

The 1981 defense budget: A buildup or a bluff ?

by Konstantin George and Susan Welsh

The Defense Department's Fiscal Year 1981 budget request—widely heralded as the beginning of an “arms buildup” to bolster the administration's “Carter Doctrine”—embodies a defense program that will increase the likelihood of general thermonuclear war, while leaving the United States in no condition to fight that war.

The budget concentrates resources on developing a “first strike” capability against Soviet military targets, while allowing the continued erosion of war-fighting capabilities in depth. The Carter administration does not anticipate fighting a general war with the Soviet Union, but seeks to develop the “credible threat” of a knock-out capability, as a bluff, in order to prevent the Soviet Union from responding to American political and military actions by launching all-out war.

The budget seeks to upgrade U. S. ability to project power into Third World “hot spots” through the Rapid Deployment Force and related programs. The underlying idea is the geopolitical encirclement of the Soviet Union, fomenting an “arc of crisis” around its borders, draining Soviet economic resources.

U.S. defense policy today is the correlative of the New York Council on Foreign Relations' (CFR) aim to destroy the “neo-mercantilist” forces of the Soviet Union, United States, Europe and Japan, which for centuries have threatened to institute a global order based on economic progress and scientific technological development. To counter this, the CFR proposes an era

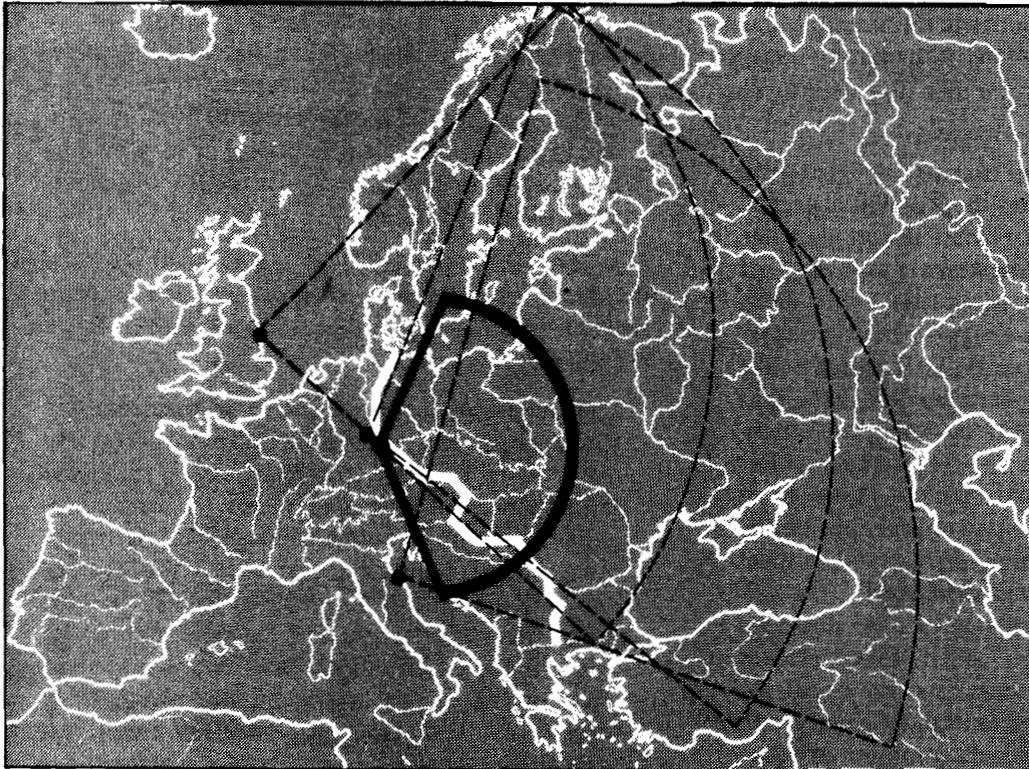
of “controlled disintegration,” in which the super-powers, fearful of launching an “unthinkable” thermonuclear war, will instead wage local “proxy” wars in the Third World, in a Malthusian struggle over dwindling natural resources.

The budget report by Defense Secretary Harold Brown demands that U.S. allies in Europe and Japan revamp their economies for increased military production in support of these policy aims, thereby cutting off channels of cooperation between these countries and the Soviet Union.

The budget statement also advocates an alliance with the People's Republic of China, to further the encirclement of the Soviet Union. It endorses the transfer to China of civilian technology “which may have potential military application.”

This is not a budget aimed to develop an in-depth war-fighting capability, since Brown declares this to be “futile.” Nor is U.S. doctrine intended to prevent nuclear war, since the Pentagon has recently issued a study suggesting first use of tactical nuclear weapons in the Persian Gulf in case of a Soviet invasion of Iran (*New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1980).

