

Western Europe and the SALT II Treaty: An American View

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The conclusion of SALT II will be termed as great progress for peace. . . . One West European government after another will publicly express its belief that the U.S. Senate must not spoil the political climate by refusing to ratify the treaty. But such statements have little to do with what most Western governments really think about the treaty. The treaty will make it more difficult to eliminate shortcomings in Western security.

— Guenther Gillessen¹

In one measure or another, all knowledgeable Europeans hold reservations about SALT II, even though they voice these only in confidential tones.

— Manfred Woerner²

The Carter Administration, like its predecessors, has actively urged European NATO allies to support American efforts to achieve limitations on strategic arms. West European leaders have usually acquiesced in U.S. pressures for the SALT II Treaty, while weighing, from their own peculiarly European perspectives, the advantages and disadvantages said to inhere in the Treaty. Thus, the SALT II Treaty has been endorsed in official communiques, by favorable press reviews and by the positive statements of many of the European defense elites. American policymakers have invoked such expressions of support to reinforce their position in the U.S. domestic debate on SALT II.

Certainly, West Europeans support SALT II both as a means of reducing the

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likelihood of confrontation with the Soviet Union and as an important step toward SALT III, which is expected to address the question of arms control at the theater level. Especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, the view is strongly held that the existing set of relationships with the Soviet Union embodied in the agreements of the last decade must be preserved. These include, first and foremost, the "normalization" that has occurred in intra-German relations, and especially the opportunities for travel from the Federal Republic to the German Democratic Republic. To the extent that relations between Washington and Moscow have enhanced Bonn's ties with East Germany, there has been broad support for superpower "detente diplomacy."

But European statements about SALT must be viewed in the context of a broader set of European perspectives toward the Atlantic Alliance and toward the roles played by the United States both as a NATO member and as a superpower having relationships with the Soviet Union quantitatively and qualitatively different from those of Western Europe. European perspectives on the SALT process, and the SALT II Treaty, are often fraught with complexity, ambiguity and contradiction.

For the past thirty years, since the founding of NATO in 1949, the United States has sought to reconcile its alliance relationships with its adversarial relationships. To the extent that American diplomacy toward the Soviet Union, its principal adversary, has encompassed issues of importance to European allies, the potential for suspicion and discord has existed. This problem has also been evident in SALT. The fact that SALT has emphasized the strategic forces of the United States and the Soviet Union ensures European interest in its results. In European minds, the efficacy of the Atlantic Alliance is measured by the perceived coupling between the U.S. strategic force and its ability to deter conflict on the battlefield in Western Europe. Basic to European confidence in that coupling has been the credibility of the American strategic force — the perceived willingness of the United States to use that force, *in extremis*, in support of European-NATO interests. Thus, at the core of European concern about SALT is stability in the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship embodied in a viable American nuclear guarantee.

While there has been extensive European support for the *principle* of arms control at the strategic level, there is underlying apprehension that in seeking a more stable relationship with the Soviet Union the United States might jeopardize West European interests. Many Europeans have often had serious reservations about an arms control process that, by limiting central strategic systems but not theater-capable systems, might decouple the U.S. strategic-nuclear force from European security. Hence, even if the United States had concluded agreements with the Soviet Union for "deep cuts" in strategic systems below the Vladivostok guidelines, as the Carter Administration proposed in March 1977, the West European reaction would probably have been ambivalent.

Though such an agreement would have reduced the vulnerability of the U.S. strategic force (one European interest), it would still have left Western Europe exposed to Soviet Eurostrategic systems (a continuing European fear). From a European perspective, such an agreement would have made sanctuaries of the homelands of the United States and the Soviet Union, while signaling — rightly or wrongly — to European allies that the United States (and the Soviet Union) were preparing to fight any future war on the territory of Western Europe. It has been a continuous European objective to prevent this and to emphasize a deterrence strategy that maintains a low nuclear threshold and relies on the ability of the Atlantic Alliance to inflict unacceptable levels of damage on the Soviet Union — in short, a deterrence based on punishment and not on denial.

