

Keegan: 'Whiz Kids,' Econometricians Undermine U.S. Strategic Capabilities

Following are excerpts from a letter written by Major General George J. Keegan, Jr. (ret.) which was printed as an editorial in the recently released spring 1977 issue of *Strategic Review*. Since his retirement as head of Air Force Intelligence on January 1, 1977, General Keegan has concerned himself primarily with "getting the facts out before the American public" (in his own words) about the enormous lead which the Soviet Union has over the United States in research leading toward early development of an operational directed-energy, electron-beam anti-ballistic missile weapon.

General Keegan made appearances throughout the country on this campaign, urging that the U.S. adopt a program of renewed emphasis on basic scientific research and calling for U.S. strategic planning to be taken out of the hands of dangerously incompetent Rand Corporation bubbleheads and similar "cost-benefit-analysis" and econometrics types. (The *Executive Intelligence Review* has published remarks by General Keegan on several previous occasions.) Keegan's current tour includes appearances not only in the U.S. but in Western Europe as well.

Meanwhile, fierce debate over the validity of Keegan and others' charges has erupted in the U.S. press.

The *Detroit News*, in a May 18 editorial, endorsed Keegan's charges as contained in the *Strategic Review* letter, warning that "this could be our last administration."

A May 19 article in the same paper by military news analyst Colonel R.D. Heinel, USMS (ret.) detailed the investments by the Soviet Union in basic scientific research, placing emphasis on that country's commitment to scientific progress. "In 1977 the USSR is committing more than \$30 billion to military research development and technology," Heinel wrote. "The United States, supposedly the most advanced technological nation in the world, is spending \$10.6 billion." Heinel listed 12 technological breakthroughs first achieved by the USSR, including several non-military advances (orbiting the first earth satellite, first walk in space, etc.). Heinel noted that the Carter Administration has gone to great lengths to knock down General Keegan's claims.

The Copley chain's *Pennsylvania Mirror*, May 20, ran an editorial titled "Science Shorted," which cited General Keegan's revelations and rhetorically asked, "Why doesn't the President take up the real question of science involved?"

On the other side, reflecting the "electron-beam-is-impossible" line laid down by Defense Secretary Harold Brown at the recent International Institute for Strategic Studies conference in London, a number of articles have

appeared attempting to debunk Keegan's assessment.

The May 22 *Chicago Tribune* ran an article entitled "Progress is Slow as U.S., Soviets Hunt Gods Arsenal" which featured a Flash Gordon-style picture of a U.S. soldier with an electron-beam gun as a science fiction fantasy. And the *Philadelphia Bulletin* carried a piece citing unnamed "Pentagon sources" who gave assurances that the Soviets could not possibly develop an electron beam anti-missile weapon.

General Keegan, in his latest appearances in Pittsburgh and Washington, has increasingly turned his attention to "why and how" the present situation developed, and has focused on the McNamara "whiz kid" period as the crucial turning point, a perception shared by most competent military officers. The excerpts from *Strategic Review* printed below details General Keegan's assessment of the matter.

An Editorial In The Form Of A Letter

Increasingly, U.S. policy has become the product of analysts whose approach to war prevention or war waging is an exercise in abstract logic and econometrics. For many of us who have experienced combat and have worked at first hand with nuclear weapons and the tools of defense, the strategic policies of the past twenty years or so are found wanting — in almost every major respect. In my judgment, those policies, and the faulty intelligence upon which they were based, have brought us closer to global conflict, not away from it. In contrast, I find the Soviet mind-set on strategy to differ so fundamentally from our own that there seems no reasonable way in which the asymmetries can be rationalized and understood so long as we are confined to the base line of our own behavior as a standard against which to judge what the Soviets are doing. Recently, the so-called "B Team" critique of CIA's view of Soviet objectives reached the same judgment. Soviet policy goals ought to be examined on their own historical merits — free from the distortions of the "mirror image" and the imputation of our own strategic predilections.

