

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Subject: Dr. Fred C. Iklé
Position: Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 1981-1988
Location: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1800 K Street, NW, Washington, D.C.
Interviewer: John G. Hines
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Prepared: Based on notes

Dr. Iklé pointed out that none of the Reagan Administration's documents provided a definitive interpretation of Soviet actions. Individuals in the administration had their own views on Soviet military intentions.

The Soviet Union was not preparing to initiate war but was planning, if war broke out, to fight and win. The Soviets were serious about nuclear warfighting. They believed that nuclear weapons had military utility, as evident from their investment in nuclear forces, such as SS-18s and SS-20s.

The USSR built up its nuclear arsenal in order both to deter and to fight. In Dr. Iklé's personal opinion, the Soviet buildup was intended mainly to deter U.S. first use of nuclear arms. Soviet weapon programs were not influenced much by U.S. force deployments. The USSR had its own seven-year cycle and track for arms procurement.

The Soviets did not share the U.S. view of mutually assured destruction. Instead of settling for a SALT-like approach, they sought an edge. Their force deployments created the image that they wanted more than parity. Dr. Iklé tried to silence talk of a "window of vulnerability" (though U.S. concerns about C³ vulnerability were real). By his assessment, the Soviet Union wanted a coercive (not a first strike) capability, but some administration officials genuinely thought that the USSR was out to acquire a first-strike capability.

Dr. Iklé also made the following points:

- The Soviet Union, due to its growing strength, was moving toward acceptance of limitations on nuclear war.
- The USSR could win a war with limited objectives using only conventional forces.
- The U.S. government was concerned about the possible Soviet employment of chemical weapons.

- The Soviet Union probably would not escalate from theater nuclear to global nuclear use, but the Reagan Administration had no sharply chiseled views on this question because when deterrence failed, thinking stopped.

In Dr. Iklé's personal view, first use was a useful doctrine for NATO in peacetime but would be dangerous in war, because London and Bonn would do everything to prevent nuclear first use and would thus leave NATO open to Soviet blackmail. Secretary of Defense Weinberger probably did not accept Dr. Iklé's argument that the NATO decision process, which was slow and which the Soviets could listen into, would give the USSR time to preempt. The Soviet Union was geared to preempt.

The analysis which Dr. Iklé received was of mixed quality. Mr. Andrew Marshall produced good stuff. The analysis from the acquisitions part of the Pentagon was poor. Dr. Iklé relied much more on the data than on the analysis provided to him.

Dr. Iklé complained that too much attention was devoted to arms control. In his view, the Reagan Administration also made too much of the MX missile. Secretary of State Haig pushed for the MX in order to prevent the USSR from acquiring a coercive nuclear potential. If the D-5⁴⁸ had been ready earlier, the U.S. could have done away with the MX.

⁴⁸ Trident II D-5 SLBM.