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PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTIONISM ABROAD
DURING THE 1990'S

by

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The outlook for Soviet military intervention abroad this decade is analyzed in view of changing Soviet vital interests. Soviet vital interests are increasingly domestic; foreign vital interests have shrunk to those which will foster Soviet economic survival and ensure continued diplomatic influence in the world. A poor economy, recognition of new means to effect international change, the Soviet nationalities crises, force reductions, and legislative restrictions may make the use of military power less appealing to Soviet leaders in pursuit of foreign vital interests. This will likely cause the Soviet Union to break historic ties with "client" states, and show less willingness to defend them militarily. These fundamental changes in Soviet national security policy will likely remain even if President Mikhail Gorbachev is removed from office. The historic military rival of the United States will be less likely to risk any foreign confrontation during this decade, especially with the U.S.



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PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTIONISM ABROAD DURING THE 1990'S

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

I state with full responsibility that our international policy is more than ever determined by domestic policy, by our interest in concentrating on constructive endeavors to improve our own country.¹ --Mikhail S. Gorbachev

Opinions on the prospect of Soviet military adventurism abroad during this decade often fall into two categories. One category of opinions generally offers an impressionistic view -- the Soviets will have little to gain with international military adventurism. But usually few concrete reasons for this view can be argued. The second category of opinions generally conclude Soviet "new thinking" under Gorbachev's perestroika is some sort of elaborate ruse to "set up" the U.S. and her allies for an eventual bold Soviet attack.

Neither of these views is adequate for the military professional concerned with Soviet intentions and capabilities at the strategic and operational levels of warfare. The purpose of this paper is to discuss fundamental reasons why the Soviet Union is less likely to intervene abroad militarily during the 1990's. By "abroad", I refer to a country external to the Soviet Union's current geopolitical borders (not to include the Soviet Union's 15 republics). Soviet military adventurism or interventionism is defined here as the employment of conventional Soviet forces in combat. There are five primary agents that should inhibit Soviet military adventurism abroad during the 1990's. They are:

- the weakened state of the Soviet economy
- primacy of new means to conduct foreign policy
- the Soviet republics crises
- Soviet force reductions
- Soviet legislative curbs on the use of force abroad

Before we begin, this paper makes three basic, but very important, assumptions. The first assumption is that Mikhail Gorbachev will complete his current term as President of the Soviet Union in 1995. At the end of this paper I will discuss how my basic thesis is affected if the first assumption is proven erroneous. The second assumption is the Soviet Union will evolve into a "loose federalist" government during the early 1990's, but separatist movements from some republics will remain strong. The third assumption is that Soviet vital interests have changed. The majority of Soviet vital interests now focuses on the very survival of the Soviet Union:

- Soviet territorial integrity (protected from external threats)
- Retention of republic entities within the Soviet Union
- A viable, self-sustaining economy
- Preservation of basic societal order
- Robust strategic forces, at least comparable to the U.S.
- Establishment of wider economic ties with the European community and countries in the Pacific rim (Japan, South Korea etc.)
- Continued Soviet diplomatic influence in the international community

It is very likely the Soviets could continue to use military force (or the threat to use it) as a means to preserve the first four vital interests (domestic vital interests). The last two vital interests can be classified as foreign vital interests. If we view military power as one fundamental means of national power (the other means being economic power and political power), military interventionism abroad would likely not advance Soviet foreign interests. Therefore, the use of Soviet military power abroad during this decade becomes a decidedly less desirable option for Soviet leaders. Of the reasons presented to support this thesis, the state of the Soviet economy, may well be the most important.

CHAPTER II

A STRUGGLING NATIONAL ECONOMY AND THE EVOLUTION OF "REASONABLE SUFFICIENCY"

In a word, comrades, acceleration of the country's economic development is the key to all our problems; intermediate and long term, economic and social, political and ideological, domestic and foreign.¹ --Mikhail S. Gorbachev

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it will briefly highlight just how abysmal the state of the Soviet economy is. Secondly, it will show how economic realities led to the new, defensive military doctrine based on "reasonable sufficiency." These themes will highlight constraints on Soviet military adventurism abroad during this decade.