I find the Soviet literature precise, specific, and rather clear — as clear as strategic concepts can ever afford to get. I am able to view that so-called imperfect expression of Soviet strategy to which you allude — as written by the Soviets — as entirely consistent with the available

“hard” intelligence. Besides, have you ever seen a good book on strategic objectives — ours or theirs — which anticipates in detail the precise circumstances under which one plans to go to war?

...Meanwhile, successive U.S. administrations in the last two decades have taken it upon themselves to impose restraint upon our own military programs in the hope of inviting similar restraint on the Soviet side. The consequence has been that we have not studied war waging in classic terms of fighting to win... Those who are not prepared to wage war successfully are destined to succumb — on the battlefield or at the bargaining table. There is no weapon, no force, and no strategy that cannot be defeated by someone determined to do so.

I am impressed by the soundness of the Soviet literature on these matters. The Soviets have correctly attended to the knitting of war and strategy. They have determined that a nation can survive a nuclear holocaust; and they have proceeded to get on with the business of being capable of initiating, waging and prevailing in a nuclear conflict.

I am convinced that the Soviet approach is more realistic than our own. The one certain way to minimize the likelihood of nuclear war is to premise your approach upon its likelihood, as have the Soviets...

To those who view the Soviet commitment to military superiority as abstruse or marginal — and clearly lacking any assurance such capabilities can be achieved at some end point — I can only say: look to the lessons of history! For better than twenty years, our war-fighting scenarios have tended to be bound parametrically by a new art form known as econometrics. We calculate battle and engagement outcomes in probabilities of kill and in terms of quantified damage expectancies.

The high-water mark of that artistic exercise came during the 1960s, and found its fullest expression in the form of a Draft Presidential Memorandum on General Purpose Forces relating to the defense of Europe. Having precisely measured the probability of kill for each bullet, artillery shell, rocket, aerially-delivered munition, etc., the paper concluded that a substantial reduction of NATO forces could be achieved in Europe. It judged that the air superiority battle could not be won; it was too costly and indecisive and therefore should be confined only to the protection of the forward edge of the land battle area. Interdiction was adjudged too costly and therefore to be confined only to the few kilometers ahead of the land battle. As that memo sat on the desk of the Secretary of Defense for his consideration and signature, the Six-Day War occurred in the Middle East.

With tongue in cheek, a few young colonels took all of

the force application tables and computations from the Draft Presidential Memo and applied them retrospectively to the 1967 Middle East War. Using the standards applied in that memo, they concluded that the Israelis should have destroyed but a few dozen airplanes, tanks and fieldpieces. That war was characterized by all of those imponderables that are not susceptible to econometric equations. That war was resolved by will, leadership, timing, initiative, and the high quality of the man-spirit-machine equation.

It seems to me, as I follow Soviet writings, that *they* have been far more judicious. Their systems analytical work is equal to our own. The difference is that they devote themselves far more extensively to the full spread of modern strategy, and they see it, with all of its imponderables, in a fuller and more realized context than do we...

In the final analysis, it has not mattered whether we exercised restraint, avoided provocation and destabilization through our weapons development, or whether we proceeded to fulfill a “mutual assured destruction” strategy that would be all things to all men. The fact is that “assured destruction” was conceived by a number of groups for entirely different purposes. It was conceived by one group as a “gimmick” to at first conceal and then rationalize a policy of unilateral strategic weapons restraint — designed to induce a like psychology and reaction on the part of the Soviets. For others, it was something much headier and which might conceivably have been made to work, save that it contravened every lesson of war that history has ever taught us about what it takes to deter and what it takes to neutralize such a deterrent. The tragic consequence is that American military professionals have long been discouraged from thinking militarily in terms of realistic war prevention and war waging. Thus, we are confronted with the fact that the largest group of professional military men in the world who think professionally about the business of avoiding, waging and winning conflict at all levels, nuclear and conventional, are the military leaders of the Soviet Union. My regret is that I myself have vacillated with the times and have sometimes been responsive to the “compulsive” logic of the “Whiz Kids.”

...We have steadily weakened our resolve, we have concluded faulty agreements, and we have created a state of mind that makes it well-nigh impossible to face up to the clear-cut military implications of what lies ahead. Most inexcusable of all has been the distortion of the intelligence estimating process for the sake of rationalizing policy.