

paper.) Three of seven direct participants, selected on a rotating basis, meet with their opposite numbers from the Warsaw Pact once a week at so-called "informal" sessions. In addition all delegations from both sides meet once a week in formal plenary sessions. Just as important as either of these structured encounters — some would say more so — is a constant round of social occasions where the negotiating dialogue continues. All proceedings are, by agreement between the sides, confidential, but a press conference is held after each plenary.

Speeches, statements, proposals, rebuttals are made in the name of the bloc concerned: there are no national initiatives in this East-West dialogue. It follows that meetings within each alliance to coordinate positions are frequent and, because of the need for advance agreement on the text of all prepared statements, arduous, at least in NATO. The principle troop contributors — the USA, West Germany and Britain — carry the most weight in these private discussions, but everyone is free to put forward ideas and proposals.

The reasons for the lack of a formal agreement are described below but in the almost 13 years of negotiation a number of important issues have been resolved, albeit only on an informal basis. The most significant of these are as follows:

- a) Parity of manpower between East and West will be maintained in the area at lower collective levels. This means that notwithstanding the much greater distance that United States reinforcements would have to travel, the West will not be entitled to station any aggregate number of troops in the area in excess of the limit imposed on the East. The agreed concept of collectivity is also important but there is still some disagreement about whether or not there will be national ceilings within the overall total.
- b) Reductions will be undertaken by all participants with troops in the area, and those maintaining major formations will take what is termed "a significant share" of the total. This point reflects a concern felt on both sides but for different reasons. Within NATO there was unease that the East might reduce non-Soviet forces only, leaving the Red Army untouched. On the Eastern side there was a similar concern about the West Germans. This provision ensures that neither country is exempted.
- c) Reductions will begin with the forces of the two superpowers. As the two dominant military powers on either side this was recognized as being only reasonable by all concerned.

- d) There will be no limitations on the locations of military units in the area. This proviso recognizes the practical fact that when troops are reduced, both sides would probably wish to rearrange the posture of forces remaining.
- e) Six accords have been reached in principle on ways to verify a general agreement, although some very important details remain in dispute. Points of agreement are:
 - (i) Advance notification will be given of certain military activities such as major exercises and troop movements;
 - (ii) On-site inspections will be carried out to verify compliance;
 - (iii) Points of exit from and entry to the area will be established with observers present from both sides;
 - (iv) Relevant information about forces remaining in the area will be exchanged throughout the lifetime of an agreement;
 - (v) There will be no interference with national technical means of verification;
 - (vi) A consultative commission will be established.

Notwithstanding these various points of convergence, major hurdles remain to be overcome before any MBFR treaty can be signed. For example, while the notion of on-site inspection is accepted, a very wide gulf remains between the two sides regarding the number of inspections that would be permitted, the rules under which they would be carried out and the degree to which the acceptance of inspection would be obligatory. The East is reluctant to accept a binding commitment to inspection, while the West insists on it. Both sides, however, acknowledge the need for further negotiations on this issue.

Until recently the other root problem was a long-standing disagreement over the number of Eastern troops now in the area, but a way to circumvent this impasse may be emerging. Eastern and Western figures differ by as much as 150,000 men, and the Soviets and their allies have refused to discuss this discrepancy in meaningful detail. They argued that, since both sides could agree on the levels that would remain after reductions took place, there was no need to reach agreement on existing levels. The West contended that agreement on the size of reductions was essential and that this in turn would require prior agreement on the numbers that were already there.

However the most recent Western proposal, put forward in December 1985, accepts the Eastern approach. The West has suggested modest US and