

Controlling Risks in the East-West Conflict

By Richard K. Betts

HANNES ADOMEIT. *Soviet Risk-Taking and Crisis Behavior*. London, Allen & Unwin, 1982.

ALEXANDER GEORGE, Ed. *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*. Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1983.

PAUL BRACKEN. *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1983.

HARRIET FAST SCOTT and WILLIAM F. SCOTT. *The Soviet Control Structure: Capabilities for Wartime Survival*. New York, Crane, Russak, for the National Strategy Information Center, 1983.

IN DIVERSE WAYS, these books bracket two general issues of great concern to strategists. One is how Washington or Moscow works to avoid intensification of their "normal" state of tension, and how they work to manage risks when a crisis nevertheless occurs. The other is how the complex organizations, plans, and procedures of the apparatus below the top level of leadership in each capital fulfill the day-

to-day mission of preparing for war, and how they can do so without aggravating a crisis. The first two books reviewed here deal with the former set of questions; the other two, with the latter.

The notion of controlling risks is almost a contradiction in terms. Indeed, the fact that neither superpower can be confident that provocative initiatives will not escalate dangerously is one of the underpinnings of deterrence. This makes the problem of risk a fundamental one in managing US-Soviet relations. Although it has become a cliché that the United States and Soviet Union have both competitive and cooperative interests, the only cooperative one on which there has been real consensus is the avoidance of war. Even this has not prevented the use of force against or through third parties. On almost everything else competition takes precedence.

Another, related cliché is that Americans became disillusioned with détente because they expected too much from it. But it is not clear that the concept was oversold by the Nixon Administration—any more than it was "overbought" by other politicians or citizens who, given the American liberal tradition, have difficulty conceiving international relations in terms of gray rather than black or white. Yet, as Alexander George shows, even the leaders who nego-

tiated détente left crucial ambiguities in the concept, each side trying to constrain the other while retaining freedom of maneuver for itself. Subsequent moves were then viewed as more provocative than the side undertaking them claimed to have intended. Much of the nature of risk lies in this gray area where ends, means, and their limits can be miscalculated by one side or misunderstood by the other. As Adomeit's study of two crises in the pre-détente period shows, Soviet aims and behavior were actually more limited and cautious than they were seen to be in the West. At the same time, though Adomeit does not focus on Western behavior in these crises, American indications of readiness for war appear to have surprised Moscow as disproportionate responses to the stakes at issue.

The possibility of war, whether from deliberate or mistaken action, remains the background that dominates superpower interaction. It exists because of the conflicting interests that make them competitors in the first place; it also provides the principal incentive for restraint. The bureaucracies most involved in the details of preparing for war, however, are not those involved in grand strategy. The implications of military technology and organization for crisis stability are not always appreciated by generalists, or even by harried spe-

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cialists at the top of government hierarchies. Paul Bracken demonstrates how the control arrangements for nuclear retaliatory forces entail a disturbing potential for unanticipated escalation during a period of high tensions. Harriet and William Scott's review of the Soviet organizations for wartime population control and protection highlights the concerns of critics of US defense policy who, in the past decade, have decried the naiveté of Americans in assuming that Soviet attitudes mirror US attitudes toward nuclear war.

In both of the general sets of issues identified above, there remain essential dilemmas that defy solution. In grand strategy, leaders want to square the circle of competition—to advance their interests while minimizing conflict. In war preparations, political leaders want to maximize deterrence and keep war unthinkable, while military professionals need viable options to execute if war nevertheless occurs. Perhaps because these dilemmas are ultimately insoluble the four books under review succeed better in diagnosis than in prescription.

HANNES ADOMEIT's *Soviet Risk-Taking and Crisis Behavior* is the densest and richest of the four books. It presents thorough case studies of the Berlin crises of 1948 and 1961 (Adomeit dismisses the 1958 crisis, not quite convincingly, as far less significant). The author meticulously analyzes Soviet motives, constraints, and behavior in terms of four categories of explanation: ideology, security and state interests, military power, and domestic politics. Adomeit's three general conclusions (p. 315) are that much of the literature on crises is unhelpful in explaining the Berlin cases, that the Soviets are adept at manipulating risks, and

that their behavior reflects Bolshevik ideology to a surprisingly high degree.

The emphasis on the latter point is a refreshing antidote to the all-too-prevalent impression that ideology has little to do with Soviet actions—an impression that usually rests on crude interpretations of Marxism and inattention to Leninism. Adomeit provides a subtle explanation (especially on pp. 328–34) of the functions of a belief system that complements rather than contradicts other factors determining Soviet policy. As in other aspects of his treatment, the author takes pains to balance his overall judgment with useful qualifications: for example, in noting that the ideological significance of Zhdanov's arguments in 1948 was cushioned by greater prudence in Soviet signals (p. 114).

