

IAI8421

European Security Perceptions

Maurizio Cremasco

a. In the first years of this century the European countries' security perceptions depended mainly on the regional balance of power and how favorable or acceptable it was for them. Each country strove to maintain its position of prestige and influence while trying to preclude the emergence of a superpower. This at times meant resorting to the diplomatic instrument of counterbalancing alliances.

It was the double game of attempting to preserve one's own power and influence while at the same time preventing the others from increasing theirs - Austria felt Serbia was challenging its influence in the Balkans, Russia wanted to undercut Austria's reach in the region, Germany perceived the Russian posture as an attempt to gain superpower status on the continent -- and, above all, the fear of a decline in their international roles which brought the European countries into the five years of bloodshed known as the first Great War.

In the 1940s, ideologies stepped in to play a supporting role for initiatives sparked by security perceptions. Thus it was that Germany called on the need for "lebensraum" to justify its imperialistic policy while the other European countries (and later the United States, too) rallied support for their war efforts by portraying them as a struggle to prevent a dictatorial power from singlehandedly dominating the entire continent.

In the period between the first and the second world wars, security perceptions were still determined almost exclusively by factors and developments of a predominantly political or military nature within the geographical boundaries of Europe. Extra-European events were viewed by European governments mainly as possible threats to their colonial possessions, but were judged not really capable of affecting the security of their countries.

The real security problems still had their origins and developed within Europe itself. It was there that the competition for influence and power was taking place, and it was there that war erupted again for the second time in twenty-five years.

In the post-World War II period, the concept of security underwent a significant transformation.

The advent of nuclear weapons profoundly changed the traditional conception of warfare as the prosecution of politics with other means. The division of Europe into two military blocs headed by two nuclear superpowers and the deployment in Europe of thousands of nuclear warheads introduced the risk of a nuclear holocaust into any and all scenarios of a NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation in Europe.

Ideology continued to be a driving force and one of the elements which shaped the course and characteristics of the confrontation between the United

States and the Soviet Union on a world-wide scale. But in Europe it played a more prominent role in domestic politics (in particular in those countries where strong Communist Parties were present and active) than in international relations between East and West European countries. In Western Europe the old rivalries and the competition for influence and power gave way to a process leading to the creation of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Economic Community (EEC).

The requisite of maintaining a favorable or at least acceptable balance of power and military strength vis-à-vis one's neighbors/rivals ceased to be a feature of each European country's security perceptions and became instead one of the main security concerns of each of the military alliances, in a context which had expanded well beyond Europe's geographical boundaries.

The military alliances tended to polarize and globalize European security perceptions. The security concerns of the Western and Eastern European countries came to include not only the strengthening of Soviet or American military capabilities, but also extra-European developments which might give either Moscow or Washington a strategic edge and those which might lead to the involvement of the two superpowers and hence eventually to a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict.

The possibility that Soviet penetration into and influence over certain Third World countries might become so deep that those countries would be obliged to side with Moscow in any international East-West crisis prompted NATO to expand its traditional threat assessment horizons. Thus, for example, in the Mediterranean area, NATO now also considers the possibility of a threat coming from the South.

The picture was further complicated by: the expansion of the superpowers' competition to the Third World; the Soviets' foreign policy activism in the '70s, which gave the impression that Moscow was utilizing détente to increase its international influence; the fact that economic interdependence had become global; the growing difficulties encountered by the superpowers in attempting to manage crises in various parts of the world; the interaction of North-South and South-South relations with East-West security interests; the endemic instability in regions (the Middle East, the Persian Gulf) considered of vital strategic interest; the possibility of further nuclear proliferation; the emergence of religion (Islamic fundamentalism) as a factor in international politics; the utilization of indirect instruments (backing "national liberation movements", financing and arming guerrilla forces, supporting terrorist activities, using "proxy" military forces) to further strategy and achieve foreign policy objectives.

b. Today, European security perceptions are influenced by an international situation whose main elements can be summarized as follows.

- Relations between Moscow and Washington have been frozen since last winter when the Soviets walked out of the INF talks in Geneva and refused, at the end of the last 1983 session, to set a new date for the resumption of the START talks.

An agreement has been reached to modernize the "red line", but the failure to finalize the agenda for the negotiations on space weapons which were supposed to be opened in Vienna this month (and the Soviet charge that American intransigence was to blame for it) is a clear indication of the deep distrust and bitter climate which currently characterizes US-USSR bilateral relations.

