

Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 103: After the INF Treaty: A New Direction for America's European Policy

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Executive Summary

Although only marginally significant militarily, the U.S.-Soviet treaty eliminating intermediate-range nuclear forces (INFs) has shaken NATO to its core. On both sides of the Atlantic, traditional security elites worry that the INF treaty sets Western Europe on the slippery slope to "denuclearization" and presages America's "decoupling" from Europe's defense.[1] The treaty has stirred West German fears that the United States is abandoning the Federal Republic, and its effect on West German foreign and security policies has prompted Bonn's security partners to ask, "Is West Germany going neutral?"

Notwithstanding glib assurances that the INF treaty "strengthens the alliance militarily and demonstrates its political strength," the treaty has triggered a painful--but long overdue--reexamination of NATO strategy.[2] As University of California political scientist Paul Seabury observed in 1967, NATO's cohesion has always depended in large part on its leaders' ability to avoid intense public, or even private, discussion of issues that highlight intra-alliance differences.[3] This has always been especially true with respect to nuclear Policy.

The role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy is the most politically sensitive issue in U.S.-West European relations. As former defense secretary James Schlesinger has written, U.S. nuclear weapons are the "glue" holding NATO together.[4] Thus, whenever the premises underlying the U.S. nuclear guarantee to Western Europe are questioned, NATO's existence is perforce placed in doubt.

The INF treaty's real significance is that it has forced into the open debate about NATO's extended-deterrence/flexible-response nuclear strategy. As a result, the INF treaty also has highlighted the divergent strategic interests of the alliance's two most important members: the United States and West Germany. In this respect, however, the INF treaty has been only a catalyst, not a cause; the transatlantic rupture on nuclear policy has been building up for a long time.

Since the early 1950s, U.S. strategic doctrine has been embodied in several linguistic formulations (massive retaliation, graduated deterrence, and extended deterrence/flexible response) but its central premise has remained constant: the United States will respond to a Soviet attack (conventional and/or nuclear) on West Germany by using tactical, intermediate, and, if necessary, strategic nuclear weapons.[5] Because NATO historically has eschewed building a strong conventional defense capability, in the event of war the United States almost certainly would be compelled to have recourse to the early and first use of nuclear weapons. NATO's nuclear first use would initiate an escalatory process leading from the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe to a central nuclear exchange between the superpowers.

Origins of NATO Strategy

It was not foreordained that Western Europe's defense should depend on U.S. nuclear weapons. On the contrary, as conceived between 1947 and 1949, America's containment strategy envisioned that the Soviet Union would be checked by powerful local forces of resistance on its periphery.[6] Thus the Marshall Plan aimed to reestablish Western Europe's strategic capabilities by restoring political stability and economic vitality to the war-shattered Continent. Indeed, despite West European attempts to involve the United States deeply in the region's security, the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty was seen by Washington as primarily a symbolic gesture of reassurance.[7] The treaty did not obligate the United States to go to war if Western Europe were attacked, did not establish an integrated military command for the alliance, and did not commit the United States to permanently deploy combat troops in Western Europe (other than the occupation forces already in Germany).

Following the North Korean attack on South Korea in June 1950--widely viewed at the time as the prelude to a worldwide Soviet offensive--the structure of the alliance and the nature of U.S. strategy changed radically. A unified NATO military command with an American as supreme commander was established and U.S. combat troops were deployed to Western Europe. Notwithstanding these steps, it was evident that neither the Americans nor the West Europeans were prepared to build up their conventional forces to the levels thought necessary to defeat the Soviet army. Instead, a conscious decision was made to Americanize and nuclearize Western Europe's defense. Possessing an overwhelming and meaningful superiority in long-range nuclear delivery systems, and being virtually immune from Soviet retaliation, the United States could credibly threaten to strike the Soviet homeland if the Kremlin marched against Western Europe. In essence, the protective umbrella of U.S. strategic nuclear power was extended to protect Western Europe as well as the United States.

The inner contradictions of extended deterrence long have been recognized. No nation is likely to commit nuclear suicide for the sake of its allies' security. Thus, as early as the mid-1950s, strategic analysts understood that the advent of U.S.-Soviet nuclear parity would fatally compromise the credibility of the U.S. nuclear guarantee to Western Europe. Extended deterrence was a sensible strategy in the age of U.S. strategic nuclear superiority but, as French president Charles de Gaulle realized, it would not be viable once the Soviet Union acquired the capability to respond in kind to a U.S. nuclear strike on the Soviet Union. In a condition of parity, the United States would not expose its cities to nuclear destruction in order to defend Western Europe.

Logically, nuclear parity should have caused NATO to shift from nuclear deterrence to conventional defense (and/or resulted in the Europeanization, and de-Americanization, of NATO's nuclear deterrent).[8] Indeed, for a quarter of a century, U.S. defense planners have acknowledged the need to try to reduce the risks of extended deterrence by "raising the nuclear threshold"--that is, by decreasing NATO's dependence on nuclear weapons. Thus the Kennedy and Johnson administrations successfully pushed to change the alliance's declaratory policy from massive retaliation to flexible response." And succeeding U.S. administrations have all wrestled with the dilemma of how to hold the Alliance together while simultaneously reducing the risks of America's nuclear guarantee to Western Europe.

