

# NATO'S Nuclear Dilemma

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Speaking on June 15, 1982 on behalf of his absent and ailing chief, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko informed the U.N. General Assembly's special session on disarmament that "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics assumes an obligation not to be the first to use nuclear weapons."<sup>1</sup>

This declaratory policy, of course, cost nothing and had a solely propaganda import, and was appropriately derided by U.S. and U.S.-allied official spokesmen. Nonetheless, it provided another example wherein the Reagan administration was placed on the defensive, seeking to explain why superficially attractive sounding ideas with an apparent disarmament connection were nothing more than a snare and a delusion. In part for reason of ill chance, but also because of political insensitivity, muddled thinking and declaratory indiscipline, the Reagan administration has suffered a veritable "time of troubles" with respect to the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. military policy. "No first use" of nuclear weapons, as a possible policy position, is a small though symbolically significant element in the current debate over the nuclear question.

Sadly for balance in defense debate, "no first use" has long been tainted fatally by its clear association with Soviet propaganda. Even had NATO been toying seriously with the idea of a "no first use" declaration in the summer of 1982, which was not the case, President Brezhnev's statement before the U.N. General Assembly special session would have served to inter it indefinitely. Somewhat uncharacteristically, the Reagan administration has betrayed an undue sensitivity to potential political peril with regard to the idea of "no first use." That undue sensitivity was shown in the ill-judged preemptive assault that former Secretary of State Alexander Haig launched against the idea in a speech delivered on April 6, 1982.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Haig was endeavoring to discredit in advance an article that was about to appear in *Foreign Affairs*

1. John M. Goshko, "Soviet Chief Renounces First Use of A-Weapons," *The Washington Post*, June 16, 1982, p. 1.

2. "Haig's Speech on American Nuclear Strategy and the Role of Arms Control," *The New York Times*, April 7, 1982, p. A-8.

written by four former government officials: McGeorge Bundy, George F. Kennan, Robert S. McNamara, and Gerard Smith.<sup>3</sup> Those four authors urged a “new and widespread consideration of the policy” of no first use of nuclear weapons.

The timing of the *Foreign Affairs* article could hardly have been less fortunate. The administration had been chivvied by pressure from some of its NATO-European allies into entering the political theater of negotiations over intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Europe late in 1981, and had seized the suitably high ground of the “zero option” as a basis for laying claim to arms control virtue. However, by early April 1982, nuclear protest had ceased to be exclusively a political embarrassment in only Western Europe; it appeared in a very well organized way in the United States also. The administration feared for the fate of its military modernization program and for the strength of its arms control bargaining hand as Soviet officials observed and encouraged round one of the “Ground Zero” consciousness raising (concerning the dangers of nuclear war) campaign,<sup>5</sup> and as political opportunists as well as sincere, if misguided, citizens propagandized energetically for a nuclear freeze.<sup>6</sup>

The Reagan administration was struggling to hold its NATO partners to their contingent commitment, as a NATO-wide endeavor, to permit deployment of ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) and *Pershing II* ballistic missiles in Western Europe, an important aspect of that struggle being the U.S. high ground arms control position of the “zero option.”<sup>7</sup> The last thing that NATO needed in the spring of 1982 was fundamental questioning of the wisdom in NATO’s strategy by four senior public figures who could command international attention. An administration battered by charges that it was unduly casual about the dangers of nuclear war; by claims from the left and center of the political

3. “Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Spring 1982), pp. 753-768.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 767.

