

Soviet view of nuclear war

he then accuses the Reagan administration of having "openly adopted a course of policy aimed at undermining détente, engaging in a massive arms race, and vigorous preparations for nuclear war." These "practical actions" seek to replace the strategic "parity" of the early 1970s by American "military superiority," and eventually by American "world domination," and they are "pushing the peoples of the world toward the abyss of thermonuclear war."

Deterrence — alive and well everywhere

Having identified the threat to peace, at least to his own satisfaction, Ogarkov goes on to define Soviet policies in general as being "aimed at ending the threat of war, deepening détente, holding the arms race in check, and opposing the forces of aggression." This naturally means that the USSR's defence efforts are seen as responses to external dangers since the Party and government have had "realistically" to seek to guarantee "the reliable security of our country" and "readiness to offer a resolute rebuff to aggression." Only in this context does Ogarkov admit that there is any possibility that the Soviet Union would contemplate using its own strategic nuclear forces. For these, he maintains, now "possess the capability, in case the aggressor initiates a war which employs nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union and the other nations of the socialist community, to immediately deliver a crushing strike in response." And in spite of other existing programs for raising his state's war-fighting and war-survival capabilities, he announces it is precisely these strategic systems "which serve as the principal factor restraining the aggressor."

Ogarkov's exposition of current Soviet doctrine, then, contains nothing that contradicts the development outlined

earlier. It is further significant that despite his frequent citing of Lenin's contributions to Marxist military thought, he makes no mention whatsoever of the Clausewitzian dictum on war and politics. Instead he includes a number of passages that stress that a nuclear war will mean worldwide disaster, and in effect thereby underscores the "irrationality" of initiating any such conflict. Of equal interest, his concept of a deterrence based mainly on the ability to launch a devastating retaliatory strike has much in common with Western ideas that peace can be kept if an aggressor fears he will suffer "unacceptable damage." So it seems that the Soviet leaders, at least in terms of their doctrine, are sincere in their fears about thermonuclear catastrophe and in their intention to use the relevant weaponry *only as a response* to an enemy's first strike.

All in all, then, they appear to have met Professor Pipes's demand that they reject the Clausewitzian dictum's applicability to nuclear conflicts. In addition, there are indications that earlier Western efforts to "educate" the Soviet military in our concept of deterrence may have born some fruit. For Ogarkov's views on this matter in many ways seem closer to those of Western strategists of the last decade than they do to those of some leading officials in the Washington of today. Ironically, it is Pipes, Caspar Weinberger and their colleagues who now envisage the possibility of engaging in a drawn-out nuclear struggle. In this way they have adopted as policy for the United States precisely the view of deterrence they once perceived as holding sway in Moscow. If this is true — as a growing body of evidence suggests it is — then Moscow's negotiators now may have to begin "re-educating" their American opposites about the facts of global life and death in the thermonuclear era. □



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