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Unanswered Questions

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Unanswered Questions

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Disquieting news items have appeared in the media regarding Soviet actions that, if officially confirmed, would affect the implementation of the INF and CFE treaties, signed respectively in December of 1987 and November of 1990. All of the reports in question speak of the transfer by the Soviet Union of specific weapons systems either to other countries or from one part of the USSR to another, in apparent nonconformity with the spirit, if not the letter of these two agreements.

The INF Treaty

In the spring of 1990, several of the newly installed, post communist governments in Eastern Europe revealed that the USSR had transferred the Soviet OTR-23 (also known as the SS-23) shorter-range missiles to those countries despite the fact that Articles I and III (2) of the INF Treaty state that "each Party shall eliminate its . . . shorter-range missiles, [and] not have such systems thereafter," and that "for the purposes of the Treaty, existing types of shorter-range missiles are: . . . for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, missiles of the types designated by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as the OTR-22 and the OTR-23, which are known to the United States of America as the SS-12 and the SS-23, respectively."

These two weapons systems, introduced at the beginning of the 1980s, cannot be regarded as inconsequential. The SS23 (NATO designation *Spider*) has a radius of action of well over 300 (statute) miles, a CEP of one-fifth of a mile, and can carry a 100-kiloton warhead; better yet, the SS-12 (NATO designation *Scaleboard*) has a radius of

action of almost 600 miles, a CEP of one-sixth of a mile, and can carry a warhead of one megaton. In both cases, a nuclear or chemical warhead could be used.

Article V (2) requires that "[N]o later than 90 days after entry into force of the Treaty, each Party shall complete the removal of all its deployed shorter-range missiles and deployed and non-deployed launchers of such missiles to elimination facilities and shall retain them at those locations until they are eliminated"

The revelations by the East European governments concerned indicate that the Soviet Union actually had transferred a significant number of the SS-23 to its (then-) Warsaw Pact allies instead of eliminating these missiles. These reports have not been denied and the only issue that has arisen concerns the date of transfer, i.e., did these actions occur before or after the treaty was signed, which amounts only to establishing whether it was a breach of the spirit or of the letter of the agreement.

More ominous still are the implications of news that reached the US administration in November of this year: According to a European diplomat, a Soviet military attaché in Baghdad had revealed the transfer to Iraq of Soviet SS-12 missiles. The administration asked Moscow whether this action had occurred recently, i.e., after the conclusion of the INF Treaty.

One has to assume that the answer would be positive. Hostilities in the Iran-Iraq war ceased eight months after the treaty came into effect and it seems very unlikely that the Iraqis would have failed to use the missile had it been in their possession at that time.

Moreover, the revelation may throw new light upon Moscow's prolonged reluctance to make Saddam Hussein agree to the withdrawal of several hundred Soviet military technicians from Iraq--on the grounds that they had to serve out the remainder of their contractual obligations (which had been superseded, one might have thought, by the many UN Security Council resolutions imposing an embargo on Iraq).

If Iraq was attempting to deploy newly acquired, sophisticated SS-12 missiles (more modern and accurate than the obsolescent Soviet Scud in Baghdad's possession), the participation of Soviet military personnel would be essential. This aspect may explain also why Mr. Gorbachev dragged his feet for some time over UN endorsement of potential US military action against Iraq (which might lead Saddam Hussein to fire these sophisticated Soviet missiles, with consequent heavy American casualties).

The revelations concerning Soviet transfer of SS-23 and SS-12 are particularly embarrassing in light of fact that the president as recently as February 23 informed the Congress (in the annual report on Soviet Noncompliance with Arms Control Agreements) that "As of November 30, 1989, the USSR has *eliminated all* 957 of its shorter-range missiles and all 238 of its launchers for such missiles." [emphases added]

The CFE Agreement

While these reports have ominous implications for the full and genuine implementation of the 1987 INF Treaty, other data cast similar doubt on the fulfillment of the terms of the just-signed CFE agreement. According to its provisions, NATO and the Warsaw Pact each were to be limited to 20,000 artillery pieces, of which US forces (in Europe) and Soviet forces (west of the Urals) were to have no more than 13,700 each. In mid-1988, when the outlines of the agreement were emerging, Soviet forces (west of the Urals) reportedly had approximately 42,300 artillery pieces (so that about 28,600 of these would have had to be eliminated).

By mid-1990, the total of Soviet artillery pieces in Europe had been reduced to 33,000, by the simple mechanism of transferring some 9,300 east of the Urals, mostly the newest and most sophisticated models. Moreover, even among the units remaining west of the Urals, antiquated models reportedly were substituted for the more modern. Thus, by mid-1990, the Soviet Union would have had to eliminate only 19,300 (older) artillery pieces, in place of the 28,600 anticipated in 1988.