5. See “Ground Zero,” *Nuclear War: What’s In It For You?* (New York: Pocket Books, 1982).

6. See Edward M. Kennedy and Mark O. Hatfield, *Freeze! How You Can Help Prevent Nuclear War* (New York: Bantam, 1982).

7. In December 1979 NATO, ill advisedly, adopted the so-called “dual track” policy of preparing to deploy new long-range theater nuclear forces, while, at the same time, pursuing negotiations with the Soviet Union to constrain deployment of this class of weapons. This had the effect of inviting the Soviet government to participate very actively in the intra-alliance politics of nuclear modernization.

spectrum that it was not really serious about arms control (the president did not announce his readiness to reopen strategic arms negotiations until May 9, 1982); and by criticism from all sides to the effect that a coherent strategic policy story was not being advanced in support of the weapons program, was not an administration likely to respond coolly to assault from a new direction.<sup>8</sup>

What Mr. Haig did on April 6, 1982, was, inadvertently, to advertise and dignify a poor idea that in reality lacked a political constituency of any importance either in Europe or in the United States. In this article it will be argued that NATO should not adopt a nuclear policy of "no first use." "No first use" is not an idea that is bereft of all merit, political or military. Indeed, the ill-advisability of a NATO declaratory stance of "no first use" can only be presented judiciously if the more persuasive of the arguments in its favor are considered fairly. The potential for political damage to the alliance that lurks in the wings of "no first use" discussion is so considerable that it is vital that the full panoply of considerations be weighed by all sides of the debate.

### NATO's Nuclear Strategy

As a former U.S. ambassador to NATO, Harlan Cleveland, wrote many years ago, a trans-Atlantic bargain defines the outer boundary of what is politically permissible by way of adjusting NATO's defense posture and strategy.<sup>9</sup> That bargain has the following terms: In return for the nuclear guarantee extended by the United States, NATO-European countries will contribute enough to the common defense so as to assuage American domestic suspicions to the effect that the allies are enjoying if not a free, at least a relatively cheap ride for their security. Much of the current debate over NATO strategy, nuclear and conventional, appears to be unhealthily innocent of appreciation of the bargain to which Harlan Cleveland referred.

Some of the reasoning advanced in support of NATO adopting a declaratory policy of "no first use" of nuclear weapons has indeed pointed to real dilemmas, illogicalities, and weaknesses in current NATO policy. That much should be conceded. However,

8. On the nuclear policy troubles of the Reagan administration, see Colin S. Gray, " 'Dangerous to Your Health': The Debate Over Nuclear Strategy and War," *Orbis*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Fall 1982), pp. 327-349.

9. Harlan Cleveland, *NATO: The Trans-Atlantic Bargain* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

real though the problems are for NATO, it is suggested here that "no first use" is not the answer.

It is worth recalling the fact that the use of nuclear weapons in Europe has been studied and debated for more than thirty years. While one should retain an open mind as to desirable changes in policy as military technology and political and economic conditions change, the enduring character of the nuclear weapons debate suggests the strong probability that NATO's policy dilemmas and difficulties stem rather more from the structural realm of lasting geopolitical factors, than they do from folly in high places.

The authoritative concept pervading NATO's defense posture remains that of flexible response. Flexible response was adopted officially by the alliance in 1967 in the document MC-14/3. That document envisages a seamless web of deterrent effect influencing the mind of a potential aggressor. It encompasses the idea that strong conventional forces should guarantee to the Soviet Union that a *coup de main* with more than the most modest of objectives in central or northern Europe is not feasible. Moreover, the strong conventional defenses guarantee a very large war, with unpredictable consequences. The large conventional war should increase the expectation that first battlefield, and then theater, nuclear weapons would be employed, which, in their turn, particularly if they engage targets within the boundary of the European U.S.S.R., should greatly increase the prospects that the war would come to embrace the homelands of both superpowers.<sup>10</sup>

This grand design, of a powder trail deliberately laid from the inter-German border to the high plains of the United States, offers full doctrinal satisfaction to none. Its fragilities are more pronounced today, as the central strategic nuclear balance has shifted from a condition of marginal, or essential (to have resort to a useful, if vague, term), U.S. superiority in the mid to late 1960s, to essential Soviet superiority in the early 1980s. Nonetheless, with its problems admitted, flexible response does meet the most vital political tests imposed by a multinational alliance comprising a wide range of actual, or potential, conflicting interests. The central truth which narrowly militarily focused policy advocates tend to ignore, or fail to understand, is that NATO's European-deployed forces have never been intended physically to defend

10. The "spirit" of NATO's defense concept of flexible response is admirably conveyed in Kenneth Hunt, *The Alliance and Europe*, Part 2: *Defense With Fewer Men*, Adelphi Paper No. 98 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Summer 1973).