On the contrary, the political and economic relations between Western and Eastern European countries are currently marked by greater dialogue, expanding commercial and financial ties, and more frequent personal contacts between political leaders.

In this respect, the "détente" policy pursued by West Germany is a significant example. The latest 330 million dollar credit to East Germany -- sharply criticized by the Soviets as an attempt to undermine the socialist system -- and the planned visit of the East German leader, Erich Honecker, to Bonn (though eventually postponed due to strong Soviet pressures) were both signs of a different climate in central Europe, the Euro missile issue notwithstanding.

- The East-West balance of conventional forces in Europe is characterized by numerical superiority for the Warsaw Pact in terms of manpower, combat units and weapons systems and by a steady erosion of the qualitative edge which NATO has always had and which has always been considered a means of offsetting the East's quantitative advantage. In summary, one could agree with the following statement in the latest edition of The Military Balance published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies of London: "One cannot necessarily conclude that NATO would suffer defeat in war, nor that the Warsaw Pact would see its advantage as being sufficient to risk an attack, but one can conclude that there has been sufficient danger in the trend to require remedies."

The Soviet Union is constantly modernizing and strengthening its nuclear and conventional forces. New ICBMs (the SS-X-24 and the SS-X-25, which are also being designed for mobile deployment) and SLBMs (the SS-NX-23) and the "Blackjack" strategic bomber are under development together with a vast array of conventional weapons systems ranging from aircraft carriers similar to the American ones, to new aircraft (the Su-27, the Mig-29 and the Mig-31), new surface-to-air missiles (the SA-X-12), new helicopters and new army equipment. The Soviet Union is developing five new long-range cruise missiles. Three of these are variants of a small cruise missile similar to the American "Tomahawk". The other two are variants of a larger system which is probably designed for longer-range operations. Furthermore, the Soviets are improving their ABM system around Moscow, but within the limits of the 1972 ABM treaty, and are very active in research and development and operational launches in the space field. Finally, the Soviet Union is continuing the build-up of its Navy.

- After years of decreasing defense budgets as a percentage of GNP in the United States, in the last period of the Carter Administration and all through the Reagan presidency the US has been formulating and funding a huge military program intended to redress a situation of perceived inferiority and to regain the position of number one world power.

The program includes the acquisition of strategic weapons systems (the MX missile, the B-1B strategic bomber and the Trident submarine and missile), shorter range nuclear systems (the Pershing-2 and cruise missiles) and conventional armaments ranging from ships (the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser equipped with the Aegis system and the Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided missile frigate), to tanks (the M-1), to helicopters (the AH-64 Apache and the UH-60 Black Hawk), to surface-to-air missiles (the Patriot), to air-to-surface missiles (the Hellfire) and multiple rocket launchers.

Furthermore, the United States is conducting research and development on a space-based missile defense system and is developing a satellite-killer system.

The image that the United States is presently projecting is one of a superpower confident in its economic and military power, ready to confront the Soviet Union's challenges in the world, but at the same time ready to negotiate comprehensive arms control agreements.

- In Europe, the first group of Pershing-2 and cruise missiles have been deployed in Italy, West Germany and Great Britain, in accordance with the program established in 1979, thus giving a much needed show of solidarity and resolve within NATO.

The Soviet Union continued to deploy its SS-20 missiles, which now number of 378, carrying a total of 1134 nuclear warheads, of which 243 are targeted on Western Europe, while many of the remaining 135 are also capable of hitting targets in Southern Europe.

Furthermore, Moscow has reportedly deployed SS-22 missiles outside Soviet territory for the first time (in East Germany) and is gradually substituting the Scud and Frog missiles in Eastern Europe with the new SS-21 and SS-23 missiles.

The antinuclear and peace movements in Western Europe have lost some of their drive and are presently less vocal in their opposition to the deployment the Eurmissiles. However, both the Labor Party in England and the Social Democratic Party in the Federal Republic of Germany have proposed a non-nuclear policy in their political platforms.

- In the regions whose instability has an indirect impact on European security the situation is marked by elements of confrontation and conflict.

The Soviets are still in Afghanistan trying to subdue the resistance of the Islamic freedom fighters. The war between Iraq and Iran has apparently reached a stalemate on the ground, but is going on in the air and on the sea. No diplomatic breakthrough appears in sight while the mining of the Red Sea waterways suggests new threats to maritime traffic and new challenges to the freedom of navigation.