For some Europeans, the development by the Soviet Union of a strategic capability in the late 1950s was sufficient to call the American nuclear guarantee into question and to provide the rationale for British and French national nuclear forces. For others the relative superiority of American strategic capabilities until the early 1970s maintained the credibility of the guarantee. The SALT I accords of 1972 raised further doubts about the coupling of the superpower strategic balance with European security. First, the Interim Agreement of Offensive Systems, one part of the SALT I accords, codified the then existing strategic-nuclear relationship based upon parity between the United States and the Soviet Union. The effect of superpower strategic parity is to weaken, if not neutralize, the strategic force of the United States for the security of allies. Second, it also provided a basis for the future growth of Soviet strategic capabilities. It is within the framework of the Interim Agreement that the Soviet Union has been able to deploy its fourth-generation strategic systems, including the SS-18 (a heavy ICBM with a large number of MIRVed warheads), that have themselves come to constitute a threat to the fixed, land-based portion of the American strategic force.

A second problem for Europeans stems from the other portion of the SALT I accords, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, in which the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to restrict the number of ABM and Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) sites each side could deploy to two. Later, this was reduced to one. Because the constraints on Soviet ABM deployments extended the life of the British and French strategic forces, the ABM Treaty found support in Western Europe. But, in retrospect, in signing the ABM Treaty the United States effectively foreclosed the option of deploying a defensive system that would have enhanced the survivability of its strategic force. This has become an even more onerous constraint because advances in BMD technology since the early 1970s have markedly enhanced its potential effectiveness. Instead, during the 1970s the U.S. fixed, land-based force became increasingly vulnerable to a Soviet first strike. Both the lack of a hard-point defense system and the Soviet

Union's deployment of a fourth generation of ICBMs have contributed to this vulnerability.

In these important respects, neither the SALT I Interim Agreement nor the ABM Treaty was fully compatible with the preservation of a credible U.S. strategic guarantee for the Atlantic Alliance, unless of course the deficiencies inherent in SALT I, and in particular the Interim Agreement, could have been remedied in SALT II. However, by permitting the Soviet Union, but not the United States, to deploy as many as 308 operational SS-18s, SALT II has codified these deficiencies. As a result, SALT II does not diminish the Minuteman vulnerability problem, but rather exacerbates it. It has legitimized and codified a U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship in which the coupling between the U.S. strategic force and European security has become more tenuous than ever before.

For many Europeans, however, the trends in the strategic relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union are not deeply vexing. This is especially so for those who either, as pointed out earlier, have doubted the American nuclear guarantee ever since the Soviet Union began its strategic force development in the 1950s, or who consider the SALT II Treaty to be an equitable agreement. To quote Christopher Makins:

. . . the fact that the central elements of the new [SALT II] treaty will, with only one major exception [the 308 SS-18s], impose precisely equal limits on the two sides, is likely to seem reasonable in Europe, where the adequacy of U.S. strategic forces has by and large been more favorably judged than by many of the American SALT skeptics.³

Even less concerned are those who perceive the substantial American military presence in Europe as assurance that the United States would invoke its full panoply of weapons in defense of Europe. According to this view, only if the United States withdrew its ground forces from Western Europe would U.S. strategic power be, in fact, decoupled from Europe. If the American strategic guarantee no longer existed, the United States would withdraw its forces for it would not be prepared to accept their defeat and destruction.

Whatever view Europeans might hold about the trends in the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship, there is little doubt that, in general, they see these trends as coinciding with a decline in the willingness or capacity of the United States to maintain its leadership role in the Alliance. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the perceived weakness of the present American leadership has contributed to European support for the SALT II Treaty. Whatever their apprehen-

3. Christopher J. Makins, "Bringing in the Allies," *Foreign Policy*, No. 35 (Summer 1979), p. 103.

sion about the Treaty, Europeans fear to an even greater extent the consequences of a deterioration in the American international position resulting from the real or perceived enfeeblement of U.S. leadership. Since World War II, Europeans have become accustomed to, and have expected, vigorous American leadership; although they have often resented the exercise of that role either because the United States has allegedly failed to represent adequately their interests or because they have not been happy with the policy results when it has acted boldly as the Alliance leader.

