

NATO and Nuclear Deterrence

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Following is an address by Richard Burt, Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, before the Arms Control Association Conference in Brussels, Belgium, September 23, 1981.

NATO's decision of December 1979 to deploy long-range cruise and ballistic missiles in Europe and to pursue an arms control negotiation with the U.S.S.R. concerning theater nuclear forces (TNF) have stimulated a debate which now transcends the military and political rationale upon which that decision was based. At issue are not comparative range, accuracy, and mobility of U.S. and Soviet systems; the proper components of a Eurostrategic balance; or the comparative advantage of sea-, air-, or land-based systems. Today many who challenge the decision of December 1979 do so not on the grounds that there are better means of linking the U.S. strategic deterrent to Europe, but because they believe that Europe's security should not depend upon nuclear deterrence of any type. To such fundamental objections, it avails little to argue the merits of ground-launched cruise missiles over sea- and air-launched cruise missiles or to explain why it makes sense to replace the Pershing I with the Pershing II. To counter such objections, one must begin with a vision of Europe and of Europe's place in the world.

The View from Moscow

The Soviet Union sees Western Europe as an appendage of the two super-

powers. Europe is relegated to a second-class status, its security a dependent function of the Soviet Union's. East Europeans may be forced to accept such discrimination, but certainly we in the West are not.

This anti-European vision of Europe is expressed in myriad ways. Soviet commentators tell us that the new U.S. Pershing missile represents an unacceptable threat to the Soviet Union because it would provide the Soviet Union only a 5-minute warning of an attack. Yet what warning time of a comparable Soviet nuclear attack does Western Europe have? Thirty seconds, perhaps.

The same sort of patronizing attitude is inherent in the Soviet concept of "forward-based systems." Somehow this term, even in Western parlance, refers only to American forces. It is never taken to mean Soviet missile and air forces massed in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, which threaten Western Europe. In other words, the American military presence in Western Europe is depicted as an unnatural, historical aberration while the Soviet military hegemony over Eastern Europe and its preoccupation with West European security policies is viewed as a natural Soviet right.

The Soviet Union thus presumes that Western Europe should have more sympathy for problems of Soviet security than the Soviet Union does for that of Western Europe. And, remarkably, often we do on this side of the Atlantic and on mine. For frequently we do not dismiss these self-serving Soviet propositions with the derision they deserve. On the contrary, we elevate them to the

status of intellectually respectable arguments and give them serious consideration in our domestic debates.

That the Soviet Union should put forward such propositions is evidence of how the Soviet Union treats its allies, and how it thinks about Western Europe. That anyone in the West finds merit in them is evidence that the Soviets have begun to affect how we think of ourselves.

Nothing more graphically illustrates the Soviet Union's vision of Europe than their position on theater nuclear arms control. For a decade the Soviet Union insisted that U.S. forces in Western Europe should be counted in SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks], but not Soviet forces in Eastern Europe. Only when confronted by the alliance's LRTNF [long-range theater nuclear forces] decision of 1979 were the Soviets forced by NATO's cohesion and resolve to fall back from this position, simply to adopt a new series of equally patronizing proposals.

In 1979 the Soviets claimed a nuclear balance existed in Europe. But they kept deploying SS-20 missiles targeted against Western Europe. In 1980 the Soviets again said a balance existed and offered a moratorium on new missiles. But they kept deploying SS-20s. In 1981 the Soviets once again claim a balance exists. They again offer a moratorium. But they still keep deploying SS-20s.

If any one of these Soviet statements regarding an existing balance were correct, the other two would, by definition, have to be wrong. For the West has deployed no new missiles since 1979, while the Soviets have during this same period deployed over 500 SS-20 warheads, not to speak of significant numbers of other new missile and nuclear-capable aircraft now targeted on Europe.

In fact, none of the three Soviet claims were true. Few in the West have ever thought they were. The Soviet technique in this instance is, however, more subtle than just their traditional resort to disinformation and deception. For in offering a moratorium at widely disparate levels, the Soviet Union is really asserting that it has a right to nuclear as well as conventional superiority in Europe. The Soviet Union is insisting that Western Europe does not have a right to call upon American strength to counterbalance Soviet power and geographical advantage. This is the message behind the moratorium. Like other forms of subliminal advertising, it takes root slowly and imperceptibly.