Similarly, Adomeit's positive assessment of Soviet risk management is modified by his account of misunderstandings on both sides. The Soviets underestimated the political costs of their venture in the Berlin blockade, which, combined with the Korean war, solidified the Cold War consensus and impetus to rearmament in the West. On the Western side, the difference in Soviet aims in the two Berlin crises does not appear to have been sufficiently appreciated. In 1948 Moscow had substantial interest in political gains from forcing the West out; but in 1961 the dominant goal was economic, to fence the East in—that is, to stem the flood of East German refugees by constructing the Berlin wall. Thus the Soviets could later claim, without complete disingenuousness, that the outcome of the latter crisis was a victory (pp. 300–02).

Adomeit's point about the relevant theoretical literature is not quite as persuasive as are his other conclusions. The author makes a

reasonable case that the frequent focus on the lessons of the Cuban missile crisis could be misleading in the case of Berlin, but since his own analysis rests on only two cases there is little reason to infer any more generalizable lessons. In this respect the book's title invites greater expectations about wider conclusions than the contents deliver. Also, the first four chapters' theoretical discussion of the types and nature of risk in international relations is not as clearly integrated as it should have been with the last 13 chapters' historical treatment. But, while theorists might wish for pithier arguments or grander lessons, Adomeit's carefully complex analysis offers valuable insight into the ways in which different variables combine in Soviet decisions about undertaking, orchestrating, and moderating the risks of international conflict.

THE SECOND volume on our list, *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry*, is very much Alexander George's book. He wrote six of the 15 chapters and succeeded far better than most editors in disciplining contributors to address the themes with which he begins. The book diagnoses the failure of détente and promotes its revival under clearer agreed-upon rules of how competition should be constrained and cooperation fostered. All the authors attempt seriously to give balanced appraisals, and there is nothing polemical in the book. To the extent that there is a tendentious flavor, it echoes the battle for the soul of the Carter Administration, with this book serving almost as a retrospective brief for the positions associated with former US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in his battles with former Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Zbigniew Brzezinski. Almost all the authors distribute blame for the

deterioration of US-Soviet relations equally between Moscow and Washington; there is thus little here that will appeal to partisans of the Reagan Administration.

George emphasizes the faulty construction of the 1972 Basic Principles Agreement (BPA), which left enough ambiguity about norms of restraint, concepts of crisis prevention, and definitions of equality that subsequent competition inevitably fueled charges of bad faith on both sides. For the most part, the crumbling of early hopes for accommodation is presented here as a tragedy of misperception or failure of imagination rather than as a conspiracy. Perhaps because of the asymmetry of sources that afflicts any investigation of superpower policies, George dwells at length on the Machiavellianism of Richard Nixon and especially of Henry Kissinger. For example, in negotiating the BPA with Brezhnev, Kissinger purposely chose not to convey the strength of Nixon's view about what sorts of Soviet behavior would be deemed impermissible (pp. 108-09). Later Kissinger duped the Soviets about prospective collaboration in the Middle East (pp. 141-43). And in the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the notorious Soviet ultimatum threatening unilateral intervention followed by only a few days a letter from Nixon to Brezhnev saying that the superpowers "must step in, determine the proper course . . . and then bring pressure to bear on our friends for a settlement" (p. 150). All the evidence about these incidents comes from Kissinger's own memoirs.

In another chapter, George Breslauer gives a scrupulously evenhanded interpretation of the failure of détente, learning toward the view that it was inevitable because both sides put a higher pre-

mium on pursuing advantage than on collaborating. For better prospects in the future, he stresses the need for clearer definitions of equality of rights and reciprocity as the basis for cooperation, and notes that this has proved easy only in Europe, where there was no ambiguity about both powers' interests. (And even there, of course, we had the Berlin crises.) He might also have noted that the early solidification of the political and military partition of the continent created a durable basis of stability there. But how can this be done in the volatile Third World without a condominium in which the superpowers divide the whole world, as they divided Europe? Otherwise, conflict remains a zero-sum game, despite contrary claims by those who overestimate the decline of bipolarity.

