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From Arms Control to Controlled Security

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The prospects for a comprehensive and complex U.S.-Soviet arms-control agreement, building on the foundations laid by SALT I and SALT II, are increasingly slim. Indeed, it is quite possible that arms control as we have known it has come to the end of the road. Once the great hope of those who believed that the U.S.-Soviet rivalry could be limited by joint agreement—with some even seeing in arms control the catalyst for a genuinely friendly American-Soviet relationship—comprehensive arms control (on the model of the SALT agreements) is likely to be the victim of the bloody-mindedness of the present Soviet leadership and of the dynamics of the technological revolution.

The present Soviet leadership recently has done something quite remarkable in the history of the U.S.-Soviet competition. It has publicly postulated that there will be no arms-control talks unless the U.S. is prepared to accept a public humiliation and a political defeat: the dismantling of the relatively few Pershing 2s and cruise missiles so far deployed in Western Europe as a response to the hundreds of SS-20s deployed by the Soviet Union over the past several years. In effect, the Soviet Union has made arms control a hostage to the attainment of a truly major geopolitical objective: the severance of the U.S.-European security connection.

A No-Win Situation

The Soviet demand is thus unacceptable. Even the accommodationists who today dominate the discourse over foreign affairs within a segment of the American body politic reject the Soviet demand, and the Reagan administration enjoys widespread backing here and in Europe in refusing to bow to it. The Soviets have thus backed themselves into a no-win situation, an act of unprecedented diplomatic stupidity.

In order to extricate themselves, they have lately proposed separate negotiations in Vienna on an anti-satellite weapons agreement. President Reagan was wise in responding affirmatively to the proposal for negotiations, but he is equally wise in anticipating no real progress in them.

But in the meantime the hostage is dying. The primary victim of this situation is arms control—not in its unrealistic utopian version but as a modest and practical way of somewhat controlling the spirals of defense spending and weapons accumulation on both sides. The Soviet refusal to negotiate simply means precious time is being lost, and as a result it will be even more difficult in the future to reach a truly ambitious and comprehensive agreement, a better version of SALT II.

This is because the political paralysis in the negotiations is being outpaced by the dynamics of the weapons revolution. The simple fact is that both the U.S. and the Soviet Union are rapidly moving—while the arms-control negotiations remain stalemated—to acquire increasingly sophisticated weapons systems, making existing ICBMs anachronistic. As pointed out in a recent study in the Naval War College Review by James Westwood: "The 1980s is a time of rapid transition and readjustments to technological changes in missilery. On the horizon are stealth-type bombers launching stealth cruise missiles (ALCM) and precision-guided munitions (PGMs), further obviating the role of ICBMs. Scientific and technological achievements in guidance, navigation, aerodynamics, electronic circuitry and componentry, and in

warhead yields-per-warhead-weight appear to be leading rapidly to a downturn, perhaps to an eventual demise of the once-ascendant and now dominant ICBMs of the period 1960 to 1985. This trend holds both in the United States and in the U.S.S.R."

Highly mobile and extraordinarily precise delivery systems are coming into being and are beginning to be deployed. By way of example, the CEP (circular error probabilities) of a Soviet SS-19 has been approximately 1,200 feet; that of a Minuteman III, 700 feet; of an MX, 450 feet; and of a Pershing 2, with terminal guidance, about 100 feet. The latest Soviet missiles also involve similarly impressive operational improvements.

It will be increasingly difficult to impose effective and verifiable limits on these weapons. The verification problem is becoming increasingly acute, given the mobility of the new systems and the opportunities for rapid reloading and covert deployment. The question of how to control qualitative improvements plagued SALT II negotiators and, at best, only a partially satisfactory response was developed. Their difficulties pale in comparison to the complexities posed by the new systems. Adequate verification of both qualitative and quantitative limits would require access to storage facilities and even perhaps to production centers. As a consequence, it is realistic to conclude that for both political and technological reasons, the chances of a truly comprehensive agreement, which can be reliably verified, are rapidly fading.

In that context, we are likely to see renewed attraction to war planners of a first-strike scenario. Since the mid-1950s, acqui-

poses the greatest danger. It could in one stroke create circumstances beyond our capacity to foresee either its social or historical consequences. Of course such a sudden-attack scenario remains unlikely, but one can disregard it entirely only at the greatest peril. Given the relative openness of American society, the precise location of key U.S. assets can be much more easily ascertained and effectively targeted than those of the Soviets. That makes the U.S. more vulnerable to such a strike, and it would be escapist to assume that Soviet planners would choose to ignore such an option altogether.

