

MAD or NUTS?

by Carl G. Jacobsen

President Reagan's defence plans have been subjected to a barrage of criticism from many of the giants of past national security policy councils, Republican as well as Democratic. But the recriminating rhetoric may have confused the issue instead of clarifying it.

The early days of the administration saw a concerted effort to portray Moscow as militarily superior. The image served to oil Congressional passage of an enormous defence budget increase (defence expenditures are scheduled to jump from 144 billion dollars in 1981 to 343 billion in 1986). Public acceptance of the image led to resigned acceptance of consequent deficits, and social security cutbacks.

The image was always flawed. The "evidence" was one-sided, selective and often wrong. That is the judgment of former Secretaries of Defense McNamara and Brown, as well as an overwhelming majority of nuclear scientists, arms controllers and (established) strategists. The judgment was backed by Pentagon Chief Scientist Dr. W.J. Perry in his testimony to Congress a couple of years ago. As concerns the twenty most important areas of basic technology he acknowledged that the US was superior in twelve, and fully as capable as the USSR in the remaining eight.

Moscow does today enjoy a crude quantitative lead in certain categories. But the US remains ahead in the more important areas, namely warhead numbers (American warheads add up to 60 percent of the world nuclear arsenal), and accuracy technologies (the Pershing II missile has six times the "kill probability against hardened targets" of the SS20). Accuracy is far more important than megatonnage: a 50 percent improvement in accuracy has the same target effect as an eight-fold increase in yield. Moscow was forced to seek improved target effect through yield increases, because she did not possess the accuracy technologies that might have allowed her to choose a more cost-effective route; the US did. The US also leads in warhead miniaturization technologies (allowing more warheads on smaller missiles), vulnerability (70 percent of Moscow's strategic force conglomerate is land-based, and hence theoretically vulnerable, as opposed to 21 percent of America's) and readiness (typically, well over 60 percent of America's strategic missile subs are ready at their firing locales at any one time, compared to 14 percent of Moscow's).

The administration image of Soviet superiority was a political device designed to secure passage of its strategic program. It was not a statement of fact. The Pentagon's

current five-year plan confirms that on-going programs are intended to "render the accumulated Soviet equipment stocks obsolescent."

US seek superiority

The administration's strategic design is further revealed in its "1983 Defense Authorization Act." The most important element concerns the procurement of new super-carriers, core units of new exceptionally potent naval squadrons. These are designed to go for the jugular, and strike directly at the heart of Soviet defences, namely Moscow's second strike and withholding sanctuary in the Barents Sea and adjacent Arctic waters. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) explains: "The specifics of these plans are based upon a maritime offensive strategy that emphasizes strikes against enemy forces and their supporting base structure, including strikes in enemy waters against its home territory."

The CBO report notes the widespread criticism: "Critics of this position view the strategy as fundamentally unworkable and likely to provoke Soviet use of nuclear weapons against the (carrier) battle groups"; the strategy is considered "dangerously provocative in a nuclear-armed world and very hazardous to US carrier forces even if a nuclear exchange is avoided."

The past five US administrations all based their defence policies on acceptance of the thesis that "mutual assured destruction" (MAD) had become a fact of life, and that it was likely to remain so for the foreseeable future (a judgment dictated by the nature of current and evolving technologies). Although Soviet forces lacked sophistication, it seemed clear that Moscow nevertheless now had sufficient invulnerable strike potential to destroy US society. This established the basic precondition for arms negotiations. Both parties acknowledged that true superiority was impossible. It therefore made sense to try to stabilize the existing balance, and to slow the escalatory momentum. This furthermore meant that both parties desist from action that might jeopardize the other's retaliatory capacity, because the scientific consensus that the ultimate ambition was futile, and because it was realized that the very

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