
Defense Report

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The INF Treaty—A Time for Cooperation, A Time for Caution

Last December the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, visited the United States for an historic summit meeting with President Reagan. Most people think of the INF Treaty as the key result of the summit. The more important aspect, however, was that Gorbachev became viewed as a responsible world leader—an honor never before accorded to a Soviet leader.

More recently, General Sergey Akhromeyev, the head of the Soviet armed forces, toured a number of our military bases and both he and the General Secretary suggested that the Soviet Union was assuming a more defensive posture and that we should all cooperate to reduce tensions.

Of course, we should not be cynical about this opportunity—if opportunity it is. The problems come when you look at the record. Peaceful protestations haven't kept the Soviet Union from building an extraordinary military capability nor from taking actions which violate prior agreements, such as the ABM treaty.

And while Gorbachev may be absolutely sincere, it is not clear that he can, in fact, deliver. He has faced sharp opposition to his attempts to change and liberalize the Soviet economy and, sincere or not, it is not clear that he can succeed. It can also be suggested that while he is sincere, the thing he is sincere about is establishing the Soviet Union as a true superpower and that with its basket-case economy he has no choice but to seek cooperation with the West to gain its technology and economic know-how.

Whatever the motivation, it would be irresponsible of us not to pursue every avenue which might reduce the chance of war. We should remain open to opportunities for cooperation. It would be equally irresponsible for us to allow pious platitudes and exhortations about peaceful cooperation to cause us to disarm unilaterally or to dismantle NATO—the alliance which has kept peace in Europe for 40 years.

We Americans are optimistic and we believe in peaceful coexistence and we don't have very long memories. So now is a time to seek cooperation—but a time to do so with caution.