

## Confidence-building measures needed

negotiations with the East over mutual and balanced force reductions in central Europe — a recommendation designed in part to offset the spirit and the spectre of Mansfieldism which haunted the alliance at that time, the spectre of American troop withdrawals from Europe.

Of late, however, the quest for a "strengthened" alliance conventional force capability has been given a new life. The paternity of this may well be traceable to new developments in the field of conventional weapons technologies, as well as NATO's 1978 Long-Term Defence Plan designed to improve alliance "readiness." While the alliance was ahead of Western public opinion in this thinking, the idea of conventional force preparedness was quickly and vigorously taken up on both sides of the Atlantic by former political leaders, government officials, and a concerned citizenry. There can be no doubt that, as far as the attentive public in the West was concerned, this developed interest was instigated in large measure by the abrupt downturn in the prospects for East-West détente and for nuclear arms control, which had been signalled by the fate of SALT II in early 1980. The subsequent imprudent tendency of chief spokesmen for a newly-elected Reagan administration in the United States to openly debate NATO's theatre nuclear war-fighting strategies only served to heighten fears in the West about the likelihood of nuclear war.

### Enter "two-track"

Alas for the alliance, these events swiftly followed NATO's theatre nuclear force (TNF) modernization decision of December 1979. As is well known, this "two-track" decision called for the emplacement of Pershing II and ground-launched Cruise missiles (GLCMs) in Europe by the end of 1983 should the proposed Geneva intermediate-range nuclear force (INF) talks between the United States and the Soviet Union fail to reach agreement by then on an arms control regime for these systems and the Soviet SS-20. In retrospect, it seems clear that the error in NATO's ways when it called for TNF modernization was in not anticipating the demise of the SALT process, since the alliance had fully intended that an INF agreement should and could be reached with the East as a theatre nuclear force companion to SALT II. Instead, the TNF decision became the focus of the widespread anti-nuclear movements in Europe and North America during the early 1980s. These movements in turn have helped to fortify NATO's interest in conventional preparedness.

At root, these contemporary expressions of fear about the danger of nuclear war are quite legitimate. Few would argue on technical or military-strategic grounds that the system of mutual nuclear deterrence in the Soviet-American relationship and America's "extended deterrence" to NATO Europe are foolproof. Should these systems fail, few would argue on moral grounds that there is any compelling reason why innocent civilians should be the hostage victims of a nuclear exchange. These strategic and moral considerations mean, in sum, that there are powerful reasons for both West and East to shift to defence, failing mutual disarmament, for their security rather than relying on admittedly unstable systems of nuclear deterrence which would provide no choice, should the moment of truth arrive, between surrender and Armageddon. On this point the professional soldier and the man in the street may well be at one, and it may be unduly provocative to suggest that a parallel could be drawn between the present Western

interest in conventional rearmament and the interest of present American administration in defensive systems against strategic missiles and bombers. As the American Defense Secretary, Caspar Weinberger, has said, based on the threat of widescale destruction of civilian neither moral nor prudent.

### US too close or too far?

Yet, to the extent that Western fears of nuclear war have been nurtured by NATO's nuclear war-fighting strategies, it is perhaps ironic that they should surface now with such intensity and political impact. These strategies, after all, were conceived a quarter-of-a-century ago. It would seem as though Western Europeans had worried about the possibility of nuclear war in Europe have always been more concerned than this, and they have been reflected in past NATO debates about alliance nuclear strategy. Intra-alliance questioning about the logic of massive retaliation, and the ill-fated multilateral nuclear force scheme of the early 1960s revolved one way or another around the fundamental and probably unresolvable issue as to how the security of NATO Europe in the nuclear era could be effectively provided for.

The strategy of flexible response represented the maximum attainable political consensus within the alliance on this central issue. It embodied all the key ambiguities in the concept of European security: a necessary commitment of the alliance to the use of nuclear weapons if need be, but not necessarily a nuclear response by the alliance because of both American and European fears about the consequences of nuclear war; the emplacement in NATO Europe of tactical nuclear systems which were (and are) supposed to serve on the one hand as a firebreak between limited theatre nuclear war and a strategic war, and on the other, to act as a coupling link to American strategic armaments; the promise of *controlled* escalation to the nuclear level in the event of war on the one hand, while on the other the positioning of nuclear systems in the forward zones of the alliance in order to guarantee their early use. This inherent contradiction between the strategies of flexible response and forward defence arose from the lack of depth to NATO European theatre, and it may be resolved by the advent of the new conventional "smart" technologies.

### "Flexible response" a chimera?

Yet if the strategy of flexible response does not make strategic sense, this is probably because it was never meant to. It was never designed as an "operational" strategy. NATO's "war-fighting" plans were a political response to a strategic dilemma, and a necessary component of the professional esprit de corps of a military compact which faced a nuclear armed adversary. It did not (and does not) make sense for military planners, whose task it is to plan for the contingency of nuclear war (however remote or unlikely that may be), to disavow the nuclear option. The points, it seems, have been wholly misunderstood, if not by those senior American spokesmen who publicized NATO's nuclear war-fighting plans, then by elements among the Western public who now seek salvation from the prospect of a nuclear war in Europe through conventional rearmament.