

Munich, 1 June 1970 (Communist Area Analysis Department:
USSR - r.r.g.)

The Tass account of what Pravda had to say about NATO's proposal for the mutual and balanced reduction of forces (1) (MBRF) is incomplete and misleading. The Tass version implies that MBRF is "absolutely unacceptable" to France, but the full Pravda text quotes M. Maurice Schumann as saying that it is "completely unacceptable to the socialist countries" (2) (emphasis supplied).

Pravda's commentator on this occasion is the highly authoritative Tomas Kolesnichenko, who is one of the leading writers on foreign affairs. His exact words are:

As regards the proposal for "the balanced reduction of forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact," which is being put forward under obvious pressure from Secretary of State of the USA, Rogers, it, as the French Foreign Minister rightly remarked, is a "tactical step completely unacceptable to the socialist countries."

"How can one believe," he said, "in the sincere intention of the U.S. Government to withdraw part of its troops from Europe in the name of reducing tension, if the USA is simultaneously expanding its military operations in South-East Asia."

At this range one cannot be sure whether M. Schumann made a statement similar to the Pravda version, which is given the appearance of a direct quotation. But clearly Pravda's intention is to express its adamant opposition to MBRF as long as the war in South East Asia is being extended. If MBRF were to be discussed at such a time the Kremlin would be accused by Hanoi, Peking, Tirana and elsewhere of enabling US forces to be withdrawn from Europe for possible use in Vietnam or Cambodia. But it does

(1) See CN 57 of May 31st in CNR file.

(2) Pravda, 31 May 1970.

not follow that the Kremlin would always refuse to discuss MBRF in any circumstances, and there is already an unconfirmed UPI report from Budapest to the effect that the Warsaw Pact countries may be able to agree eventually to the NATO proposal for talks on the subject. (3)

This cautiously favorable response is so much more conciliatory than Pravda's position that one is tempted to believe that it could apply only to the long term, i.e. after the war in South East Asia has ground to a halt. It does not seem likely that the Hungarian government sources who are said to have leaked the report to UPI are announcing a serious disagreement with Moscow on an issue of such importance, although there must be many officials in Budapest who would like to see the present Soviet garrison in Hungary reduced from four divisions to half that strength -- or less.

Moreover the scheduled withdrawal of US troops from Cambodia is now only a matter of weeks, and the rundown of the US forces in Vietnam is continuing rapidly. Hence Kolesnichenko's qualification may soon have to be withdrawn, unless the Kremlin wishes to continue indefinitely the stone-walling policy on MBRF of 1968 and 1969. There is no real likelihood that the Kremlin will be interested at any time in the "asymetric" approach to MBRF, which would almost certainly be unacceptable to the majority of the Politbureau and to the Defense Ministry. But equally there is no firm ground for thinking that the USSR will be eternally opposed to a discussion of MBRF on the "symetric" basis, partly because so many other arms limitation agreements between East and West have already proven to be practicable. The atomic test-ban treaty, the non-proliferation treaty, the approach to the disarming of the sea-bed, and the favorable atmosphere at the Salt talks are all cases in point. Moreover MBRF is itself a Soviet proposal, made in July 1963.

At present the conventional arms probably account for at least 80% of Moscow's huge annual defense expenditure, and about

(3) UPI, Budapest, 30 May 1970.

half of that sum is spent on the East European deployment. In economic terms therefore MBRF has at least as much to offer Moscow, at a time of declining long-term economic growth, (4) as the Salt talks but one essential precondition for the Kremlin would be the avoidance by Moscow of any cuts large enough to endanger the Soviet control of East Europe. Nevertheless even cuts on the smaller scale now suggested by NATO could mean some alleviation of the arms burden without detriment to Soviet security and that is precisely what the Soviet delegation now in Vienna is also seeking.

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(4) See Neue Zuercher Zeitung, 31 May 1970.