Throughout the 1980s the impetus for decreasing NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons has come from U.S. civilian and military strategists in the form of doctrines such as No First Use, AirLand Battle 2000, Follow-On Forces Attack 'FOFA' (which includes the use of sophisticated "emerging technologies" weapons systems to mount deep-strike attacks on Soviet second- and third-echelon forces), conventional deterrence and conventional "retaliation." However, while a high nuclear threshold would advance U.S. strategic interests, West European traditional security elites do not believe a change in NATO strategy would serve Western Europe's interests. Put another way, any policy that lowers NATO's strategic risks to the United States raises--or at least is perceived to raise--the strategic risks to Western Europe, particularly West Germany. Consequently, the major West European governments remain committed to the alliance's current nuclear posture.

West German Apprehension

Western Europe appreciates the diminishing credibility of the U.S. nuclear guarantee, and in response Great Britain and France are enhancing their respective independent nuclear forces.[9] West Germany, on the other hand, though committed to NATO's doctrine of nuclear deterrence, is a nonnuclear power; so Bonn looks to the United States to

provide the deterrent that West Germany itself lacks. NATO's strategic anomaly has always been that its most militarily exposed and important member lacks its own nuclear weapons and must rely upon others for its security. Extended deterrence is the underlying foundation of the U.S.-West German relationship. Thus, much of NATO's recent history--especially the INF affair--has consisted of U.S. attempts to reassure Bonn that the United States will risk nuclear war in West Germany's defense.

Because of the country's geographic position, any European war--conventional or nuclear--would be disastrous for West Germany. Bonn's overriding objective is war avoidance, an objective achieved through a NATO deterrent strategy that makes U.S. use of nuclear weapons in a conflict as nearly automatic as possible. A NATO strategic posture that raises the nuclear threshold--that is, which makes less certain NATO's prompt resort to nuclear weapons--weakens the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons. In the West German view, any move away from NATO's present strategy would make conventional war more attractive to the Soviets. As Joseph Joffe, a leading West German foreign policy analyst, puts it, "Raising the 'nuclear threshold'--another key shibboleth of flexible response--would surely lower the price of conventional aggression for the Soviets and increase it for the Europeans." [10]

Unlike American strategists, who have responded to strategic parity by urging NATO to become less dependent on nuclear weapons, West German defense planners have responded to parity by seeking new ways of bolstering extended deterrence. Their goal is to "couple" the United States to West Germany's defense. Although the Americans have had the upper hand in the battle to shape the alliance's declaratory policy, NATO's actual posture still reflects West Germany's strategic preferences.

Negating America's Freedom of Action

The dilemma of NATO strategy is often posed in the following terms: Would a U.S. president sacrifice New York in order to defend Hamburg? However, this is a misleading way of posing the issue. Traditional security elites in West Germany (and elsewhere in Western Europe) do not want an American president even to have the option of deciding whether to make this trade. West German strategists want to ensure that if the Soviets attack Western Europe, New York will be traded for Hamburg. In other words, their goal is to deny the United States freedom of choice, to commit the United States in advance to using nuclear weapons in Western Europe's defense. In a crisis America is not to be permitted to choose between honoring its commitment to Western Europe--regardless of the cost--or abandoning it. As Egon Bahr, one of the West German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) foremost foreign policy experts, says, "Europe does not want to allow America the freedom to decide when to put its own existence on the line, but rather wants to link the United States indissolubly, in an almost automatic manner, with Europe's own destiny." [11] As succinctly stated by Joffe, coupling consists of tying "America's hands by rendering it just as vulnerable to Soviet aggression as Western Europe is by dint of its weakness and geography." [12] From the West European viewpoint, coupling is the sine qua non of an effective NATO deterrent strategy.

For coupling to work, neither superpower can be permitted to think that a clash between them could be confined to central Europe. If war comes, both superpowers must know that their respective homelands could not remain untouched sanctuaries. Thus, NATO's strategic posture must make clear to Moscow that even a conventional attack on Western Europe would inevitably unleash an all-out nuclear war between the superpowers. [13] As four prominent West German analysts wrote in 1982, it is the "tight and indissoluble coupling" of U.S. strategic nuclear forces with NATO's conventional forces and European-based nonstrategic nuclear weapons that "confronts the Soviet Union with the incalculable risk" that a superpower clash in Europe "could escalate to a nuclear war." [14]

Absent this U.S.-West German nuclear coupling, the Soviets could stage a conventional offensive against West Germany with the certain knowledge that as long as they refrained from themselves using nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union would be immune from retaliation. Thus, if the U.S. nuclear umbrella covering West Germany were lifted, that country, in the analysts' words, "would have to bear the destruction and devastation of war alone [because] conventional conflicts in Europe would no longer involve any existential risk for the territory of the Soviet Union and . . . would be without such risk for the territory of the United States as well." [15] This is why West German strategists favor NATO's extended-deterrence/flexible-response strategy and why they reject conventionally oriented strategies.