The Middle East knot is still far from being untangled while in the Balkans and in North Africa political and economic factors could foment crises and domestic unrest.

g. In addressing the issue of European security perceptions there is another frame of reference, besides the one sketched above, which must be taken into due account: that of the differences between the United States and its European allies, deriving from varying geostrategic, political, economic and psychological considerations and concerns.

- Geostrategically, the Soviet Union is close to the heart of Europe. As a matter of fact, the Soviet Union is also, at least partly, a European nation and its vicinity, both in political and military terms, is an element that counts more for Europe than the United States in East-West relations.

- Politically, the European countries feel they can play only a regional role, while the United States plays a global role. Because their role is seen as limited to the regional context, the Europeans have tended to place East-West relations and East-West issues in a more restricted and confined perspective. Over the past few years, however, the European countries have begun to pay more attention to what is happening in regions outside NATO's area of responsibility, even if the initiatives taken have not been the result of a coordinated or common policy.

Furthermore, in the political context, the United States and its European allies perceive the Soviet threat and evaluate the Soviet role in the Third World quite differently, and hence have divergent opinions on how the West should respond to crises which might occur outside the Atlantic Alliance's traditional confines. Basically, the Europeans tend to disagree with the tendency of the United States, in particular of the Reagan Administration, to see all Third World crises in the light of the East-West confrontation.

Finally, perceptions diverge, even if the gap is narrower in this case, on the range of military threats the Soviet Union poses and on the military strategy and posture which should be adopted by NATO to meet these challenges.

- East-West trade has become a key element in the European economic picture. The European countries therefore find it very difficult to follow the United States in its policy of imposing economic sanctions on the East, as was clear in the cases of Afghanistan and Poland. Any American-imposed restriction on trade is seen as an unacceptable constraint on Europe's economic development. West Germany very recently warned that it would not tolerate further US attempts to restrict technology transfers to the Soviet bloc, hinting that it was ready to promulgate a law, if necessary, to prohibit domestic companies from complying with "extra-territorial" trade restrictions imposed by a foreign power. A similar law was passed in England when the United States attempted to pressure European companies into complying with an American embargo on equipment for the Siberian gas pipeline.

- As for the psychological factors, the Europeans paradoxically tend to complain when they feel that American leadership is not strong enough, but also when it seems to be too strong and Washington is seen as trying to impose its political and military course of action on reluctant allies.

The Europeans think they are more capable than the Americans of grasping Soviet "reality" and they rightly complain when there is little or no consultation and coordination within the Alliance before the American Administration takes its decisions.

The Americans complain that the Europeans want the best of all possible worlds. American protection, the American nuclear umbrella, and American troops in Europe, and at the same time the freedom to increase military budgets by less than the 3 percent in real terms agreed upon in NATO, freedom of action with respect to their national and regional economic and political concerns, plus a kind of veto power over American policy in the context of superpower relations.

The United States tends to judge the Europeans' evaluation of and reaction to the Soviet threat and Soviet international behavior as an indication of the status, and hence of the cohesion, of the Atlantic Alliance.

The European countries tend to forget the Soviet Union's wrongdoings on the international scene more quickly and to proceed "business as usual". They tend to forget the difficulties they have had in their relations with the Soviet Union as a result of Soviet military and foreign policy more rapidly than the difficulties and disagreements they have in their relations with the United States.

d. Keeping these two background pictures in mind, it is now possible to address the issue of Europe's security problems.

In the past, there was a lot of talk of a NATO crisis so deep that it risked calling into question the very existence of the Atlantic Alliance. These pessimistic forecasts have not become a reality, however. NATO has survived the

Euro-missile issue, like so many issues before, and is now working to resolve old and new political and military problems. As a military organization NATO is alive and efficient, even though shortcomings, deficiencies and inadequacies are impairing its military posture and reducing the level of combat readiness of its forces. On the whole, however, the image is one of a structure working with dedication and effort to overcome the military problems typical of a multinational alliance.

The NATO malaise, which exists and should not be underestimated, is more political than military. It stems from the difficulties the Atlantic Alliance has encountered in attempting to re-evaluate and to give fresh answers to fundamental questions about NATO's strategy, East-West relations and Western Europe's role in the world.

Nuclear parity between the two superpowers and the Soviets' conventional strength in the European theatre; the re-surfacing of European doubts about American readiness to fulfill its pledge to defend Europe with nuclear weapons, if necessary; the bitterly debated Euro-missile deployment in response to the Soviet SS-20 threat; the burgeoning of strong antinuclear sentiments among the European peoples and the growth of vocal peace movements; the careless American talk of the possibility of a limited nuclear war in Europe are all elements which have focused European attention on nuclear issues.

