

NATO IN A CHANGING WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

As NATO enters its fifth decade, the alliance faces perhaps its greatest challenge because of the increasing political and economic tensions between alliance members and the significant changes taking place within the Soviet bloc. Over the years, NATO members have had some differences of opinion, but the presence in Eastern Europe of large Soviet forces seemingly ready to invade Western Europe favoured a strong consensus within the alliance. During the 1980s, however, changes in the military policies of the United States have raised doubts in the minds of West Europeans about that country's commitment to their defence. Furthermore, the negotiation of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty has reduced the nuclear arsenal on which NATO depends to deter a Soviet attack, and has thus increased the importance of its short-range nuclear missiles. The dispute within the alliance over the need to modernize these missiles illustrates the increasing difficulty for NATO members to agree on how to deal with the Soviet threat. The process is made even more complicated by Soviet leader Gorbachev's initiatives in both domestic and international politics. Soviet arms control initiatives tend to reaffirm the growing conviction among many West Europeans that the Soviet Union no longer poses a threat to the West, especially in view of its quest for economic development. The announced withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe also suggests that the Soviet Union is moving from an offensive to a defensive military posture in Europe. This development puts into question what has been the basis for NATO's existence for the past 40 years, the need to mass forces on the central front to deter an attack by Soviet bloc forces. How well NATO can adjust to the new military situation and the changing relationship between the United States and Western Europe will determine whether the alliance will renew itself or cease to exist.



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**NATO IN A CHANGING WORLD**

**INTRODUCTION**

Since its creation in 1949, NATO has experienced one political crisis after another in which the cohesion of the alliance has been tested by frictions between members, arguments over military strategy and changing perceptions of the threat it was designed to counter. NATO has survived these crises and contributed to the maintenance of peace in Europe for 40 years, one of the longest-ever periods of peace for that continent. Indeed, some describe NATO as being "one of the most successful treaty arrangements in history."<sup>(1)</sup> However, as it enters its fifth decade, NATO faces perhaps its most serious challenge. Tensions within the alliance, significant changes in public opinion and radical developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, may provoke a crisis capable of causing NATO's disintegration or may make the alliance rethink its role and renew itself. This study examines the effect of the political and military developments of the past decade on the basic tenets of NATO's military strategy and then considers how this influences the alliance's current posture vis-à-vis the changes in the Soviet Bloc and the implications for its future.

**THE UNEASY PARTNERSHIP**

**A. The Weakening Link Between the United States  
and Western Europe**

Ever since the Second World War, aggression against the Western World has been deterred by the ability of the United States to

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(1) Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance, "Bipartisan Objectives for American Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 66, No. 5, Summer 1988, p. 907.

launch a massive nuclear attack against an aggressor. Until it developed its own nuclear arsenal, the Soviet Union's ability to launch a massive conventional attack into the heart of Western Europe was the main threat facing the West. However, even in the 1970s when the Soviet Union reached rough parity with the United States in terms of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with nuclear warheads, the central front in Europe across which the armies of NATO and the Warsaw Pact faced each other remained the major focus of East-West confrontation. The countries of Western Europe together with Canada and the United States formed NATO in 1949 to counter the threat posed by Soviet forces massed along the central front. The Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies formed the Warsaw Pact in 1955 when West Germany joined NATO and added its troops to the alliance forces on the central front. NATO's ability to deter a Soviet invasion across the central front was its best guarantee of security while the Soviet Bloc's capability to launch a large-scale attack against Western Europe was its best deterrence against aggression by NATO. This is basically the situation which prevails today.

Another thing which remains constant is the dependency of West European members of NATO on United States nuclear weapons for their security. Unable or unwilling to match the Warsaw Pact forces in terms of soldiers, tanks and aircraft, NATO has relied on nuclear weapons to bolster the deterrence value of its conventional forces. Today, the strategic nuclear forces of the United States, mostly based in the continental U.S., and the tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons in position in Western Europe, but controlled by the United States, are the main elements of NATO's flexible response strategy. Under this strategy, NATO's conventional forces would resist any Soviet attack on the central front either until it stopped or until it broke through NATO defences; at that point the alliance could escalate its response, starting with battlefield nuclear weapons and ultimately retaliating against a continuing invasion by attacking Soviet territory with strategic nuclear weapons such as ICBMs. In short, NATO's central front is a trip-wire which in a matter of days or even hours after a Soviet attack could trigger off a nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. The presence of U.S.

troops on the central front ensures that the United States would be involved in the defence of Western Europe the instant Soviet forces attacked it. By the same token, once NATO was engaged in nuclear escalation, the United States would be fully implicated in a process which may might make it launch its strategic nuclear missiles against the Soviet Union at the risk of Soviet retaliation. The willingness of the United States to risk the destruction of its cities in order to guarantee Western Europe's security determines to a large extent the credibility of NATO's threat to use nuclear weapons to stop a Soviet invasion.

