

Dismantling NATO

EXCALIBUR: With the latest arms agreement scraping short- and medium-range missiles, many analysts claim that this is going to decouple American commitments to NATO. Do you agree with this point of view?

DYER: Really there's not a larger trend of United States decoupling from Europe. Rather it is the failure of the final attempt to paper over the fact that Europe and the United States have been decoupled since about 1965 in terms of rational strategic policy.

EXCALIBUR: Why 1965?

DYER: That's about when the Soviet Union reached nuclear parity with the US. NATO is not outnumbered by the Warsaw Pact. On the contrary, it outnumbers the Warsaw Pact two to one in population and about four to one in economic resources. Western Europe alone is comparable in population, including the demographic structure, and how many young men you could conscript, to the entire Warsaw Pact. They don't need our help on any rational analysis.

But NATO was set up in the late 40s and early '50s when they were economically flat on their backs and politically pretty shaky. In fact, that's why NATO was set up. We didn't think the Russians were coming, we wanted to reinforce the Belgium, French, and Italian governments and resist the local communist parties which were very popular in those days. But the strategy that underpinned NATO then was we, the Americans and the Canadians who were tagging along, will guarantee the Europeans their defence. What we will do is we will put some troops in Europe as hostages, not enough to actually hold off the Russians, but enough to get killed so that we're dragged into the war. And then, if a conventional war breaks out and Western Europe starts to lose, what we will do is launch a nuclear attack against the Soviet Union. Massive retaliation, first formulation of NATO strategy which was perfectly credible because the Americans had all the nuclear weapons in the world up to 1949, and at least a 10 to one superiority over the Soviet Union until the early '60s. Even during the Cuban Missile Crisis in '62, the ratio was about ten to one and thus the Soviet Union was effectively deterred and that strategy made some sort of sense. The Western Europeans, it was assumed in the '50s, would soon recover and then they would take over their own defence and the Americans would go home. Nobody expected Canadian and American troops to still be there in the '80s.

The Western Europeans did recover economically, they are at least on par with North America now. So, they are perfectly capable of taking care of their own defence, but they have fallen into the comfortable habit of not making the conventional effort that the Soviets were making because the American nuclear guarantee filled the gap and it

didn't cost very much. Nuclear weapons are much cheaper than soldiers. So, it was quite tidy for everybody. The problem being that the American nuclear guarantee became fundamentally incredible in the early '60s, as soon as the Soviet Union was capable of destroying America with nuclear weapons too. Why on earth would any American government launch a nuclear war to save Europe from conventional defeat? Bonn may be worth a lot, but it's not worth Chicago from an American perspective. So, all of NATO strategy since 1965 has been designed not to make the Europeans take the burden (of defending themselves), but to covering the crack in the credibility of the basic strategy.

EXCALIBUR: So, is that what the American deployment of Tomahawk Cruise Missiles and Pershing 2s in Europe in 1983 represented?

DYER: Yes, that was the last in a series of efforts, flexible response and all the rest of it, to try to reassure the Europeans that although the Americans would self-evidently be crazy to do what they promise to do, they would nevertheless do it. And so you put the American missiles in Europe where they will be overrun early in a conventional war and so you either use them or lose them. And using them commits America to a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. That's what they were about, we were not trying to counter the SS-20s, they were the pretext, not the reason. The Soviets have always had short- and medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe. The SS-20s were a replacement for the SS-4s and SS-5s. They (the SS-20s) have the same targets and we've lived with them for 20 years and nobody cared.

If you go back to the original decision, it was the Europeans who asked for the American missiles in Europe. Chancellor Schmidt went to London in 1977 and asked for American missiles in Europe to reinforce the fading European belief that the Americans would actually do what they promised to do. Between 1977 and 1979, we came up with a nice way for justifying this which was a new generation of Soviet missiles—the SS-20s. It was nothing of the sort, it was reinforcing the American hostage in Europe. Robert MacNamara who was Secretary of Defence from 1961 to 1967, when America lost its nuclear superiority, is on record as saying that he told Presidents Kennedy and Johnson that under no circumstances would he ever recommend the first use of American nuclear weapons. Well—shit!—that's exactly what bothers the Europeans. And so all this INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) stuff was an attempt to sort of create a more sell-out fiction that they would actually do it. But it's hard to tell, because the way that they've tried to reinforce it is by making things more and more automatic. In other words, the Americans have sort of voluntarily tied their hands so that the escalation of nuclear weapons gets more and

more automatic. That's what coupling is all about. Decoupling is the exact opposite of that and that is exactly what's happening with INF.

EXCALIBUR: So, do you look at this agreement as enhancing stability in the arms race?

DYER: Well, it forces people to consider what the hell they're doing. I mean, we've lived with a total fictional NATO strategy for 25 years, which is in fact kind of reassuring in a way, because if it was that transparent a bluff for 25 years and the Russians never called it, they probably didn't really intend to attack.

EXCALIBUR: What about the conventional superiority which the Warsaw Pact now has in Europe?

DYER: It does have conventional superiority, though we greatly exaggerate how much. The ratio of superiority in very specific weapon sys-

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tems, like tanks, can go up to three to one, which isn't all that impressive given that the ratio of anti-tank weapons, or good ones, runs the other way (in NATO's favour). In soldiers, it's nothing like that, unless you count everybody's reserves in ready soldiers, it's no more than about seven to five (in Warsaw Pact's favour). . . . Now, whether that's enough to win a conventional offensive in 1987 is a very moot point.

EXCALIBUR: But what about the American nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers stationed in Europe which are also equipped with nuclear warheads?

