

THE UNEASY ALLIANCE: WESTERN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

by Edward A. Kolodziej and Robert A. Pollard

"In this century," Senator Sam Nunn (D.-Ga.) observed not long ago, "Americans have died in large numbers on European battlefields. We are prepared to do so again if necessary, but only for a Europe that is dedicated to its own defense."

Once again, with anti-American demonstrations taking place in England and Germany, Americans are asking if the costs of sustaining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)* exceed the benefits, and if the Europeans really share the U.S. view of the Soviet threat. But this is nothing new. "It is a myth," as European affairs analyst Anton DePorte notes, "that there was once a golden age when Europeans followed American leadership compliantly and cheerfully and put their faith in American power and goodwill without question."

American ambivalence toward Europe goes back to the early days of the Republic. In his "Farewell Address" on September 19, 1796, George Washington warned that "Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. . . . 'Tis our true policy to stay clear of any permanent alliances, with any portion of the foreign world."

As long as the United States enjoyed physical isolation from Europe, American energies could be directed westward toward conquering the frontier. Great Britain, by maintaining a stable balance of power in Europe and keeping world seaways open, shielded its former American colonies from the intrigues of continental diplomacy—"the pest of the peace of the world," as Thomas Jefferson put it.

The unequivocal threat that Josef Stalin posed to U.S. security led after World War II to the first long-term peacetime deployment of American troops in Europe and, in 1949, to the

*NATO's members are Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United States, and West Germany. President Charles De Gaulle pulled France out of NATO's integrated military command in 1966, but it remains a member of the North Atlantic Council, and, unofficially, does joint planning with the allies. Spain joined in 1982, but has yet to integrate its armed forces into NATO.



"It's getting dark in here . . . Somebody turn on the lights," reads the caption of this 1983 cartoon. European protesters have largely ignored the Soviet deployment of 243 SS-20s trained on Western Europe.

founding of NATO. In 1983, alongside British, German, Canadian, and French units, the United States maintains 248,000 servicemen, 700 combat aircraft, and 5,000 tactical nuclear weapons in West Germany alone.

The mutual interests binding together the Alliance are still strong. Neither the Americans nor the Europeans alone can preserve the democratic values or basic economic and security interests that all have in common.

Nonetheless, the Alliance has led a troubled existence. Americans and their NATO partners have repeatedly argued over four key issues: military strategy and nuclear weapons, relations with the Soviets, distribution of defense burdens, and trade and monetary matters. But at no time have these four problems afflicted the allies all at once—until now.

Since the creation of NATO, the European allies have depended upon the United States to deter a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. As long as U.S. strategic forces—first B-29 bombers stationed in England, now ICBMs, SLBMs, and B-52s—offered an inexpensive and convincing way to deter a Russian blitzkrieg, the Europeans balked at massive conventional rearmament. In effect, leaders in European capitals con-

ceded conventional superiority to the Warsaw Pact and accepted a version of Secretary of State (1953–59) John Foster Dulles's "massive retaliation" policy that relegated NATO ground forces in West Germany to the role of a "tripwire" against a Soviet attack. Arguably, this deterrent theory has worked: The Soviets have, on occasion, threatened the West, but have yet to break the peace.

Yet once the Soviets launched Sputnik in 1957, the American nuclear "umbrella" began to look a bit fragile. European leaders, notably French President Charles De Gaulle, asked if Washington would unleash its ICBMs in response to a Soviet invasion of Western Europe once Moscow could retaliate against the continental United States with its own ICBMs. Would the U.S. President risk New York to save Paris, Bonn, or Copenhagen?

Since the late 1960s, Soviet strategic parity with the United States has renewed European anxieties. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger conceded in 1979 that the U.S. pledge "to defend NATO against Soviet attack with its own weapons is losing credibility because of the risk of exposing American cities to nuclear devastation by the USSR."

Starting in the mid-1970s, the Soviets began deploying 243 intermediate-range MIRVed SS-20 missiles and 100 Backfire bombers in western Russia—all aimed at West European targets. Ironically, the SALT I agreements, by roughly stabilizing the Soviet-American strategic balance, had magnified the importance of the Warsaw Pact's overall regional advantage in nuclear and conventional weapons. The Europeans, Kissinger has written, feared that "the Soviet Union might be tempted to exploit its preponderance of intermediate-range missiles for blackmail against Europe—reasoning that no American response with strategic weapons would be forthcoming."