The Soviet Economy -- How Bad Is It?

Historically, the Soviet Gross National Product (GNP) was thought to be about 50 percent that of the U.S. Recent estimates put the figure closer to 33 percent.² Moreover, some estimate the Soviet military consumes 25 percent of their GNP; U.S. defense spending consumes roughly 7 percent of its GNP.³ Investment in the Soviet economy stopped growing in the mid-1970's and began declining in real terms during the 1980's.⁴ By the mid-1980's, it became painfully apparent to Gorbachev that he must return investment capital to the civilian economy. This required a choice: either reduce the share of national income going to investment (in order to maintain the Soviet military), or cut the burden of military spending (to stimulate the economy).⁵ Gorbachev chose the latter.

Robbing investment capital is but one burden the Soviet military puts on the national economy. The defense industry receives preferential treatment for access to raw materials, the best machinery, and the most skilled labor. This resulted in consumer goods that come nowhere close to

meeting Western standards of quality. For example, only 15-17% of Soviet machinery meets world standards.⁷ In Moscow alone about 2,000 Russian-made color televisions explode each year-- resulting in many residences burning to the ground.⁸ Put in perspective, Soviet consumer quality of life fits very closely to an "advanced" third-world country (i.e. Mexico or Turkey).⁹

Another important sector of the Soviet economy has been stymied by the Soviet military: commercial research and development (R&D). A report based on a survey of recent Soviet emigres concluded the Soviet military "... is in fact the first claimant on all research and production."¹⁰ This strangled innovation to the point no new car model was introduced on a mass scale from 1972-1987¹¹; there were fewer inventions per researcher in 1985 than in 1950.¹²

The Concept of "Reasonable Sufficiency," The Evolution of Defensive Soviet Military Doctrine

By the early 1980's, the failures of the Soviet economy were becoming apparent to the Soviet leadership. When Mikhail S. Gorbachev took power in 1985, his focus was on domestic economic and political reform. As argued earlier in this chapter, diversion of government funds into the investment segment of the economy will necessarily drain funding from the Soviet military. One observer notes of Gorbachev:

... during the first two years ... it was apparent his top priority was economic growth, followed by consumer welfare; the defense budget was a distant third.¹³

By 1989, Gorbachev's perestroika, with economic and political reform at the forefront, precipitated a 4-5 percent drop (in real terms) of overall Soviet defense spending.¹⁴ Moreover, the CIA concluded Soviet reductions in defense spending "... are almost certain in 1990 and 1991."¹⁵ Furthermore,

the CIA projects Soviet defense spending will continue to decrease through 1995.¹⁶

Gorbachev's economic perestroika and "new thinking" on national security led to a new Soviet military defensive doctrine based on the concept of "reasonable sufficiency." Gorbachev unveiled this new concept at the 1986 Twenty-Seventh Party Congress.¹⁷ Gorbachev defined reasonable sufficiency as the level of military capabilities to perform only "defensive tasks."¹⁸ Furthermore, Gorbachev mandated in 1987 that the Soviet military must be ". . . sufficient to repel possible aggression, but not to conduct offensive operations."¹⁹ Thus far, Soviet military leaders have supported the new defensive doctrine.²⁰ How much of this is true support and how much is pro forma endorsement remains to be seen, however. Nevertheless, defensive doctrine soon appeared in Soviet professional military writings, making the prevention of war an official part of military doctrine. A strong defense (embodiment of reasonable sufficiency) is nothing new for the Soviets at the operational level of warfare. In a 1986 Military Historical Journal article, General-Major Maryshev argued the Soviet military could easily employ the doctrine at the operational level of warfare--in much the same way the Soviets successfully fought the 1943 Battle of Kursk.²¹