Europe. Hence, much of the recurring debate concerning whether this class of technology or that strategy would serve to deny Soviet forces a plausible plan for intervention or conquest is really beside the point. Politicians cannot admit to this in public, but NATO-Europeans do not want to see local defenses deployed that would stand a reasonable prospect of containing and repelling a Soviet invasion. Whether or not that view is sensible is a valid question to pose, but it does remain a reality today. NATO-Europe wants to prevent war in Europe, of any character, and it believes that its security would suffer a net diminution were a far more robust local (conventional or nuclear) war-fighting capability to be deployed.

A truly robust-seeming non-nuclear defense for Western Europe would, in European perspective, threaten the vital alliance principle of equality of risk. In the same perspective it probably would harm the stability of deterrence by holding out to Soviet political leaders a marginally more plausible prospect of the possibility of a campaign that would not engage the superpower homelands. American critics of NATO strategy have long noticed the extreme reluctance of NATO-European governments to consider nuclear weapon employment options other than in the context of a managed process of escalation for the restoration of deterrence. What those critics have missed is a scarcely smaller NATO-European reluctance to pursue defense schemes that might markedly improve the prospects of NATO effecting a successful non-nuclear defense. As West German politicians and generals will say privately, though not publicly, a credible conventional capability for NATO-Europe (in the first instance, of West Germany) is really no more acceptable than is a credible nuclear defense.

The present situation is not a happy one. The security of Western Europe rests, ultimately, upon the willingness of an American president to risk the American homeland in order to seek to restore deterrence and reverse a rapidly unfolding local military disaster. In support of this premise, which is implicit in MC-14/3, is the deployment of some 300,000 military personnel (plus dependents) in Europe; the objectively vital nature of the U.S. interest in denying Western Europe to the Soviet *imperium*; and considerations of U.S. honor and reputation. Contrary to the argument that NATO and U.S. policy with respect to the defense of Europe is a bluff, this author believes that neither the alliance as a whole, nor the United States, is bluffing in the public architecture of its deterrent strategy. But critics of many doctrinal

persuasions are correct in pointing to the possibility, even probability, that current policy, if ever tested under fire, would lead to a disaster of limitless proportions. The prospect that this disaster would be of a bilateral character is, of course, the basis of the deterrence thinking of the alliance.

### The Bad News

The bad news is that critics are correct in saying that NATO does not have a credible conventional capability; does not have a theory of how it would employ battlefield and theater nuclear weapons in a way that would make net military sense (and would be politically acceptable to the West German government); and does not have on hand, to redress the theater imbalance, an American strategic nuclear capability for extended deterrence which enjoys unambiguous credibility. All of this must be conceded. This author believes, with many critics of NATO defense policy, that across-the-board improvements in military capability are highly desirable. However, current problems, which to a noteworthy degree are endemic in the geopolitics of the Western Alliance, are not so severe as to require a radical shift of defense policy course, either in a declaratory sense, or by way of operational planning.

The somewhat less bad news is that NATO's conventional defenses, while far short of immaculate, are certainly adequate for their basic mission, which, to repeat, is to guarantee a very large war in the event of a Soviet assault westward, and hence to raise very substantial Soviet fears of escalation. Also, although NATO does not have an agreed doctrine for the employment of theater nuclear forces, given the role of those forces as a bridge linking the European battlefield and the superpower homelands, it is not self-evident that the absence of a doctrine should be seen as a fatal weakness. It is worth mentioning that the more strident critics of NATO's current defense plans, and particularly those who urge upon NATO the necessity or feasibility of a non-nuclear defense, essentially "solve" tactical nuclear dilemmas by ignoring them. This author has long believed that from a military, and hence deterrent, point of view, NATO should plan to employ nuclear weapons very early and in sufficient numbers so as to promote fatal disruption of a Warsaw Pact attack before it could properly roll much beyond its starting lines.<sup>11</sup> However, that argument is po-

