

EAST WEST RELATIONS, ARMS CONTROL AND THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN WESTERN EUROPE AND THE SOVIET UNION

Outline of Dr. S. Silvestri's presentation
at the IAI-IMEMO bilateral meeting

Rome, Palazzo Rondinini, 15 October 1987

If and when implemented, the "double zero" agreement between US and USSR will have a double effect on Western Europe. From the purely military point of view it will be an advantage. From the strategic point of view it might turn out to be a disadvantage.

Militarily speaking, Western Europe is not badly served. The zero option eliminates 93% of the intermediate range nuclear forces of the USSR (1.113 nuclear warheads, mounted on mobile, very precise vehicles).

The further elimination of the SRINFs would apparently include the Soviet SS-23s and SS-12s MOD 1 and 2, the Atlantic Pershing-1A, and the maintenance of the Soviet 518 SCUDs (URSS 395, WP 143) and 1.014 FROG/SS-21s (URSS 800, WP 214), and of the Atlantic 91 LANCES.

Moreover, we have to consider that the SS-21s, as of now, are organically linked with the various Soviet divisions operating them, and therefore follow the deployment of those same divisions (launchers operated by second and third echelons cannot participate in the initial phase of the attack without forward deployment). Their total number is limited (4 launchers with 4 missiles for refiring, per division). Their targeting is, as of now, linked to divisional operations, and not to strategic planning (that means that it would probably not be easy to utilize them for surprise attack purposes against NATO's MCBs).

The elimination of the Soviet SRINFs, therefore, could represent an important asset for NATO, destroying a military threat very carefully increased by the USSR in recent years, further diminishing the Soviet capacity of surprise attack against NATO. No pre-emptive nuclear strike against NATO's MCBs will be possible in the future, even considering the utilization of all existing, forward deployed, SS-12 MOD 2. A European ballistic defense system will be easier to conceive.

That of course would leave Germany more exposed than the rest of the Alliance (to the remaining nuclear forces), together with Greece, Turkey and Finland: but NATO as a whole could be more capable of resisting surprise attacks. The two considerations have to be balanced, especially as far as the military assessment is concerned.

The problem arises as of "why" Gorbachev is proposing the elimination of these forces. While a good case could be established for the SRINF (because of the increased threat against the Russian territory assured by NATO's

euromissiles), the SRINF case is much less clear, in a military Soviet perspective.

A possible military justification of Gorbachev's proposals on SRINFs might be found in the developments of Cruise technologies. More GLCMs and ALCMs in the Soviet inventory, together with the existing SRINFs, could create big problems of management, command, control and planning of operations, as well as duplications: such a joint deployment might unduly decrease the agility and mobility of Soviet ground forces, contradicting recent developments in the Soviet doctrine. Technical and logistical costs, moreover would increase disproportionately. On the positive side (from the Soviet military point of view), the practical elimination of all NATO's missile capacities could increase the effectiveness of the Soviet Air Defense system and, moreover, decrease the eventuality of the deployment of conventional ETs based on missile launchers.

It might very well be however that Gorbachev's motives are essentially political, aiming at the "decoupling" of NATO's Europe and the singling out of West Germany, Greece and Turkey (Norway's Firmark is militarily linked more to the naval than to the land strategic theatres anyway). This is tantamount to identifying the main strategic problem posed to Western Europe by the proposed reductions: we are renouncing to the only American nuclear weapons based in Europe, capable of striking the Russian territory (with the exception of a few, rather obsolete, nuclear strike bombers). The Soviet Union, on the contrary, still retains a full fledged capacity of threatening Western Europe with its short range and its strategic nuclear weapons. French and British strategic nuclear forces do not have the same capacity of "extended guarantee" for the other members of the Alliance, as the American nuclear forces in Europe had.

Various solutions are possible, from further reduction agreements, to a greater european integration of the two national european nuclear forces, and to a redistribution and a retargeting of some american nuclear capacity (sea based or air borne). It will be necessary however to take important strategic and political decisions.

In the same time, the military problems of the Mediterranean are becoming more important.

In the past, the military threat against Nato's Southern Region has been largely an indirect threat. Soviet troop deployments and readiness levels have all pointed toward an attack in the central European region. No Soviet divisions have stood ready for short warning attacks against Italy, Greece or Turkey. From 1980's on, this situation has been changing, with the full nomination of two new commanders for the Sothern and the South-Western TVDs of the USSR.

For the Southern Region, "flexible response" has meant a minimum role. If Nato held in the Center with conventional forces, or if necessary, nuclear weapons, peace would soon come, with little action on the Flanks. If Nato were defeated in the center, the Flanks would have little choice but to accomodate to Soviet desires. Thus, Southern Region countries have had a vital stake in the success or failure of Nato defenses, but have had little effect on the outcome.

This situation has changed. The growing nuclear capabilities of both sides have culminated in a fundamental change in both Nato and Soviet perceptions. Both appear to recognize that the only way to achieve a reasonably satisfactory outcome would be to limit any conflict to conventional means. The arms control agreements are reinforcing this trend. Nato, therefore, is striving to increase its defense budgets so that nuclear weapons will not have to be used at an early stage. On the Soviet side, there is continued growth in numbers of divisions and conventional weapons of all types.

It remains true, however, that both sides have interests so vital that nuclear war at some level could appear preferable to abandoning them. For Nato, these interests are located in the Central Region of Europe: avoiding catastrophic defeat on Flanks also would be a vital Nato interest and could trigger nuclear defenses, but the fact is that there is more room for maneuver (either political or military, or both). If the Soviets choose to launch a military attack against Nato as a means toward limited gains, therefore, they will have to do so without total victory over Nato forces and without seeking to capture West Germany. Consequently, a war for limited gains would make the Southern Region of Nato as attractive a target for the Soviets as the Center Region (and a less risky target).

Should the trend towards increasing "conventionalization" of military strategy continue, both in Nato and in the Warsaw Pact, this could further increase the threats against the Southern Region of Nato. Nuclear deterrence as what can be termed a "unitarian" effect of common solidarity, and sharing of risks, between allied countries, while the conventional dimension is strictly linked to the the geo-strategic features of the various military theatres, widely scattered and far from each other.

The Southern Region of Nato, moreover, is not merely a regional defense line. It is also the guarantee of a Western strong presence in the oil rich Middle East and in the Gulf, and the strategic cover of the Western dominance of the entire Mediterranean region. Thus, in the event of a Warsaw Pact-Nato conflict, the Soviets might well turn to the Southern Region of Nato as an opportunity for important military and political success, in Europe, in the Middle East, in North Africa and in the entire Mediterranean.

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