The impact of a defensive doctrine based on reasonable sufficiency has important implications on the likelihood of Soviet military intervention abroad during this decade. This doctrine has no tenets for conventional force employments anywhere outside Soviet borders. Deputy Foreign Minister V. Pertrovskii wrote in 1987 that reasonable sufficiency means for the military a distinct ". . . ruling out the possibility of using it as an offensive potential, as a potential for aggression."²²

Besides the evolution of a defensive doctrine based on reasonable sufficiency, fiscal realities under perestroika have important impacts on the Soviet ability to intervene militarily during the 1990's. While defense spending has decreased in real terms, the Soviets have begun to qualitatively improve their military hardware. This is especially true for the Soviet Navy, whose procurement funding may actually increase during the 1990's. To

compensate for the large procurement costs, huge drops in funding have occurred in operations and maintenance (O&M). Former Foreign Defense Minister Dmitrii Ustinov claimed hundreds of millions (perhaps billions) of rubles could be saved by "economizing" military O&M funds.²³ As a result, although raw combat power (through more modern weapons systems) may increase, Soviet force training, force readiness, and force sustainability may be severely curtailed.²⁴

The Soviet economy has been the primary cause for evolution of the new Soviet defensive military doctrine based on "reasonable sufficiency." Consistent decreases (in real terms) of Soviet military spending have also caused huge cuts in O&M funding. These factors act as hindrances on the Soviet ability to use their military forces internationally in support of foreign vital interests.

CHAPTER III

SOVIET RECOGNITION OF NEW MEANS TO EFFECT CHANGE?

The new thinking denies this confrontationist approach. It favors a minimum and not a maximum of military might for both and favors the excluding the idea of seeking a military solution to disputed international problems.¹ -- Soviet writer L. Semeiko

Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 determined to keep the Soviet Union a legitimate superpower -- but one whose superpower status did not rest solely on military might. Indeed, it has been accurately claimed the Soviet Union is a third-world country with a superpower military. As discussed in Chapter 2, Gorbachev's sine qua non is to revamp the Soviet economy. Nearly as assiduously, he has worked to legitimize Soviet participation in the world's political arena, using diplomatic means in lieu of military means. There are several reasons for this dramatic reversal in relating Soviet means to ends.

First of all, Gorbachev came to power with no strong ties to the Soviet military. This is in stark contrast to his predecessors, especially Brezhnev and Krushchev.² He is also the first Soviet leader (since Lenin) to never have fought in a war.³ Gorbachev has also never performed any national service in the Soviet armed forces.⁴ This is not to imply Gorbachev has not experienced the horrors of war. He lived close to the front during World War II, and his father was seriously wounded during the war. Still, his ties with the military were few before he took power in 1985.

Secondly, Gorbachev is apparently haunted by major failures of Soviet military means to obtain political objectives throughout the world. The first was the fielding of the SS-20 intermediate range missile in the late 1970's. The fielding of this weapon led to the NATO counter of Pershing 2 missile and cruise missile deployments. Moreover, the SS-20 deployment led to a serious setback in the Soviet diplomatic relations with the West.⁵ Gorbachev viewed

this fiasco as "... an example of the dangers of allowing purely military technical considerations to drive policy and take precedence over broader political objectives."⁶ The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 not only damaged Moscow's credibility with Third-World nations (potential Soviet "clients"), it sent U.S.-Soviet relations plummeting to rock bottom. According to F. Stephen Larrabee, a former member of the Carter Administration National Security Council Staff:

The political costs of the invasion, both at home and abroad, probably underscored to Gorbachev the risks of allowing Soviet policy to be dictated by narrow military considerations.⁷

With a less than sublime view of the Soviet military involvement in international affairs, Gorbachev has used Soviet diplomatic means to earn respect in the international community. Nowhere is this more evident than Soviet diplomatic efforts in the current Persian Gulf crisis. To quote Kremlin analyst Richard Weitz:

The U.S.S.R.'s international position has greatly improved since Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Not only has the Soviet government been able to maintain better ties with Iraq than any other major power, but the U.S.S.R.'s relations with moderate Arab governments, Western Europe, and the United States have strengthened immensely.⁸

Soviet "new thinking" in international affairs paid off for the Soviets in relations with the U.S. The cooperation between Secretary of State Baker and (former) Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze on the Persian Gulf crisis is probably unprecedented in U.S./Soviet relations. On 21 November 1990, after three days of consultations with Shevardnadze, Baker remarked on the U.S./Soviet position: "We have shared a common platform, we have acted together, and we intend to continue to act in the same way in the future."⁹

Moreover, Soviet institutional changes suggest the military is being eschewed as a choice to effect changes in today's politically turbulent world. The Soviet Union's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) now plays the lead role in defining Soviet interests in the international scene; the once foreboding Politburo of the Brezhnev and Krushchev eras is now virtually powerless in foreign affairs.¹⁰ This institutional change is indicative of what Gorbachev has done to the Soviet system on a broad scale: he has shifted political decision-making from the Communist Party to the state.¹¹

The MFA has put the Soviet Union in an unusual role in the world -- an international broker of political (vice military) solutions to international conflicts and crises.¹² This role has helped bring the Soviet Union international political legitimacy. With this legitimacy, Moscow has opened diplomatic channels considered not long ago as hopelessly closed. Following a meeting between Gorbachev and South Korean President Roh Tae Woo in June of 1990, Moscow and Seoul agreed to establish formal diplomatic relations.¹³ Perhaps in some way this diplomacy validated the new approach to Soviet hardliners: in addition to establishing diplomatic relations, Seoul will provide the Soviets with \$2.3 billion in loans.¹⁴ In addition, the MFA has carried on extensive talks with Japan over the long standing northern islands dispute; there are some reports a diplomatic solution may be near.¹⁵

The enhanced prestige of the Soviet Union in the international diplomatic scene has replaced decades of reliance on military might coupled with diplomatic inertia. The Soviets appear convinced that diplomacy can effectively pursue their vital foreign interests. Any misuse of force abroad by Moscow during the 1990's would rupture the ties of diplomatic and political legitimacy Moscow now finally enjoys with the rest of the world. Unfortunately for the Soviet Union, more than prestige in the world's diplomatic channels is needed to solve problems threatening the very survival of the Soviet system -- the Soviet nationalities crises.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOVIET NATIONALITIES CRISES

**I am resolutely against the division of the state,
against the changing of borders, against the
destruction of age-long ties between peoples.¹
--Mikhail S. Gorbachev**

The boiling cauldron of the Soviet nationalities crises pose vexing problems for Soviet President Gorbachev. Several of these will impact upon his country's ability to use military force abroad during the 1990's. The crises will undoubtedly commit large numbers of troops to keep some semblance of order (as was done in bloody fashion in Baku in January 1990 and in Lithuania in January 1991). The nationalities issue has caused the annual Soviet military draft to end up a failure with defiant non-participation by thousands of potential conscripts. Moreover, the demographic data suggests these problems may well be long-term, putting a potential restriction on the Soviet ability to successfully use military force abroad during this decade.

The Soviet nationalities' upheavals require the Kremlin "keep the troops home" to restore order when and where needed. All 15 Soviet republics have asserted the right of supremacy of republic law over law from the central government. All 15 have also claimed the right of conducting independent foreign relations; not less than six (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Moldavia, the Ukraine) have proposed secession. Military force was used to restore order to the republics of Azerbaizan and Armenia in early 1990; the number of troops sent likely totaled several divisions.² Under the guise of enforcing compliance with the Soviet draft, "several divisions" of paratroopers were ordered deployed to the Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) on 8 January 1991.³ More divisions could be deployed to the Ukraine, Moldavia, and Georgia if the Baltic violence is a catalyst for further unrest.