The relationship between strategic capabilities on the one hand, and theater nuclear and general purpose forces on the other, has also shaped European views of the SALT II Treaty. Supporters have voiced concern that the failure of the Treaty would lead the United States to make major new investments in strategic forces to the relative neglect of NATO battlefield capabilities.

However, the emphasis on improving NATO's capabilities detracts from what is in fact a more salient Alliance issue: agreeing on the doctrine that will govern those capabilities. There are essentially two schools of thought on NATO defense doctrine — European and American. The European school advocates a policy which clearly articulates that the use of theater nuclear weapons will result in a rapid escalation to the strategic level. Deterrence is served by the threat of a strategic exchange. The American school, on the other hand, seeks a nuclear force capable of actual war-fighting at the theater level so that the resort to strategic weaponry may be postponed and, if possible, avoided. Prior to SALT II, this doctrinal uncertainty served to minimize Alliance strain. Now, however, the growing importance of theater nuclear forces to European stability and security has caused that uncertainty to become a source of strain. In this regard, it must be recognized that European perspectives on the SALT II Treaty are influenced not only by what the Treaty includes, but also by what it does not include, i.e., the SS-20 and the Backfire bomber.

Both the SS-20 and the Backfire are examples of a growing class of weapons known as "gray area" systems. Capable of variable range, these systems have thus far been excluded from SALT, which has been addressed principally to "central systems," i.e., those that can strike either superpower from the territory of the other or from ballistic missile submarines. But what is a "gray area" system to the United States represents in Western Europe a system viewed in far more vivid colors. Such a system is, in fact, from a European perspective a strategic threat. The comparatively small U.S. concern over the threat posed by the SS-20 and Backfire bomber to Western Europe has been a signal about the steadfastness of the United States in its alliance commitments. The assurances President Carter has sought from President Brezhnev in regard to the range and production limits of the Backfire do little, if anything, to assuage European apprehensions.

Throughout the SALT process the Soviet interest has been to include as many

NATO theater nuclear-capable systems in the negotiations as possible. The United States, on the other hand, has sought to keep such systems out of SALT while including Soviet systems, notably the Backfire, that could be used to attack the United States. At the time of SALT I, the Soviet Union sought to define as "strategic" any system capable of striking the territory of the other superpower without reference to range. Thus the forward-based systems of the United States whose principal missions were the interdiction of targets behind Warsaw Pact lines outside the Soviet Union would have been included. This definition the United States successfully resisted. Instead, SALT I dealt only with the "central strategic systems" of both sides — ICBMs and SLBMs.

By the time of the SALT II Treaty the United States had developed, but had not yet deployed, a cruise missile capable of carrying either a nuclear or conventional warhead for short- or long-range missions. The Soviet Union had developed and begun the deployment of the SS-20 and the Backfire. The SS-20 gives the Soviet Union a counterforce capability against NATO military targets. However, in the United States the SS-20 — like the Backfire — has attracted attention more because of fears about its variable range than because of its potential against Western Europe — since it might be converted into the SS-16 ICBM by adding a third stage or even by removing ballast from the warhead. This has, perhaps, reinforced the suspicion of the Europeans and the Soviets that the United States views the interests of its allies in the SALT process as less important than the security of the United States itself.

