

The viewpoint developed by Epstein stresses the "rationality of pre-emption" as a Soviet solution to or compensation for self-perceived operational inflexibility. If Soviet capabilities and doctrines *are* the product of this sort of conscious design intended to compensate for known weaknesses, what are the consequences for NATO planning and what are the implications for the construction of effective Confidence-Building Measures? Epstein's analysis concludes that any NATO defence plans that (1) emphasize the "disruption of the Soviets' rigid (conventional) command and control system;" (2) offer increased protection for NATO aircraft and airbases; or (3) increase the time available for NATO mobilization and reinforcement will increase the existing uncertainty of Soviet decision makers and, as a consequence, enhance conventional deterrence. He also points out that the Soviet command structure, because of its reputed inflexibility, is particularly vulnerable to unexpected adversary actions. This leads Epstein to make a somewhat more controversial recommendation. He suggests that the perceived NATO capacity to wage local counter-offensives will also increase Soviet uncertainty and therefore enhance deterrence.⁸⁶

The notion that Soviet conventional force structure, equipment and doctrine reflect the deliberate, rational accommodation⁸⁷ to undesirable operational inflexibility suggests that Soviet interest in Constraint CBMs would be, at best, minimal. Unless Constraint CBMs could reduce, in some way, the consequences of net Soviet inflexibility – and no obvious method for achieving this end suggests itself – it is hard to see what advantages the Soviets would perceive in the pursuit of this type of Confidence-Building. Because Constraint CBMs typically would impair the ability of the Soviets to launch a pre-emptive attack, Soviet decision makers would be loathe to negotiate wide-ranging measures of this type. It is entirely possible,

however, that the Soviets would be interested in those more limited CBMs designed to reduce the chance of misperception and unintended escalation. Reduced uncertainty about and increased knowledge of NATO forces and intentions would tend to reduce the effects of inflexibility. It is not clear, however, whether the Soviets would be prepared to trade-off such knowledge in an Information CBM regime against NATO enjoying correspondingly greater access to information about the WTO.⁸⁸

Although it may be quite true that the Soviet High Command has self-consciously structured its doctrine and capabilities to compensate for intrinsic operational inflexibility (with certain consequences for Confidence-Building possibilities), this is only one of a number of possible explanations for the specific nature of and changes in Soviet conventional force capabilities and doctrine. This one happens to be a very specific and unique sort of explanation, one that is largely inner-directed, sensitive to organization rigidities but nevertheless rational in nature. As we have noted many times, there are other explanations for why the specific character of Soviet doctrine and capabilities is as it is. In the most general terms, these explanations rely upon one of two basic dynamics: (1) a fundamentally unilateral, non-rational, incremental process of force and doctrinal development; or (2) a fundamentally interactive, rational "action-reaction" process where Soviet decision makers respond consciously and deliberately to counter NATO policy. It is not at all clear whether the opportunities for Confidence-Building would be worse or better if Soviet policies appeared to be largely unilateral and non-interactive. Presumably, decision makers presiding over an inner-directed and incremental process of policy development would not be especially influenced by nor interested in technical CBMs. Such measures would likely be seen to be external impedimenta or simply extraneous. It seems more likely that

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 84-86.

⁸⁷ It is also possible to argue – although Epstein does not – that Soviet military decision makers may have come to realize that doctrines and capabilities developed for other reasons address, serendipitously, the increasingly serious problem of inflexibility. As a practical matter, this sort of after-the-fact rationale is more likely to have been the case.

⁸⁸ Although Epstein does not say so, it does not necessarily follow that increased operational flexibility would make the Soviets any less likely to prefer a pre-emptive form of defence. Likewise, it is not necessarily the case that CBMs would deflect Soviet interest in essentially pre-emptive doctrines.