Of course, it is one thing to state the theory of deterrence through coupling; it is quite another to implement it. After all,

no matter how logical extended deterrence may seem from the West European viewpoint, this strategy still rests on the questionable assumption that the United States would risk nuclear destruction by using nuclear weapons in Western Europe's defense. Accordingly, because Washington almost certainly would not cold-bloodedly initiate nuclear warfare, NATO's military structure is designed to ensure that the United States will do reflexively what it would not do deliberately. This is the alliance's dirty little secret.

The Illusion of Flexible Response

U.S. strategists describe flexible response as a strategy that allows for carefully controlled escalation through three levels of conflict: conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear. From the American viewpoint, the use of tactical and intermediate-range nuclear weapons deployed in Western Europe is an intervening step between a conventional conflict and a strategic nuclear exchange between the two superpowers.

In the U.S. view, flexible response is essentially a war-fighting strategy. The West Germans, however, are interested in deterrence, not war fighting. For them, there is nothing flexible about flexible response: theater and intermediate-range nuclear weapons are in Europe to ensure that any European war would automatically become an all-out nuclear conflict.[16] Contrary to what U.S. strategists say, West German planners do not regard these weapons as a means of gaining battlefield advantage. As Yale professor Paul Bracken explains, these weapons are the key to NATO's real strategy; a strategy properly described as "suicidal deterrence," not as flexible response:

In the face of the suicidal consequences of a war in Europe, it is easy to see why a rational political leader would never take steps leading to devastation. What is needed instead of a rational procedure for going to war is a posture that is so complex that war could be triggered in any one of a number of different ways without rational control.[17]

NATO's tactical nuclear weapons serve this objective perfectly. In wartime, excluding France's independent nuclear forces, eight NATO nations would control nuclear weapons, and no centralized organization exists that would exercise command and control over these weapons. Whereas strategic forces are assigned to functionally specialized organizations--a fact that underscores nuclear weapons' distinctive characteristics--tactical nuclear weapons are imbedded in the structure of conventional military units. There, they are likely to be regarded as "just another weapon" once the shooting starts.

In peacetime, NATO's tactical nuclear weapons are kept at a relatively small number of storage facilities. Because of their vulnerability to attack, in a prewar crisis these weapons would have to be dispersed to their assigned units. Because of the short reaction times imposed by the geographically confined nature of the possible European battlefield--and the inevitable confusion and disruption of communications that would occur during combat--the authority to use these weapons, in reality, would be predelegated to battlefield commanders. Official statements by top NATO political and military leaders assert that the decision to use tactical nuclear weapons resides solely with civilian authorities at the highest level. The reality, though, almost certainly is different: battalion commanders in the field, not the president of the United States, will make the momentous decision to initiate nuclear warfare in Europe.

The INFs and Suicidal Deterrence

With the coming of strategic nuclear parity in the 1970s, however, West German strategists found themselves in a quandary. Although firmly wedded to suicidal deterrence, they became concerned about the consequences if deterrence somehow failed. In a preview of the current U.S.-West German discord over battlefield nuclear weapons, West German strategists began feeling doubtful about tactical nuclear weapons. Then, as now, NATO's tactical nuclear arsenal consisted of short-range weapons that could only reach targets on German soil (including East Germany). Moreover, strategic parity reinforced U.S. incentives to limit the use of nuclear weapons to Europe. What the West Germans wanted was the coupling of American strategic nuclear forces to their defense; what they sought to avoid was a limited nuclear war fought on their territory.

As a leading SPD politician put it, the alliance's extended-deterrence strategy requires that the United States, as well as Western Europe, must be fully at risk in the event of war.[18] However, he said, there are too many tactical nuclear weapons on West German soil. He concluded by declaring that the importance of tactical nuclear weapons in NATO strategy must be diminished and that the number of such weapons on West German soil had to be reduced. The

implication of these remarks was clear: NATO needed to revise its strategy to shift the risk of nuclear war to the United States; if the worst happened, the Germans wanted the superpowers to fight the nuclear conflict over their heads, not on their soil.

Former West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt was one of the first European leaders to grasp the implications of SALT I's codification of strategic parity between the superpowers. In his 1977 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture, Schmidt took the initiative to restore the credibility of America's extended deterrent, and thereby set in motion the events that culminated in the INF deployments.[19] Even before this seminal address, Schmidt had made clear his views that the alliance's strategic risks were not fairly shared; West Germany was bearing too much of this risk because under the prevailing conditions of superpower parity, the United States could not be counted upon to honor its nuclear commitment to NATO.[20] For West Germany and other West European countries, the INFs were the perfect answer to NATO's strategic conundrum in an age of strategic parity: the problem of restoring credibility to a threat that rational U.S. policymakers could never deliberately carry out.