NATO's reaction was a unanimous "two-track" decision in December 1979 to deploy 572 American-manned missiles (108

Edward A. Kolodziej, 48, is director of the Office of Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security at the University of Illinois. Born in Chicago, he was graduated from Loyola of Chicago (1956) and received his Ph.D. (1961) from the University of Chicago. He is the author of French International Policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou: The Politics of Grandeur (1974). Robert A. Pollard, 32, is an associate editor of The Wilson Quarterly. Born in St. Louis, he was graduated from Brown University (1973) and received his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina (1983). He is co-author of "The Era of American Economic Hegemony, 1945–1960" in Economics and World Power (1983) and author of a forthcoming study on economic security and the origins of the Cold War.

Pershing II, 464 cruise) in Western Europe (West Germany, Britain, and Italy) beginning in December 1983. With the new missiles in place, European officials believed, the superpowers could not use their nuclear weapons in Europe without risking a nuclear exchange between their homelands; specifically, the Pershing IIs and cruise missiles once more tied America's fate to Europe's. On the other hand, NATO's pledge to reduce its deployment if the Soviets followed suit won the European states a role in superpower nuclear arms talks (the Intermediate Nuclear Force negotiations now taking place in Geneva).

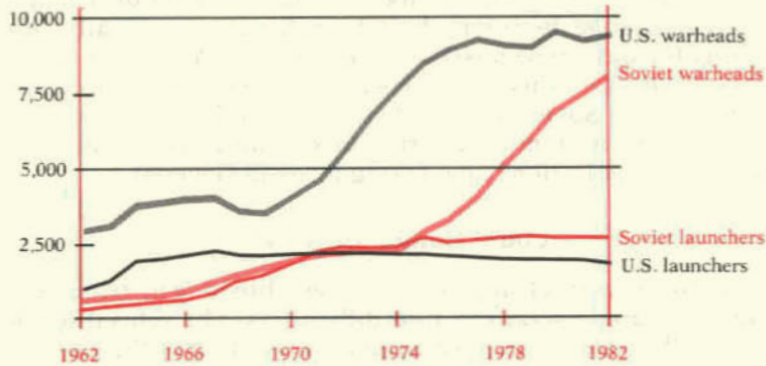
Come Home, America?

Yet this two-track approach to re-establishing a "balance of terror" in Europe soon ran into difficulties. The refusal of the Reagan White House to push Senate ratification of the SALT II treaty and its acceleration of Jimmy Carter's strategic nuclear build-up reactivated the European Left, notably Germany's Green Party, and generated the most violent anti-American demonstrations on the continent since the late 1960s. Perhaps most unsettling to the Europeans were President Reagan's remarks of October 1981, suggesting that he "could see where you could have the exchange of tactical [nuclear] weapons against troops in the field without it bringing either one of the major powers to push the [ICBM] button." Reagan's November 1981 "zero-option" proposal, issued without full warning to his allies—to cancel U.S. "deployment of Pershing II and ground launched cruise missiles if the Soviets [would] dismantle their SS-20, SS-4, and SS-5 missiles"—did not quiet European fears. Washington's terms seemed too stiff to bring the Soviets to any kind of agreement.

Leaders in Bonn, London, and Rome soon felt that they were facing the worst of all worlds: a destabilizing arms race, the overall deterioration of East-West relations, reduced prospects for genuine arms control, and strong criticism at home from the Left for having tied European interests to seemingly more bellicose U.S. policies.

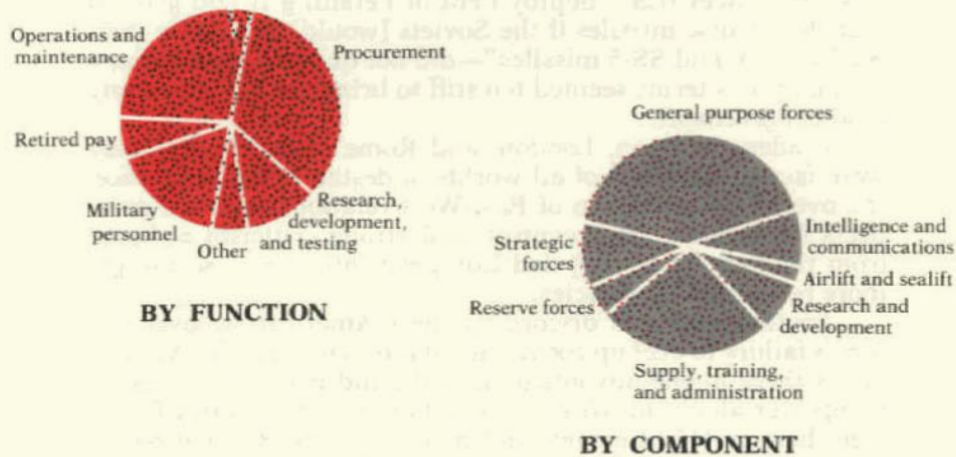
Another source of discord has been American ire over Europe's failure to beef up conventional forces to meet the Warsaw Pact's three-to-one advantage in tanks and two-to-one edge in manpower along the West German border—the Central Front. (See chart, p. 117.) Georgetown University's Earl Ravenal points out that "Europe will continue to be the main beneficiary of American defense resources in 1984, accounting for \$115 billion." A phased U.S. pullout of its nonnuclear forces, he argues,

