

A Sunny Day In January

By John T. Correll, EDITOR IN CHIEF

CONTINUING along its well-advertised path toward peace and enlightenment, the Soviet Union has begun deploying the Mod V variant of its SS-18 heavy ICBM. It is more accurate and lethal than the Mod IV variant, which was sufficient by itself to target every US ICBM silo (allocating two warheads against each of them) and command facility, with about 1,000 warheads left over.

The Mod V is the third new ICBM the Soviets have introduced since General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's ascension to power in 1985. Also deployed on his watch have been the rail-mobile SS-24 and the road-mobile SS-25. In the past year alone, twenty SS-24s and sixty-five SS-25s have entered service.

US Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney finds it exasperating that many Americans believe the Soviet military threat has vanished. "If anything, the United States is facing a *more* formidable offensive strategic arsenal than before Mr. Gorbachev took power," he says.

Soviet conventional forces are not withering away either. *The Military Balance*, published October 5 by the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, concludes that Soviet forces possess significantly more manpower, tank strength, and surface-to-air missiles than was estimated previously. The Institute now figures that the Soviets have 60,000 main battle tanks, up by 6,700 from last year's estimate.

The chart below is derived from *Soviet Military Power 1989*, published September 27 by the Pentagon. It shows clearly enough that Mr. Gorbachev's diplomacy has not interfered with his production of military goods.

Lest anyone think these numbers are a Western propaganda trick, the Soviets acknowledge that their military spending did not decline during Mr. Gorbachev's first three years. Five months ago, Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov explained that "when forming plans for 1986-90, because of the international situation prevailing at the time and our military doctrine, we were compelled to envision a traditional growth of defense ex-

penses at a pace exceeding the growth of national income." Mr. Gorbachev's admirers may take comfort nevertheless from his forecast of a fourteen percent reduction in military spending "as early as 1990-91."

It is little wonder that Western strategists turn no cartwheels about Mr. Gorbachev's peace offensive. Ironically, the United States, which has cut its defense spending by twelve percent in four years and which has not gotten its own ICBM modernization program beyond the first fifty Peacekeepers, is often accused of being unresponsive to Mr. Gorbachev's overtures.

If the Soviets have adopted a defensive doctrine, Mr. Cheney asks, why did they push ahead with the SS-18 Mod V, a powerful missile based in fixed silos? The Mod V, Mr. Cheney charges, "would seem by its basic design to be a use-it-or-lose-it weapon—one that would make sense only for a preemptive first strike."

Available evidence indicates that preemptive attack remains the preferred nuclear employment option in Soviet strategy. In the Pentagon's assessment, "the Soviets will likely maintain adequate weapons even under START [Strategic Arms Reduction Talks] constraints to cover current and anticipated future target sets."

Similarly suspect are Soviet claims that their conventional forces have switched to the defensive. To the extent that anything has changed, US planners say, it is because the Russians are worried that NATO's Follow-On Forces Attack concept will upset their battle plans for reinforcement and resupply. While there have been some adjustments to protect rear echelons, Soviet theater forces are still tailored for offensive operations.

The reduction of Soviet tank forces in Europe, announced with fanfare last December, seems to have gone astray, too. It now appears that the troops and equipment have been assigned to other units rather than disbanded and that the infrastructure of the units remains intact. "What Gorbachev said at the UN is that six tank divisions would be withdrawn and disbanded," Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, observes. "That is not what is going on."

Mr. Gorbachev has convinced most of the world that his force-reduction proposals are an unprecedented act for a Soviet leader. Not so, says the Department of Defense: "Thirty years ago, Khrushchev made significant unilateral cuts that were even more drastic than those announced by Gorbachev. He reduced the size of the Soviet armed forces by over 1,000,000 men, which accounted for over thirty-six divisions." It did not take his successor, Leonid Brezhnev, long to build back what was lost and then some.

Unfortunately, the hard facts seem to influence public opinion less than does public relations puffery. Americans are too quick to assume the danger is gone, Mr. Cheney warns.

"They have seen *some* changes and apparently believe *everything* is now just fine," he says. "It is if they had decided to give away their overcoats on the first sunny day in January." ■

The Soviet "Slowdown"
(Average annual production)

	Pre-Gorbachev (1982-84)	Gorbachev (1986-88)
Tanks	2,800	3,400
Other armor	5,400	4,600
Self-propelled artillery	900	900
Submarines	9	9
Surface warships	9	9
Bombers	40	47
Fighters	950	680
Military helicopters	580	450
ICBMs	116	116
Sea-launched cruise missiles	1,000	1,100
Surface-to-air missiles	15,000	16,000