The importance of nuclear weapons to the security of West Europeans makes them sensitive to anything which could affect the deterrence value of these weapons or the commitment of the United States to use them when required. There were frictions between the North American and the European members of the alliance during its first decades, but the basic tenets of NATO's strategy were accepted by all. In the late 1970s, when the balance of nuclear forces in Europe appeared to be upset by the Soviet Union's deployment of SS-20 nuclear missiles in Eastern Europe, NATO responded by deploying intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) composed of Pershing II and cruise missiles. Despite strong opposition from segments of their population and tensions within their ranks, the West European NATO countries agreed to the INF deployment by the United States, thereby confirming not only the importance of nuclear weapons to their defence, but also their dependence on the United States.

However, events in the 1980s raised more doubts about the U.S. commitment to West European security. On 23 March 1983, U.S. President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), also known as Star Wars, to examine the feasibility of providing the United States with an effective defence against ICBMs. It was claimed, among other things, that strategic defence would make nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." The announcement stirred a storm of controversy as doubts were raised about the feasibility and necessity of such an undertaking. However, the announcement also signalled the apparent intention of the United States to switch from a military posture based on offence to one based on defence. Instead of relying only on its strategic nuclear

forces to deter war, the United States wanted to adopt a defensive posture whereby the cities and especially the strategic forces on the continental U.S. would be defended effectively. A potential aggressor would be dissuaded from attacking the United States because of the latter's capacity to defend itself rather than because of its ability to retaliate. The U.S. Secretary of Defense argued that "strategic defense represents a change of strategy, for a more secure deterrent. It offers a far safer way to keep the peace."<sup>(2)</sup> The new emphasis on the defence of the continental U.S. also indicated growing doubts in the United States about the effectiveness of relying only on offence to ensure national security at a time when the Soviet Union had reached nuclear parity and when the cost of maintaining bases overseas, notably in Western Europe, was perceived to be making heavy demands on an overburdened economy.

While the deployment of an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defence system as a result of SDI was by no means certain, the fact that the United States was thinking along these lines was of great concern to the West European members of NATO. The emphasis placed on the defence of the continental U.S. implied that the security of Western Europe was becoming less important to the security of the United States:

The SDI has, for the first time, made the "European question" peripheral to the Americans' perception of their territorial security interests.<sup>(3)</sup>

If the United States had an effective ABM system to deal with a Soviet missile attack, it could ignore the situation in Europe and stand idly by, knowing that it would not be harmed whatever happened there. The credibility of NATO's flexible response strategy would be undermined because there would be less certainty that the United States, now safe from attack, would retaliate for the invasion of countries hundreds of kilometres from its shores. The presence of U.S. troops in Western Europe would of course make it difficult for the United States to completely ignore aggression in Western Europe. However, growing demands in the United States for the

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(2) Caspar Weinberger, "U.S. Defense Strategy," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 64, No. 4, Spring 1986, p. 679.

(3) Louis Deschamps, The SDI and European Security Interests, Atlantic Paper No. 62, Croom Helm, London, 1987, p. 50.

withdrawal of U.S. troops in Europe because of the costs and the apparent ability of Western Europe to contribute more to its own defence, raised the possibility that this element of the trip-wire might eventually disappear. Even if U.S. troops remain in Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union could, if one or even both of them enjoyed the protection of an effective ABM system, simply engage in conventional warfare in Europe, leaving both countries unscathed, but leaving Western Europe in ruins.<sup>(4)</sup> In short, the SDI announcement threatened to alter the basis on which the security of Western Europe had been ensured since the end of the Second World War and to leave the West Europeans in a quandary about how to deal with the situation. Coming in the wake of frictions between the Reagan administration and the European alliance members on issues such as the pipeline supplying Soviet natural gas to Western Europe, and the political turmoil surrounding the deployment of the INF missiles, the SDI announcement could only create more uneasiness within the alliance.

#### **B. The Impact of the INF Treaty**

Pending the deployment by the United States of an ABM system under SDI, something which would happen many years in the future, if at all, West European leaders could at least draw comfort from the fact that U.S. strategic and battlefield nuclear weapons would continue to ensure their continent's security for many years to come. They were therefore flabbergasted when, at the Reykjavik summit of October 1986, President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev almost agreed to eliminate strategic nuclear weapons completely and did agree to eliminate INF missiles in Europe. While world opinion welcomed the INF agreement and the attempt to eliminate all nuclear weapons, West European leaders appeared to buck the trend by expressing shock and dismay at the developments at the Reykjavik Summit. In fact, their reaction was understandable, given the dependency of Western Europe on nuclear weapons for its security. The

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(4) Philip Williams, "West European Security After Reykjavik," Washington Quarterly, Vol. 10, No. 2, Spring 1987, p. 37. See also Jonathan Dean, "Europe in the Shadow of Star Wars," in John Tirman, ed., Empty Promise, The Growing Case Against Star Wars, Beacon Press, Boston, 1986, p. 163.