Indeed, though the word is scarcely ever mentioned, condominium seems to be the hidden agenda of the book. How else would it be practical to improve the understandings about rights and restraints meant to prevent crises arising from local instabilities? One logical alternative is mentioned fleetingly: agreements not to compete in certain regions. It is hard to see, though, how this does not amount to a wistful hope that the superpowers will agree not to act like superpowers. The past examples cited are weak. One is the West's lack of meddling in Finland. But the government there has been stable, and the Finns have offered no opportunity for serious involvement. Almost everywhere else it was some group of local clients in a chaotic situation that attracted Western intervention. The other example is George's claim that the Soviets have "often forgone competing in parts of the Third World" (p. 375). But he cites no such instances, and it is hard to

think of a case of such forbearance that was not dictated by insufficient resources, opportunity, or access. Breslauer makes a reasonable case that Soviet policy in the Middle East qualifies somewhat, but I remain unconvinced.

Another verdict rendered by George is that moderation of competition "will require US policy to . . . facilitate and channel sociopolitical change in a particular country rather than opposing it" (p. 371). US interventions, however, have not been as crudely reactionary as this implies. American policy has opposed not change per se but only nondemocratic leftist revolutionary or pro-Soviet change. Indeed, the injunction to "channel" change is a warrant for a degree of intervention, and that degree would have to vary (if intervention is to be effective) with how closely the local situation approaches anarchy and how energetically the USSR or its clients are involved.

Consider two cases compared in a chapter by Larry Napper: Angola and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. He presents the former as a Western bungle, and the latter as a success. But in Angola—keeping in mind George's suggestion for Washington to channel change constructively—there is no evidence that, when the Portuguese withdrew, the Soviet-supported MPLA represented the popular will or the positive forces of change any more than did the pro-Western UNITA, or (somewhat less credibly) the FNLA. According to Napper's own chronology (pp. 161-62), the Cubans were first into the fray in June 1975, with 250 advisers to train MPLA troops. Only the following month did Washington authorize covert aid—and on quite a modest scale—to the opposing parties. The real disaster was South African military intervention,

which conceivably might not have occurred had the United States done what for many good reasons was unthinkable at the time: intervene on a much larger scale to help the anti-MPLA forces reach Luanda.

Napper makes much of the US failure to focus on the specific conditions of the African political "terrain." Yet, curiously, he seems to overlook some of those conditions in the comparison with the Zimbabwe "success." In that case the process of change did not take place in a vacuum of authority as it did in Angola. US policy did not have a great deal to do with the final transition, which was managed by an orderly election—and then only after a civil war that lasted longer than the one in Angola yet has.

Breslauer notes accurately that the lists of responsibilities on both sides for the collapse of détente cannot be reconciled, because "they are based upon conflicting assumptions about the nature of the contemporary international order" (p. 338). The book does not explicitly convey a preferred interpretation on that question, although it does hint at a preference for deemphasizing both bipolarity and political intervention in volatile areas. There remains, however, a large question about how susceptible today's international order is to the sort of regulatory norms discussed in the book. George puts Paul Gordon Lauren's chapter, "Crisis Prevention in Nineteenth Century Diplomacy," at the book's beginning, presumably as a model for dealing with current problems. If so, then this is a conceptual confusion, a yearning for a post-Napoleonic order where today's Napoleonic power (or two of them, if one wants to equate American with Soviet expansion) is still rampant. The norms and mechanisms Lauren describes did not so much

resolve the basic conflict as reflect its resolution. They functioned in a de-ideologized multipolar system. Both stability and instability in today's international system, by contrast, are largely the products of bipolarity. Moreover, the Soviets' concept of the evolving "correlation of forces" (to which their spokesmen frequently attributed the inevitable US acceptance of Moscow's equality in the early 1970's) rejects the 19th century's "balance of power" norms.

George and his authors¹ are careful to present the complexities of this problem along with some of the barriers to its solution. While they might be a bit optimistic about the objective potential for a safer and more institutionalized set of arrangements if statesmen were only wiser, they are not unduly optimistic that such wisdom will prevail. For those who do have hopes for a rebirth of détente, this book is a good place to begin.

ON THE NARROWER, military aspect of superpower crisis-management, *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces* is the first general work on a subject that professional military analysts have long recognized as crucial but that has still largely escaped the broader political debate about nuclear strategy and deterrence. Bracken's book goes beyond the briefer and more technical analy-

ses so far available² in discussing ways in which organizational evolution of command systems, war plans and weapon deployments, and communication technology have interacted to produce peculiar problems for strategic stability. At least until the forthcoming comprehensive study by Bruce Blair appears,³ this will stand as the definitive book-length work.