11. See Colin S. Gray, *Defending NATO-Europe: Forward Defense and Nuclear Strategy*, DNA 4567F (Washington, D.C.: Defense Nuclear Agency, November 1977).

litically untenable within the alliance, regardless of its military merits. Given that NATO cannot reconcile the national interests of its members in a detailed doctrine for operational nuclear employment, the current compromise and ambiguity simply reflect the political facts of life. NATO should not be criticized for not effecting the impossible.

Finally, the credibility of extended deterrence is not a matter of all or nothing. Objectively speaking, the United States should not be able credibly to threaten to intervene with her strategic nuclear forces to turn the tide of a theater conflict in the 1980s. Today, the United States cannot escalate from a theater war to a higher level of violence in expectation, or even reasonable hope, of securing an improved outcome to a war. But the Soviet Union would have some good reasons to suspect that an American president threatening such an expansion of a conflict might not be bluffing. Hundreds of thousands of Americans would be engaged in a full-scale war in Europe, and, as careful students of power politics, Soviet leaders would know, and would expect an American president to know, that the stakes of a conflict in Europe really would amount to global hegemony. If the United States lost in Western Europe, then the Middle East, Africa, the Gulf region, and all of East Asia inevitably would fall within a newly expanded Soviet empire. The United States would remain sufficiently powerful to defend herself, but she would be denied access to Europe, Asia, and Africa. This, of course, presumes that the Soviet Union permits the United States the luxury of deciding whether or not to attempt to extend a European conflict. It is as likely as not that during the course of a very large war in the European theater, the Soviet Union, confounding the escalation sequence and reasoning most familiar in the West, would strike a massive preventive or preemptive blow against American strategic nuclear forces and their command, control, and communications.

Nothing could be further from the truth than to suggest, as Lawrence Freedman does, that "Improved conventional forces could compensate for weakness in the nuclear component of flexible response, but the reverse is not true."<sup>12</sup>

As competent campaign-minded defense planners whose eyes always are focused upon the problems and requirements of general war, Soviet military leaders are most unlikely ever to recommend massive military action against NATO in the European

12. "NATO Myths," *Foreign Policy*, No. 45 (Winter 1981-82), p. 53.



theater unless they have a noteworthy measure of “splendid superiority” with respect to central strategic forces.<sup>13</sup> They would lack adequate “top cover” otherwise and would be recommending action in the absence of a comprehensive theory of victory. Mr. Freedman’s belief in the efficacy of conventional substitution for erstwhile nuclear missions is wrong in logical and practical terms in several major respects. First, it ignores the Soviet incentive to engage in nuclear escalation to resolve problems at the conventional level of combat. A Soviet Union willing to invade Western Europe would not be a Soviet Union likely to hesitate to have resort to nuclear weapons to maintain the planned timetable of its advance. Second, the stronger NATO’s conventional defenses, the stronger the Soviet incentive is to initiate nuclear employment early in the conflict. Third, only within narrow limits could nuclear forces compensate for conventional deficiencies, but there is no way in which conventional forces can compensate for nuclear deficiencies. If the Soviet Union could secure useful or decisive net advantage through nuclear escalation, the war would be lost for the West.

