
Background to the News

Pentagon report rips basis of Zero Option

by Leo Scanlon

The 1987 issue of the Pentagon's yearly publication, *Soviet Military Power*, makes a simple point: The arms of the Soviet State are poised for offensive action against the West. "Soviet forces are not equipped and trained as a home-based defense force"; the authors state, "rather, they are designed for offensive operations in the enemy's homeland."

This fact is at the heart of the commotion which has erupted in Europe ever since President Reagan indicated that his administration was considering the "Zero Option" for withdrawal of all intermediate-range nuclear missiles from continental Europe. The following simplified description of these systems should make clear the actual issues which are obscured by arms-control jargon.

In Soviet thinking, rocket forces, including ICBMs, are a form of long-range artillery, assigned according to range, in theater, front, and divisional units. The Soviets have, logically, built huge quantities of rockets in order to provide their tank armies with the most massive possible advantage at any level of military combat. Until recently, the accuracy of these missiles was poor, in part creating the need for such large numbers; likewise, the older nuclear systems are characterized by relatively large-yield warheads. If you can only predict accuracy to within several hundred yards, you need a combination of missiles, each with a pretty big explosive power, to guarantee the destruction of any one target.

This poses no problem if you are bombarding airfields and command headquarters deep in enemy territory, and far in advance of your front line of troops. The problem is different if you intend to hit targets close to your forces. In the current Soviet strategy, which calls for lightning strikes by "Operational Maneuver Groups," Soviet forces may even be behind, or surrounding the target on which the missiles are trained. In these circumstances, a large nuclear explosion is too uncontrollable to be of any value, and the more successful the armored forces are, the less protection they are afforded by such a missile.

Therefore, the big issue in design of the shorter-range systems is accuracy, and explosive power. In both areas the Soviets have made enormous advances. Beginning with the

intermediate range SS-20s, and working down to the shortest-range systems, the Soviets are upgrading guidance systems to be the equal of NATO technology. The next development on the horizon is the installation of new generations of extremely powerful conventional explosives, called "air/fuel explosive ordnance" or "improved conventional munitions" (ICM), and sophisticated chemical and biological warheads on this large inventory of more accurate missiles.

The high-power explosive ordnance technology is an area of research which the United States put on the shelf 10 years ago. The Soviets did not, and are now the world leaders in this area. Warheads using this technology can reportedly cause as much destruction as a small nuclear explosion, without the radioactivity which makes subsequent operations in the target area so cumbersome.

The Soviet short-range rocket systems with these technologies begin with the unguided "free rocket over ground" or FROG-7 (70 km range), on through the SS-21 (100 km), SS-1 SCUD B (300 km), SS-23 (500 km) and SCALEBOARD (900 km). The chart shows what these ranges look like on the map of Europe. In addition, the Soviets have a very large number of FENCER bombers which can deliver such ordnance, and also large numbers of the BM-27 multiple rocket launcher which fires salvos of 16 ICM, mines, or chemical munitions over a distance of 40 km. Finally, the almost uncountable number of self-propelled and towed artillery in the Soviet arsenal are all nuclear capable.

As *Soviet Military Power* points out, the Soviets "now believe that both sides possess enormous military capabilities that cannot be rapidly destroyed, even in nuclear conditions; thus, they foresee prolonged theater campaigns. The operations may begin with a bitter struggle to seize the initiative, encompassing extreme destruction and mass casualties. . . ."