**U.S.-SOVIET STRATEGIC BALANCE,
LAUNCHERS AND WARHEADS, 1962-1982**



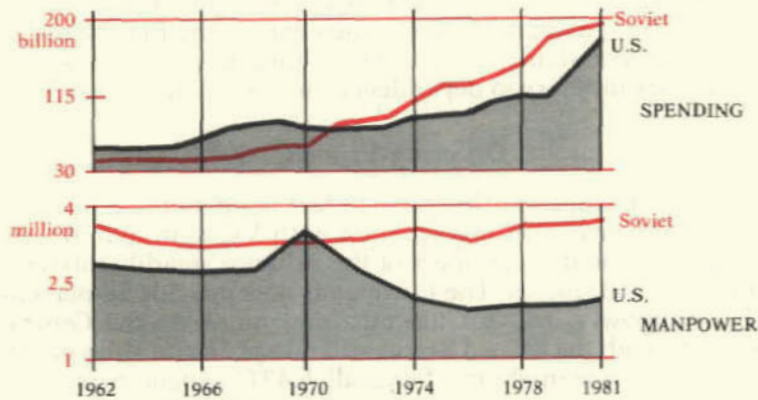
The number of Soviet and U.S. strategic "launchers" (above) has leveled off, thanks to the SALT I and SALT II talks, but the quantity of warheads has soared as both sides have MIRVed their ICBMs and SLBMs. Reagan's 1984 defense budget (below) calls for \$274 billion to pay, train, and equip nearly 2.2 million active duty personnel (783,000 Army, 613,000 Air Force, 572,000 Navy, and 197,000 Marine Corps).

AMERICA'S 1984 DEFENSE BUDGET



Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies; Congressional Research Service.

U.S.-SOVIET MILITARY SPENDING AND MANPOWER, 1962-1981



Moscow has outspent Washington on defense since 1970 (above), and the Warsaw Pact maintains a wide margin over NATO in men and tanks (below). But numbers can be misleading. In combat conditions, such as the 1967, 1973, and 1982 Middle East wars, U.S.-built fighters and tanks outclassed Arab-manned Soviet weapons. Moreover, 52 of the Red Army's 191 divisions (not all at full strength) are tied up on the Chinese border.

NATO-WARSAW PACT TANKS AND GROUND FORCES ON THE CENTRAL FRONT, 1970-1982*



* Graph does not include French forces, which were withdrawn from NATO's integrated command in 1966, or Soviet forces in the Western districts of the Soviet Union.

would ease federal deficits and reduce the risk of this country being dragged into another war in Europe. At the very least, many U.S. Senators and Congressmen expect the Europeans to pick up a larger share of the defense burden, even if, realistically, they cannot forego dependence on U.S. nuclear weapons.

Differing Visions

But our European allies have in fact done more on defense. While Americans were preoccupied with Vietnam and Watergate, the continental members of the Alliance steadily modernized their armed forces. The Europeans now provide 70 percent of the manpower, combat aircraft, and tanks on the Central Front. Although the United States still outspends its allies on defense, the European share of overall NATO expenditures rose from 23 percent in 1969 to 39 percent in 1981. And West Germany and most other NATO allies retained conscription while the United States abolished it in 1973.*

Europeans and Americans also do not see eye-to-eye on "détente." For Americans, détente is vaguely associated with a brief period under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford that was climaxed by SALT I, the 1975 Helsinki accords normalizing post-World War II boundaries, and hopes for expanded trade. Many Americans believe that the West received little or nothing from détente, that Moscow used it to legitimize the oppression of Eastern Europe, and that it placed Western Europe in danger of being seduced—or "Finlandized"—by the Russian bear.

For Europeans, notably West Germans, détente has had a longer life, bringing gains in trade and cultural exchange. From 1970 to 1981, West German exports to the Soviet Union roughly quintupled. The Germans believe that importing Soviet natural gas (\$4 billion worth, or 2.6 percent of their total energy needs, in 1982) has reduced their dependence upon uncertain Middle Eastern supplies.

