

stage) would have to rely on conventional weapons to deter Soviet and East European forces, which they currently perceive to be numerically superior. Finally there is the fear that, even if SS-20s are removed from Europe, the USSR could still re-assign some of its ICBM strategic missiles to targets in Western Europe.

Officials on both sides of the Atlantic have asked whether European countries are prepared to sacrifice more of their high standard of living to develop the kind of conventional forces which are considered necessary to deter a Warsaw Pact incursion, without the need to rely on nuclear missiles.

But the Gorbachev plan raises an even more fundamental question: can the nuclear genie ever be put back in the bottle? Since nuclear knowledge can never be eliminated, can adequate verification procedures ever be devised so that no country would be able to hide its bomb when all the others had demolished theirs?

As C.G. Jacobsen, a senior researcher of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, said about the Gorbachev initiative:

"The nuclear genie is out. To destroy all stocks could be naive, and suicidal. We need to break the arms spiral, and halt the move to forward deployments, minimal warning, and computer dependence. We need to cut redundant arsenals, arsenals that exceed deterrence requirements, and spawn fear, and jitteriness. We must cut. We cannot disarm, or at least not without a radical change in mindsets, East and West. In today's world, Gorbachev's dream, like the Siren songs of Greek mythology, promise danger, not relief."

What is new is that both sides have actually begun to contemplate a 50 per cent reduction in their strategic weapons, an idea unthinkable five or six years ago. This suggests that there are redundant arsenals that can be disposed of without wrecking the military postures of either side.

At the same time there may be military as well as political concerns at the direction technology and strategy are leading us. Questions about the 'Follow On Forces Attack' plan in Europe and debates over the US 'Air/Land Battle' doctrine and their effect on an opponent's strategy are current. The way in which Pershing missiles have cut the reaction time to six to ten minutes with its effect on decision-making are serious concerns. The dependency of modern weapons technology and space reconnaissance and communication of computerization raises urgent questions about the time and facts available for deliberate political decisions and adequate command and control of crisis situations.

But there are the military mindsets, as well as the political ones, to contend with in viewing such a sweeping proposal as Gorbachev's. The offensive

strategy that is built into Soviet military thinking and the first-use problem that is always at the back of American military strategy because its conventional forces in Europe depend on it, may be roadblocks to seeking the kind of disarmament proposed here. There is little public evidence in NATO military circles of a serious debate on the possibilities of minimum deterrence as either politically or militarily practicable as yet. Certainly Soviet military circles have been more interested in nuclear and conventional buildup in recent years than in debating nuclear deterrence at a minimal level.

An example of how the NATO military adheres to the status quo, unless the Americans favour change, is the experience of Canada's Admiral Robert Falls. When he was chairman of NATO's military committee, he found himself roundly censored in 1983 for publicly suggesting that NATO could rid itself of a lot of unuseable nuclear weapons and could even unilaterally reduce its nuclear weaponry by 50 per cent, without harming its defences.

There is also the political problem of Western Europe's continuing fear of being de-linked from the American strategic forces. This was the basis of the Pershing and cruise missile deployment decision of 1979, a move that of itself created problems in the cohesion of the alliance. Linkage has again raised its head, as the Americans consider weapons reductions in Europe at the new Geneva START talks.

Certainly NATO, and especially its principal European members, have never seriously considered a nuclear-free defence of Europe as being either militarily credible or an example of effective deterrence against heavily conventionally-armed Warsaw Pact forces. Politically it has had no support in Washington and no studies of it have been made by NATO.

There is, of course, the argument that some nuclear weapons are always going to be necessary to keep the peace, and that raises the question of how many would be necessary for serious deterrence. If minimal deterrence between the superpowers was possible, nuclear proliferation would still be a major problem.

Whether the superpowers and the rest could ever agree on no nuclear weapons or on some minimum level makes it ever more urgent to develop assured verification procedures against cheating and an enforcement institution against those who break the nuclear rules. Gorbachev's acceptance of international on-site inspection, both in his January proposal and in the Stockholm confidence-building agreement, are hopeful signs. The idea that the UN Security Council, which includes the five major nuclear powers, could be the international control agency would be worth exploring, but would the five abandon their veto on nuclear weapons issues?