More remarkably yet, the Soviet Union has attempted to attribute to the United States a view of Europe which is its own. The Soviet Union, in training, in doctrine, and in the structure of its forces, is prepared to fight a nuclear war in Europe. I am not suggesting that the Soviets intend to provoke a war. But if a war comes, the Soviets are ready to escalate rapidly to the nuclear level. They have trained and equipped their forces to prevail in such an environment. And they have structured and positioned their forces to limit the conflict to territory outside the U.S.S.R.

The United States, on the other hand, has for 30 years linked its fate with that of its European allies. In 1979 the United States responded positively to the desire of those allies to have deployed in Europe new systems, which could reach deep into the Soviet Union, to demonstrate that it could not devastate Europe from a Russian sanctuary—that any war in Europe would result in unacceptable damage to the U.S.S.R.

The United States took this step in the full knowledge that the Soviet Union would most likely respond to an attack on its homeland by U.S. systems in Europe with an attack on the United States. Thus the emplacement of long-range U.S. cruise and ballistic missiles in Europe makes escalation of any nuclear war in Europe to involve an intercontinental exchange more likely, not less. This is why our allies asked for such a deployment. This is why the United States accepted. This is why the deployment strengthens deterrence.

Nevertheless, the LRTNF decision is one of the most controversial security issues to have gripped the nations of the alliance. On reflection, this should not be surprising: Nuclear weapons raise profound moral, political, and strategic problems that must concern thoughtful people in healthy democracies. But in my view the LRTNF debate also clearly demonstrates that we in the West are in danger of losing sight of our vision—the Western vision—of European security. Governments on both sides of the Atlantic have not sufficiently explained to new generations of Americans and Europeans how the Atlantic alliance continues to offer a vision of Europe consistent with its security needs and its political values.

The Atlantic Vision

Throughout modern history, Europe has been the battleground where mankind's most intense, extended, and destructive conflicts have been waged. Twice in this

century, war has devastated the continent, leaving 50 million Europeans dead. Yet since 1945, despite the proximity of a heavily armed hostile power, Europe has enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity unparalleled in the experience of mankind. How was peace secured? How has it been maintained?

By the middle of the 20th century the ever-quickening pace of European warfare was brought to a halt by two innovations in Western strategic thought—collective defense and nuclear deterrence. In those early postwar years, the nations of Western Europe, along with the United States and Canada, formed an alliance based upon the principle that a threat to one was a threat to all. The objective of their alliance was purely defensive. Their strategy was one of deterrence. These nations sought to work together to minimize the risk of war by maximizing the risk to any potential aggressor of engaging in war. In particular, the United States, the strongest member of the new alliance, proclaimed that it would regard an attack on its European allies as an attack on itself and committed its full military power to deter such an attack. This commitment remains today the foundation of American defense and foreign policy and the cornerstone of European security.

NATO's Three Pillars

NATO is an alliance of nations separated by 3,000 miles of ocean. The geopolitical situation of each ally is in some way unique; the threat it faces in some way different. Adversary forces are deployed throughout an area bordering directly on NATO's most populous, developed, and vulnerable regions. Geography thus provides the Warsaw Pact significant advantages. The Soviet Union can project military force in central Europe more easily and more quickly than can the United States. In consequence, it has been difficult for NATO—throughout its history—to provide a major conventional force sufficient in itself to insure its defense.

In order to defend this wide expanse of territory and to deter aggression against it at any point, NATO has come to rely on strategy based upon three interrelated types of forces. At one end of the spectrum are NATO's conventional forces. The role of these forces is to meet any aggression at the level it occurs, and, if possible, to force the enemy to cease his aggression and withdraw. At the other end of the spectrum are

America's intercontinental-range nuclear forces, which represent the ultimate guarantee of Western security. Between the two are the alliance's nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, which link NATO's conventional forces and intercontinental-range systems based on U.S. soil. The presence of these nuclear systems in Europe insures that the deterrent value of America's strategic forces fully underwrite the defense of Europe. They underscore to a potential aggressor that there are no circumstances in which it could gain a victory over NATO's conventional forces without running the risk of nuclear escalation.

