by the Soviet Union since the final days of the Second World War, which have long been a focus for the multiple Japanese grievances against the USSR. The Soviets claim that the islands are part of the Kurile chain, which was ceded by Japan at the time of surrender; the Japanese deny this. The emotional commitment of the Japanese nation to the

⁶¹On the other hand, one may speculate that some Chinese might make the opposite calculation, and come to see a rationalization for PRC agreement to a Cambodia settlement in which Vietnam retained the upper hand: namely, hopes that in the aftermath, Hanoi might break its dependence on Moscow and gravitate away from the USSR and toward the PRC. One Chinese functionary has in fact privately contended that he believes the new general secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Nguyen Van Linh, has some latent pro-Chinese sympathies which may become evident if a Cambodia settlement is reached. (Personal conversation with the author, July 1988.) On the whole, however, it seems unlikely that such highly conjectural hopes will come to dominate Chinese policy on Cambodia. If the PRC ever does come to accept what is essentially a “Vietnamese peace” in Indochina, it will not be because of Chinese hopes about Vietnam, but rather because China will have become so isolated politically on terms of a settlement as to have little choice but to yield.

⁶²One, in fact, is a group of islets (the Habomais).

recovery of these islands has always been underestimated by Soviet leaders, who have traditionally belittled the issue as having been artificially whipped up by Japanese politicians. The Soviet Union flatly insists that there is no territorial dispute between Japan and the USSR left over from World War II. Japan, for its part, has traditionally refused to sign a peace treaty with Moscow while the Soviets maintain their position, or even to sign the friendship agreement which the Soviets have proposed as a substitute. Against this background, the issue has been further inflamed by Soviet fortification of the Territories over the last decade.

The Soviet Political Perspective

It is easily conceivable that as part of the general review of inherited policy positions which Gorbachev has undertaken since assuming power, the Japanese territorial issue has been aired in behind-the-scenes regime deliberations. A submerged minority in the Soviet elite, apparently centering in the Oriental Institute and the Institute for the Study of the United States and Canada of the Academy of Sciences, has evidently believed for many years that Soviet refusal to conciliate Japan over the Northern Territories issue was a fundamental mistake. Those who take this view have probably felt that Soviet insistence on retaining and fortifying these islands, and the refusal of successive Soviet leaderships to discuss the matter, were counterproductive to Soviet net interests. Like many in the West, this isolated current of Soviet opinion has evidently concluded that the military benefits the Soviet Union obtains from the islands are not commensurate with the losses incurred—notably, the inflammatory effect on Japanese public attitudes toward the Soviet Union, the added impetus given to Japanese military cooperation with the United States, and the additional obstacle posed to Japanese economic cooperation with the Soviet Union on the scale the Soviets desire. With the coming of *glasnost* and the advent of permission for the Soviet elite to discuss foreign policy alternatives with fewer inhibitions, this point of view has undoubtedly now been aired privately within the Gorbachev regime. Indeed, by the summer of 1988 writers such as Aleskandr Bovin have been sufficiently emboldened to recommend publicly that the Northern Territories be returned to Japan.

This perspective, however, is apparently still not shared by Soviet decisionmakers, and the arguments for change cited above continue to be overshadowed by the considerations that perpetuate Soviet intransigence.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the military factors that affect leadership attitudes, there is, in the first place, one general consideration that tends to paralyze Soviet policy toward Japan even in the Gorbachev era. This is the latent, unarticulated pessimism about Japanese attitudes toward the Soviet Union which permeates much of Soviet thinking, and which appears to predispose Soviet leaders to assume that significant Soviet concessions to Tokyo would not produce the desired results and that the sacrifice of Soviet interests involved would be wasted. The Soviets are well aware of the historic grounds for Japanese dislike of their country, and of the traditionally low position the Soviet Union has held in Japanese opinion polls even before the growth of Soviet-Japanese difficulties in the 1970s. They are equally aware of the central importance the United States continues to hold for Japan, despite the bilateral difficulties of the last decade. Unless the Soviets receive strong reason to believe that independent factors—such as Japanese-American trade friction—are likely to decisively alter this political equation, they will probably continue to assume that any effort to conciliate Japan will always labor under grave disadvantages.