proposed elimination of all strategic nuclear weapons would have removed the threat of massive nuclear retaliation which is the cornerstone of NATO's flexible response strategy, while the INF agreement removed some of the nuclear battlefield weapons from NATO's initial nuclear escalation capability, thereby weakening its deterrence value. The fact that the U.S. President had entered into negotiations with the Soviet leader on matters directly affecting the security of the West Europeans without consulting them heightened their dismay. Relations between the United States and its NATO allies were already strained as a result of the negative reaction of the West Europeans to the U.S. raid on Libya in April 1986. The Europeans considered the raid an excessive response to the terrorism problem, an attitude which angered U.S. public opinion and government officials. The apparent willingness of the U.S. President to negotiate away without consultations some basic elements of Western Europe's security guarantee threatened to aggravate a growing rift within NATO, although Reagan's attitude at Reykjavik was shaped as much, if not more, by SDI and other considerations as by the situation in NATO. If nothing else, the episode fuelled speculation concerning an eventual "decoupling" of Europe and the United States on security matters.

The reduction in the number of battlefield nuclear weapons set in motion by the INF agreement, and increasing doubts over the value of the U.S. nuclear deterrence for Europe's security in light of SDI and Reykjavik increased the importance of conventional forces and the remaining nuclear battlefield weapons.<sup>(5)</sup> To compensate for denuclearization, NATO's conventional forces would have to be increased substantially because of the significant advantage, at least in terms of numbers, of the Warsaw Pact's conventional forces. The West Europeans, however, have always been reluctant to increase their conventional forces significantly because nuclear weapons, with a greater deterrence value, make smaller demands on a nation's treasury and manpower. The reliance on relatively cheaper nuclear

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(5) Keith Payne and Colin Gray, "Nuclear Policy and the Defensive Transition," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 62, No. 4, Spring 1984, p. 832; John Morrocco, "Allies Weigh New Deployments to Offset Proposed INF Cuts," Aviation Week and Space Technology, Vol. 126, No. 20, 18 May 1987, p. 18.

cheaper nuclear weapons has allowed the West Europeans to allocate funds to other needs, notably to subsidize extensive social welfare systems, a tendency strongly criticized by some in the United States.<sup>(6)</sup> Some portions of U.S. public opinion also perceive the United States as bearing most of the financial burden for the defence of Western Europe, which uses the funds it should spend on its own defence to subsidize industries competing against those in the U.S. The West Europeans, however, have always faced the dilemma that if they increase their conventional defence spending, they might satisfy U.S. demands for a more balanced sharing of NATO's costs, but they might also unwittingly encourage the United States to "decouple" its strategic deterrent from Europe's defence.<sup>(7)</sup> With the commitment of the United States to European security increasingly in doubt in the wake of the Reykjavik summit, the West Europeans did not want to accelerate the "decoupling" process by radically expanding their conventional defence capability. Besides, the euphoria surrounding the progress made on arms control at the Reykjavik summit and the improving relations between the two superpowers made it difficult for the West European governments to justify to their electorate the huge increases in defence spending which would be required to bolster NATO's conventional forces. In short, the substantial expansion of conventional forces is not an attractive option for Western Europe.

## **NATO'S POSITION IN THE GORBACHEV ERA**

### **A. West Germany and the Modernization of Short-Range Nuclear Missiles**

NATO members nevertheless agreed to pledge increased support for conventional arms development and procurement during the May 1987

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(6) See for example Melvyn Krauss, How NATO Weakens the West, Simon and Shuster, New York, 1986, p. 24-26 and Irving Kristol, "NATO: Do We Still Need It? The Case Against," Freedom at Issue, No. 95, March-April 1987, p. 5-6.

(7) Jeffrey Record and David Rivkin, Jr., "Defending Post-INF Europe," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 66, No. 4, Spring 1988, p. 736.

meeting of the alliance's defence planning committee. Other measures also demonstrated the growing desire of West Europeans to bolster the European pillar of NATO and even to develop a uniquely European defence strategy. Undertaking the former through, for example, a measured increase of conventional forces, was one way of meeting U.S. criticism that Western Europe was not doing its fair share for NATO's defence, while the pursuit of the latter prepared Western Europe for the day when the United States might no longer guarantee its security. France and West Germany agreed to establish a joint brigade and to hold joint exercises outside the NATO context to show that Western Europe could indeed take greater control over its own defence.<sup>(8)</sup> Military cooperation between West European countries is no longer automatically synonymous with military cooperation within the NATO alliance. However, the new enthusiasm for military cooperation notwithstanding, the West Europeans are unwilling if not unable to match the large conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact. As a result, they are still dependent on the alliance's nuclear weapons to guarantee their security. Since the INF Treaty signed in December 1987 called for the dismantling of intermediate-range nuclear forces, the remaining short-range nuclear forces have taken on great significance for the West European alliance members.