Through the entire INF episode, from NATO's December 1979 decision to deploy intermediate range cruise and Pershing II missiles up to and including the present treaty debate, analysis has been skewed by the variety of rationales advanced to explain why the INFs were deployed in the first place. The most widely advanced rationale--one that for the West Germans proved fatal because it legitimized the INFs' eventual removal--has been that NATO's deployments were needed to counter the Soviet buildup of mobile, highly accurate, triple-warhead SS-20s. However, this argument has never been convincing. The bulk of INF warheads (464 of a total of 572) are on slow-flying cruise missiles; these pose no counterforce threat to the SS-20s. Moreover, the 572 NATO INFs are not sufficient to regain escalation dominance over the Soviet SS-20 force of 1,200-plus warheads. Finally, the suggestion that the INFs would have given NATO limited nuclear options (for selective, low-yield strikes)--like the escalation-dominance argument--rests on the hotly debated contention that nuclear weapons are military usable.[21]

Another frequently invoked rationale for the INFs' deployment has been that they represented nothing more than a "modernization" that improved the survivability and penetrability of NATO's in-theater nuclear weapons systems. If survivability was the main concern, however, the INFs ought to have been deployed at sea; on land, they are vulnerable and a magnet for a Soviet preemptive strike. Finally, although the SS-20s may have had a significant political and psychological impact in certain NATO circles, their effect on the actual military balance in Europe is much less certain. All of the SS-20s' targets in Western Europe could be covered by Soviet strategic nuclear forces without significantly depleting the strategic warheads available for targeting the United States.[22] Indeed, it has long been known that a significant portion of the Soviet strategic arsenal is dedicated to West European targets.[23]

These deployment rationales have been simply red herrings. While most U.S. officials have relied on them to justify the deployments, West Europeans have been more forthcoming in explaining the real reason they wanted the INFs. Simply put, they have viewed the INFs as a means of recoupling U.S. strategic nuclear forces to Western Europe's defense. INFs represent a paradigmatic coupling weapon. They share all the characteristics of tactical nuclear weapons that are ideal for suicidal deterrence. Like the tactical nuclear weapons, the INFs' forward deployment in West Germany means that in a conflict, NATO would be pressured to "use 'em or lose 'em." However, the INFs have two unique characteristics that set them apart from tactical nuclear weapons: they are wholly under U.S. control, and they can hit targets in the Soviet Union itself. These two factors mean that the INFs would shift much of the risk of nuclear suicide from West Germany to the United States

From the West European perspective, the INFs have been considered to be preeminently political--not military--weapons.[24] They have been viewed as a way to restore credibility to the suicidal-deterrence strategy. A Soviet conventional attack on Western Europe would provoke U.S. INF strikes against the Soviet Union; these in turn would trigger Soviet retaliation against the United States. The INFs promised to restore the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrent while simultaneously relieving West Germans' fears that a nuclear posture based on tactical nuclear weapons (or a switch to conventional defense) would tempt the superpowers to fight a war confined to Europe. As Joseph Joffe says:

The ultimate logic of the Euromissiles was the destruction of sanctuaries. If all are going to be entangled in war, all are going to be equally vulnerable. If all are equally vulnerable, all will be equally safe. Threatening Soviet soil while

forging a solid escalatory link to America's strategic arsenal, these missiles point both ways, as it were. Euro-missiles are poised to carry nuclear destruction into the territory of both superpowers, promising to defy any traditional distinction between "small" and "big" wars; that is the murderous foundation on which the safety of lesser allies thrives.[25]

On this side of the Atlantic, most analysts either do not understand or (for obvious reasons) do not wish to admit, the true rationale for the INF deployments. Instead, like former secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger, they assert that the INFs were intended to give Washington a "less cataclysmic" alternative to using strategic weapons in response to a Soviet attack on Western Europe:

The INF made it difficult for the Soviets to threaten America's allies with a nuclear or conventional attack confined to Europe because the Kremlin would have to calculate that either might trigger the American missiles. And even a 90% successful attack on the missiles in Europe would leave tens of missiles (and scores of warheads) capable of damaging Soviet territory while the United States strategic forces remained intact. But to attack the United States simultaneously would mean general war. Thus, the INF closed a gap in deterrence; it "coupled" the defense of Europe with that of the United States and the defense of Germany with the defense of Europe.[26]

Such arguments, at best, are indicative of sloppy thinking. At worst, they are outright sophistry. They rest on the fallacious assumption that Moscow would react differently to an attack on the Soviet Union by West German-based Pershing IIs than it would to an attack by North Dakota-based Minuteman missiles. In fact, as Assistant Secretary of State Richard Burt admitted several years ago in a moment of ill-advised candor, the INFs would increase the risk of a nuclear apocalypse, not lower it. "The Soviet Union," he said, "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 to involve an intercontinental exchange more likely, not less." [27] In the perverse view of American Atlanticists, this was a good thing.

The Real Significance of the INF Debate

The real question in the INF treaty debate is the one that U.S. policymakers are afraid to ask: Should the United States allow itself to be irrevocably committed to fight a nuclear war on Western Europe's behalf?

The answer clearly is no. Western Europe is important to the United States but its security is not identical to that of the United States. Whether based on INFs or tactical nuclear weapons, suicidal deterrence is not a strategy that serves American interests. In matters of nuclear strategy, the United States should retain its autonomy and not allow itself to be automatically bound to risk nuclear war on another nation's behalf. Defenders of NATO's strategic status quo say extended deterrence/flexible response works and has kept the peace for 40 years. But the critical question--which they avoid--is, What happens if deterrence fails?