The development of this strategy was not without difficulty for the alliance. In the 1950s, with the nightmare of the 1939-45 war fresh in people's minds, there was less concern about lowering the nuclear threshold and a greater willingness to accept the risk of a nuclear exchange in order to keep the conventional threshold as high as possible. Thus early attempts to bolster conventional defense in Europe met with resistance from those who feared that those efforts meant that the United States no longer wished to shoulder the responsibilities of the nuclear umbrella. As Soviet nuclear capabilities grew, however, concern shifted to also encompass the now more familiar worry that moves to strengthen NATO's theater nuclear capabilities have, as their ulterior motive, the confinement of any nuclear weapon to European territory.

These conflicting concerns led to the development in the early 1960s of NATO's strategy of flexible response. This strategy tied U.S. strategic forces firmly into a "seamless web" of conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear forces. The concept which underlies the strategy of flexible response is that neither Western Europe nor the United States must bear all the burdens or run all the risks of deterring war—everyone must do their part. The purpose of building up conventional and nuclear forces in Europe in the 1960s was not to supplant the deterrent role of U.S. strategic forces but to make their use in major conflict appear more credible, thus enhancing overall deterrence.

But NATO's flexible response strategy was challenged, at its inception, when the Soviet Union in the early 1960s began to deploy large numbers of intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs)—SS-4s and SS-5s—as well as a formidable force of frontal aviation, all of which was designed to target Western Europe. The motivation for this

Soviet buildup was almost certainly political as well as military. Just as NATO theater nuclear systems were designed to link Europe more closely with America's strategic arsenal, so Soviet systems targeted upon Europe were meant to break that link, to isolate Europe, to threaten it from a Russian sanctuary which Europe could not in turn put at risk, and so to hold Europe a nuclear hostage.

The expansion of the Soviet IRBM force, coupled with Moscow's advantage in conventional forces, brought to reality a prospect which Europe had long faced—the possibility that a nuclear conflict might be limited to Europe. For over a decade, however, this threat was successfully met, not by an expansion of U.S. nuclear forces in Europe, but by an increase in the U.S. strategic arsenal in the 1960s along with the development of British and French nuclear systems. During this period, and into the 1970s, American strategic superiority provided the margin of security which permitted shortfalls in other areas of NATO's force structure.

Changing Strategic Environment

The Soviet buildup has now continued for more than a decade beyond the end of the U.S. strategic buildup of the 1960s. It has continued through a period when the West pursued policies of detente, when the United States cut its military budgets, and when NATO undertook virtually no nuclear force modernization. These Soviet actions have had a direct impact on the alliance's ability to implement its deterrent strategy of flexible response.

Soviet force improvements have occurred at all levels and in all areas. Major improvements have occurred in the conventional forces facing Europe, the Far East, and the oil-rich regions of Southwest Asia. Major improvements have occurred in Soviet airborne and seaborne forces capable of projecting Soviet power into regions further afield. Major improvements have also occurred in Soviet intercontinental nuclear forces and nuclear forces targeted on Europe. In this latter area, the Soviets have developed and are rapidly deploying new generations of short-range, medium-range, and long-range nuclear missiles, as well as several new types of nuclear-capable aircraft.

Thus, at the conventional level, the Soviet Union threatens Europe directly through its local superiority in numbers and increasingly modernized forces, as well as indirectly through its ability to project force into other regions of vital

interest to Europe, such as the Persian Gulf. The growth in the Soviet conventional threat places a heavier burden on NATO's nuclear deterrent to keep the peace. Yet, at the same time the Soviet Union has achieved parity in intercontinental-range nuclear forces, it has moved into position of clear superiority in those nuclear forces deployed in or targeted on Europe. In consequence, NATO's deterrent is being eroded at a time when the need for it is being heightened.

Although the Soviets over the last decade have enhanced their military capabilities across the board, they have given a high priority to the buildup of their theater nuclear forces threatening Europe. The deployment of the MIRVed [multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicle] mobile SS-20 gives the Soviet Union a capability to hit, accurately and in great number, targets located anywhere in Western Europe from locations deep within the Soviet Union, far beyond the range of any of NATO's European-based systems. In the spring of this year [West German] Chancellor Schmidt wrote that the introduction of the SS-20 "has upset the military balance in Europe and created for itself an instrument of political pressure on the countries within the range of the SS-20, for which the West so far has no counterbalance."

