

A Change in the Atmosphere

In the early 1980s, during the first few years of the Reagan Administration, the US questioned the value of arms control as a process for dealing with the problem of nuclear weapons. They also accused the Soviet Union of violating the SALT Treaties and other arms control agreements. During negotiations, the US pointed to Soviet unwillingness to accept on-site inspection as proof that the Soviet Union was not serious about arms control. The accusations of non-compliance fed an atmosphere of distrust and acrimony between the US and the Soviet Union. In 1983 the Soviet Union left the INF and START negotiations in protest against the deployment of US intermediate-range missiles in Europe and refused to set a date for resumption of the talks. It was not until 1985 that negotiations began again.

In the wake of these divisive and unsuccessful years in arms control, the INF Treaty has acted as a confidence-building measure. It has changed the atmosphere, and proved that arms control negotiations can be successfully concluded and implemented.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO

Post-INF Situation

In the late seventies, NATO leaders were looking for a way to respond to Soviet deployments of the intermediate-range SS-20 missile. In a meeting in December 1979, NATO members, after much discussion, settled on the so-called dual-track or two-track decision. It called for deployments of Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) to begin in 1983 (the first track), and negotiations with the Soviet Union to attempt to deal with the SS-20 problem through arms control (the second track).

The INF Treaty represents the successful completion of this latter process, eliminating all land-based nuclear missiles with a 500 to 5500 kilometre range. Once these missiles are completely destroyed, the two alliances will still face each other with massive conventional forces and nuclear weapons with ranges of less than 500 kilometres.

According to NATO the Warsaw Pact maintains a greater number of conventional forces than does NATO. In order to deal with this threat, NATO has said that it must rely on nuclear weapons to deter the Warsaw Pact from using its conventional superiority to attack or to threaten Western Europe. Without INF and shorter-range INF missiles, NATO will have to rely on nuclear weapons with ranges under 500 kilometres to carry out this deterrent function. Both NATO and the Warsaw Pact maintain a variety of nuclear weapons with this range, including missiles, aircraft-carried bombs, and

nuclear artillery. However, in the category of short-range missiles, the Warsaw Pact has a distinct advantage — 1600 missiles to NATO's 88 Lance missiles.

The removal of INF and SRINF missiles has thrown a spotlight on the question of how serious the threat from the Warsaw Pact is and how best to deal with it. The Soviet Union has offered to eliminate missiles with ranges under 500 kilometres, as well as all remaining tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. Should NATO enter negotiations on this category of weapons? NATO has a commitment to modernize its short-range nuclear forces. Should this commitment now be carried out? If so, how?

Soviet Proposals

Just after the signing of the INF Treaty the Soviet Union put forward a series of proposals on short-range nuclear forces and conventional forces. In January 1988 Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze proposed a complete elimination of "tactical nuclear means," effectively proposing the denuclearization of Europe. At the end of that year, in December 1988, the Warsaw Pact offered to forego modernization of its tactical nuclear missiles if NATO was willing to do the same. Also in December, as part of his speech to the United Nations, General Secretary Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would be unilaterally reducing its conventional forces. In Europe this would involve the removal and demobilization of 50,000 troops and their equipment from Eastern Europe.

The Problem for NATO

These proposals suggest a new future for Europe. They also directly challenge NATO's own plans for the future. In sum, the debate that has resulted within NATO has focused on three questions: whether NATO should enter into negotiations on SNF; whether a final goal of zero SNF is desirable; and, whether it is necessary to undertake a definite commitment to move ahead with the modernization of the Lance missile.

NATO Response

All three of these questions relate to West Germany and its position in the NATO alliance. A large number of short-range forces are deployed in West Germany. Due to their short range, if the missiles were ever used, they would affect primarily West German territory and population. Because West Germany represents the front line of NATO defence, it has the most to gain from SNF reductions. The West German population has been enthusiastic about Gorbachev's initiatives. The government of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) has therefore been inclined to pursue the proposals put forward by the Soviet Union. On this issue, the FRG found itself at variance with the other key NATO allies, notably the US and Great Britain.