There is a widespread conviction in Europe today that the role and scope of nuclear weapons should be reviewed. And it is felt that the level of tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe is far too high, and that NATO's program to withdraw 1400 warheads in the next five years (over and above the 1000 withdrawn in 1980-81) is just a modest and insufficient step in the right direction.

The chances of attaining the goal of relying less on nuclear weapons for the defense of Europe depend of course on the feasibility of building up a stronger conventional defense and on the level of credibility of a purely conventional deterrence.

There seems to be a wide consensus on the need to enhance NATO's conventional capabilities. And the conceptual and technical framework within which this enhancement should take place (so consistently outlined by the Commander in Chief of NATO forces in Europe, Gen. Rogers) is generally considered acceptable and the only alternative capable of moving NATO strategy toward "no-early-use" of nuclear weapons.

But there are also a number of reservations. Some consider the hypothesis of a conventional war in Europe just as disastrous as that of a nuclear war, because it is apparently "more likely". The enhanced precision of conventional weapons systems and their qualitative evolution are viewed both positively (as a possible substitute for tactical nuclear arms) and negatively (because, according to critics, they could increase the destructiveness of a conventional war).

There is a certain concern, particularly in West Germany, that Gen. Rogers' plan might eventually lead to an implicit rejection of the forward defense component of NATO's flexible response doctrine. And West Germany cannot lightly consider a maneuvering war, fought on its territory, as a pre-planned feature of a new strategy.

There is also a widespread feeling of subtle distrust for the real effectiveness of the high technology weapons in a real battle situation, which would be different from the environment of the test ranges. Some point to the

danger of expecting too much from the emerging technologies (ET) and of planning too extensively on their utilization to redress the conventional balance. Others, considering a pure conventional defense of Europe unfeasible, fear that too much emphasis on conventional ET weapons will eventually weaken the deterrent role of nuclear weapons to an unacceptable level. And there are experts and military men who favor the enhancement of the technological capabilities of tactical nuclear arms to the point of risking the complete blurring of the concept of nuclear threshold.

But there are other problems. High technology conventional weapons are costly. Many point out that it would be very difficult to strengthen European conventional forces to the level felt indispensable to constitute a credible deterrent, due to the limits on the size European military budgets. In fact, it is often pointed out that few European countries are currently meeting the goal of an annual 3 percent increase in real terms and that it is therefore unrealistic to expect annual increases of 4 percent in the future as would be required by Gen. Rogers' plan.

Finally, there is the problem of the development and production of technologically advanced weapons systems. Taking into consideration the American lead in the ET field, the European countries fear that the strengthening of NATO's conventional forces could result in a new round of "buy American". The Europeans want to be sure, before fully accepting the ET philosophy, that their defense industries will participate in the production of the new weapons systems either directly or through Euro-American joint ventures.

e. The overall picture is further complicated by the varying appraisals of the present situation, by diverging national interests, and by the differing perceptions of the best solution to adopt.

The political trends in West Germany worry France. The "Europeanization of Europe", a catchy phrase coined by Willy Brandt, was widely interpreted in France, in a somewhat emotional way, as a sign of both a neutralistic tendency within German policy and a new drive toward re-unification. This trend, together with the emergence of a new nationalistic spirit, quite evident even in the anti-nuclear movements, was enough to raise concern. As William Pfaff wrote in the International Herald Tribune, the French fear a revival of German political romanticism -- a version of that taste for imprecise perspectives and unrealistic hopes which at other times in German history had led to stupid and dangerous gambles.

Paris has therefore strongly supported the Euro missile deployment (President Mitterand's speech at the Bundestag in January 1983) and has intensified the traditionally annual intergovernmental talks on security and defense matters, which had already been given greater substance by Chancellor Schmidt and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. The opposition leader Jacques Chirac went even further by hinting, during a visit to West Germany in October 1983, that there might be ways to more closely associate Bonn to an independent European nuclear defense.

Furthermore, France is in the process of creating a Force d'Action Rapide with the specific mission of supporting conventional defense on the European front in case of war.

However, the French cannot extend the nuclear umbrella of their Force de Frappe to West Germany without radically changing their nuclear posture and strategy in a politically unacceptable way.