This underlying pessimism about the effectiveness of conciliatory steps toward Tokyo probably tends to inhibit Soviet behavior changes on the margin. Large changes in Soviet policy involving major concessions to Japan naturally have the greatest difficulty in gaining acceptance in Moscow in any case; meanwhile, those relatively modest prospective changes that might have a greater chance of acceptance within the Soviet bureaucracy may be considered unlikely to produce a sufficient payoff within Japan. Hence, there is a strong propensity, even under Gorbachev, to make no substantive changes at all.⁶³

These inhibitions have probably been partly responsible for the caution with which Gorbachev has treated one obvious compromise possibility: an offer to return the two least important of the four disputed islands, while keeping the other two. For geographic reasons, Shikotan and the Habomais have considerably less strategic importance to the USSR than do the two larger disputed islands. At one time, three decades ago, Khrushchev was in fact willing to promise to yield them after a peace treaty had been signed. It might be supposed that a return to this long-abandoned position would pay important political dividends for Gorbachev in Japan, just as his INF concessions have produced dividends for him in Western Europe. But while Gorbachev

⁶³In May 1988, Foreign Minister Shevernadze told a visiting leader of the Japanese parliament:

As to the so-called territorial issue, the Soviet side regards it as solved on a historical and international legal basis. The Soviet Union has a lot of territory but not any that we do not need. (TASS, May 7, 1988.)

has gradually been edging toward such a policy change, formal Soviet espousal of a two-island compromise has thus far apparently been impeded by doubts about the payoff.

That the Gorbachev leadership is aware of the two-island alternative and has been considering it is suggested by his renewal of quiet Soviet probes on the subject addressed to influential but unofficial Japanese opinion. Such probes were first seen four years earlier, under Andropov, in the immediate aftermath of Brezhnev's death. During 1982-1983, two senior Japanese nongovernmental figures, one a former diplomat and the other possessing ties to the highest circles of the business community, were each approached by Soviet contacts desiring an estimate of Japan's likely reaction to a hypothetical Soviet public hint that the status of Shikotan and the Habomais islets might be considered unsettled. In each case, the Soviets were told that the Japanese reaction would be negative, and that it was too late for such a partial concession; Japanese public opinion would no longer tolerate a deal that failed to return all four islands to Japan. In 1987, at least one similar probe was made, and received a similar response.⁶⁴

In June 1988, the Japanese Foreign Ministry took the initiative to convey essentially the same message officially in talks with the Soviet Union. During consultations with the Soviets in Moscow, Deputy Foreign Minister Kuriyama is reported to have stated that "we are against any notion of substituting the border confirmation issue for the Northern Territories issue." Japan surrendered claim to the Kuriles at the close of World War II, but maintains that none of the four Northern Territories in fact are part of the Kurile chain. The Japanese government appears to fear that were it to agree to define the problem as merely one of demarcating the border between Hokkaido and the Kuriles, it might be implying a distinction between the two smallest islands—which are nearer Hokkaido—and the two larger ones, a distinction that would be damaging to its claim to the latter.⁶⁵

A Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman subsequently declared that the Soviet government had not directly raised the issue of redefining the Northern Territories question in this way during the Japanese-Soviet consultations. However, Japan is said to have told the Soviet government that it was aware that a suggestion of this kind was being discussed "in some Soviet circles," and that Japan was taking the occasion to make it clear that it was unacceptable.⁶⁶ It would thus appear that some in Moscow had been considering holding out to Japan in this

⁶⁴Personal communication to author.

⁶⁵*Asahi Shimbun*, June 28, 1988.

⁶⁶KYODO, June 30, 1988.

very indirect fashion the possibility that the two smaller islands, but not the others, might some day be returned. Soviet academics who had long desired a change in Soviet policy toward Japan were apparently encouraged to raise this suggestion privately as a trial balloon. Meanwhile, the Soviet government could remain uncommitted even to this modest concession and could disavow it whenever desired.⁶⁷ The Japanese government therefore took preemptive action to rebuff the suggestion explicitly.