### The Flexible Response

It is easy to be misunderstood. This author is not arguing for the starvation of NATO’s conventional, relative to its nuclear, capability. It so happens that largely for nonstrategic political reasons of intra-alliance peacetime accord (or tolerable discord), NATO has chosen an overarching defense concept that does make deterrent and military sense. Proponents of a heavy conventional emphasis in NATO’s defense posture should be reminded that the alliance has twice rejected such an orientation already: in the early 1950s, in the effective repudiation of the “Lisbon Goals” for conventional rearmament and mobilization readiness, and again in the early 1960s. Two of the authors of the *Foreign Affairs* article that urges reconsideration of a declaratory stance of “no-first use,” McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, appear to have learned relatively little from their experience as very senior members of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Robert McNamara’s Pentagon sought to persuade its NATO allies in the early and mid-1960s to adopt a policy of flexible response, which

13. I have derived considerable benefit from reading a recent short paper by Fritz Ermath, “Soviet Assessment of the Strategic Nuclear Balance: The Overall Strategic and Political Context,” unpublished, July 1982.



translated as a requirement that NATO should never be in a condition where it was unable to cope with conventional aggression by conventional means alone. This definition of "flexible response" was unacceptable to NATO-Europe in the 1960s (indeed, French displeasure with the character and stridency of American ideas was expressed by her leaving the military organization of NATO in 1966), and there is no reason to believe it will prove any more acceptable in the 1980s. By way of summary, NATO-Europe, while willing, and indeed compelled, to humor many American military doctrinal preferences, is not prepared to endorse a NATO defense concept that requires the alliance to be able to fight and win a conflict confined to Western Europe, whether that conflict be nuclear or non-nuclear.

There is a conflict of national interest between the United States and her allies in Europe which no designer of alliance defense doctrine can afford to ignore.<sup>14</sup> The United States, while endorsing the idea of the deterrent value of there being close linkage between NATO's Central Front and ICBMs on the high plains of the American homeland, wishes to develop and sustain at least the possibility that a war which begins in Europe would remain confined to Europe. By way of contrast, NATO-European countries appreciate that sufficient local denial capability must be maintained so as to render escalation credible (or not incredible), and so as to satisfy American domestic political requirements, but they want a relatively short fuse to connect the local battle with U.S. central strategic forces. In other words, NATO-Europe favors a planned deficiency in locally deployed forces such that the trans-Atlantic linkage, for the sharing of risks, is clear and unmistakable.

European politicians, like prudent people everywhere, know that war is a very uncertain enterprise. Every few years the intellectually turbulent American defense community produces a new or refurbished theory for the improved defense of Europe. Too often, American defense intellectuals and policy-makers alike fail to realize not only that their NATO-European audience is skeptical of the promised benefits of, say, mobile defense (to cite but the latest doctrinal panacea), but that it would not endorse the new concept even if it believed it to hold great military promise. In European perspective, rightly or wrongly, the best guarantee of peace

14. See Colin S. Gray, "Theater Nuclear Weapons: Doctrines and Postures," *World Politics*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 (January 1976), pp. 300-314.

and stability is a highly visible American presence in and commitment to the defense of Europe. Schemes intended to improve dramatically NATO's in-theater ability to repel invasion, are perceived as being potentially harmfully erosive of the trans-Atlantic nexus.

### 'No First Use'?

Virtually the entire community of NATO-oriented defense analysts and commentators, European and American, appears to be agreed that it would be desirable were NATO to be able to deemphasize the role of nuclear weapons in its defense planning. Notwithstanding the recurring popularity of nuclear deemphasis, it is rare for public figures, or even for scholars, to go so far as to suggest an explicit NATO declaratory stance of "no first use." Many people otherwise tempted to advocate "no first use" have recognized the political damage that such a proposal could wreak if advanced formally as a U.S. preference. "No first use," if it is anything more than a declaratory flourish intended to appease popular antinuclear sentiment, cannot help meaning that the United States would prefer, *in extremis*, that its European allies be overrun by Soviet armies rather than that the risks attendant upon firing even a single nuclear weapon should be run. In the event, though not as declared policy in peacetime (when it would weaken deterrence by reducing Soviet uncertainties), NATO-Europe might well prefer conventional defeat to being defended by battlefield and theater nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup> In terms of intra-alliance politics, it clearly would be less divisive if pressure for a "no first use" stance were to emanate from Bonn than from Washington. In that case however, many voices would be raised in Congress saying that a NATO-Europe so unwilling to run nuclear risks even on its own behalf, is a NATO-Europe so greatly susceptible to nuclear intimidation that it must be viewed as a very unreliable group of partners in the event of a future military crisis.

