

COMMENTARY AND CORRESPONDENCE

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To the Editor:

Philip Zelikow is correct when he argues in "Visions of the Future War in Europe" that uncertainty is the primary feature of any scenario for conflict in Europe. Mr. Zelikow hints though at some assumptions that we can use for war planning that seem to point to conclusions diametrically opposed to his own—that war in Europe will be drawn out. In fact, no one, least of all the Soviets, has any interest in extended conflict in Europe. It is that option, more than anything else, that may be the prime deterrent to aggression against Western Europe.

Soviet forces are structured to move quickly against an unprepared enemy — hence the concern with the blitzkrieg scenario (accompanied by poor Allied preparedness) that preoccupies military analysts. The Soviet navy is designed for operations close to the homeland and does not have the interdiction or anti-submarine capabilities necessary to cripple or retard Allied reinforcements — if it could get out of its ports. The Soviet nuclear strategy, which places a premium on preemption, is designed to prevent Allied war continuation by leaving NATO with the options of capitulating or inviting strategic nuclear exchange. Clearly, such a situation does not invite extended conflict.

Additionally, extended war poses two further considerations the Soviet Union would desperately try to avoid. In the East, the Chinese would be hard pressed not to open a second front and finally resolve by force the border dispute that has plagued Sino-Soviet relations since 1969. In the West, Warsaw Pact reliability is a real question mark for Soviet planners. It is doubtful if any Pact forces would be completely reliable in a Soviet move against Western Europe (save the Bulgarians) and some might in fact take up arms against the Red Army. At the least, the removal of the Soviet forces that serve a police/occupation function might provide the impetus for the outbreak of nationalist forces, such as in Poland, a contingency the Soviet leaders cannot afford.

Finally, the most compelling argument against a war of attrition is one Mr. Zelikow indirectly addresses at various points—the relationship of war to the political ends it is intended to achieve. The Soviets seem to

have a keen appreciation for Clausewitz' dictum subordinating military matters to political ones, constantly stressing the need to understand the political roots of war in their doctrinal writings. If so, it is imperative to trace the origins of war to the political intentions of the Soviet elite. If those intentions include continued functioning of the West European economies, in which the Soviets have no small stake given the support provided through trade and aid, war, particularly a war of attrition, would destroy those very interests. If, on the other hand, Soviet aggression against Western Europe would be a product of necessity rather than opportunity, an argument Mr. Zelikow himself makes and I endorse, then a war of attrition is not the option Soviet planners would choose. Instead, necessity provokes an attack that offers rapid success without nuclear escalation in the face of the disintegration of the Soviet empire. Ultimately, a war of attrition has to be resolved, and the more drawn out the conflict the more extreme will be the desire to resolve it, which invites the use of nuclear weapons — the objective to have been avoided all along. It is this relationship between political ends and military means that should be the focus of war planning. It is intentions and capabilities, not capabilities alone that should shape scenarios for the future.

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The author responds:

Mr. Glosserman ably explains why the Soviet Union would prefer a short war, if they felt that war was necessary. In July 1914 every nation in Western Europe emphatically preferred, and envisioned, a short war. Their preferences were not honored. The failure to rationally envision how the war will end, a deficiency common to both of the present superpowers, should encourage a vision grounded in reality rather than political or military preference.

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