

Arms Control: MBFR Talks

April 1984

Background: Negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) in Central Europe, involving 12 members of NATO and the 7 Warsaw Pact members, began in Vienna in 1973. The primary Western objective is to improve stability in Central Europe by:

- A reduction in ground forces; and
- Establishment of parity at lower levels in the form of a common ceiling on each side's military manpower.

The continuing Eastern superiority in ground forces is a potentially destabilizing factor; its elimination could reduce the risk of war in Europe. On July 8, 1982, the West proposed a draft MBFR treaty embodying a comprehensive proposal. Its main innovation was to meet the Eastern demand for stronger commitments on the forces of our allies. The West offered a commitment on the total size of allied reductions, and it proposed other assurances, including a commitment that all allied countries with sizable forces would take a significant share of total NATO reductions.

This proposal required full agreement on the current size of forces, a requirement the East has been reluctant to meet. On April 19, 1984, the West made a concession offering to ease initial data requirements in exchange for substantial Eastern assurances on verification.

The data problem: The data problem--the dispute on the size of Eastern forces--has been the central unresolved issue of the negotiations. Eastern figures for Eastern ground and air forces are about 200,000 less than Western estimates for those forces. The issue is central because both sides have agreed that the end result of reductions should be parity at lower levels of military manpower in the reduction area. The East claims that approximate parity already exists, which would imply total Eastern reductions of about the same size as the West's. Western figures, however, show a margin of Eastern superiority of about 20%. To provide an objective basis for setting the size of reductions needed to reach equal levels, the West has insisted on agreement on the present strength of the forces of both sides.

Recent developments: The NATO countries had hoped that, in exchange for the West's 1982 concessions, the East would move rapidly to resolve the data dispute. The East, however, has continued to maintain that approximate equality between Eastern and Western troop levels already exists and that NATO's demands for large, asymmetrical Eastern reductions are an attempt by the West to gain an unfair military advantage. The East has stuck to its figures while refusing to cooperate in any detailed discussion to uncover the reasons for the different assessment of the size of Eastern forces.

One element of progress has been that in 1983 the East did make some concessions in principle on the verification issue, involving on-site

inspection in certain situations, but their proposals still fell well short of Western requirements for effective verification to ensure that necessary reductions to achieve parity are carried out.

April 19th Western proposal: The new Western proposal presented in Vienna in April responded to this situation. It was the result of a thorough US review of MBFR policy and of extensive consultation within the NATO alliance. We believe the proposal, which amends the West's 1982 draft treaty, should be attractive to the East because it greatly reduces the previous data demands. We are now proposing that:

- We initially exchange data only on ground combat and combat support forces; and
- These data fall within an acceptable range of Western data estimates (as opposed to figures that must agree precisely with our own).

Full data agreement would not be reached until after initial US and Soviet reductions and satisfactory verification of remaining forces had taken place. In return, the West is asking the East to address fully the verification measures we are proposing, which are prerequisites for assuring compliance with the treaty.

The East has been talking about a data and verification trade-off for some time. Our new initiative offers them an opportunity to deal with a concrete proposal in these areas--although one tailored differently from their own in order to protect our security interests.

The West is committed firmly to moving the talks forward and to seeking an outcome equitable to both sides that enhances security in Europe. We will do our part in working with the new Soviet leadership to examine approaches that can bring us closer to agreement. The East's response to this major Western move will provide a good test of the willingness of the new Soviet leadership to engage in a constructive dialogue.

Arms Control: MBFR Talks

April 1984

Background: Negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) in Central Europe, involving 12 members of NATO and the 7 Warsaw Pact members, began in Vienna in 1973. The primary Western objective is to improve stability in Central Europe by:

- A reduction in ground forces; and
- Establishment of parity at lower levels in the form of a common ceiling on each side's military manpower.

The continuing Eastern superiority in ground forces is a potentially destabilizing factor; its elimination could reduce the risk of war in Europe. On July 8, 1982, the West proposed a draft MBFR treaty embodying a comprehensive proposal. Its main innovation was to meet the Eastern demand for stronger commitments on the forces of our allies. The West offered a commitment on the total size of allied reductions, and it proposed other assurances, including a commitment that all allied countries with sizable forces would take a significant share of total NATO reductions.

This proposal required full agreement on the current size of forces, a requirement the East has been reluctant to meet. On April 19, 1984, the West made a concession offering to ease initial data requirements in exchange for substantial Eastern assurances on verification.

The data problem: The data problem--the dispute on the size of Eastern forces--has been the central unresolved issue of the negotiations. Eastern figures for Eastern ground and air forces are about 200,000 less than Western estimates for those forces. The issue is central because both sides have agreed that the end result of reductions should be parity at lower levels of military manpower in the reduction area. The East claims that approximate parity already exists, which would imply total Eastern reductions of about the same size as the West's. Western figures, however, show a margin of Eastern superiority of about 20%. To provide an objective basis for setting the size of reductions needed to reach equal levels, the West has insisted on agreement on the present strength of the forces of both sides.

Recent developments: The NATO countries had hoped that, in exchange for the West's 1982 concessions, the East would move rapidly to resolve the data dispute. The East, however, has continued to maintain that approximate equality between Eastern and Western troop levels already exists and that NATO's demands for large, asymmetrical Eastern reductions are an attempt by the West to gain an unfair military advantage. The East has stuck to its figures while refusing to cooperate in any detailed discussion to uncover the reasons for the different assessment of the size of Eastern forces.

One element of progress has been that in 1983 the East did make some concessions in principle on the verification issue, involving on-site

inspection in certain situations, but their proposals still fell well short of Western requirements for effective verification to ensure that necessary reductions to achieve parity are carried out.

April 19th Western proposal: The new Western proposal presented in Vienna in April responded to this situation. It was the result of a thorough US review of MBFR policy and of extensive consultation within the NATO alliance. We believe the proposal, which amends the West's 1982 draft treaty, should be attractive to the East because it greatly reduces the previous data demands. We are now proposing that:

- We initially exchange data only on ground combat and combat support forces; and
- These data fall within an acceptable range of Western data estimates (as opposed to figures that must agree precisely with our own).

Full data agreement would not be reached until after initial US and Soviet reductions and satisfactory verification of remaining forces had taken place. In return, the West is asking the East to address fully the verification measures we are proposing, which are prerequisites for assuring compliance with the treaty.

The East has been talking about a data and verification trade-off for some time. Our new initiative offers them an opportunity to deal with a concrete proposal in these areas--although one tailored differently from their own in order to protect our security interests.

The West is committed firmly to moving the talks forward and to seeking an outcome equitable to both sides that enhances security in Europe. We will do our part in working with the new Soviet leadership to examine approaches that can bring us closer to agreement. The East's response to this major Western move will provide a good test of the willingness of the new Soviet leadership to engage in a constructive dialogue.