Prior to the Reykjavik summit, NATO's flexible response strategy basically called for gradual nuclear escalation, once it was clear the conventional forces could not stop a Soviet invasion, using short-range, intermediate-range and ultimately strategic nuclear weapons. The announced intention of President Reagan and Soviet leader Gorbachev to proceed with the dismantling of INF weapons not only dismayed West European leaders and NATO military commanders, but also made them consider ways to compensate for the loss of the intermediate-range weapons.<sup>(9)</sup> Basing

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(8) See for example David Wood, "Europe Set to Go Its Own Way on Defence," Gazette (Montreal), 25 April 1987, p. B4; "Europe's Braver Colours," Economist, Vol. 304, No. 7506, 11 July 1987, p. 11-12; Jocelyn Coulon, "L'Europe se cherche une voie," Le Devoir (Montreal), 17 July 1987, p. 1; "Français et Britanniques vont accroître leur coopération militaire," Le Devoir (Montreal), 1<sup>er</sup> mars 1989, p. 7.

(9) See Morrocco (1987), p. 18.

cruise missiles on ships off the European coasts and deploying B-52 bombers equipped with cruise missiles were some of the alternatives considered. However, deploying new weapons to compensate for INF weapons scrapped under an agreement hailed as a breakthrough in arms control and as a major step in easing East-West tensions would have been difficult to justify to Western public opinion. NATO leaders have therefore put aside plans to directly compensate for INF cuts and have concentrated instead on carrying out the modernization of short-range nuclear forces agreed to by the alliance's Nuclear Planning Group at its 1983 Montebello meeting. The modernization implies the development of new nuclear artillery shells, a new missile with a range of about 300 kilometres to replace the Lance missiles now in place in West Germany, and a new missile with a range of some 400 kilometres which can be launched from tactical aircraft. In the present context, the modernization of short-range nuclear weapons would allow NATO to enhance the deterrence value of the remaining number of tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons.

NATO leaders, however, have failed to agree to proceed with the modernization of short-range nuclear weapons. While NATO members accept the recommendations of the Nuclear Planning Group, the West German government has become more and more recalcitrant, Chancellor Helmut Kohl calling on NATO to delay its decision until 1991 or 1992 while reaffirming the importance of short-range nuclear weapons to alliance security.<sup>(10)</sup> Strains have developed within the alliance between the United States and the United Kingdom, both of whom favour an early decision on modernization, and West Germany, where modernization and security issues in general have become very controversial. The relaxation of East-West tensions and promising developments in arms control and disarmament since the Reykjavik summit have made a strong impact on the West Germans, who would bear the brunt of any war breaking out on the central front. Buoyed by the promise of peaceful coexistence with the Soviet bloc as a result of Soviet leader

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(10) See "Kohl Won't Decide Yet on New Arms System," Financial Post, 10 February 1989, p. 7; "Kohl s'oppose à l'élimination des missiles à courte portée," La Presse (Montreal), 14 February 1989, p. B4; "Relance du débat sur la modernisation des armes nucléaires tactiques de l'OTAN," Le Devoir (Montreal) 16 February 1989, p. 5.

Gorbachev's overtures to the West, and weary of the high level of military preparedness on their territory and the extensive military exercises and risks of accidents which accompany it, many West Germans have displayed great impatience with NATO's apparent slowness to break the deadlock which has been at the centre of the East-West confrontation and increasing reluctance to tolerate the risks and sacrifices which accompany the alliance's military policies. A growing number of West Germans, from both left and right, are opposed to the deployment of new conventional weapons and the training, such as low-level flights, required to keep NATO forces proficient, regardless of the consequences for the alliance's deterrence capability.<sup>(11)</sup> West Germans are also more uneasy about the presence of large numbers of nuclear weapons in their country. Their doubts about the necessity of modernizing short-range nuclear weapons reflect not only growing optimism that the new international context will ensure lasting peace, but also increasing difficulty in accepting the fact that they and their country would inevitably be obliterated should these weapons ever be used.

In the wake of the INF missile deployment in the early 1980s, a study of public opinion in NATO countries had detected "a strong preference for arms control measures over defense improvements."<sup>(12)</sup> The Reykjavik summit and the signing of the INF Treaty in December 1987 could only reinforce this preference for arms control measures, especially among West Germans, who are tired of living with the constant danger of war and who still hope that improved East-West relations will pave the way for the eventual reunification of the two Germanies. In the short term, the debate among West Germans on the modernization of NATO's short-range nuclear weapons places the government of Chancellor Kohl in a delicate

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- (11) See for example Keith Mordoff, "NATO Fighter Training Flights In Germany Halted Until Jan. 2," Aviation Week and Space Technology, 19 December 1988, p. 31; Keith Mordoff, "USAFE Study Likely to Recommend Against Cutting Low-level Flights," Aviation Week and Space Technology, 2 January 1989, p. 95-96.
- (12) Gregory Flynn and Hans Rattinger, "The Public and Atlantic Defense," in Gregory Flynn and Hans Rattinger, eds., The Public and Atlantic Defense, Rowman and Allanheld, London, 1985, p. 373.

position as it approaches general elections expected in 1990. The ruling centre-right coalition, composed of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), its Bavarian ally, the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), faces an uncertain future in light of its steadily declining popularity reflected in public opinion polls and electoral defeats in state or Land elections, even in Länder where support has been traditionally strong. Economic and social problems also contribute to the government's unpopularity, but the defence issue is potentially the most damaging one, especially since it has already created divisions within the ruling coalition.