In the post-INF era, Washington will be challenged to fashion a new strategy toward Western Europe. The objective of this strategy should be to provide some measure of protection for Europe while restoring to the United States control over U.S. nuclear destiny. No doubt, many on both sides of the Atlantic will argue that this pulling back of the U.S. nuclear umbrella will make Western Europe safe for conventional war. However, American leaders need to remember that NATO's present strategy keeps Western Europe safe from conventional war by exposing the United States to almost certain nuclear destruction if NATO is attacked.

As Bonn's reaction to the INF accord shows, any change in NATO's extended-deterrent/flexible-response strategy has important implications for West Germany's overall diplomatic and security policies, particularly its relations with Washington.

Although proclaimed by some Atlanticist Pollyannas as a "victory" for the alliance, the INF treaty has been a Pyrrhic victory at best. One of the great ironies of postwar transatlantic relations is that the INF deployments--which were supposed to recouple the United States and West Germany--have dramatized the politico-military differences between Bonn and Washington. The postwar security consensus in West Germany has been shattered by the INF episode.

Within the SPD, Helmut Schmidt's Atlanticist followers have been driven to cover. The SPD's emerging leaders--such

as Saarland premier Oskar Lafontaine and Andreas von Bulow--talk about taking West Germany out of NATO's integrated military command, demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from West Germany, and shifting the country to a neutralist foreign policy. The SPD already is on record as favoring a "security partnership" between Western Europe and the Warsaw Pact and a central European nuclear-free zone.[28] On the right, conservative members of the Christian Democratic party (CDU) have reacted with bitterness to the October 1986 Reykjavik summit meeting and the INF treaty.[29] Alfred Dregger, the CDU's Bundestag floor leader, has accused the United States of "betraying" West German interests and "abandoning" the Federal Republic. In a position paper, Dregger's colleague Bernhard Friedmann argued that because America inevitably is going to withdraw from Europe, Bonn should seek Soviet support for a united, neutral German state. On both the political right and left, German nationalism and the question of German reunification have been revived.[30] Finally, although West Germany's traditional security elites may still believe in extended deterrence/flexible response, West German citizens have acquired a strong aversion to the U.S. nuclear weapons on their soil.

Post-INF Problems

The post-INF dilemma in U.S.-West German relations already has taken shape. And if it sounds familiar, it is. In the wake of the INF accord, Washington is pressing NATO to modernize its short-range battlefield nuclear weapons (especially the Lance missile). However, battlefield nuclear weapons make the West Germans feel nervous and "singularized." [31]

Singularization is simply a clumsy term that restates long-standing West German fears that a NATO deterrent strategy based on tactical nuclear weapons will tempt the superpowers to fight a limited nuclear war at West Germany's expense if a conflict occurs. Unlike the INFs, which decreased West Germany's nuclear risks while increasing America's, a post-INF NATO deterrent posture based on battlefield nuclear weapons is perceived by West Germans to have the opposite effect. As Christian Democratic foreign policy spokesman Volker Ruhe puts it in a catchy, now widely quoted phrase, "the shorter the range, the deader the Germans." (Of course, West German extended-deterrence advocates never explain to audiences on this side of the Atlantic the corollary of their position: the longer the range, the deader the Americans.)

Bonn's security partners say West German fears of singularization are misplaced, but these reassurances ring hollow. For example, France and Great Britain say that because their long-range nuclear weapons are capable of reaching the Soviet Union, they are more likely to be hit by Soviet nuclear strikes than is West Germany.[32] This argument misses three obvious points. First, West Germany is in the front line if the Soviets attack Western Europe; France and Great Britain are not. Second, precisely because they are nuclear powers, France and Great Britain control their own fate in a way that West Germany does not. Third, because it is a nonnuclear power, West Germany depends on others to provide it with a nuclear deterrent shield.

Another approach, adopted by Richard Burt, now U.S. ambassador to Bonn, is to tell the West Germans that the INF treaty really has not changed anything--that all it does is return NATO to the 1979 status quo ante.[33] However, as Burt should well know, Bonn insisted on the INF deployments precisely because the status quo ante was unacceptable. As the current controversy demonstrates, nothing has transpired during the past nine years to make singularization more palatable to the West Germans than it was in 1979. Finally, many U.S. officials tell Bonn that the INF treaty leaves the American nuclear umbrella unaffected because there still are some 4,000 U.S. nuclear warheads in Europe. Because almost all of these are on short-range delivery systems, such comments jangle rather than soothe German nerves.[34]

Recent developments have aggravated West German fears rather than assuaging them. Intentionally or otherwise, the Ikle Commission--a blue ribbon panel of strategic experts appointed by President Reagan to study America's long-range strategic posture--report validates West German concerns that extended deterrence has been vitiated and that West Germany has been singled out as the conventional and/or nuclear battlefield if the Soviets march west.[35] "To help defend our allies," the report says, the United States "cannot rely on threats expected to provoke our own annihilation if carried out." [36] The report implicitly repudiates the deterrence-through-coupling strategy advocated by West Germany's traditional security elites; Western strategy should be structured to ensure that a conflict "does not rapidly deteriorate into an apocalypse." [37]