As most specialists have long known but feared to say, the vulnerability of nuclear forces—the issue that drove so much of the defense policy debate of the 1970's—pales in significance beside the vulnerability of the people and mechanisms that control their use. The starkest example is the center of highest US authority, Washington, DC, which can be destroyed with less than ten minutes of warning time by a Soviet submarine-launched missile. The situation is only very slightly better for most subordinate control centers. Over the years, as Bracken points out at length, this fragility has prompted informal as well as official decentralization of control over procedures—the details of which are among the most highly classified—for release and coordination of nuclear forces. Bracken emphasizes the dangers posed by the combination of such decentralization with the process of alerting forces in a crisis. In his view, this creates a dangerous and poorly understood potential for crisis escalation as each side reacts to the other's precautionary alerts, and, by implication, a potential for accidental war. For example, he makes a persuasive case that organizational sociology and technical imperatives would lead to more devo-

¹In addition to those cited are chapters by Coit Blacker on Soviet views of détente; Barry Blechman, Janne Nolan, and Alan Platt on arms transfer negotiations; Gloria Duffy on the controversies over Cienfuegos and the Soviet brigade in Cuba; and I. William Zartman on preventive diplomacy in the Third World.

²John J. Hamre, Richard H. Davison, and Peter J. Tarpgaard, *Strategic Command, Control, and Communication: Alternative Approaches to Modernization*, Washington, DC, US Congressional Budget Office, October 1981; Desmond Ball, *Can Nuclear War Be Controlled?* Adelphi Paper No. 169, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Autumn 1981.

³Bruce G. Blair, "Headless Horseman of the Apocalypse: Command and Control of U.S. Strategic Forces," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University (New Haven, CT), 1984, to be published by The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC.

lution of discretion to commanders in practice than is officially allowed in principle (pp. 231-32). "The likelihood of nuclear Munichs has been exaggerated," according to Bracken, "but the possibility of nuclear Sarajevos has been understated" (p. 2).

Some of the ways in which the author supports such inferences brush over important qualifications. He notes that the chief of the North American Air Defense Command was "given emergency authority to use certain nuclear weapons" (p. 198), conjuring up the fanciful image from the 1983 movie *War Games* in which that commander not only has but almost uses his authority to launch strategic forces. The authority to which Bracken refers, however, involves air defense weapons, not offensive retaliatory forces. Similarly, the crucial discussion of the "safety catch" design of the US command structure (pp. 196-204) leaps further beyond ambiguity than the evidence cited permits. Bracken asserts that an attack on the Presidential center would "destroy the one mechanism holding back all-out retaliation" (p. 202), but he fails to prove that release authority would not pass to a surviving center (such as the "Looking Glass" command plane that is constantly in the air) rather than devolving piecemeal to subordinate units. The actual procedures, as noted, are highly classified; if Bracken knows what they really are, he does not tell us his sources. The author also accepts the Soviet accusation that the Pershing II can reach command centers in the Moscow area (p. 222), and does not mention the official US statement that the missile's range falls more than 100 miles short of the city. All of these are far from trivial points, given the theme of the book, and deserve

more careful argumentation.

When the author addresses the Soviet system he is also not sufficiently cautious about analytic inference. Citing only one tract by General Daniel Graham, Bracken maintains that the Soviet leadership has probably pre-delegated authority to the military to launch nuclear weapons "if there are indications of attack" (p. 43). According to Raymond Garthoff, in my view a rather more reliable expert on Soviet military doctrine and organization, there is no evidence for such a conclusion.⁴ Indeed, it contradicts the bulk of the evidence for extremely tight centralized control in Moscow. Bracken appears to confuse the evidence for a Soviet policy of launch on warning with the question of pre-delegation.

The reader could be more confident about a number of the author's assertions if the analysis were not so scantily documented. The book shows unfortunate signs of very hasty publication (repetition, lax editing, utterly superfluous diagrams, trivial errors of spelling and dates, lack of a preface). In sum, Bracken's book does not yield a satisfactorily precise account of specifics, or a conceptual schema as tightly crafted as it could have been. Nevertheless, in terms of setting the general intellectual scene for wider thought about vital lacunae in our strategic lore, it succeeds well as a readable and provocative presentation.⁵ Deficiencies of detail are far less significant than the book's value in alerting and sensitizing a bigger audience to how far the debate about strategy, deterrence, and

stability has been mired in second-order issues.

On a related topic, Harriet and William Scott's *The Soviet Control Structure* is a workmanlike handbook of the USSR's numerous command and political organizations for planning and directing wartime operations on the home front. It is a good primer on Soviet mechanisms for indoctrinating, mobilizing, and protecting both elites and the general population, and for preserving or restoring communication networks. In a few places the recitation of things like martial law provisions or regulations for requisitioning materials is a bit laborious; and the discussion of how *dachas* could be used for shelters and post-attack recovery really does seem to lose perspective on the magnitude of the task. But overall the book offers a useful laundry list for those with little knowledge of the formal organization of the Soviet system.