During a visit to Moscow soon thereafter by former Prime Minister Nakasone, Gorbachev again made apparent both his interest in testing Japan's willingness to accept a two-island settlement and his reluctance to commit the Soviet Union to such a solution in the absence of good reason to believe that Japan would settle on this basis. In conversations with Nakasone, Gorbachev is reported to have alluded to Krushchev's 1956 conditional offer to return the Habomais and Shikotan, and Japan's refusal at the time to accept less than all four of the Northern Territories. Gorbachev is also reported to have reiterated that the Soviet Union was forced to withdraw its two-island offer after Japan accepted a strengthened security relationship with the United States in 1960. Although Gorbachev thus did not change the Soviet position at all, his readiness to discuss this historical background with Nakasone was interpreted in Japan as new evidence "that he is trying to shake Japan's firm position that all four islands must be restored to the nation." The Japanese reaction was to take some encouragement from the fact that he was now willing to discuss the matter, but to continue to insist that there could be no settlement unless the Soviet Union agreed to return all four of the Northern Territories.⁶⁸

The net effect of exchanges such as these may reinforce Soviet reluctance to sacrifice concrete advantages in the absence of an equally concrete and visible *quid pro quo*. Moreover, some officials who continue to hold influential positions in Moscow would probably regard a major concession as tending to reward Japan for what the Soviets see as a pattern of worsening behavior—that is, a pattern of increased military cooperation with America over the last decade. The earlier-mentioned Ivan Kovalenko, the deputy chief of the Central Committee International Department who is the most influential Soviet specialist on Japan, has for many years preferred a policy of Soviet pressure on

⁶⁷During a July 1988 visit to Japan, Soviet Central Committee official Ivan Kovalenko denied that any Soviet official had endorsed the proposals in question, adding that "Soviet academicians may have mentioned it, but their comments are more often than not an expression of personal views." This was clearly a face-saving operation. (*Mainichi Shimbun* (Tokyo), July 13, 1988.)

⁶⁸*Yomiuri Shimbun*, July 24, 1988; KYODO, July 27, 1988.

Japan, and his name has become identified in Japan with Soviet inflexibility. To date, Gorbachev has not abandoned the essence of the obdurate Kovalenko posture toward Japan; in this case, the style of Soviet behavior has been modified far more than the content.

In January 1986, Gorbachev did break with the past sufficiently to send Foreign Minister Shevernadze to Tokyo, which Gromyko had refused to visit. But since then, although Shevernadze has planned a second visit, Gorbachev has indefinitely postponed a visit of his own to Tokyo because of Japanese insistence on pressing the Northern Territories issue. The present Soviet strategy toward Japan remains one of seeking to induce Japan to expand its investment and trade with the USSR in the absence of decisive Soviet concessions regarding the Northern Territories.

Military Attitudes

For the past decade, it has been commonly believed in the West that the Soviet military leadership has been particularly dedicated to retaining the Northern Territories because they border on the Sea of Okhotsk. This judgment appears to be justified. Ever since the appearance of the SS-N-8 in the second half of the 1970s, when Soviet SLBMs acquired the ability to reach the United States from Soviet territorial waters, "bastion areas" where Soviet SSBNs have been deployed for this purpose have evidently acquired a special sensitivity in the eyes of the General Staff. The Sea of Okhotsk is one of the two principal such maritime bastions. A felt need to strive to minimize wartime access by hostile forces to the SSBNs in the Sea of Okhotsk thus appears to be the single most important reason why military leaders have been unwilling to part with the Northern Territories.

Although some in the West have questioned the concrete military usefulness of the Northern Territories for this purpose, the Soviets appear to disagree. It is possible, moreover, that the primary Soviet military concern here may not be the antisubmarine warfare (ASW) benefits they themselves obtain from strategic exploitation of the islands, but rather the benefit they obtain from preventing the United States or Japan from using the islands in wartime to assist ASW operations.

The intransigent attitude toward the Northern Territories is undoubtedly intensified by the Soviet military leadership's general sense of the vulnerability and relative isolation of the Soviet Far East. The high command's anxieties in this regard can only have been increased by the air defense blunders that surrounded the Soviet destruction of a Korean airline passenger jet in October 1983. They

have probably been further augmented by the new inadequacies revealed by Mathias Rust's small aircraft penetration of the Soviet Union in 1987, even though this took place in the west rather than the east. The conclusion many military leaders will draw from these episodes is that the protection of the Soviet Union has little margin to spare, and that the country can ill afford to sacrifice existing territorial assets on its periphery such as areas in the Far East that are particularly hard to control and to defend.⁶⁹ This argument may also find some resonance in the Soviet political elite.