For those West Germans who missed the point, the report states: "The Alliance should threaten to use nuclear weapons not as a link to a wider and more devastating war--although the risk of further escalation would still be there--but mainly as an instrument for denying success to invading Soviet forces." [38] Finally, the report states that a NATO capability of defeating a Soviet attack with conventional forces--and, if necessary, with the discriminating use of nuclear forces--is a more effective stance than a policy that attempts to deter the Soviets by raising the spectre of escalation to all-out nuclear war. [39] West German apprehensions that the United States is seeking to shift back to them the main part of NATO's strategic risks have also been fanned by defense secretary Frank Carlucci's recent threat to withdraw U.S. troops unless Bonn proceeds with modernization of battlefield nuclear weapons. [40]

U.S.-West German relations--and thus the entire European security situation--are now at a critical juncture. It is time that Washington's actual strategic policy (as distinct from its declaratory policy, or discussions among strategic analysts) reflects the reality that strategic nuclear parity has rendered untenable NATO's extended-deterrence/flexible-response strategy. In this respect the Ikle Commission report is a step forward. Its underlying theme is that the United States must regain control over its nuclear destiny and minimize the nuclear risks of its NATO commitment. But the report--coupled with Carlucci's threats--also underscores another vital point. An American policy of reducing the nuclear danger to this country by increasing it for West Germany risks triggering a bitter divorce between Washington and Bonn--something from which only Moscow would benefit.

Washington's current approach to NATO's post-INF strategic policy suggests U.S. policymakers have learned nothing from the INF episode. Those who seem to have forgotten recent history (even though the ink is hardly dry) should remember that although West Germany's traditional security elites are addicted to U.S. nuclear weapons, the West German public is allergic to them. If the United States persists in trying to force Bonn to accept modernization of battlefield nuclear weapons, it runs the risk of a repetition of the domestic crisis that gripped West Germany during the early 1980s. Moreover, Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher (whose views are much closer to the SPD's than to those of his CDU/Christian Socialist coalition partners) is adamantly opposed to modernization. If Bonn accedes to Washington's demands, the current coalition could collapse and be replaced by one between Genscher's Free Democrats and the SPD (with the Greens possibly included, as well). Finally, if America persists on its present course, it is playing into Mikhail Gorbachev's hands.

Moscow's "German Card"

The Kremlin is well positioned to take advantage of West Germany's nuclear angst, rising national neutralism, and the growing friction in U.S.-West German relations. [41] The Soviets have a great deal of leverage because they can link progress in intra-German relations to Bonn's willingness to make political security and economic concessions to Moscow. Moreover, as Milan Svec recently argued in *Foreign Policy*, Gorbachev's greatest opportunity to "sway the West"--indeed to break up NATO--"is to take on the so-called German question." [42]

The Soviets can effectively play their "German card" without offering outright reunification. In fact there are signs (including hints by Valentin Fallin, a former Soviet ambassador to Bonn who now heads the Novosti press agency) that Gorbachev may soon offer to tear down the Berlin Wall in exchange for a central European nuclear-free zone and/or withdrawal of all foreign troops from East and West Germany. If such an offer is made, it is hard to see how a West German government that refused it could survive politically. Yet, accepting a deal like this would shatter the NATO alliance.

An Alternative Strategy

In the post-INF world, the primary Soviet challenge to American interests in Europe is political rather than military. Washington must display the flexibility and imagination to devise a policy that will preempt the Soviets diplomatically, provide for West Germany's security, and lower America's nuclear risks. To attain these goals the United States should adopt a new European security policy based on: (1) an interim solution to the German question (not reunification) that guarantees unhampered travel between the two Germanies; (2) removal of both superpowers' military forces and nuclear weapons from central Europe (the two Germanies, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary); and (3) a pledge that neither superpower will be the first to reintroduce its forces into central Europe. At the same time, the United States should shift from its present extended-deterrence strategy to a residual-deterrence posture and link

any future strategic nuclear arms control talks to this new European security package.

By championing new European security arrangements, the United States would put the Soviet Union on the defensive. Such a U.S. initiative would have widespread popular appeal in West Germany, unlike current U.S. policies that have resonance only among a narrow (and shrinking) spectrum of politically conservative West Germans. Such a proposal recognizes the obvious: because the credibility of extended deterrence cannot be restored, NATO's cohesion is seriously compromised. Thus, it is necessary to seek a diplomatic solution to West Germany's

Disengagement would neutralize Moscow's conventional superiority by putting the Soviet army back where it belongs--in the Soviet Union. (Disengagement would also have the salutary effect of bringing the U.S. army back home where it belongs and allowing the United States to reduce its ground forces to a size commensurate with its status as a maritime, not a continental, power.) Unlike the conventional arms control proposals now being mooted, disengagement would not get bogged down in discussions about proper units of account, definitions of "offensive" versus "defensive" weapons, and the problem of reducing forces that are asymmetrical both quantitatively and qualitatively. Unlike the technical minutiae of arms control, the pristine simplicity of disengagement could easily be grasped by the West German public, which would strengthen the U.S. position both politically and morally.