The authors do not attempt analytical interpretation of the relative effectiveness of the organs and plans they describe, though the compilation implies that we should be quite impressed. This may be fair enough, and reviewers may err when they criticize a book for not accomplishing what it did not purport to do. Still, it is a little dispiriting to find inconclusive conclusions such as these:

- "It is possible that under certain conditions the Soviet Communist Party system might survive a nuclear exchange and accomplish post-attack recovery" (p. 121).

- "There is no certainty that any group governing a large, heterogeneous population can design controls that would be effective throughout a nuclear war and in its aftermath" p. 129).

- "There is no reasonable method to determine the effective-

⁴Personal communication to the author.

⁵The clearest formulations of the problem yet published are two shorter pieces by John Steinbrunner: "National Security and the Concept of Strategic Stability," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (Beverly Hills, CA), September 1978; and "Nuclear Decapitation," *Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC), Winter 1981-82.

ness, or vulnerabilities, of the Soviet control structure" (p. 135).

In terms of implications for US strategy, it would be interesting to ask what this survey suggests about the feasibility of counter-C³ (command, control, and communications) targeting, which was raised in prominence by Presidential Directive 59 (the 1980 revision of targeting doctrine). The Scotts mention the question of targeting policy in just two sentences (p. 137) and do not provide an answer. If one takes the diversification and robustness of the Soviet control system described in the book at face value, one could infer counter-C³ warhead requirements far beyond US capabilities.⁶ On the other hand, the focus on control *structure* (which is comparatively observable) rather than *process* (which is harder to trace or predict) may overemphasize the Soviet control system's potential efficacy even when the system itself is not a target of a dedicated nuclear attack. In either case, the larger question of how serious the Soviets *really* are about nuclear war survival—and the meaning of that question for deterrence—becomes even more important. On this the authors seem to take old official Soviet statements (for instance, those in Marshal V. D. Sokolov-

skiy's *Soviet Military Strategy*⁷) at face value, confronting neither counterarguments by Americans nor more recent public statements by Moscow's highest leaders repudiating the notion that nuclear war can be won. The authors' implicit assumptions may be correct, but the analytical case is not made, so the question remains as unresolved as it has always been in the strategic debate.

BEYOND the specific issues treated in these works, there are also implications for the future to be drawn from them. Adomeit's book, broader in scope than Bracken's and narrower than George's, allows for the most optimistic inferences. The two crises he looks at were among the most severe of the Cold War, yet both were resolved on acceptable terms. In neither case—even when tensions rose and Soviet actions prompted Western responses that included military reinforcement—did the conflict degenerate into an uncontrolled action-reaction sequence of escalation. Adomeit emphasizes that, notwithstanding its prevalence in crisis-management theory, the "image of the escalation ladder just does not fit" (p. 316). Similarly, in the more recent disputes discussed in the George book, intensification of hostility never approached the point of uncontrollable escalation. And though the incidents considered in that book were damaging, one has to stretch to apply the term "crisis" to any of them without devaluing

earlier episodes. Thus, in the context of the postwar period as a whole, the George book's message is less that competition has gotten worse than that it just has not gotten any better. Perhaps the positive lessons from Adomeit's study and the negative ones from George's reflect the different prevalent expectations of the two periods: fear in the Cold War and hope in the time of détente.

The issues for Bracken and for the Scotts are ones that would arise only from an intense crisis for which there is no precedent. Unfortunately, Adomeit's and George's cases do not provide grounds for confidence that such a crisis is improbable. In the Cold War period American strategic superiority was recognized. Later, in the rise and decline of détente, many of the controversies involved recognizing the advent and meaning of superpower parity. But in the future, under the altered and ambiguous circumstances of parity, something like the Cuban missile crisis could be more likely to provoke the sort of inadvertent escalatory sequence that worries Bracken. The Soviet promise to respond to the new NATO intermediate-range missile deployments—in the context of the most brittle political relationship between the superpowers in over two decades—underlines this potential. One hopes that it is too somber to view the books by Adomeit and George as history, and those by Bracken and the Scotts as forecasting.

⁶Especially if that requirement is added to requirements for basic counterforce missions after a Soviet first strike.

⁷See Marshal Vasily D. Sokolovskiy, *Soviet Military Strategy*, 3rd ed., trans. by Harriet F. Scott, New York, Crane, Russak, 1975.

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