Today, SS-20 missiles are still being deployed in ever-increasing numbers. There are currently 250 SS-20 missiles deployed, carrying 750 warheads, along with 350 SS-4 and -5 missiles, for a total of 1,100 long-range missile warheads. At the same time, the Soviets have undertaken a comprehensive program of improvement and modernization of short- and medium-range missile forces threatening Europe, including the SS-21, -22, and -23, and of new aircraft with nuclear capability and missions, such as the Backfire, Fencer, Flogger, and Fitter.

NATO's Response

The comprehensive nature of the growing Soviet threat requires a comparably comprehensive NATO response in order to sustain NATO's deterrent strategy and so maintain a stable peace. NATO must improve its capability to meet and defeat aggression at the conventional level. To do so, NATO must maintain and, where possible, increase current force levels while regaining its traditional superiority in the quality of its military equipment, training, and morale of its forces with which the West has hitherto compensated for Warsaw Pact conventional advantages. The nuclear

threshold will not be raised by degrading the capability of nuclear forces. Unfortunately those who seem to worry most about lowering the nuclear threshold seem among those least inclined to support the conventional modernization needed to raise it.

Yet improving NATO's conventional posture is not enough. For NATO to maintain the credibility of its deterrent strategy, it must shore up the link between the intercontinental and European-based nuclear systems. The Soviet Union must never be allowed to assume that there exists any level of conflict at which it could conclude hostilities victoriously, or that it can limit a conflict to Europe. In particular, the Soviet Union must never be permitted to believe that under any circumstances Soviet territory could serve as a sanctuary from which nuclear strikes in Europe could be launched without fear of retaliation in kind. To allow even the perception of such a gap in the deterrent to emerge would offer fresh opportunities for Soviet political coercion.

The steps NATO has taken to sustain its deterrent strategy include U.S. and allied conventional force improvement, now underway, and a deployment in the United States of a more survivable intercontinental missile system designed to reduce the growing vulnerability of the existing U.S. land-based missile force. An equally critical step in sustaining deterrence was the alliance's decision of December 1979 to modernize its long-range nuclear forces by deployment of 464 ground-launched cruise missiles and the replacement of 108 Pershing ballistic missiles with a model of greater range.

This decision to modernize NATO's long-range nuclear forces was a particularly important part of the overall NATO response to the Soviet buildup. The new systems will be mobile, and they will disperse in times of crisis, thus enhancing the survivability of NATO nuclear forces and reducing the dangers of a Soviet preemptive attack. The very existence of NATO's nuclear forces compel any aggressor to disperse its forces more widely and adopt less efficient modes of conventional attack even at the early stages of any conflict. These new systems can also reach into the Soviet Union. Thus their deployment to Europe will reinforce the Soviet leadership's realization that Soviet territory cannot be a sanctuary in wars from which long-range missiles like the SS-20, or aircraft

like the Backfire, could threaten Western Europe with nuclear destruction. Finally, these systems, like other NATO nuclear systems, will be based in a number of member countries. They thus demonstrate the concept of shared risk, shared effort, and shared security upon which the Western alliance is based.

When TNF modernization is seen in this broader context of Western deterrence strategy, the myths which have come to surround alliance decision of December 1979 melt away.

- The deployment of long-range cruise and ballistic missiles to Europe does not move NATO away from its existing strategy of flexible response. Rather, the LRTNF decision is essential to sustaining NATO strategy. In particular, this deployment will link more firmly the alliance's existing nuclear forces in Europe to the U.S. strategic deterrent.

- This deployment was not thrust by the United States upon the Europeans. Rather it represents a considered American response to a widely felt European need for an evolutionary adjustment of NATO's capabilities to take account of the onset of strategic parity and the massive and continuing buildup of Soviet theater forces, such as the SS-20.

- The deployment does not give the alliance a qualitatively new capability. The United States has had systems in Europe capable of striking the Soviet Union since 1952. This new deployment will permit NATO to retain that capability and retain that element of our deterrent strategy despite improvements in Soviet air defense, the aging of our own systems, an increasing need to commit NATO's aircraft resources to conventional roles, and large-scale new deployments of Soviet TNF.

- This deployment does not increase the alliance's reliance upon nuclear weapons. Rather, in providing NATO a more balanced theater nuclear force, this planned deployment has already permitted a significant net reduction in older and more vulnerable nuclear weapons located in Europe.