The obvious objection to disengagement is that geographical asymmetry would give the Soviets a major edge over the United States if they broke the agreement and moved back into central Europe. Although this argument is superficially plausible, the search for militarily flawless arrangements is always the enemy of diplomacy. In any event, there are many reasons for thinking that disengagement would improve, not weaken, Western Europe's security position.[43]

The proposal set forth here does not call for dissolving either NATO or the Warsaw Pact and would affect only the two superpowers' forces. Belgian, Dutch, and French forces now in West Germany would only have to pull back a short distance from their present deployment areas; they still could easily reach their assigned sectors in the event of crisis. The British Army of the Rhine could be relocated in its entirety to the Low Countries or be split between Great Britain and the continent. Because the proposal does not affect French and British nuclear forces, it would not be an obstacle to the development of an independent European nuclear deterrent force.

Disengagement would also enhance NATO's strategic depth (now one of its real weaknesses) by putting Soviet forces hundreds of miles to the east of their present positions--and thus well away from West Germany's now-vulnerable industrial and population centers. Moreover, to strike Western Europe, Soviet forces probably would first have to fight their way through Poland and East Germany. In any event, a Soviet move west would be an unambiguous signal, providing NATO with strategic warning and ample time for mobilization.

Washington should use the arms control process as a lever to induce the Soviets to agree to mutual superpower disengagement from central Europe. The United States should not throw away its leverage by rushing headlong into a strategic arms control agreement at the upcoming Moscow summit. Although it is not widely understood, strategic nuclear force reductions and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) are intimately linked to West European security because the force posture needed to extend deterrence to protect Western Europe is far different from that needed to deter a direct attack on the United States itself. Direct deterrence is easy as long as the United States maintains secure second-strike retaliatory forces capable of inflicting unacceptable damage on the Soviet Union even after absorbing a Soviet first strike. SDI is not critical to the credibility of direct deterrence.

Extended deterrence is a more complex proposition because it requires that Washington be prepared to initiate nuclear warfare across the spectrum of conflict. That is, in a war the United States must be the first to use strategic, as well as tactical, nuclear weapons. A credible extended-deterrence strategy requires that the United States have counterforce/first-strike weapons (such as the MX and Trident D-5) and an effective strategic defense system.[44] In the event of war in Europe, U.S. strategic forces would be used in a counterforce role--that of destroying Soviet missiles in their silos, so that Moscow's ability to hit back would be seriously reduced. U.S. strategic defenses would be highly effective against the Soviet Union's weakened retaliatory forces, and U.S. population centers would thus be largely protected. Extended deterrence would be undermined by deep cuts in strategic nuclear forces and restrictions on SDI.

By the same token, it is clear that if the United States did not have to extend deterrence to cover Western Europe, its strategic requirements would be much different and it could be much more forthcoming on strategic force reductions

and SDI restrictions. Washington could make such concessions, however, only if Moscow agreed to measures that enhanced Western Europe's security. That is why there is an obvious linkage between deep cuts in strategic nuclear forces and SDI limitations, on the one hand, and disengagement, on the other. U.S. negotiating strategy should make this linkage explicit and tell the Soviets that either there is a package deal (strategic nuclear force cuts plus politico-military disengagement in Europe) or there is no deal at all.

Why would the Soviets strike such a bargain at a time when they have good (and justifiable) reasons to think a unilateral U.S. pullout from Europe is on the horizon? After all, if they wait, the Soviets can hope to see NATO dissolve without any political concessions on their part. There is, however, an important reason why it would still be in the Kremlin's interest to reach an agreement with Washington.

Even if the United States should unilaterally withdraw some or all of its troops from Western Europe in the next 10-15 years, it still will retain a strong interest in European security matters. If it maintains the strategic nuclear force configuration appropriate to an extended deterrent strategy and deploys SDI, Western Europe still would benefit from the residual deterrent effect of U.S. power. Deterrence can be effective even without the explicit understandings and visible symbols of a formal alliance. This was demonstrated in the late 1960s when Washington used its deterrent threat to dissuade Moscow from launching a preemptive war against China--a nation with which the United States at that time did not even have official diplomatic relations.[45]

For the United States, however, there would be a critical difference between residual deterrence and NATO's present strategy of suicidal deterrence. Today, the United States does not control its own fate; as long as U.S. nuclear weapons are deployed in Europe, U.S. survival is hostage to Western Europe's fate. Residual deterrence, however, would enable the United States to regain its freedom to choose whether to use nuclear weapons. Washington should not abdicate its responsibility for America's safety to others, even to its closest security partners. U.S. nuclear forces should not be "tightly and indissolubly" coupled to any other nation's defense. Only after deliberately balancing the U.S. interests at stake against the risk of nuclear intervention should Washington decide whether, when, and what manner to employ its nuclear forces.

