

Jp 0501

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NATO Summit: The Continuing Soviet Build-Up

In preparation for the Summit the Prime Minister will wish to note the continuing growth of Soviet armed strength despite the public statements of Soviet leaders in favour of arms reductions and 'sufficiency'.

2. Despite smooth Soviet words, the JIC see no evidence to suggest that there has been any lessening of the threat posed to NATO by the Warsaw Pact. Soviet Defence Minister Yazov has said publicly that the purpose of introducing 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' into the armed forces is to improve combat readiness, training, and discipline. As Defence Minister, he publicly supports the new doctrine of 'reasonable sufficiency', and has said that the Soviet side is ready for "fundamental reductions". But he continues to argue that any cuts should not upset the "approximate equilibrium" which he claims exists at present. He appears also to believe that cuts will need to be offset by compensatory measures. While denying any intention on the part of the Warsaw Pact to achieve military superiority, he has said (in his Report on 9 February to the Supreme Soviet Commissions on INF Treaty Ratification) that the "quantitative reduction" in arms under the INF Treaty would require the USSR to take "necessary measures" to improve the armed forces further. "We shall exert all efforts to make the military alliance of socialist countries, the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, even more powerful, and to strengthen the joint defence of socialist states".

*equilibrium*  
*INF treaty would require USSR to take the necessary measures to improve armed forces.*

*2*  
*Some useful additional material*

*CAF*  
*26/2*



3. Improvements in Soviet nuclear forces in recent years (involving considerable increases in warhead numbers) provide scope for more than adequate compensation for those missiles to be destroyed under the INF Treaty\*. In testimony to the Supreme Soviet earlier this month on INF ratification Marshal Akromeyev said "that there were other nuclear weapons in the European area which to a certain extent compensated for these (ie the INF) missiles". There are also already signs that, for example, some SS-23 missiles, which are to be removed under the INF Treaty, are being replaced on their bases by shorter-range SCUD missiles, which are not caught by the Treaty.

4. The evidence we have shows no slowing up in Soviet modernisation programmes in conventional and nuclear weapons. Modern aircraft, tanks, ships and submarines, missiles (tactical and strategic), and land armaments continue to replace older equipment in operational units at the same rate as previous years, and development programmes are continuing without any apparent let-up. For example, in addition to maintaining its (admitted) numerical superiority in main battle tanks over the West (over 2 to 1), the Warsaw Pact is rapidly making qualitative improvements in its tank capability through the introduction of the T-64 and T-80. With their special reactive armour these tanks are at least an equal to anything possessed by NATO. In 1987 at least 3,500 new modern tanks went into service with Warsaw Pact tank units compared with 1,600 into NATO. At the other end of the weapons spectrum the new strategic mobile missile, the SS-25, has been deployed rapidly and in large numbers over the last 2 years.

\*JIC(87) (N) 98 of 3 December 1987: Soviet Union: Theatre Capability post-INF.

*Akromeyev  
"Other nuclear  
weapons ---  
which ---  
compensated ---  
for the (INF  
missiles)*

*Tanks*

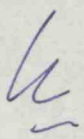
*SS-25*



5. Similar improvements are taking place in the Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact Forces. While Gorbachev would clearly like to lessen the burden of defence on the economy (14-16 per cent of GNP, compared with 5 per cent in the UK), defence expenditure is in fact continuing to grow. According to our estimates\*, it could rise by as much as 3 per cent per annum over the rest of the decade, unless deliberately constrained. But even a lower real increase, of say 1 per cent per annum, would represent a significant improvement in Soviet defence resources. Nor are there any signs of any reductions in the large number of Soviet divisions (30) deployed in the forward area facing NATO. In the absence of any significant reductions, we are highly sceptical that recent Soviet trumpeting of the Warsaw Pact's 'defensive' doctrine really amounts to any change in Soviet attitudes.

6. The threat therefore remains, and, in the absence of resolute Western counter-measures, will continue to grow. It should perhaps be added to avoid misunderstanding that this does not amount to a prediction of a Soviet invasion. In present circumstances direct Soviet military intervention, though never to be excluded, is unlikely. What is more than likely, however, is the long-term exploitation of military superiority for political ends, to intimidate or overawe. The end-situation would be a denuclearised and divided Western Europe, increasingly doubtful of the US commitment and increasingly under the shadow of Soviet arms, responding to Soviet political pressures and making alternative arrangements for its security.

24 February 1988

  
PERCY CRADOCK

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\*JIC(87) (WSI) 45 of 19 November 1987: Soviet Defence Spending 1970-1992.