Outside the SALT II framework, therefore, the Backfire and the SS-20 pose security problems for Western Europe in what has been termed the evolving "Eurostrategic" balance — problems that have become more pressing because of trends in the strategic relationship adverse to the United States. This point can be illustrated by reference to a recent editorial in the European press:

SALT II does not apply to medium range nuclear missiles deployed in the West European theater. And herein lies a sharp dilemma. Western Europe has depended heavily on the Americans' ICBM umbrella while its own home-based nuclear systems have become increasingly antiquated or obsolete. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union has pushed ahead with development of new systems — the SS-20 mobile missiles and the Backfire bomber. There is nothing in SALT II which prevents the Kremlin from further adding to or improving these weapons providing their ranges do not extend to the U.S.⁴

To make matters worse, while SALT has thus far placed no restrictions on Soviet Eurostrategic systems, a precedent has been established for limitations

4. *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), 10 May 1979, p. 14.

on NATO theater systems as a result of the Protocol attached to the Treaty. It has long been a Soviet objective to achieve limitations on NATO forward-deployed systems in order to reduce the likelihood of their being used against Soviet territory while gaining a free hand for the Soviet deployment of systems capable of posing a counterforce threat to Western Europe. The Soviet Union has succeeded in obtaining, if only temporarily, restrictions on NATO theater systems by prohibiting the deployment of ground- or sea-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs or SLCMs) having a range greater than 600 kilometers. Although the GLCMs and SLCMs will not be ready for deployment before the expiration date of the protocol, a further extension of the ban would deny systems to NATO which will be needed in light of the Soviet build-up in the European theater. It is likely that a permanent ban on such systems will be a Soviet objective in future negotiations, although the United States has expressed strong opposition to its extension beyond 31 December 1981.

Because of this, in recent months a debate has taken place in the defense establishments of Western Europe and the United States about deployment of new-generation theater nuclear systems in Western Europe. The purpose of such systems would be not only to offset the modernization of comparable Soviet forces, but also to facilitate the targeting of second-echelon targets, such as staging areas, supply depots, communications networks, landing fields and weapons supplies, that would have to be destroyed in the initial stage of a conflict. The growing lethality of the European air environment will place a premium upon manned aircraft, which will be more vulnerable in such missions than in previous eras. Systems such as the cruise missile, the extended-range Pershing, and a new-generation MRBM might reach targets in East Central Europe and Western Russia more easily than manned aircraft.

But the European attitude toward such force modernization has been characterized by ambivalence, if not contradiction. On the one hand, there is opposition to any SALT provision that would foreclose the deployment of these systems on European soil. Perhaps the sensitivities on this issue arise from the fear that once again the United States would be signaling to allies and adversaries alike its *de facto* decoupling of the U.S. strategic force from Western Europe. As this coupling has grown more tenuous, the European sensitivity about the need for land-based systems such as the GLCM and Pershing II has increased. The more credible the strategic guarantee, the less urgent would be the need to reinforce that coupling by the presence of theater systems in Europe, rather than for example by a sea-based force. So long as at least the option for their deployment remains open, the worst of European fears are assuaged. On the other hand, there is some opposition within Western Europe to the deployment of new-generation nuclear weapons there, the product partly of apprehension that the Eurostrategic balance is shifting at a pace that cannot be altered substantially by NATO force modernization, and of related fears about Soviet opposition to such systems.

Despite this, and even in the face of Brezhnev's 6 October 1979 speech in East Berlin, marking the opening of a new phase in the Soviet diplomatic offensive against deployment of such systems in Western Europe, there exists substantial support in Western Europe for theater nuclear force modernization. This was reflected in the announcement by Bonn's defense minister Hans Apel on 15 November 1979 that all of the Federal Republic's conditions for the deployment of new-generation theater nuclear systems had been met. Although the announcement clearly indicates the prevalence of this point of view, the debate leading up to the final decision reveals the ambivalence among the West Germans and Americans with respect to the linkage between SALT II Treaty ratification and NATO nuclear modernization.