If Washington adopts a residual-deterrence strategy, Moscow's strategic situation would become difficult because the United States would press ahead with SDI and new deployments of strategic nuclear weapons. The Soviets would not find this a pleasing prospect; they would feel militarily threatened and would have doubts about their ability to sustain a high-tech arms race with the United States. Moreover, such a climate of superpower relations would not be conducive to the modernization and reconstruction of the Soviet economy. Thus for the Kremlin, the downside to not doing a deal on disengagement is that the Soviet Union will fall further behind the United States, Japan, and--eventually--China, economically and technologically.

The INF treaty debate is not taking place in a vacuum. Even as the treaty places in doubt the premises underlying NATO's extended-deterrence/flexible-response strategy, other questions are being raised about the durability of the post-1945 world order. The bipolar system of two superpowers is being transformed into a multipolar system of four or five great powers. The relative decline of America's economic power and worsening fiscal constraints foreshadow an inevitable contraction of Washington's overseas commitments. Even as the Soviet Union wrestles with the difficulties of its internal decline, Gorbachev's domestic program of openness and revitalization and his diplomatic new thinking are giving Moscow an edge in the East-West political competition.

In a world where the ground seems to be shifting under their feet, the West Europeans are contemplating a future in which the U.S. presence may be much reduced. West Germany is naturally inclined to tilt eastwards but is unwilling to cut loose from the West. Nervously watching as Bonn pursues German national interests more assertively--and as Washington gradually distances itself from Europe--France is talking up the idea of a West European defense community. In the meantime, Great Britain faces its own long-standing dilemma: should it preserve its special relationship with the United States or commit itself wholeheartedly to Europe?

Conclusion

For a world in flux, the INF treaty is a critical event. After the treaty, NATO probably will never again be able to

conceal the deep fissures in its strategic policy. If NATO relations are mishandled after the treaty is ratified, the results could be disastrous. On the other hand the INF treaty debate affords an opportunity to do something that seldom has happened in NATO's history--conduct a candid transatlantic discussion about the Atlantic Community's future. On both sides of the Atlantic, a cold dose of reality is long overdue. The West Europeans need to understand that the United States is not going to involuntarily commit suicide for them. They need to understand, too, that even though the United States probably will remain in NATO, its military role will be vastly reduced. The question no longer is, "Will the U.S. withdraw troops from Europe?"; the real questions are now "When?" and "How many?"

For its part, Washington must acknowledge that it cannot abruptly pull the rug out from under the West Europeans; the United States must ease Western Europe through the transitional period that lies ahead. And Washington cannot forget that the West Europeans--especially the West Germans--have legitimate concerns and interests that the United States ignores at its peril.

The next administration will take office at a delicate moment. If it stumbles, Gorbachev could capitalize on the resulting transatlantic discord. But the next administration will also have heretofore unimaginable opportunities as well. To meet Gorbachev's challenge at a time when transatlantic relations are evolving into a new stage, Washington must outthink the Kremlin. Washington holds the diplomatic high cards in the political struggle for Europe and needs only the boldness and imagination to play them.

FOOTNOTES

[1] See Richard M. Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger, "To Withdraw the Missiles We Must Add Conditions," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1987, pt. 5, p. 1; Bernard W. Rogers, "Why Compromise Our Deterrent Strength in Europe?" *New York Times*, June 28, 1987, p. E25; Rudy Abramson, "Eliminating Ballistic Missiles Dangerous, Scowcroft Contends," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1987, p. 6; Howard Phillips, "The Treaty: Another Sellout," *New York Times*, December 11, 1987, p. 33; Don Irwin, "Kemp Calls Proposed Arms Treaty 'A Nuclear Munich,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1987, p. 26.

[2] "The Treaty, Europeans and the Jitters," *New York Times*, February 15, 1988, p. 18.

[3] Paul Seabury, *The Rise and Decline of the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1967), pp. 14-15.

[4] James Schlesinger, "Reykjavik and Revelations: A Turn of the Tide?" *Foreign Affairs: America and the World* 1986, p. 430.

[5] For an excellent overview of the development of NATO's nuclear strategy, see Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), especially pp. 63-90, 283-330.

[6] See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), chapter 2; John Van Oudenaren, "Containment: Obsolete and Enduring Features," in *U.S.-Soviet Relations: The Next Phase*, ed. Arnold Horelick (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[7] See Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The United States and NATO: The Formative Years* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), chaps. 3-5.

[8] For a lucid presentation of the view that parity requires devolution of America's NATO nuclear responsibilities to NATO, see David Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), especially pp. 150-71.

[9] See George M. Seignious and Jonathan Paul Yates, "Europe's Nuclear Superpowers," *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1984).

[10] Joseph Joffe, *The Limited Partnership: Europe, the United States and the Burdens of Alliance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1987), p. 483.

[11] Egon Bahr, "Peace: A State of Emergency," in *Germany Debates Defense: The NATO Alliance at the Crossroads*,

ed. Rudolph Steinke and Michael Vale (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharp, 1983), p. 146.

[12] Joffe, *The Limited Partnership*, p. 148.

[13] *Ibid.*, chaps. 2, 4; Francois de Rose, "Inflexible Response," *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1982).

[14] Karl Kaiser, George Leber.