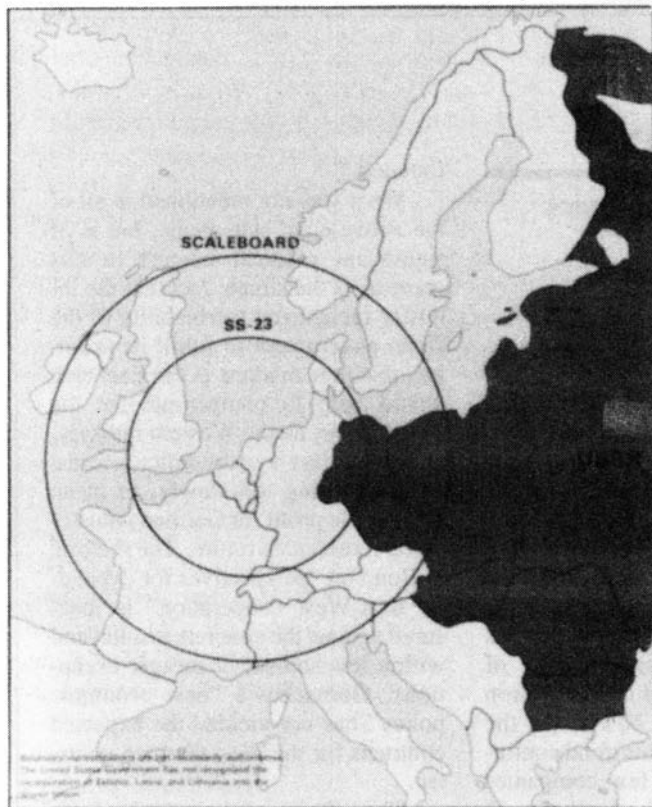
Soviet conventional forces

As a result of the situation described above, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, his West German counterpart Manfred Wörner, and U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rushed to demand that President Reagan refuse to discuss the issue of INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) and short-range missiles, unless there are discussions about reducing conventional forces in tandem.

Once the U.S. Pershing IIs are reduced in range by the removing of one stage, as is under way, NATO forces will have no artillery threat capable of reaching a target on Soviet territory. This is a great comfort to the waves of tank drivers who will be pouring into Europe, after the NATO missiles have been used up defending against the spearhead of a Soviet assault.

The Soviets are screaming that the Pershings could easily be returned to their original status, and are using this issue to stall the current talks on this matter. Of course, it should be pointed out, that they possess several options for achieving the same result with their SS-20s, which they have offered to

Potential SS-23 and SCALEBOARD Missile Coverage in an Advance Across Europe



restation behind the Urals. They can simply put them into their new CONDOR heavy lift aircraft, and have them on the front in less than an hour; or remove a warhead or two, and increase the range of the missile to reach its original target.

The idea that the Soviets would comply with limits on short-range systems is an even greater joke. Even if they did, there would be at least 1,500 SS-21 missiles plus other missiles not covered in talks, still capable of delivering their ordnance, against practically nothing left for NATO. These weapons would be accompanying Soviet armored forces which would possess a 5-to-1 advantage (conservatively estimated) against the West, and would be delivering both conventional and chemical warheads. Soviet armored units have a fully mobile decontamination capability—something which is nonexistent in the West. This is also an important technological development, since in previous wars chemical weapons have been little used, even when possessed in large numbers, because they were ultimately too messy and uncontrollable. This, and not humanitarian concerns, has restrained these horrible weapons—until now.

Finally, Soviet reserve echelons, the second and third wave of the “prolonged conflict” described by *Soviet Military Power*, will be heavily protected by an interceptor capability which is now second to none. The Soviets are continually reorganizing their air forces to take advantage of the latest



Department of Defense

A chemical protection company can cleanse the vehicles of one regiment with one load of decontaminant. The Soviet TMS-65 shown here uses a jet engine to dispense decontaminant.

technologies being deployed, always increasing the depth and strength of their air defenses. It should not be imagined that these defenses are only to protect “the motherland”—as has been pointed out, they are to protect the offensive forces represented in their tanks, infantry, and artillery. There are now close to 500 of the latest FOXHOUND, FLANKER, and FULCRUM fighters, with a “look-down, shoot-down” radar capability for defense against NATO cruise missiles. These are backed up by the densest SAM system ever deployed, 11 layers in all, which makes the staging ground for the Soviet armored columns nearly invulnerable once the medium-range Pershing missiles are gone.

European response

The picture presented by a Europe denuded of American medium- and short-range missiles, is very grim indeed. European governments are speaking out loudly against the folly being pursued by the Reagan administration, and at the same time are pushing ahead with efforts to develop a defense against the Soviet short- and medium-range missiles, which they fully expect to be deployed, no matter what Gorbachov agrees to. Simultaneously they are racing to develop an anti-aircraft system which will protect against the superior numbers of Soviet fighter bombers. After all, it does little good to stop a missile if an airplane can deliver the same bombload. The best response would be a demand that the Allies desist from double-talk at the bargaining table, and put the SDI and its related Tactical Defense Initiative systems on a crash footing. Then there would be something real to talk about with the Soviets.