

Soviet military trades space for time

by Leo F. Scanlon

The Pentagon's 1990 edition of *Soviet Military Power* was released in September with none of the usual publicity and fanfare. The almost embarrassed treatment given by the Secretary of Defense is the Bush administration's declaration that it is unfashionable to talk about the military capabilities of enemies which pose a real threat to the United States. This season, it is the ill-equipped militaries fielded by underdeveloped nations which make strong men weep and women faint on Capitol Hill. But the booklet outlines realities more ominous than anything to be found in the Mideast.

The facts presented show that the Soviet command has responded to the collapse of the Warsaw Pact system with a well-executed strategy of "trading space for time." They have trimmed the mass of their Armed Forces by eliminating outdated equipment and replacing it with new systems which have reduced logistical requirements, and have preserved a vigorous production base in all major weapons systems. Despite the economic crisis in the Soviet economy, "there is no evidence confirming that any major weapon development programs have been stretched out or canceled, and research and development of follow-on systems in all major weapon categories appear to be continuing with no sign of decline."

Soviet Military Power warns that "Soviet military planners have not given any signs of reducing their efforts to achieve a qualitative leap in military capabilities by developing a new generation of weapons based on emerging advanced technology. Likewise, they appear determined to develop a fundamentally new class of weapons by exploiting new, cutting-edge technologies such as plasma, directed energy systems, and biotechnology in order to be prepared for what they see as a revolutionary change of the nature of the future battlefield."

The authors warn that at the end of the current "reform" of the Russian empire, "the Soviet Union will have the greatest military potential of any single country on the Eurasian landmass, likely retaining an army of around 3 million men, and weapons with thousands of nuclear warheads."

Arms treaties protect Soviet capabilities

Despite the propaganda surrounding the Bush administration's arms control agreements, the consequences of these treaties is that Soviet strategic and theater capabilities are

well preserved, even if the threat of ground attack in Western Europe has declined. It is emphasized that the strategic arms limitation (START) treaty "does not restrict the rapidly evolving technologies which have resulted in the deployment of increasingly capable Soviet strategic offensive and defensive weapon systems. As a result, even as Soviet weapons are reduced, overall Soviet capabilities may remain largely unchanged and could even increase over time."

The main effort in reorganization of Soviet strategic forces has been to replace their aging silo-based missile systems. *Soviet Military Power* reports: "By eliminating these silo-based systems the Soviets are streamlining their [intercontinental ballistic missile] ICBM force and giving it a decidedly mobile character. . . . With the three ICBM systems currently being deployed, the Soviets have the flexibility to adjust their force composition over the next few years. *Should the START process be interrupted, the Soviets could resume their modernization efforts without regard to START limits*" (emphasis added).

The report continues, "it should be noted, however, that the importance of theater nuclear forces in Soviet strategy has not decreased, and that short-range nuclear forces withdrawn to Soviet territory remain within the Western Theater of Operations."

In the post-Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty environment, Soviet ground forces will maintain their robust character, according to *Soviet Military Power*. The report provides the understated conclusion: "What has not been widely publicized is the fact that the new structure is a well-balanced combat force featuring a significant increase of artillery systems, armored infantry fighting vehicles, and personnel."

The report stresses that Soviet defenses are not matched by the United States. "Soviet strategic defenses are capable of degrading the effectiveness of U.S. offensive forces," both air-breathing and rocket-powered. "U.S. air defenses are less extensive," it continues. "In short, we would probably be able to detect Soviet bombers coming but would be limited in our ability to stop them from completing their attacks."

This array of Soviet land- and space-based systems are described in scant detail in order to downplay Bush's decision to abandon the Strategic Defense Initiative program. It nonetheless admits that "despite these obvious asymmetries, the Soviet Union continues to modernize its strategic air defenses. Indeed, current funding for these programs continues to show support for a long-term commitment to strategic defense."

While Bush hypes his "new world order," "Senior Soviet leaders insist that . . . the military danger to the Soviet Union has not significantly decreased and may, in fact, be growing." With Gorbachov, "the politically mandated disavowal of surprise attack has not yet been completely correlated with traditional Soviet operational requirements."