

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia resulted in the expected atmospherics and ill-will but did not interfere with the onset of negotiations as much as did a more basic reluctance to consider adversary proposals. Until March 1971, NATO and the Soviet Union continued to sponsor their own respective proposals, more or less ignoring each other's competing proposal. The Soviets continued to call for a general conference in Europe to legitimate post-war boundaries while NATO continued to call for narrow force reduction talks. On March 30, Leonid Brezhnev's speech at the 24th Communist Party Congress marked a significant shift in Soviet policy when it expressed an explicit interest in conventional force reduction negotiations. On May 14, 1971, Brezhnev was even clearer in signaling the Soviet interest in negotiating. Despite this, it took another year to make any real progress toward an agreement to actually negotiate and the final Soviet agreement seems to have been conditioned on American acceptance of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The MBFR preparatory talks began in January, 1973, in Vienna. These sessions dealt with the status of participant states and quickly became deadlocked. In particular, NATO wanted Hungary to count as a direct participant because of the geographical proximity of the 55,000 men of the Soviet Southern Group of Forces stationed in Hungary. The Soviet Union absolutely refused to consider this, declaring that Hungary was a "flank state" similar to Italy. From the Soviet perspective, its Southern Group of Forces were crucial for retaining leverage over Yugoslavia, Hungary and Romania. The status of Hungary was non-negotiable. The Western nations felt obliged to accept this position if they wished the main negotiations to proceed. The Soviets were unsuccessful in leaving participation open to non-alliance states and had to abandon their efforts to involve France in the negotiations. Although the Soviets gained the most from the preliminary sessions, it must be remembered that the NATO states – and particularly the United States – were in a weak bargaining position. There were strong sentiments in the United States to reduce American troop strength in Europe (witness the various legislative efforts of Senator Mike Mansfield) and this severely restricted NATO negotiators.

The negotiations proper commenced on October 30, 1973. There were seven "direct participants" (states having military forces in Central Europe): Belgium, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom and the United States. The five "special participants" (states near but not within the reduction zone) from NATO were Denmark, Greece, Italy, Norway and Turkey. The Warsaw Treaty Organization's "direct participants" were Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Poland and the Soviet Union. The WTO's "special participants" were Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. Conspicuous by its absence was France, a state with significant military forces in the reduction zone but no longer a military member of NATO. The French have, coincidentally, pursued alternative plans for European arms control and disarmament which have led indirectly to the Conference on Disarmament in Europe – the CDE.

The Warsaw Treaty Organization presented its first proposal on November 8, catching the Western delegates by surprise. The proposal called for negotiations to occur in one phase prior to any actual reductions. The first stage of the reductions would involve 20,000 ground and air personnel total per side from the ranks of the direct participants. The second stage would involve an additional reduction of 5 percent and would be accomplished in 1976. The third stage entailed a 10-percent reduction in air and ground personnel to be accomplished in 1977. Stationed forces (like the United States Army) were to withdraw from the continent in organic units, taking all of their equipment with them. Indigenous forces (Germany's, for instance,) were to be demobilized. There were no provisions for verification nor were any base-line force figures included. Because force levels were *not* equal to start with (according to Western negotiators), this would have amounted to an asymmetrical or unbalanced reduction, perpetuating a WTO advantage in manpower and main battle tanks. Such an outcome was unacceptable to NATO. The speed of the reductions (three years) was also regarded as being potentially destabilizing. Finally, the reductions would have had an especially severe effect on West German military manpower.

The Warsaw Treaty Organization negotiators modified their original proposal in October, 1974, when they suggested that the first reduc-