Instead the doctrine aims to limit the Soviet Union's response to such a scenario, forcing Moscow to accept the possibility of “limited nuclear war” and “selective” strategic exchanges between the United States and U.S.S.R. against counterforce targets on each other's



The heavy arc shows the range of U.S. Pershing I missiles currently deployed in West Germany. The lighter arcs show the range of new medium-range missiles—within four-minute flight-time of Soviet targets—to be stationed in Britain, West Germany and Italy according to NATO's decision of Dec. 12, 1979.

home territory. Brown readily admits (with some perplexity) that this all goes completely against Soviet military doctrine, which stresses war-winning capability even in general thermonuclear war.

But Brown and his co-thinkers hope that by developing U.S. counterforce capabilities—through improved accuracy of nuclear missiles, hardening of silos, and such programs as the MX missile and the deployment of the cruise and Pershing II medium-range missiles in Western Europe—the U.S. can use the threat of a disabling first strike to force Soviet adherence to American counterforce doctrines.

Take for example the MX missile for which the budget proposes \$1.6 billion for research and development towards full (operating) capability in 1989. The missile will have a higher accuracy and higher pay load than existing Air Force rockets. The 200 missiles will be housed in an underground trench, with mobile launchers shuttling the missiles in and out of 4,600 concrete shelters to be built in Utah and Nevada. The MX presumes either a surprise U.S. first strike (since if launched in retaliation it would hit empty Soviet silos), or Soviet acceptance of “restraint” and counterforce doctrine, in which case large quantities of both sides’ missiles would remain in their silos after the first launch.

Secretary Brown, in testimony on the MX before the House Appropriations Subcommittee March 25, explained: “We need to be able to attack their military

forces. If we want to be able to attack them promptly, we need a highly accurate intercontinental ballistic missile.” Asked why the Carter administration could not rely on a strategy of launching existing missiles after detecting a Soviet strike, Brown replied that that “would be going to war by computer—I think that would be a mistake.”

Will It Work?”

Washington’s strategy is based on a notion of “controlled escalation,” from conventional fighting to tactical nuclear to selected strategic strikes, with general thermonuclear war the “unthinkable” last phase which is never expected to occur. Since this concept was first worked out by Henry Kissinger, James Schlesinger, Robert McNamara and others during the 1950s and 1960s, it has been viewed as a thermonuclear “chicken game” for securing political and military gains short of all-out war.

It will not work, since Soviet doctrine absolutely excludes it. The Soviets believe that if nuclear war comes, it will be because the vital strategic interests of one or both superpowers are at stake to a degree which makes “compromise” impossible. Neither power would give up those vital interests before all the military means at its disposal had been launched against the enemy; therefore, “escalating” warfare is impossible. Soviet doctrine draws no distinction between “tactical” and “strategic” weapons, viewing them both as components in the arsenal of

total war. "Counterforce" is rejected as an "imperialist invention," since Soviet missiles will hit American industrial and population centers along with military targets.

These facts are admitted and then dismissed by Harold Brown:

Soviet leaders acknowledge that nuclear war would be destructive beyond even the Russian historical experience of the horrors of war. But at the same time some things Soviet spokesmen say—and, of even more concern to us, some things they do in their military preparation—suggest they take more seriously than we have done, at least in our public discourse, the possibility that a nuclear war might actually be fought. In their discussion of that prospect, there are suggestions also that if a nuclear war occurred, the time-honored military objectives of national survival and dominant military position at the end of the fighting would govern and so must shape military preparations beforehand.

Beyond the murky teachings of these doctrinal presentations, the Soviet leaders make evident through their programs their concerns about the failure of deterrence as well as its maintenance, and their rejection of such concepts as minimum deterrence and assured destruction as all-purpose strategic theories. Those concerns are understandable; some of us share them ourselves. What must trouble us, however, is the heavy emphasis in Soviet military doctrine on the acquisition of war-winning capabilities, and the coincidence (in one sense or another of that word) between their programs and what have been alleged as the requirements of a

deliberate war-winning strategy....

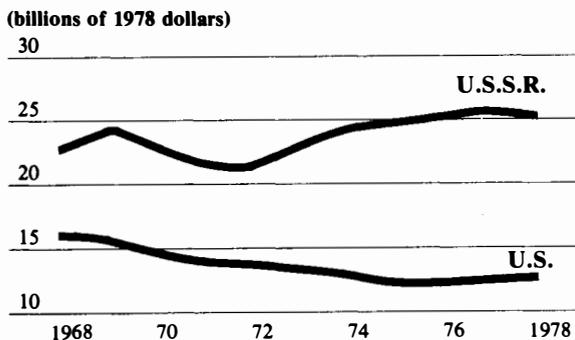
These leaders should know by now, as we learned some years ago, that a war-winning strategy—even with high levels of expenditures—has no serious prospect of success either in limiting damage in an all-out nuclear exchange or in providing meaningful military superiority. (DOD *Annual Report FY1981*, pp. 82-83)

A study produced in 1977 by the Council on Foreign Relations, titled *Nuclear Weapons and World Politics*, attempts to grapple with the same issue that CFR-member Brown addresses:

Understandably, given a history of recurrent foreign invasion and devastation under both tsars and commissars, there is a strong inclination within the Russian character to prepare for the worst. Regardless of any hypothetical expansionist intent, many (most?) Soviet planners believe that the Soviet Union ought to be prepared to win the next war, whatever its scope. The logical appeal of the Western concept of mutual deterrence has not and will not thoroughly overcome this war-fighting instinct (David C. Gompert, "Strategic Deterioration: Prospects, Dimensions, and Responses in a Fourth Nuclear Regime")

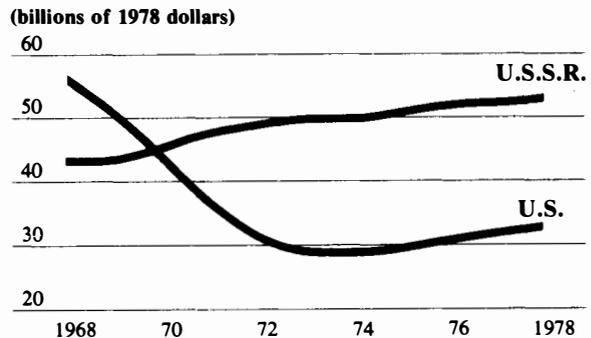
The CFR study concludes that the economic difficulties faced by the Soviet Union will be a major constraint on the country's ability to significantly outpace the United States. Therefore an essential "equilibrium" will allegedly be maintained at least through the 1980s, since neither side is likely to develop effective defenses against

Strategic forces
U.S. outlays vs. estimated dollar cost of Soviet activities



Source: Department of Defense Annual Report, FY1981.

General Purpose forces
U.S. outlays vs. estimated dollar cost of Soviet activities



Source: Department of Defense Annual Report, FY1981.

ballistic missiles, of the sort necessary to seriously upset parity. This underestimation of Soviet technological advance is discussed in an accompanying article.

Global projection of power

Despite the Carter administration's stated commitment to an arms build-up, the current state of the U.S. economy prohibits simultaneously beefing up the strategic deterrent, creating the new Rapid Deployment Force, and strengthening the general purpose forces to the extent required to actually wage war. Under the CFR's "controlled disintegration" of the world economy, not even outright Nazi-style austerity conditions could gouge sufficient funds out of the shrinking civilian economy to make such an all-around build-up possible. Therefore the administration is focusing on the global projection of power, while in-depth war-fighting capabilities continue to erode.

The most striking new item in the proposed defense budget is the funding of the first phase of a \$10 billion Rapid Deployment Force program, to make available 100,000 men for rapid dispatch outside the NATO area.

Brown threatens our "cavalier" NATO allies that they must gear up their economies for military production to fill the gap in general-purpose forces which the U.S. is unable to fill. The Carter administration is demanding that West Germany increase its role in patrolling the North Atlantic and other areas within the NATO sphere, so that British and American forces can be deployed "east of Suez." According to Brown:

Because we will bear by far the greatest load in strategic, theater nuclear, naval, and rapid deployment forces, our allies will have to carry the bulk of the burden of needed increases in their own regions. They may well have to increase their efforts by more than the three percent a year pledged by NATO.... (p. 24)

The Soviets continue to produce new tanks, guns, and aircraft at two or three times the rate of the United States. They are investing perhaps twice as much in defense research and development. We must count on our NATO allies to make up many of these differences. (p. 48)

If Washington succeeds in forcing such an arms build-up in Western Europe, it will destroy what remains of Europe's detente relationship with the Soviet Union and its allies. Moscow has hitherto looked to Paris and Bonn as representing virtually the only viable war-avoidance tendencies in the West. If those tendencies are destroyed, the Soviet Union will conclude that general war has become inevitable. It will then seek the best opportunity to launch a first strike; the United States will probably be completely destroyed.

The provisions

What the new spending is for

Defense Secretary Harold Brown's budget statement for Fiscal Year 1981 released on Jan. 29 claims that the budget effects a 4.6 percent real rise in defense spending over the previous year. Two and a half months later, adjusted inflation figures have already reduced the real military "build-up" to something closer to 1 percent.

In a remarkable sleight-of-hand, the administration early this month cut \$82 million from the FY 1980 budget, so as to be able to fulfill the obligation, undertaken by all NATO member countries, of showing a 3 percent real annual increase in defense spending from FY 1980 to FY 1981.

What effect will the new budget have on U.S. combat readiness? We review each of the key program categories, assessing the impact of major new programs.

Research and Development. Despite the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "special emphasis be placed on revolutionary technological opportunities to harness the innovative spirit and capabilities of the American people," (*Military Posture for FY 1981*) R&D has for years been the "poor man" of the DOD budget. During the 1965-75 period, the overall research budget fell by nearly 50 percent in constant dollars. Since then it has risen by about 1 percent per year.

Meanwhile the Soviet Union spends at least twice as much as the U.S. military on research and development, and has more than double the number of scientists and engineers involved in research activity.

There is one technology which could revolutionize the military balance in much the same way the nuclear-tipped ICBM did 25 years ago, and that is the directed energy beam weapon. This device, if perfected, would be capable of directing intense energy (either laser energy or subatomic particles) in a beam travelling at or near the speed of light, capable of destroying an incoming missile or plane. Fired either from a satellite or from an