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NON-OFFENSIVE DEFENCE: THE WAY TO ACHIEVE COMMON SECURITY IN EUROPE

by Robert Neild

INTRODUCTION

For some time the idea has been discussed that security in Europe could be increased, East-West relations improved and the arms race eased if a new strategy was adopted for *non-nuclear* forces in Europe. The capacity of non-nuclear forces to go on the offensive would be minimized and their capacity to defend maximized.

Various labels have been attached to this idea—alternative strategy, non-provocative defence and non-offensive defence. I shall use the term non-offensive defence, since it most clearly and briefly conveys what the idea is all about.

Non-offensive defence has been gathering support in West Germany and other western European countries, principally amongst the social democratic parties. In that context, non-offensive defence has mostly been discussed as a one-sided policy: debate has concentrated on whether it would be possible for NATO to construct a sufficiently strong defensive force to be able to hold an attack by the Warsaw Pact with its existing, offensively oriented, force structure. The idea that the Warsaw Pact might also adopt a strategy of non-offensive defence has seemed remote and has scarcely been discussed.

Now all that may be changing. Mikhail Gorbachev and his new generation of advisers, besides radically rethinking how the political economy of the Soviet Union should be run, have also gone in for rethinking military strategy and have been voicing the idea of defensive non-nuclear defence. It is pretty clear that they have not yet converted the military to their new ideas but that a debate is going on, or possibly a struggle similar to

the struggle with the bureaucracy over the introduction of new economic policies.

What we know in the public domain is that the Warsaw Treaty Organization produced an agreed statement in Budapest in June 1986 calling for far-reaching non-nuclear disarmament in Europe which included the statement that "... the military concepts and doctrines of the military alliances must be based on defensive principles."¹ Then in May 1987 in Berlin they produced a statement on military doctrine, signed by the leaders of the member states in which they proposed that consultations be held between the two alliances with the aim of comparing military doctrines and "... ensuring that the military concepts and doctrines of the military blocs and their members be based on defensive principles."² Coming from an alliance whose adherence to an offensive doctrine and structure for their non-nuclear forces has been a main cause of the confrontation in Europe, this is a remarkable change.

On its side, NATO, in Brussels December 1986, produced a declaration on arms control which proposed negotiations that should "focus on the elimination of the capability for surprise attack or for the initiation of large-scale offensive action."³

In March 1988 there were some new developments. First, the US Secretary of Defense, Frank Carlucci, and the Soviet Minister of Defence, General Dmitri Yazov, met for two days of informal talks at Bern, during which the Soviet Minister is reported to have said, as regards defensive doctrine for non-nuclear forces, that there were going to be changes in Soviet training manuals and military exercises; the US Secre-