Reinforcements must be available to back-up deployed troops in troubled republics, as many nationalist groups are well armed. By decree, President Gorbachev ordered in the summer of 1990 a confiscation of "illegal

arms" and ordered " . . . illegal armed formations . . ." disband immediately.⁴ To a large extent, the presidential decree was ignored by the republics. Despite the decree's failure, 2,535 rifles were collected in Azerbaijan, 175 submachine guns were confiscated in Georgia, and 1,600 "firearms" were collected in Armenia.⁵ Assuming these numbers were only a small percentage of the actual number of arms illegally possessed, we see the potential for armed clashes between the republics and the central government. Many more divisions of ground forces (and potentially Black and Baltic Sea naval forces) may eventually be the only preventative of a bloody civil war.

Perhaps above all else, the Soviet military must have adequate forces deployed to rebellious republics to keep positive control over strategic and theater nuclear weapons. Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Dmitrii T. Yazov has already cited " . . . calls for surrender of nuclear weapons to republican control."⁶ In addition, Soviet forces must be able to protect nuclear power plants from sabotage by desperate separatist groups (there have been several reports of high explosives stolen from ammunition stores in some Soviet republics).

The Soviet nationalities crises have precipitated another dilemma for the Soviet military: a refusal of draft induction. During 1990 alone, the Soviet Union's military inductions were 400,000 short of requirements.⁷ Deputy Chief of Soviet Ground Forces Main Staff, Lieutenant General N. Ter-Grigoryants, recently briefed the percentage of eligible recruits actually inducted during 1990 from some of the most troubled republics: Lithuania, 10 percent; Estonia, 17 percent; Moldavia, 8 percent; Azerbaijan, 17 percent; Armenia, 7 percent; and Georgia, 4 percent.⁸ Unless military service regains some level of respect in the eyes of the Soviet populace, continued defiance of the draft could throw unit manning into chaos. If this occurs, the Soviets might be forced to emulate the U.S. model of an all-volunteer force. By the turn of the century, the Soviets could have a smaller, but much more capable military force if an all-volunteer force is implemented.

Although Gorbachev has a sense of empathy for republic grievances, he is resolutely opposed to any separatist movements.⁹ He has already proven

he will use military force to keep the union intact. The Soviet nationalities crises challenge the very survival of the nation itself. Since this grave issue will probably not be resolved soon, the Soviet leadership will likely direct its attention on the domestic vital interest of national survival. The nationalities question will leave the Kremlin with less inclination and means for any military interventionism abroad well into this decade.

CHAPTER V

FORCE REDUCTIONS

The Warsaw Pact will no longer exist. We are not opposed to NATO, especially as a political organization.¹ -- Soviet Minister of Defense, Marshal Dmitri Yazov

The Soviet Union will find itself relatively manpower-limited during the rest of this decade. The primary causes are the decrease in military personnel due to announced unilateral force reductions and Conventional Forces Europe treaty limitations. These factors could tend to limit the ability of the Soviet Union to effectively use military force abroad during the 1990's, especially in Europe.

Soviet force reductions in Europe during the coming years will make substantial changes to Soviet force projection capabilities. In December 1988, Gorbachev announced unilateral force reductions of 500,000 men; Soviet forces east of the Urals will be slashed by 40 percent by later this year.² Although today the Soviets have nearly 500,000 troops stationed throughout Eastern Europe, these are being withdrawn. The Soviets have negotiated (on a country-by-country basis) to remove these troops. By the end of this year, all Soviet troops will have left Hungary and Czechoslovakia; only a small number of troops will remain in Poland (mainly from Polish fears of a unified Germany).³ All Soviet troops will leave Germany by 1994 (and perhaps much sooner). In any event, all Soviet forces in Eastern Europe are scheduled for withdrawal by 1996.⁴ These announced force reductions are perhaps the most compelling support for the credibility of the new Soviet military concept of "reasonable sufficiency." As a result, the Soviets soon will have more limited means to militarily intervene in European affairs. Moreover, Soviet Military Power 1990 concluded the Soviets "... could not count on any East European military to participate in, or even tacitly support, an attack against NATO countries."⁵ As observed by Marshal Yazov at the outset of this chapter, the Warsaw Pact will soon cease to exist as a viable military alliance. NATO's