Critics of NATO's flexible response policy, with its first use connotations, have noted with much good reason that flexible response *à la* MC-14/3, to be credible, let alone operationally interesting to a NATO alliance in military distress, requires a measure of theater and strategic nuclear superiority that has long since

15. For a grim prediction of the character of a nuclear battlefield, see Arthur S. Collins, Jr., "Tactical Nuclear Warfare and NATO: Viable Strategy or Dead End?" *NATO's Fifteen Nations*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (June-July 1976), pp. 71-87.

vanished.<sup>16</sup> In short, NATO is clinging to the policy idea that nuclear threat and execution can substitute for conventional weakness, even though the material basis for Western escalation dominance no longer obtains. In addition, it is argued, the prominent role of nuclear threat in NATO's deterrence story is probably more frightening to NATO-Europe than it is to the Soviet Union. The necessity for nuclear threat and use in NATO's defense planning may well promote uncertainties in Soviet minds that are healthy for the stability of deterrence, but also they carry promise of promoting policies of accommodation among NATO-Europeans. In the words of Fred Iklé:

The more firmly NATO leaders have expected that a conventional war in Europe would develop into a nuclear war, the more anxious they would be to terminate the fighting if a conventional war actually broke out. Every day, every hour during which the conventional campaigns were being fought would seem to prolong the risk of imminent nuclear war.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Iklé is correct. Unfortunately Mr. Iklé and others are not correct when they suggest that NATO can and should look to a very considerable strengthening of its conventional forces in order noticeably to alleviate its nuclear dilemma. The dilemma lies in the fact that the alliance depends critically for its security upon a weapon that it does not know how to employ in a controlled manner at bearable cost, given the unfortunate, though now long-standing, complication that nuclear conflict would be bilateral. NATO-Europe prefers to rely upon a deterrence system that does not downgrade the uncertainties and risks of nuclear threat, even though it cannot face, let alone talk very honestly in public about, the military implications of the structure of the threat that it has chosen.

Critics of NATO's nuclear "first use" doctrine are correct in noting that the doctrine has tended to function as a crutch for conventional weakness, as a generally inexplicit alibi for an absence of determination to build robust non-nuclear forces, and as a serious inhibitor even of rational planning for nuclear forces themselves. If conventional defenses can be trumped, and perhaps trumped easily, by nuclear use, why waste resources on conven-

16. This point is forcefully argued in Fred Charles Iklé, "NATO's 'First Nuclear Use': A Deepening Trap?" *Strategic Review*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (Winter 1980), pp. 18-23.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

tional forces that cannot affect a campaign outcome beyond their initial roles of denying easy access to territory, and of compelling force concentrations (necessary to attempt breakthroughs) which provide appropriate targets for nuclear weapons? Also, if there is to be early resort to nuclear weapons in the theater by NATO, with a central exchange following rapidly thereafter, there is little point in devoting time, energy, and resources to ensuring the survivability of local nuclear forces.

This author is strongly critical of NATO's current and planned nuclear force posture. In addition, he believes that NATO's non-nuclear forces can and should be strengthened. However, he does not believe that NATO's "forward defense" strategy is mistaken. The promise of a maneuver strategy, or mobile defense, as offered by such analysts as Steven Canby, Edward Luttwak, and William Lind, almost certainly is illusory.<sup>18</sup> NATO forces lack the territorial depth for maneuver, they lack the integrity and cohesion of command needed, and, as a general rule, they lack the necessary skills.