On the other hand, while a Franco-British nuclear force is a very distant and uncertain prospect, even British cooperation with France in providing West Germany with a sort of nuclear guarantee is, at present, a political dream.

Apart from sharing with France the concept that their nuclear force is a national and independent last resort instrument for the defense of the country, Britain has always been keen to maintain a special relationship with the United States. A break in the fabric of European defense would push London to look even more toward Washington.

Finally, it is doubtful that West Germany would accept a Franco-British nuclear guarantee because of its lack of strategic credibility and because it would implicitly signify a separation of the American deterrent from the European theater. This would be just the opposite of that continuity in the nuclear deterrence spectrum which the Euro-missile deployment was intended to restore.

West Germany appears to be the key country in any conceptual and practical framework of a European defense. Divided, bordering on a country which it considers both a potential enemy and a logical extension of its territory, haunted by the specter of an impending Soviet threat and by the dream of an impossible re-unification, possessing the best armed forces among the European NATO nations, West Germany feels, more than any other European country, the effects of any variation in the climate of East-West relations, and needs, more than any other European country, the American commitment to its security and American support for its defense.

West Germany feels that, in the event of a war in Europe, no doctrine or strategy would be able to save its territory from destruction and that even a "conventional weapons only" conflict would be just as terrible as War World II. For the Germans what really counts is a credible and strong deterrent, capable of preventing all wars. And this credible deterrent can be provided, at the present, only by a strong Bundeswehr together with an American nuclear umbrella and American forces in Europe.

This does not mean that West Germany is not willing and ready to cooperate for a better "European" defense effort in terms of armed forces integration, joint production of new weapons systems, more diffuse interoperability and standardization, and the revival of a European military organization like the Western European Union.

But West Germany can conceive of such an effort only in the framework of the Atlantic Alliance and only within the context of a firm relationship with the United States.

France too is cautious on the prospect of an autonomous European defense. At the press conference following the 42nd Franco-German summit meeting in Bonn (November 25, 1983), French President François Mitterand clearly stated that France and West Germany did not intend to build their future security on the destruction of the security they presently possess.

Arms control holds a very important place in European security perceptions. The West European countries have therefore always considered arms control negotiations an integral part of NATO's strategy.

Since the Harmel report in 1967, NATO's guidelines have been "détente and defense". And for the Europeans the word "détente" meant not only political and economic relations with the East based on dialogue and peaceful coexistence, but also arms control agreements lowering the level of both the armaments and the military forces in Europe.

Even in 1979, when the decision to deploy the Pershing-2 and cruise missiles was taken, NATO adopted a two-track approach. In fact, the decision to

deploy was tied to the condition of proposing to Moscow that negotiations to reduce intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe be opened immediately.

Furthermore, the Europeans are active in the MBFR talks, the only East-West arms control negotiations which are still alive, and in the European Defense Conference which started in Stockholm in 1983.

Finally, the Europeans are very worried about the possibility of a further militarization of space. Pressure has been put on the United States (and more is expected after the American presidential elections) to find ways to start talks with the Soviet Union, as soon as possible, on limiting space-based weapons. The Europeans are also conducting a strong diplomatic drive for the re-opening of the INF and START negotiations in Geneva.

f. In conclusion, European security perceptions are undergoing a clear re-evaluation in terms of military posture and military strategy. Even though flexible and graduated response will very probably remain the cornerstone of NATO's military doctrine (with the option of first use of nuclear weapons), the eventual adoption of ET weapons systems is bound to influence force employment tactics.

In the political field, a full resumption of the East-West dialogue, in particular on arms control, will remain a top priority for the European countries, together with the continuation and the expansion of economic and commercial ties, even though there is a full awareness of the security implications of uncontrolled transfers of Western technology to the East bloc.

On the other hand, the West Europeans are also fully aware of the risk that the Soviet Union might perceive the eventual "westernization" of its allies' economies as a direct threat to the political stability of its empire in Eastern Europe.

Thus East-West economic and political relations will presumably be managed in such a way as to limit the impression that the Western countries are trying to loosen the Soviet grip on the East bloc.

Finally, the Europeans will continue to keep a close watch on any strengthening of the Soviet Union's military power and will continue to link the word détente with the word defense. This will mean the maintenance of a military balance in Europe which will stand as a credible deterrent against any Soviet threat.

iai ISTITUTO AFFARI
INTERNAZIONALI - ROMA

n° Inv. 10488

19 GIU. 1991

BIBLIOTECA