Secretary General, Manfred Warner, quipped of the Warsaw Pact in November, 1990: "... as a military threat, you can forget it."⁶

The recently signed Conventional Forces Europe Treaty (CFE) will greatly reduce Soviet military hardware west of the Ural Mountains. Soviet tanks now numbering 46,000 will drop to 13,300 by 1994.⁷ Artillery pieces will drop from 47,000 to 13,700 during the same period; armored vehicles will drop from 45,000 to 20,000.⁸ Although the Soviets were accused of "hiding" thousands of hardware pieces east of the Urals (just before the CFE baseline was established), these assets are nonetheless out of theater. (The Soviet tank hiding episode and other Soviet treaty irregularities may cast doubt on the likelihood of CFE ratification by the U.S. Senate.)

Lieutenant General F. I. Ladygin, Chief of the U.S.S.R. Armed Forces General Staff Legal Treaty Directorate, recently commented on NATO/Warsaw Pact force correlations after CFE implementation. He claims NATO/Warsaw Pact correlations will be 1.5:1 in tanks and armored vehicles, 1.4:1 in artillery, and 1.3:1 in combat aircraft and strike helicopters.⁹ But Ladygin claimed these correlations are consistent with a Soviet defensive military doctrine based on "reasonable sufficiency."¹⁰ He quickly added that qualitatively "... our equipment should not be inferior to the arms of Western countries armies."¹¹

The mention of qualitative improvements in hardware is an important one. Chief of Staff of U.S.S.R. Armed Forces General Staff, Army General M. A. Moiseyev, recently commented on this issue. He discussed a "technical regrouping" of the Army and Naval Forces, resulting in "... the procurement of modern weapons and hardware for the Army and Navy."¹² He strongly believes the Soviet Union can eventually have smaller, but more modern and efficient Armed Forces. In the long run, he predicted such a force will be "... less of a burden to the state."¹³ This statement clearly shows the Soviet General Staff is sensitive to the burden their forces have placed on the Soviet economy.

In summary, announced Soviet unilateral force reductions (when completed) and CFE limits on hardware (when implemented) will leave the Soviet military with less means to intervene militarily, especially in Europe. In all likelihood, total Soviet military manpower will drop from the current 4,000,000 to roughly 3,000,000 by 1995.¹⁴ It seems the Soviet conventional forces (ground, air, and naval) will transition from a quantity driven to quality driven force. If this shift is successful, the Soviet military could emerge early in the next century as a much more modern force.

CHAPTER VI

LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS

At the same time all decisions must be adopted with your consent. Any use of troops outside the country will require a Supreme Soviet decision. In this way alone, and in no other way.¹ -- Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Schevardnadze, addressing the Supreme Soviet, 15 October 1990

New legislative constraints are potential hindrances to Soviet military interventionism during the 1990's. Especially during the past year, precedent setting decisions by the Soviet legislature have mandated consultation, and implicit approval, by the Supreme Soviet of any use of military force abroad. This is crucial because Supreme Soviet actions are now more true legislative initiatives than pro forma endorsements of Kremlin policy.

Clearly, this is an historic change in the formulation of Soviet foreign policy. The chairman of a Soviet seminar on foreign policy planning conceded in June 1990 " . . . we lack practice in regulating the country's security under constitutional law."² But Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was a catalyst to change this view.