Statements by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hans-Dietrich Genscher of the FDP, who advocates delaying the modernization decision and adopting a more trusting attitude towards the Soviet Union, have been criticized by his CDU and CSU colleagues as well as by U.S. and British officials. Meanwhile, the opposition parties such as the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens have argued forcefully against modernization and have called for the eventual removal of all nuclear weapons from Europe. The SPD accepted West Germany's commitment to NATO only around 1960 and the issue continued to divide the party in the 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, some elements of West German society have always been uneasy about their country's position within NATO and have called for a more neutral stance vis-à-vis the superpowers.<sup>(13)</sup> Recent public opinion polls show that a growing number of ordinary citizens, especially from the younger generations, are joining the ranks of those who want more accommodating policies towards the Soviet Union and who dispute the need for new military measures such as modernization.<sup>(14)</sup> Mindful of the divisions within the ruling coalition and the West German population in

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(13) See M. von Donat, "Neutrality in Germany," Government and Opposition, Vol. 21, No. 4, Autumn 1986.

(14) See for example the shifts in public opinion over the decade noted in Robin Knight, "A New German Nationalism in the Age of Gorbachev," U.S. News and World Report, Vol. 106, No. 3, 23 January 1989, p. 27.

general on this subject, Chancellor Kohl has delayed the modernization decision in a bid to avoid political turmoil like that experienced during the INF missile deployment in the early 1980s. The losses suffered by the CDU in the 29 January 1989 elections in West Berlin and the formation of a coalition government composed of Greens and SPD members could only reinforce the Kohl government's caution.<sup>(15)</sup>

### **B. Implications of Soviet Defensive Posture**

The decline in popularity of the ruling coalition and the possibility that the SPD could win enough support at the upcoming national elections to form a coalition if not a majority government inevitably cause concern within NATO. During the INF deployment of the early 1980s, an SPD government weathered a storm of public protest, not to mention internal divisions, to implement NATO policies. NATO officials were confident in the knowledge that if the SPD government lost an election, it would be replaced by a CDU government with an even stronger commitment to NATO.<sup>(16)</sup> Now, however, a CDU-led government may be defeated in the next elections and replaced by an SPD majority or coalition government elected on a platform which rejects not only the modernization of short-range nuclear weapons, but also the continued deployment by the alliance of nuclear weapons anywhere in Europe. Even if the CDU remains in power, the government will still have to deal with the significant trend in public opinion towards a more trusting attitude vis-à-vis the Soviet Union which increases the difficulty of convincing West Germans to support NATO policies. NATO's situation is further complicated by a possibly growing erosion of traditional public support for the alliance's existence. To a large extent, the protest marches of the early 1980s were aimed at NATO's policy of deploying INF missiles rather than at the alliance itself. Many West Germans and other West Europeans disagreed with what the alliance wanted to do, but still recognized the need for NATO's continued

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(15) See "The Berlin Effect," The Economist, Vol. 310, No. 7592, 4 March 1989, p. 43.

(16) Ibid.

existence.<sup>(17)</sup> In the present context, where many citizens have a much reduced fear of the Soviet threat, the need to maintain a NATO alliance may be increasingly questioned.

Indeed, NATO was basically created because the Soviet Union was perceived to have a bellicose attitude towards Western Europe and had large conventional forces in Eastern Europe capable of bursting through the central front at any moment. Over the years, diplomatic overtures and expanding trade have reduced the animosity between Western Europe and the Soviet Union and the significant changes in Soviet social, economic and foreign policies initiated under Mikhail Gorbachev have accelerated the process. Indeed, some opinion polls suggest that up to 60% of West Germans now believe that their country is not militarily threatened by the Soviet Union.<sup>(18)</sup> Such an attitude among West Germans is particularly worrying to NATO planners since the bulk of alliances forces are stationed in West Germany and their deterrence value would be severely diminished if their presence became unacceptable to the citizens they are meant to protect. Other West Europeans share the perception that the Soviet Union is less bellicose and expect the NATO alliance to respond by also taking a more conciliatory approach. As the Soviets no doubt realized, nothing could more effectively reinforce the perception in Western Europe that the Soviet threat had diminished than the reduction of Soviet conventional forces poised on the central front. There have been a number of East-West *détentes* in the past, but Western sceptics could always argue that the Soviet threat had not really diminished by pointing to the large Warsaw Pact forces which, notwithstanding the improvements in the diplomatic climate, could still pounce on Western Europe. However, reductions in the number of troops and weapons in Eastern Europe, and the promise of more

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(17) Flynn and Rattinger (1985), p. 375. Their conclusion is based on public opinion polls in various NATO countries examined in the other chapters of the book.