- This deployment does not represent a step toward the development of a NATO nuclear war-fighting capability. It is the Soviet Union which is developing the capability to fight and win a nuclear war in Europe. This deployment will

force upon them the realization that NATO will not fight a war on their terms, will not permit them to regionalize a conflict to exclude their territory, and will not permit them to hold Europe a nuclear hostage.

Theater Nuclear Arms Control

The 1979 LRTNF decision not only promises enhanced prospects for deterrence of war in Europe, it also holds out the prospect of a serious effort to negotiate reductions in U.S. and Soviet theater nuclear forces. As a result of NATO demonstrating the resolve to modernize its TNF, the Soviet Union has been persuaded to put on the negotiating table, for the first time, nuclear forces that threaten the allies. Without modernization there would be no prospect of limiting the Soviet nuclear threat to Europe.

I take no credit for noting that Florence Nightingale's injunction regarding hospitals—that their first task was to avoid spreading disease—applied equally to arms control. An arms controller's first imperative is to limit arms in ways which do not make wars more likely. The Reagan Administration believes that if arms control is to reinforce the prospects for peace, it must be closely integrated with defense and foreign policies of its practitioners.

The United States is committed to making arms control a coherent, supportive part of its total national security program. We recognize that arms control, properly pursued, helps to reduce the threat we face and contributes to stability and peace.

Last July, Secretary of State Haig outlined the principles which will guide the United States as it enters into theater nuclear arms control as well as other arms control talks.

- Arms control will be an instrument of, not a replacement for, a coherent alliance security policy.
- We will seek balanced arms control agreements.
- Arms control must include effective means of verification and mechanisms for security compliance.
- Our strategy must consider the totality of various arms control processes, not only those that are being specifically negotiated.

- We will demonstrate our seriousness by insisting that whatever the scope of negotiations, we are prepared to accept reductions to the lowest possible level based on equal, balanced limits on comparable systems.

This very day Secretary Haig is meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. They will discuss, and I hope agree, to begin theater nuclear arms control negotiations in the next 2 months or so. Consistent with the principles Secretary Haig outlined in July, the United States will press in those negotiations with all the strength, skill, and persuasion it can summon for equitable, verifiable, and global limits in theater nuclear forces at the lowest possible levels. The burden will be on the Soviet Union to move from propaganda to real arms control, to abandon its one-sided proposals, to reduce the number of these weapons in Europe, and to reach an agreement which will enhance the security of East and West alike.

The U.S. position in these negotiations is being worked out in closest consultations with our NATO allies. Throughout the spring and summer of this year, NATO's Special Consultative Group and High Level Group have been meeting regularly to establish a common alliance view on the threat we face,

NATO's needs in the nuclear area, and our arms control objectives. These alliance consultations, of unparalleled intensity, will continue once U.S.-Soviet negotiations begin later this year, in order to insure that we pursue an agreement which is fully supported by the alliance and which enhances the security of all its members.

A Choice of Visions

Today I have tried to explain how, over 30 years, a viable alternative to Moscow's view of Europe as a second-class hostage to Soviet power has been fashioned. This Atlantic alternative is built upon ties of history, culture, and commerce. It shares a concept of man's place in society and of the manner in which intercourse between societies should be conducted. To survive, however, this alternative has had to create an alliance structure which can bridge the ocean which provides its name.

The Atlantic has been spanned by the commitment to strategic unity, through which each member accepts the risk of war in order to protect its allies and to secure its allies' protection. It has been spanned by the integration of conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic forces in a single spectrum of deterrent power. It has been spanned by a

strategy of flexible response, which commits the alliance to escalate a conflict as high as is needed to defeat any aggression, but permits it to confine a conflict to as low a level as possible consistent with that objective. And it has been spanned by a common commitment to seek meaningful and effective arms control.

The nuclear debate in Europe today has become a battle for the soul of Europe. The alternatives are clear. The West can reaffirm its faith in collective defense, deterrence, and serious arms control and thus remain free. Or America can turn in upon itself, and Europe can rest its hopes for security and its prospects for freedom upon Soviet goodwill. For 30 years America has rejected isolationism. For 30 years Europe has rejected Soviet patronage. For 30 years the West has instead chosen unity, strength, and freedom. There is no other choice. ■

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