By and large, the Soviet populace (and Soviet legislators) are resolutely opposed to the use of Soviet forces in the Persian Gulf Crisis. On 12 September 1990, the Supreme Soviet passed a resolution to support the Soviet diplomatic stand on the crisis. Very importantly, the Supreme Soviet introduced a provision in the resolution to keep them fully informed:

To deem it expedient that the U.S.S.R. Foreign Ministry regularly brief the International Affairs Committee and the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet as a whole on the development of the situation and the Soviet side's participation in the political settlement of the crisis in the Persian Gulf.³

In an address to the Supreme Soviet on 15 October 1990, then Foreign Minister Shevardnadze reiterated an earlier pledge (quoted at the beginning of this chapter), that any use of Soviet military force outside the Soviet Union must have approval of the Supreme Soviet. It appears the Soviets have evolved a parliamentary approval procedure, for military use of force, similar to the U.S. Congress' approval of President Bush's use of force to attack Iraq.

To be sure, the Soviet military took a dim view of how this development affected them. One Soviet colonel (himself a member of the Supreme Soviet) called the proclamation a "lightweight approach to the possible use of military force."⁴ Nevertheless, despite some expected debate, the proposal was approved, with instructions to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet International Affairs Committee "... to finalize it."⁵

The ramifications of this legislation on the ability to employ Soviet military forces abroad during this decade are considerable. First, Soviet legislators in the Gorbachev era reflect a much better consensus of public opinion since the Brezhnev and Krushchev eras. Since the Soviet military is undergoing a catastrophic loss of esteem in the eyes of the Soviet public, few legislators could justify new Soviet military incursions unless the very survival of the country was at stake. In a recent poll of Soviet citizens, almost 70 percent of those polled felt there was no credible threat of an attack against the U.S.S.R. today.⁶ Furthermore, only 10 percent of respondents had a favorable view of the "state of affairs" in the Soviet Armed Forces.⁷ Apparently the pollsters documented public deep-seated hostility towards the use of Soviet forces abroad, noting "... military action often proved to have damaging political consequences."⁸ This is part of broader isolationist sentiment among Soviet citizens, reflected in their increasing dislike of distributing foreign aid.

Finally, even the debate over the use of Soviet military forces abroad could cause more political divisions in the Soviet government -- a problem the Soviets hardly need right now.

As President Gorbachev presses his drive for "rule of law" and legitimacy of the Soviet legislative bodies, legislative restraints will limit the Soviet Union's effectiveness at employing military forces abroad during the 1990's. Moreover, the possible domestic furor over such moves would be more domestic problems the Kremlin does not need.

CHAPTER VII

REDEFINITION OF FOREIGN VITAL INTERESTS?

We are so bogged down in our internal affairs that we are losing interest in the outside world, in everything does not directly concern us.¹ - Soviet foreign policy commentator Alexander Bovin

The central thesis of this paper has been the assertion that the threat of Soviet military adventurism abroad during this decade has been reduced. With this thesis intact, it is appropriate to look at geographical regions where historically the Soviets have freely used their military might in support of their foreign vital interests. It is argued these foreign vital interests have been redefined.

The most drastic decline in chances of Soviet military adventurism abroad will occur in Europe. Both the NATO military chief and the Soviet Defense Minister have acknowledged the Warsaw Pact's impotence as a military alliance. Soviet troops continue to pull out from Warsaw Pact members. And probably Moscow's most telling sign of credibility of a new defensive military doctrine was the acquiescence to a unified Germany in NATO. The inescapable conclusion is that force reductions, a defense-oriented military doctrine, and unwilling allies make a Soviet attack on NATO forces in Europe unlikely. The economic ties with the European community are vital to the Soviet Union's survival (Germany was the first country to provide financial assistance to Moscow when food shortages arose in the fall of 1990); these ties now take precedence over all else.