Finally, military leaders are likely to be reluctant to contemplate giving up any of the Northern Territories for certain emotional reasons. The Kuriles are regarded as war booty from the Second World War, won from an opponent who in the past had defeated and humiliated Russia. In this sense, the islands are a patriotic trophy as well as a strategic asset.⁷⁰ Consequently, it is doubly inappropriate to sacrifice them for a marginal and uncertain political reward. This attitude is again likely to be shared by some in the political elite.⁷¹

Prospects

In sum, the issue of the Japanese Northern Territories, more than any of the others discussed in this report, is one in which political and military impediments to a Soviet pullback have thus far tended to reinforce each other, despite Gorbachev's evident desire for progress with Japan.

This will not necessarily remain the case indefinitely. The retirement of Kovalenko from the Central Committee apparatus, when it eventually happens, could reflect a change in the balance of opinion in the regime, if only because Kovalenko has for many years been identi-

⁶⁹In a V-J Day article in 1985, Marshal Kulikov cited "the Kuriles" as one of the territories which Japan in 1945 was allegedly seeking to use as a "bridgehead for attack on our country" up to the moment when the Soviet Union declared war. (*Izvestiya*, September 3, 1985.)

⁷⁰In September 1985, the late Marshal Petrov, then first deputy minister of defense, acknowledged that the Soviet Union attacked Japan in 1945, not only to help end the war, but also with a view to "restoring the Soviet Union's historical rights to the southern part of Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands which had been seized by Japan. . . ." (Marshal V. Petrov, "Military-Political Lessons of the Defeat of Japanese Militarism," *International Affairs*, No. 9, September 1985, p. 5.)

⁷¹John Stephan has unearthed the following passage from a Soviet tenth-grade history textbook: "[The Red Army] . . . returned to the Soviet motherland primordially [iskonno] Russian lands—southern Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands—which had been seized in the past by Japan." (*Istoria SSSR*, M. P. Kima (ed.), 6th edition, Moscow, 1977, p. 115, cited in John J. Stephan, "Soviet Approaches to Japan: Images Behind the Policies," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Fall-Winter 1982, p. 138.)

fied with the toughest extreme of civilian opinion in alliance with military opinion.

Moreover, should the Soviet Union eventually reach a border agreement with China, this could, in principle, remove at least one of the political impediments to Soviet territorial concessions to Japan. In the past, the Soviet leaders have appeared to believe that in addition to all else, any weakness in dealing with Japanese territorial claims would set a harmful precedent for Soviet ability to fend off the territorial claims of others, and particularly of China. But the neutralization of this Soviet concern would probably still not be decisive for Soviet policy toward Japan.

A remote contingency that might some day modify the traditional Soviet attitude toward the Northern Territories would be an evolution of Soviet SSBN deployment policy away from deployment in the maritime bastions and toward increasing deployment under the polar ice. In principle, such a trend might eventually weaken the force of military arguments to the political leadership about the sensitivity of islands bordering on the Sea of Okhotsk.

Finally, if a fundamental change for the worse should occur in Japanese-American relations—for example, as the result of an enormous escalation of protectionist trade pressures—it is conceivable that the balance of opinion might shift in the Gorbachev leadership about the usefulness of concessions to Japan. Even then, however, the result would still very likely be limited to Soviet gestures Japan would consider inadequate—such as a more formal and concrete offer to return the two lesser of the Northern Territories.

On the whole, therefore, while there are contingencies and possibilities on the horizon that could erode the traditional Soviet political-military alliance on the question of the Northern Territories, they are either not probable or are likely to have only limited effect in the near future. Of all the potential Gorbachev deployment retreats considered in this study, surrender of the Northern Territories is likely to come last.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The following observations emerge from the five cases of hypothetical deployment retreats considered.