Trade and monetary problems pose perhaps the greatest long-term difficulty for the Alliance. In European capitals, disenchantment with alleged U.S. economic mismanagement is widespread. High U.S. interest rates draw capital from Europe and force up rates on the continent; the exceptional strength of the U.S. dollar raises the cost of oil imports (which are paid for in dollars) and disrupts domestic economic programs, notably

*Only Canada, Great Britain, Luxembourg, and the United States have all-volunteer forces. The five European members of NATO with the largest armed forces in 1982—Turkey (569,000 men), Germany (495,000), France (493,000), Italy (370,000), and Spain (347,000)—have all maintained some form of conscription.

in France. Moreover, Washington's tight money policy and its tilt toward protectionism appear to prolong the worst recession and highest unemployment in Western Europe in 50 years. At the Williamsburg economic summit in July 1983, Reagan promised to cut government deficits, lower the cost of borrowing, and stabilize the dollar. But European leaders and financiers fear that unless Washington drastically reduces its budget deficits, their countries will suffer from high interest rates and unemployment for the foreseeable future.

Washington's effort to restrict East-West trade is also irritating to the Europeans, notably the French and the Germans. The United States has repeatedly sought to use curbs on trade, investment, and technology transfer as economic weapons against the Soviets, as with President Carter's curtailment of grain exports and Reagan's restrictions of computer sales. Yet, the Soviets have usually found ways to circumvent U.S. controls, to find other suppliers, or to build plants whose output could substitute for imports from the West.

American Hypocrisy?

The prospects for effective economic pressure against Moscow today are even more remote. The Europeans now depend upon exports to the East to help sustain domestic employment and production. No wonder, then, that the leaders of West Germany, France, Italy, and even Britain's Margaret Thatcher refused to accede to President Reagan's requests during 1981-1982 to cancel their multi-billion dollar gas pipeline contracts with the Soviet Union. As European officials have made clear, they must answer to domestic interest groups every bit as vocal and volatile on foreign trade issues as their American counterparts. Reagan's decision, under pressure from American farmers, first to lift Carter's post-Afghanistan partial grain embargo and then, in 1983, to raise grain sales to Moscow by 50 percent, seemed blatantly hypocritical in European capitals.

Despite all the problems confronting NATO, it is likely that the Western allies will once again muddle through this most recent of its several postwar crises. The two-track decision remains NATO's position, despite massive protest demonstrations in London and Bonn. Even with its powerful Communist Party opposing the move, Italy is quietly preparing bases in Sicily for 112 U.S. cruise missiles. The Thatcher government, fortified by a resounding electoral triumph in June 1983, will begin installing 96 U.S. cruise missiles in England by December 1983 if U.S. talks on Intermediate Nuclear Forces with the Soviet Union

break down. And amid continuing demonstrations against the missiles, West Germany under Helmut Kohl remains America's good friend. As former Chancellor Willy Brandt argues, "It would be wrong . . . if people in the United States took the European anti-missiles attitude for anti-Americanism. . . ."

François Mitterand's France, out of NATO since 1966, has supported the two-track decision and helped to steady wavering West German resolve. Without abandoning its independent nuclear force, the *force de frappe* (18 intermediate-range ballistic missiles, five submarines with 80 SLBMs, and 34 Mirage bombers), France is willing to station Pluton tactical nuclear missiles in West Germany to reinforce the three armored divisions (48,500 troops) that it maintains in the western region of that country—forces that could serve as a backup for NATO in the event of a Soviet invasion.

The conflicts remain. On occasion, the Europeans still fear that the United States will either abandon them or go too far, blundering into war with the Soviets. They need our nuclear deterrent to protect them from Moscow; not surprisingly, they feel uneasy with their lack of control over its use. Americans worry about "Finlandization," especially of West Germany. And, through periodic threats and blandishments, the Soviets will seek, as they have since 1945, to divide Americans from Europeans, Frenchmen from Germans, Norwegians from Britons, Left from Right. Yet, international economic upheavals, such as another Mideast oil crisis or a world financial breakdown, may do more to test the Alliance than anything the Soviets can do short of war.

In the long run, the strength of the West depends as much on European and American confidence as on raw military power. If Americans and Europeans, two centuries after the American Revolution, must hang together or hang separately in assuring their defense, they must also learn to "hang loose," to remember that NATO, for all its flaws, has kept the peace in Europe for 35 years, and, with common sense, flexibility, and consistent leadership, will continue to do so for some time to come.