Moreover, a bolt out of the blue could create such initial disbelief among the U.S. decision makers that they would be unable to make a prompt response. Even without a special Soviet effort to disrupt or destroy U.S. decision makers, a sudden massive attack would put the American leaders under extraordinary psychological pressure, capable of inducing erratic behavior and hesitation. One can hardly imagine how utterly dumbfounding would be the situation in which the president would find himself awakened in the middle of some night, confronted with the following life-and-death decision tree (as based on public sources):

- Time (minutes)
- 0 Massive attack launched.
- 1 SLBMs detected.
- 2 ICBMs detected.
- 4-6 Confirmation of attack; uncertainty over scale; U.S. decision process begins.
- 6-10 First SLBMs detonate in High Altitude EMP attack; SAC launched

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sition by the Soviets of a respectable nuclear capability meant that a first strike—inherently messy and unpredictable in its consequences—was until recently not an attractive option for either side. A messy attack with large and relatively inaccurate warheads (the only kind possible) would still precipitate an almost equally messy counterattack. But with the deployment of extraordinarily accurate systems, a first strike designed to paralyze the opponent's capacity to respond through the pre-emptive destruction of most of its forces and through the decapitation of its command structure can again become a viable planning option. From an offensive point of view, a sudden attack by highly precise and very numerous nuclear weapons is more profitable than an exchange resulting from a political crisis prompting both sides to gear their forces to maximum alert.

In the years ahead, one can envisage several ways in which nuclear weapons might be used in anger and by deliberation. Four basic variants summarize the range of possibilities: (1) a massive surprise attack; (2) through crisis escalation; (3) by contagion from non-superpower conflicts; (4) by terrorist attack. Of those, in the years ahead probably the fourth is the most likely since it involves a relatively simple operation, and it can be undertaken by a limited group of individuals with little concern for society and motivated by their own peculiar brand of rationality.

But while the employment of a nuclear device in a terrorist attack may be the

preemptively; confirmation of scale of attack; final U.S. decision process.

10-12 U.S. decision needed: Ride-out or respond; first SLBMs detonate over U.S. SLBM bases and National Command Authority.

12-14 Final window for initiating response; launch under attack.

16-20 Delta SLBMs launched from home ports hit SAC.

20-30 ICBM attack initiates possible X-ray pin-down and begins impact on targets.

How in these circumstances would the president perform? How effective would be the chain of command? How rational would be the choices made in response to initially unbelievable information? Could incoming information regarding the nature of the attack be rationally related to the needed response? We are dealing here with truly sensitive and disturbing operational as well as psychological questions.

The advent of increasingly numerous and accurate systems is making it possible for planners of a strategic attack to envisage a first strike that leaves the opponent strategically crippled, capable of only a spasmodic, disorganized and strategically aimless response—or none at all. This still does not make a first strike attractive from a moral or even political point of view, given the stakes, but the point is that gradually the military attractiveness of this option is again increasing.

Accordingly, with the stalemate in arms control, the enhanced capacity of strategic defense must be sought—and it is likely to

be offset by greater reliance on the part of both sides on defensive strategic systems. The Times of London put it correctly when it stated editorially on June 13: "The Soviet Union is now naturally worried about the consequences of a burst in American spending on missile defense. It casts doubt on Soviet plans for offensive systems since the possibility of any missile defense—even an incomplete one—would radically alter the cost calculation of offensive systems. In the long run a defensive program would enhance arms control by reducing the potential gains from building offensive weapons. . . . It is ironic and paradoxical that the age of deterrence has so confused the strategic mentality of many commentators that their reaction to a purely defensive system is to suggest that it increases danger."

The fact is that strategic defense has become feasible not in the sense that it can safeguard society but because it can increasingly complicate the planning and execution of an effective first strike. In other words, strategic defense can somewhat negate the offensive advantages of increasingly sophisticated strike systems, restoring the element of deterrence simply by creating again greater uncertainty as to the consequences of a first strike.

Respective Vulnerability

For the U.S., it is an especially attractive option for it permits us to exploit the advantages of high technology, an area of U.S. superiority. This provides us with genuine potential for offsetting the military advantages gained in recent years by the Soviet Union, and would put pressure on the Soviet Union to return to serious arms-control negotiations.

But even with such negotiations, the development of some defensive strategic capability will remain desirable. It is often said that an imbalance might arise when one side sees the other side acquiring a relatively invulnerable shield while itself remaining vulnerable. Pre-emption might therefore become tempting. In fact, that is not likely to happen. The acquisition of a defensive strategic capability is not like purchasing an umbrella, which one can unfold against the rain upon leaving the store. It is bound to be a protracted trial-and-error piecemeal process, with both sides experimenting, deploying partially, and adjusting their capabilities, with neither one at any point in the next 15 to 20 years feeling it is truly invulnerable to the other side, even though over time the respective vulnerability of each side to a first strike by the other will gradually be declining.

Through such a process, a measure of reciprocal stability will be acquired and security of both sides will gradually be enhanced, though the process will not yield the kind of restraint in defense expenditures that many have associated with the hoped-for arms control. But the time has come to lay to rest the expectation that arms control is the secret key to a more amicable American-Soviet relationship or even to the enhancement of mutual security. The maintenance of such security will remain an ambiguous and protracted process requiring unilateral actions by both sides, and increasingly so in the area of strategic defense.

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