Brezhnev's 6 October speech was an important new Soviet effort to strengthen those groups in the debate opposed to theater nuclear modernization. This speech was originally followed by a statement (subsequently reversed) by Apel in the United States that theater nuclear modernization in Europe was dependent on SALT II ratification by the United States Senate, something for which the Soviets were quite anxious. It may be inferred that Apel was echoing a view set forth by his host, President Carter, to the effect that if the Senate were to reject the Treaty, "some European countries might very well turn to the Soviet Union and put an anchor out to the East,"⁵ thus destroying the Atlantic Alliance.

To complicate further the transatlantic debate over the Treaty's relevance to nuclear modernization, Franz Ludwig von Stauffenberg (a member of the Bundestag from the Christian Social Union Party of Bavaria, which is part of the conservative opposition coalition in the Federal Republic), angered at these pro-SALT II Treaty remarks by President Carter and Defense Minister Apel, questioned the Schmidt government on this issue in mid-October. His inquiry elicited an official response from the government of the Federal Republic: "There is no reason whatsoever to link the loyalty of members of NATO, and especially the Federal Republic of Germany, to the SALT ratification process."⁶ To this should be added an unofficial response to Apel's original statement from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*:

If one would interpret Apel's statements in a malicious way, one could say that West Germany advocates Soviet interests in America. Even a benevolent interpretation of Apel's statement is evil enough. The Russians may come to the conclusion that the Europeans consider disarmament more important than maintaining the balance of power, and that NATO morale is lacking.⁷

5. See Michael Getler, "Some Europeans See Carter's Linking SALT to NATO as Hurting Alliance," *The Washington Post*, 21 October 1979.

6. *Ibid.*

7. John Vinocur, "For Bonn, a New German Question is Taking Shape," *New York Times*, 21 October 1979, p. E-1.

In a speech to the German-American Roundtable Conference in Washington, co-sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis on 22 October 1979, Senator Sam Nunn criticized the Apel position on SALT-theater nuclear modernization linkage somewhat differently: ". . . [I]f the modernization program is cancelled because of Senate delay or even rejection of SALT II, then support for theater nuclear modernization is probably so weak in NATO that it would not have occurred anyway." Support for NATO nuclear modernization was in fact strong enough in West Germany to cause Bonn to approve the deployment of the new missiles on its territory before ratification of the Treaty.

The extent to which the SALT II Treaty's non-circumvention clause might discriminate against Western Europe in the area of technology transfer is another issue that helps shape European opinion on SALT II. The United States has given assurances to European governments, and especially to Britain, that the SALT II Treaty will not adversely affect the U.S.'s ability to render such technological assistance. Nevertheless, there remains in Western Europe concern that the United States, in light of weapons decisions of the late 1970s (the neutron bomb as one example), might not be prepared to assist in the development of a new-generation British nuclear force, or that SALT III will intrude to delay such assistance, if one or both of the national European nuclear forces were themselves to become the object of negotiations. This is undoubtedly one of the motivations behind France's refusal to participate in SALT III.

Finally, no analysis of European perspectives on the SALT II Treaty would be complete without considering European understanding of the effect SALT II could have on SALT III. For reasons already set forth, the United States has reached a stage in the SALT process in which it is deemed essential to include theater systems in future negotiations, if only to place some limitations on the growth of Soviet systems that are excluded from SALT II. There is little doubt that Europeans endorse this approach, just as there is little doubt that SALT II has gained support because it is regarded as a necessary first step toward what are, from a European point of view, the more important discussions about theater weaponry. However, because of the greater numbers and sophistication of Soviet systems targeted against Western Europe relative to those that will be available to the United States and its European allies in the early 1980s, it is difficult to see what advantages to NATO could result from such negotiations. If they are deemed essential as a means of controlling, and even limiting, Soviet deployments of Eurostrategic systems, the SALT I and SALT II experiences regulating the broader U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship do not provide solid foundations for optimism.

It will be said that, without SALT III, the imbalance in such systems will turn even more starkly against the West. But, it must be asked, what are the incentives for the Soviet Union to reduce greatly its growing arsenal of SS-20s, Backfires, and other theater systems in Europe, short of the development of