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MOSCOW OKAYS MISSILE LIMITATION TALKS

Moscow's decision to enter into an "exchange of opinions" on the limitation of offensive and defensive missiles was influenced in part by the judgment that its strategic position had improved but would begin to slip over the next few years if current US military plans take effect.

Negotiations will be long and hard, but some Soviet leaders probably are convinced that it would be advantageous for the USSR to attempt to halt or slow the arms race and they were able to persuade others on the politburo to agree at least to explore the prospects.

Economic, political, and military considerations all played a part in the Soviet decision. The possibility of a de-escalation of the Vietnam war raised for Moscow the prospect that the US would be free to channel more funds into new and better offensive and defensive missile systems. With competing demands on its own scarce resources, the USSR would be hard pressed to match additional US spending. The length of time that Moscow took to reply to the US offers to hold talks, however, suggests that the decision in Moscow was made only after considerable weighing of the alternatives. Foreign Minister Gromyko's speech on 27 June and Brezhnev's remarks on 3 July indicate that there are lingering

misgivings among the Soviet leaders.

The list of nine disarmament topics subject to negotiation put forth in the Soviet memorandum made public on 1 July also suggests that Moscow will seek a high price for any agreement. The list contains familiar Soviet proposals--such as a ban on nuclear overflights and the liquidation of foreign military bases--that have been advanced in various forums over the years. It makes no explicit mention of limiting antiballistic missile deployment, but it does propose restrictions on offensive strategic missiles and missile carrying submarines. The memorandum's treatment of regional disarmament was aimed particularly at the Middle East, but a disarmament agreement was made conditional on Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territories.

The memorandum appears to be a more serious offering than the usual "general and complete" disarmament propaganda package. In publicizing the memorandum, Kosygin said that "stage-by-stage" implementation would be a "serious contribution" to slowing the arms race. Some of its elements probably are intended for independent consideration in the UN or its subsidiary bodies. Other elements may be the quid pro quo sought in bilateral talks with the US.

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