However, in the rush to conclude CFE by the arbitrary deadline of November 19, 1990, the United States apparently allowed further attrition in the amount of Soviet weapons to be eliminated. (The November deadline, moreover, left insufficient time for agreement on the number of troops each side could retain).

According to the London *Economist* and Reuters, by mid-October of 1990, the USSR informed the United States that the number of Soviet artillery pieces remaining west of Urals was down to a mere 18,300 (implying that an additional 14,700 units had been moved east of the Urals in less than four months of 1990). By the time the agreement was signed one month later, the USSR told the US that only 13,828 artillery pieces remained in the area in which 13,700 were permitted, meaning that a mere 128 pieces were "declared" for elimination. In other words, between mid-October and mid-November, yet another 4,472 Soviet artillery pieces had been shifted east of the Urals.

Apparently, the rapid movement of such large quantities of hardware across the Urals presents no major logistical problem for the USSR. (It should be noted that the parties have 90 days in which to verify the precise numbers; according to some reports, Moscow is willing to discuss increasing the number of pieces to be eliminated from 128 to all of 600! However, the issue here is not the balance of forces but rather the apparent Soviet manipulation of the data.)

According to the information provided by the USSR at the time of signature, a total of almost 28,500 Soviet artillery pieces (over 67%) must have been moved east of the Urals since 1988, and the number to be destroyed has been reduced from 28,600 to 128. This may explain also why the Soviet Union allowed fewer than 1,000 military facilities to be visited for verification under CFE, well under one-half of the number anticipated by the US.

Although only artillery is discussed in this article, it constitutes merely one factor in a syndrome affecting other weapon systems covered by the agreement. General Vigleik Eide, chairman of NATO's military committee, has stated that the Soviet Union has

removed some 60,000 tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery pieces from the area west of the Urals and that this number exceeded by far anything that had been expected by NATO officials.

These NATO statistics indicate that, in addition to the 28,500 Soviet artillery pieces, 31,500 Soviet tanks and armored vehicles have also been spirited out of the CFE region. (According to unofficial sources, the number was even larger: 21,000 tanks and 28,000 armored personnel carriers.) Where the elimination of weapons numbering many tens of thousands had been anticipated, harsh reality shows that a mere handful will be destroyed.

Incidentally, while both the USSR and the US are permitted to keep conventional armaments outside "Europe," for the former this means merely moving major elements back across the Ural hills into a potential theater of combat, while the US would have to ship weapons across the ocean, with all the delays and complexities that have become apparent during the build-up in the Gulf.

Questions to Pose

Now, two questions arise in connection with these manipulations of both arms control agreements: Are they or are they not of major military significance? Is Gorbachev or some other (presumably military) element in the leadership responsible?

A quick answer to the first question would be that at least a transfer of the SS-12 to Iraq would be of considerable military importance, while the significance of the transfer of the SS-23 to East European countries, viewed *ex post facto*, was vitiated by subsequent political developments. The issue of the movement of artillery pieces across the Urals can be judged only by the logistical criteria to which this article has alluded. Obviously, if the bottom line is a net military gain of considerable dimensions for the USSR, then the question of threat perceptions would have to be reexamined.

However, even if none of these manipulations pose a major military hazard for the west, the question arises why the USSR would risk potential diplomatic exposure and international disillusionment with the arms control process for gains that do *not* provide important military advantages.

As to the problem whether Gorbachev or other elements in the Soviet leadership should be viewed as responsible, the effect would be the same, whatever the answer. If *he* is responsible, then one would have to ask whether Gorbachev can be viewed as a productive partner, at this stage, for meaningful arms control measures. If someone else is responsible, then one would have to ask the identical question.

It is because the details of Soviet actions regarding INF and CFE raise such broader issues that they are worthy of discussion. It may be argued that these concerns are marginal at a time when dire predictions abound regarding the imminent dissolution of the Soviet state. However, paraphrasing a recent statement by JCS chairman General Colin Powell, the only worthwhile assumption about the next 18 months is that they will prove no less revolutionary than the previous 18 months. Wisely, he forbore from saying whether the movement would be forward or backward. It is because of such uncertainty that it would be rash to write off the concerns that are voiced in this article.

Soviet Artillery West of the Urals

	mid-1988	mid-1990	Oct.1990	Nov. 1990
Actually present	42,300	33,000	18,300	13,828
CFE Treaty limit	13,700	13,700	13,700	13,700
To be eliminated	28,600	19,300	4,600	128

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