In Third World countries, the Soviets have already tipped their hand -- traditional Soviet "clients" may be jettisoned; no relationship is sacrosanct. Nowhere is this more evident than in Cuba. Cuba is much less valuable to Moscow than in the past three decades for several reasons. First, advances in

strategic intelligence collectors have reduced Cuba's value as a Soviet "listening post."² Secondly, Cuba's involvement in insurgency in Central America embarrassed Gorbachev as he strove to elevate the Soviet Union's standing in international diplomatic circles.³ Third, Castro's revolutionary ideology threatens the recent warming of relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Most importantly, the \$6 billion pumped into Cuba each year in foreign aid (including \$1.2 billion in military aid) gets the Soviets little return on their investment.⁴ With the current crisis in the Soviet economy, these expenditures are increasingly difficult for the Kremlin to justify. Soviet cutbacks to Cuba, both in political and military/domestic support, are judged by the CIA as a near certainty.⁵ If Fidel Castro is overthrown or faces a prolonged insurgency, the Soviets could well not intervene. It might be their best opportunity to cut their ties to a fiscal sinkhole.

Although the Soviets continue to politically support the Najibullah regime in Afghanistan,⁶ all Soviet military forces were pulled out some two years ago, ending a military incursion that is now widely viewed in Moscow as a colossal mistake.

In Africa, the threat of Soviet military incursion is decreasing. Although Moscow provides financial assistance to the Marxist regime in Angola, Moscow has "... made clear its unwillingness to support a military solution to the war."⁷ Ethiopia received a half-billion dollars in Soviet aid in 1989 but Moscow has apparently abandoned hope for a military solution.⁸ Although Soviet aircrews continue to provide airlift support, Soviet military advisors are being withdrawn.⁹

Moscow is possibly signaling an end to its ties to Vietnam. Although Soviet air and maritime traffic still frequents Vietnam, the Soviets have vacated the huge naval complexes at Cam Ranh Bay. (The Vietnamese have even offered the basing rights to the U.S.).¹⁰ As in the Cuban case, the Soviets cannot justify pouring subsidies into Vietnam when the Soviet economy is virtually collapsing. The Soviets foreign vital interests are now economic and diplomatic, and here Vietnam has little to offer.

The Soviet/South Korean diplomatic rapprochement clearly sent Pyongyang a strong signal. Although Moscow has provided MIG-29's to North Korea, the Kremlin apparently is using this as leverage to dissuade North Korea from any hostile intentions.¹¹ Perhaps as a result, 1990 saw historic reunification talks between Seoul and Pyongyang.¹² And like Cuba and Vietnam, North Korea has little to offer Moscow in terms of economic benefits.

The evidence presented suggests Soviet foreign vital interests have indeed changed. Around the world, the Soviets seem to place economic and diplomatic ties above purely military and ideological ones. This is the very essence of Soviet "new thinking" in national security affairs. The military instrument of Soviet national power appears to the Kremlin as the least likely to promote the newly defined foreign vital interests.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

The Soviet Union is now struggling for its very existence. Separatist movements and economic collapse threaten to turn the world's geographically largest country into a battleground for a bloody civil war. The Soviet Union has become increasingly inward focused, narrowing its foreign vital interests to economic linkage with the rest of the world and diplomatic influence in the world's diplomatic community.

As a result, military power as an instrument of Soviet national power becomes a less viable choice to further Soviet foreign vital interests. Moscow will likely give an unemotional farewell this decade to some long-time clients. Economic survival and diplomatic legitimacy now eclipse ideology and military basing rights as international priorities.

If Mikhail Gorbachev is ousted, would these conclusions change? Probably not significantly. Gorbachev's assessment of Soviet ills are widely accepted, even in the Soviet Union. Any future successor to Gorbachev would still have to confront formidable internal challenges. This successor would soon find himself in the same position as his ousted predecessor. Independent of who rules, evidence suggests the Soviet military will play only marginally in international relations during the remainder of this decade.

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