DYER: Theory says that conventional war happens first and nuclear weapons are used if we start losing the conventional war. Frankly, it's mostly bullshit and the soldiers know it. I don't know many people who have commanded at senior levels in NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe, who believe that a conventional war would last more than a week. By then you'd be overrunning nuclear storage dumps, and the political level of panic would be escalating right off the scale, so you got about a week to shut it down at best.

EXCALIBUR: Out of this latest arms deal, who won?

DYER: Who loses is the Europeans. The Americans win and the Soviets win. The Soviets win because they decouple the US from Europe. The Americans win, because they get decoupled and the Western Europeans have to figure out what the hell they really want to do, which is why sour grapes were the order of the day in London and Bonn. Thatcher was as diplomatic as she could conceivably be, which isn't very. But it was extremely clear that she didn't like this deal. Neither did the Germans, they dragged their feet to the last minute, because it means they have to figure out what they want to do about it (defence) themselves. Now I'm quite optimistic . . . because

the Soviets have their own agenda that does involve major conventional cuts. What you may get out of this deal (is not a buildup on the NATO side), but a build-down on the NATO side. The Russians are now talking quite explicitly about what they call asymmetrical force reduction proposals on the table from the Soviets. Within a year, he said, we're going to have major proposals for the withdrawal of forces from the East-West frontier, and within three years, now I haven't heard this in Moscow, but I've chased it and it's interesting, he said we will have a proposal for a confederal Germany, demilitarized and neutralized, one capital and two sub-capitals. I believe him.

EXCALIBUR: (in complete shock) Not in a period of three years, and the Soviets would never allow it.

DYER: No, I believe him. Look, the Soviets have their own agenda which is like anybody's politics, 90% domestic, right? Foreign policy follows domestic policy. I mean, Gorbachev, like any other national leader, came up through domestic politics. And his priority is economic reform, not just *glasnost*. It is dealing with the fact that the Soviet Union is ceasing to be a great power, because of long-term economic stagnation. All reforms get their justification from that.

Now that system has 14% of the GNP going into the military, that's twice the American proportion. About half the scientific and administrative talent in the country is going into this sort of military enclave economy. If you're going to free

the resources to restructure the Soviet economy, that problem has got to be attacked. In addition, economic reform is relatively long-term, and then there's the short-term pain you inflict on the workers through such things as increased discipline, removing subsidies and all the price-fixing stuff. So, they have to find something to keep the workers happy in the meantime, and one of the things you can do is foreign policy successes. Given the intense insecurity of the Soviet population, peace is really a sellable political issue to the mass of the Soviet people. So, you would want to do things that reduce arms levels, particularly conventional arms, because 95% of all defence expenditure in every country is conventional. Fixing the nuclear weapons is only symbolic. If you really want to attack the defence budget, you really have to go after the conventional side.

EXCALIBUR: Why should Canada withdraw from NATO, and how will the break-up of NATO affect the superpower balance?

DYER: NATO is what locks the Soviet Union and the United States together, it puts the United States in Europe. I mean, one of the reasons that the Americans stay in Europe, though it is not in their national interest to do so, is because they get all sorts of psychological benefits for playing the superpower role, leader of the free world, tra-la-la. These benefits are of great value to bureaucrats and politicians. And one of the things about withdrawing from NATO is that it in fact intensifies the decoupling process. I mean bringing Canadian troops home from Europe is an enormously useful example to Americans who should do the same with their own troops.

In addition, the great powers will be the last to get the message, they always are. But the more you erode the alliances, the less areas of contact there will be for the alliances to come into conflict. One of the things that can happen quite early in this process is that the other northern nations with a long tradition of neutrality who got swept up into NATO in 1949, like Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, and are halfway out psychologically, and have been all the time, could go all the rest of the way which could allow you to do useful regional things, like create buffer zones in the North and demilitarize the Arctic.

The most important thing is the political and psychological example that a major industrial power, despite its political and cultural allegiances, can demonstrate that the alliance is a bad thing. I mean, we do have to dismantle the alliances. They are the principle device for the psychological and military polarization of the world. And frankly, the Europeans think that it's a wonderful idea to dismantle the alliances, and they would be a lot safer without them. Essentially, what you have to work your way back towards is the security system which we created in 1945, which is to get back to the UN. It's not idealistic, it's quite realistic. All the powers have a veto. Everywhere you go in Moscow, they're talking about the dissolution of the alliances, and they know where they have to go instead. This is not idealism. This is reconstructing what we had set out to do with the Americans and the British in 1945. It just sort of fell by the wayside once we got caught up in this alliance business.

GWYNNE DYER

Globe-trotting free-lance journalist Gwynne Dyer offered *Excalibur's* James Flagal and David Dollard 45 minutes of his time and opinions. Dyer's background in political science, coupled with 15 years service in His Majesty's Navies, have made him a widely-published international affairs "guru," author/personality, and nothing short of opinionated.

His strong opinions were responsible for his start, when in late 1973, as he says, he had become fed-up with the "inaccurate, biased" reporting of global events, especially in the Middle East. "Pissed-off," Dyer submitted his first article to the *London Times*. A week later, much to his surprise, a cheque arrived. Dyer, previously an academic who "fed the kids" by lecturing, then realized that writing was far more lucrative than speaking.

Dyer still writes for five of the original 12 papers he first sent articles to, with one of these papers being the *Toronto Star*. Dyer was in Toronto recently, speaking at U of T's Convocation Hall as part of the *Toronto Star's* lecture series presented by David Lavin Associates Inc. During his address, Dyer explained that the world has, in fact, experienced seven world wars (occurring every 50 years), with each transforming the global "pecking order" of nations. According to Dyer, the only way to correct these vicious cycles is by dismantling the alliances and adopting a collective security system, like the one embodied in the Charter of The United Nations.