(18) Knight (1989), p. 27. A growing number of Canadians share this opinion. A Gallup Poll released on 16 March 1989 indicated that 49% of Canadians believe that the Soviet Union is trying to increase its area of influence in the world, compared to 87% in 1980.

to come, would make it difficult for Western sceptics to maintain that the Soviet threat is as menacing as before. When Soviet leader Gorbachev announced on 7 December 1988 at the United Nations General Assembly that Soviet forces in Eastern Europe would be cut, he no doubt hoped that the reductions would be considered as tangible evidence that Soviet bellicosity had greatly diminished.

In his speech, Gorbachev indicated that 5,000 Soviet tanks and 50,000 Soviet troops now stationed in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary would be withdrawn to the Soviet Union and that six of the 15 tank divisions in the region would be disbanded. He also announced the withdrawal from Eastern Europe of an unspecified number of assault units specialized in river crossings which would have spearheaded any attack on Western Europe. This was in effect a signal that the Soviet Union was switching from an offensive to a defensive military posture in Europe. The Soviet leader also stated that, in addition to the removal from service of 8,500 artillery pieces and 800 combat aircraft, the number of troops and tanks in the western part of the Soviet Union would be cut over the next two years. As a result of these cutbacks and those in Eastern Europe, total Soviet military manpower will be reduced by 500,000 men and the Soviet arsenal will lose 10,000 tanks.

It is generally accepted that one of the reasons for this initiative is the desire of the Soviet leadership to reduce the burden of military spending which hampers the development of the Soviet economy. The aims of Gorbachev's perestroika policies include the strengthening of the economy, the improvement of the supply of consumer goods and the closing of the technology gap with the West. Reducing military expenditures will free substantial funds needed to accomplish these aims. Demographic changes in the Soviet Union are also advanced as one reason for the troop reductions. Doubts about the political reliability of soldiers from some of the nationalities in the Soviet Union may be an incentive for a smaller Soviet army.<sup>(19)</sup> The announced troop cuts also serve to maintain the momentum

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(19) Jeff Trimble, "Building a Military Machine," U.S. News and World Report, Vol. 106, No. 10, 13 March 1989, p. 34.

acquired by the Soviet Union in the propaganda battle with the West on peace and disarmament issues. The 10% cut in overall Soviet military manpower and the reductions in the Soviet arsenal can be brandished as tangible proof that the Soviet Union is sincere in its desire to promote international peace and disarmament. The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe reinforces the perception of many Western Europeans that the Soviet threat is diminishing, thereby causing debate within the NATO alliance which delays weapons modernization. This in turn reduces the threat posed to Soviet security by western forces on the central front. This situation facilitates Soviet moves towards a defensive military posture which holds strategic as well as economic advantages for the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies had started to emphasize the defensive nature of their new military doctrine many months before the December 1988 announcement. Gorbachev started the process in April 1986 in a speech to the East German Communist Party Congress where he proposed reductions in ground and air forces and acknowledged that in dealing with Europe's security problem, the whole area between the Atlantic and the Ural mountains had to be considered, not just the region around the central front. The Warsaw Pact pursued the matter, notably at the May 1987 meeting of its Political consultative Committee where more cuts were proposed and where the need for asymmetrical reductions was recognized because of the significant disparity in numbers between Warsaw Pact and NATO forces in Europe. The Committee also issued a statement which emphasized the defensive nature of the Warsaw Pact's military doctrine and the need to reduce conventional forces in Europe "to the level where neither side, in ensuring its defense, would have the means for a surprise attack on the other side or for mounting general offensive operations."<sup>(20)</sup> Western sceptics could say that this was only rhetoric by pointing out that the Soviet Union has always claimed that its policies were defensive, even when its forces on the central front were prepared for offensive operations. However, the withdrawal from Eastern Europe

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(20) Quoted in Michael McGuire, "A Mutual Security Regime for Europe?" International Affairs, Vol. 64, No. 3, Summer 1988, p. 371.

of some assault forces and other troops and equipment tend to confirm that a fundamental shift in military doctrine has taken place. Instead of relying on an offensive posture based on large forces in Eastern Europe ready to cross the line between East and West, the Soviet Union is taking a defensive one, which would allow it to keep its land and air forces within its borders. While the element of surprise is an important factor in an offensive posture, it hardly matters in a defensive one, so the Soviet Union can be less secretive about its military installations and can accept intrusive verification.<sup>(21)</sup> Greater willingness to allow foreign observers to inspect its military installations and to make on-site verification of compliance with various arms control and disarmament agreements, can only improve the Soviet Union's standing in Western public opinion.