First, although military influence on the Soviet political leadership is now—on the average—weaker than it once was, this generalization is a poor guide to the extent of military influence on any given issue of foreign policy in which Soviet military forces are involved. The circumstances surrounding each case are all-important. Sometimes the balance of nonmilitary considerations seems to support conservative military preferences, as in the case of the Japanese Northern Territories. Sometimes it does not, as apparently is now the case in Afghanistan. More often it has offsetting and ambiguous effects, as has been seen with the issues of asymmetrical Soviet reductions in Europe and unilateral Soviet withdrawals from Asia. Sometimes the Soviet military leadership may itself have mixed feelings about a given Soviet retreat, as may well be the case regarding Afghanistan. Sometimes Soviet military leaders may be divided in their degree of intransigence, as is likely to be the case with regard to Cam Ranh Bay. And sometimes, even if military opinion is divided, political circumstances tend to delay extreme changes in Soviet policy anyway—as is also likely to be the case in Soviet policy toward Indochina and Cam Ranh Bay.

Second, it seems clear that there is now considerable contention within the Soviet elite over the linked issues of external deployment pullback and unilateral force reduction. The question of a Soviet troop cut appears within the last year to have become a real political issue, although there does not yet seem to be reason to believe that the political forces favoring such a cut outweigh the very powerful forces opposing it.

Third, the five cases of potential deployment retreat discussed in this report appear, as of mid-1988, to net out as follows:

— Although there is still some remaining ambiguity about Soviet ultimate intentions, Afghanistan is the one case in which Soviet retreat has now begun. The Soviet leadership still hopes to avoid losing all influence in Afghanistan even after withdrawal, but is probably resigned to a worse result.

— Soviet conventional force reductions in Europe are definitely on Gorbachev's agenda, but the scope and the tolerable degree of asymmetry remain highly contentious—and probably still undecided—issues

within the Soviet elite. Those who oppose reductions have a powerful argument with which to delay a final decision in this regard, in the Soviet felt need to extensively test first what the market will bear in negotiations with the West.

— Soviet force reductions in Asia are also gradually becoming politically more possible over the long run, but will again be a highly contentious issue. Such reductions, if they eventually come, will have to be essentially unilateral, and will have to involve demobilization rather than transfers if they are to occur on a significant scale. Reductions of this kind are not likely to occur at least until a general border agreement is reached with China, and even then may not materialize.

— A Soviet geopolitical retreat from Indochina involving sacrifice of the base at Cam Ranh Bay does not appear likely over the next few years, despite Gorbachev's offer to leave this base if America leaves its Philippine bases. The Soviet Union has not yet tried to put decisive pressure on Vietnam to meet China's terms regarding Cambodia. It is conceivable that Gorbachev will eventually move in this direction, and thus for the first time take risks with the position at Cam Ranh Bay. As yet, however, this does not seem probable.

— Major Soviet concessions to Japan over the Northern Territories are the least likely of the five possibilities to materialize in the next few years. There seems little chance that Gorbachev will convince the Soviet consensus to offer to return all four islands in dispute to Japan within this period. There appears to be a greater possibility that the Soviets will explicitly offer to discuss the return of two of the islands, but such an offer is likely to remain unacceptable to Japan.

Fourth, if Soviet deployment retreats in different parts of the world do continue, they are likely to engender increasing political resistance in Moscow. The political costs to Gorbachev of external military concessions are likely to be cumulative, and opposition to concessions regarded as excessive is likely to become more outspoken as time goes on. This tendency was illustrated, in particular, in the earlier-cited *Moscow News* interview with Deputy Minister of Defense Tretyak in mid-February 1988. Although each prospective Soviet military concession will be argued over on its own terms, if Gorbachev creates the impression that he is leading the Soviet Union by degrees into retreat all around the Soviet periphery, it is likely to galvanize a more generalized opposition.

Finally, the question of Soviet deployment concessions is likely to become increasingly intermingled with elite infighting over the nature and extent—and ultimate purpose—of change inside the Soviet Union. Many in the elite will see military concessions as justifiable only to the extent that they are unavoidable to secure the Soviet Union the release

from external pressure, the "breathing space," needed to accomplish modernization. Those who are the least committed to far-reaching internal change may tend to be the least convinced of the need for drastic external concessions to facilitate such change. And since it is the Soviet Union's global superpower position that Gorbachev is ultimately seeking to preserve through radical modernization, there is likely to be ongoing argument in the elite over external military concessions which some may see as needlessly sacrificing aspects of that inherited position.