Thus, for the Soviet Union, the switch from an offensive to a defensive posture in Europe has public relations as well as economic benefits. These benefits complement each other. Any improvement in Western attitudes towards the Soviet Union reduces the threat of an attack from the West and facilitates more troop reductions in Eastern Europe. In turn, these cuts reduce the Soviet Union's financial burden because it can withdraw divisions from Eastern Europe, and even disband them completely. The financial resources freed by the cuts can be used to buy consumer goods and the machinery needed to revitalize Soviet industry. The prospects for increased trade with the Soviet Union, together with its political and economic reforms, will no doubt promote an increasingly benign attitude towards the Soviet Union in the West. The Soviet leadership has a stake in the continued relaxation of tensions in Europe in order to facilitate its own political and economic reforms and to allay the fears of those in the Soviet system who may doubt the wisdom of the change in approach. A benign Western attitude towards the Soviet Union would also help it deal with the uncertainties resulting from the significant changes in the countries of Eastern Europe.

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(21) Ibid., p. 369, 373.

The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe also modifies the Soviet Union's relationship with its Eastern European satellites. The troop cuts announced so far do not greatly reduce the Soviet Union's ability to intervene militarily in order to prop up an Eastern European communist regime in dire straits, but continued cuts in Soviet forces in Eastern Europe would certainly do so. However, the public relations consequences of a military intervention are a far greater deterrence against such action than the lack of troops.<sup>(22)</sup> The Soviet Union's old, heavy-handed approach to problems in Eastern Europe, as demonstrated in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, would, in the present context, nullify most of the Soviet leadership's success in the promotion of a more relaxed international situation and greater domestic acceptance of reforms, two conditions vital to the revitalization of the Soviet economy. Indeed, a reforming Soviet Union which maintained a tight grip on its Eastern European satellites could not win as much goodwill in the West as one which let the East Europeans more or less pursue their own course. It is not clear, however, to what extent the Soviet Union is ready to give its satellites a free hand.<sup>(23)</sup> Soviet leader Gorbachev has made statements which appear to repudiate the Brezhnev Doctrine which originated in 1968 when Brezhnev reiterated Soviet control over Eastern Europe and justified Soviet interventions in the affairs of Soviet satellites. The West has demanded a clear-cut rejection of the Doctrine, but Gorbachev has not yet responded.

The Soviet Union may not be ready to take all the risks involved in giving its Eastern European satellites a completely free hand. However, if the negotiations in Vienna on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) between NATO and the Warsaw Pact lead to further troop reductions in both Western and Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe may become less important to Soviet security. In such a case, the Soviet Union could afford to loosen its grip on its Eastern European satellites. A defensive posture based on sufficient forces within the borders of the Soviet Union

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(22) Charles Gati, "Eastern Europe on Its Own," Foreign Affairs. America and the World 1988/89, Vol. 68, No. 1, 1989, p. 102.

(23) Ibid.

would greatly diminish the military importance of Eastern Europe to Soviet security. The states between West Germany and the Soviet Union would still constitute a buffer zone and besides, if the CFE negotiations succeeded in significantly reducing force levels in Europe, the threat of an attack against the Soviet Union on its western borders would be of little consequence. Indeed, the countries of Western and Eastern Europe would be too preoccupied with the development of trade and would see little value in ganging up against the Soviet Union. The politics of Eastern Europe, however, have always been complicated and there is no guarantee that the process started by the loosening of the Soviet Union's grip on the region will follow ideal patterns for everyone involved. Nevertheless, Western Europe as well as the Soviet Union has a lot at stake in the peaceful transfer of Eastern Europe from its present situation to one where the countries of the region would be more or less on their own, and efforts will likely be made on both sides to ease tensions.

### **C. The Future of Alliances**

The Soviet Union's switch from an offensive to a defensive posture in Europe and the loosening of its ties with its satellites in Eastern Europe puts in question the future of the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet Union already had bilateral treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with each East European satellite when it decided to establish a multi-lateral agreement, the Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, in reaction to the 1954 agreement between the Western powers to admit West Germany into NATO. However, the context has changed significantly since the mid-1950s. East-West antagonism has diminished considerably and Soviet moves towards a defensive posture are not only removing Soviet troops from the East European countries, but also changing the Soviet Union's political relationship with the latter. As Eastern Europe becomes less important to Soviet security, the Soviet Union may be tempted to distance itself from an entangling alliance at a time when the United States may be moving in a similar direction. An example of this tendency in the United States is a report presented to the Reagan Administration in January 1988, Discriminate Deterrence, prepared by the Commission on

Integrated Long Term Strategy composed of former government officials and security specialists such as Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski. The report recommended that the United States should place more emphasis in its strategic policies on possible Third World conflicts and somewhat less on the situation in Western Europe.<sup>(24)</sup> If the tensions between the United States and Western Europe continue to increase because of the costs of maintaining U.S. troops in Europe and growing antagonism due to commercial disputes, the United States may, like the Soviet Union, distance itself from an entangling alliance.

Such changes will not occur overnight and the extent of the decoupling between superpowers and their respective alliances may not go as far as the complete disbandment of alliances; nevertheless, they are signs that the two superpowers are distancing themselves from their allies. When Europe was the main focus not just of East-West confrontations, but also of international politics, alliances with European countries were key elements for both superpowers, but they have sometimes proved cumbersome when tensions in other parts of the world threatened United States or Soviet interests. An offensive military posture in Europe was an added drawback for the Soviet Union because it limited its options. If a conflict developed between American and Soviet forces outside of Europe, in the Persian Gulf for example, the Soviet Union could respond by launching an attack on NATO's central front, with all the risks of escalation which that involved. On the other hand, the Soviet Union could respond by trying to keep the conflict localized while keeping most of its forces tied down in Eastern Europe to hold the line against a possible NATO attack. In neither case would the offensive posture be very effective; in the first it would threaten to provoke an all-out war, while in the second, it would be doing something, holding the line, it was not really designed to do. Faced with these limitations as well as the costs of keeping large forces in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Government apparently concluded during the 1980s that

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(24) See Phil Williams, "West European Security and American Troop Withdrawals," The Political Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 3, July-September 1988, p. 327; and Michael Kläse, "De dispendieux scénarios non nucléaires," Le Monde diplomatique. La Paix des grands, l'espoir des pauvres, manière de voir 4, February 1989, p. 44-46.

it was time to put aside the traditional reliance on an offensive strategy and to rely on a defensive posture.<sup>(25)</sup> The new posture has the added advantages of reducing the importance of Eastern Europe to Soviet security and in increasing the Soviet Union's flexibility to deal with tensions in other parts of the world. As shown, it also contributes to the lessening of tensions in Europe. Thus, as the military importance of their respective European alliances diminishes, the United States and the Soviet Union will tend to treat Europe like other areas of the world.

How NATO and the Warsaw Pact will evolve in such a situation is difficult to predict. The relaxation of East-West tensions and the promise of troop cuts in Europe, along with Soviet moves towards a defensive posture, are removing the military basis for the existence of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The political basis for these alliances have been somewhat neglected over the years while efforts were concentrated on the security issues, but with Soviet bellicosity and offensive capabilities on the central front apparently diminishing, NATO may have to find a new raison d'être. The North American and West European members of NATO have no doubt established friendships and commercial ties which will persist whatever happens to the alliance. The question is whether they can continue to work together within an alliance based on mutual political interest rather than mainly on security considerations. When the military threat was clear cut, the allies could settle their differences and deal with the task at hand. The fact that the military threat was in Europe itself was an added incentive for the West Europeans to find agreement with their North American allies. The situation that is developing, however, is removing the military threat from Europe without necessarily putting an end to superpower competition. When the United States wanted NATO members to participate in measures to ensure the security of the Persian Gulf area in the early 1980s, tensions increased within the alliance because the issue was outside the specified areas of concern of the alliance. Past difficulties within the alliance and out-of-area or out-of-Europe issues raise doubts about how NATO would deal with such an issue if the direct military threat in Europe more or less disappeared. On the other hand,

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(25) See MccGuire (1988), p. 365-374.

NATO members who no longer had to worry about a Soviet attack in Europe might have fewer misgivings about cooperating with the United States to deal with a global threat or a regional conflict. However, the extent to which Western public opinion believes that superpower confrontation is no longer an issue will influence the degree of cooperation between alliance members. While the Soviet Union revitalizes its economy, the threat of war may become more remote, but regional conflicts outside Europe could still raise international tensions.

## CONCLUSION

While the debate continues on whether or not the Cold War has really ended, the real significance of recent developments in East-West relations is that the stalemate in Europe which followed the end of the Second World War is finally on its way out. After the defeat of NAZI Germany, the process of returning to a pre-war setting was upset by rising East-West tensions and the need to keep in place large military forces. Alliances were formed to coordinate military strategy and to boost the deterrence value of the forces massed along the central front. There is however, a noticeable trend developing whereby the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, are distancing themselves from their alliance commitments. The United States is paying more and more attention to the global situation instead of concentrating on security in Europe. The Soviet Union is working towards the easing of tensions in Europe and is moving to a defensive posture which allows it to keep its forces within its own borders. Like the United States, the Soviet Union is also paying more attention to the global situation. As security in Europe improves and the basis of military cooperation between the members of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact changes, the raison d'être of both alliances comes into question. How well the NATO members can adjust to the significantly changing situation in Europe will determine whether the alliance will disappear or will reappear in a new form.

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