Unexciting though it is to record this verdict, NATO has a defense concept in flexible response which can be rescued from dangerous obsolescence by the appropriate modernization of forces at all levels. It is militarily unsound and politically not viable for the alliance to pursue seriously the prospect of changing radically the structure of its deterrence posture. NATO can, and should, redeploy and reequip its forces so as to offer Soviet planners a tougher defense crust through which they would have to gnaw. But, it is chimerical to aspire to achieve a successful all-conventional defense of Western Europe. Soviet mobilization potential for land combat is such that they will always be able to win a conventional war in Europe, if not in days or weeks, then in months or years.<sup>19</sup> The Soviet empire may betray internal fissures under the pressure

18. A useful review of the maneuver, or mobile defense, school of thinking is John J. Mearsheimer, "Maneuver, Mobile Defense, and the NATO Central Front," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Winter 1981-82), pp. 104-122. However, *en passant*, the critics of forward defense do offer many telling criticisms of current NATO military practices.

19. Assessment of the military balance in Europe has become a minor industry. Particularly useful are James Blaker and Andrew Hamilton, "Assessing Military Balances: The NATO Example," in John F. Reichart and Steven R. Stern, eds., *American Defense Policy*, fifth edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 333-350; and Robert Lucas Fischer, *Defending the Central Front: The Balance of Forces*, Adelphi Paper No. 127 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Autumn 1976). For a recent "bean count," see NATO, *NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Force Comparisons*, 1982.

of a long campaign, but NATO cannot assume that these fissures would have a decisive effect upon Soviet ability or willingness to prolong the struggle.<sup>20</sup>

Conflict in Europe must always be conducted in the shadow of nuclear weapons, no matter what NATO's declaratory policy may be. As Bernard Brodie and Thomas Schelling argued in the early and mid-1960s,<sup>21</sup> in fashionable opposition to the conventional deemphasis orthodoxy of that time, the Soviet Union cannot possibly believe that it would be permitted to crash from the inter-German boundary through to the Channel Coast, against a very heavily nuclear-armed enemy, without triggering nuclear employment by NATO (or the U.S., or France, or Great Britain, acting independently). Such a prospect is so unreasonable that almost certainly it is dismissed by Soviet planners. This is not to deny that the Soviet Union may well hope to profit from a delay in the onset of a nuclear phase to hostilities,<sup>22</sup> but that is quite another matter. Brodie suggested that since nuclear threat is ineradicable from the East-West military confrontation in Europe, it would be foolish for NATO to seek to minimize whatever deterrent benefit flows from that fact.

### The Case in Favor

In their recent *Foreign Affairs* article, McGeorge Bundy and his three collaborators specified six arguments which, they claim, support the case for deliberate movement by NATO towards a "no first use" stance. In fairly summary fashion these are discussed below: much of the pertinent argument has been advanced already.

- (1) "The first possible advantage of a policy of no-first-use is in the management of the nuclear deterrent forces that would still be necessary. Once we escape from the need to plan for a first use that is credible, we can escape also from many of the complex arguments that have led to assertions that all kinds of new nuclear capabilities are necessary to create or restore

20. See Steven F. Kime, "Warsaw Pact: Juggernaut or Paper Tiger?" *Air Force Magazine*, Vol. 65, No. 6 (June 1982), pp. 67-69.

21. Bernard Brodie, *Escalation and the Nuclear Option* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); and Thomas C. Schelling, "Nuclears, NATO and the 'New Strategy,'" in Henry Kissinger, ed., *Problems of National Strategy: A Book of Readings* (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 175-177.

22. See Joseph D. Douglass, *Soviet Military Strategy in Europe* (New York: Pergamon, 1982).

a capability for something called 'escalation dominance'—a capability to fight and 'win' a nuclear war at any level."<sup>23</sup>

*Comment:* NATO's nuclear "doctrine" today, to stretch terminology, merely accommodates the possibility, and asserts the legitimacy, of first use of nuclear weapons. That doctrine does not require or even on balance anticipate first use by NATO. Prominent among the many functions of NATO's nuclear posture today is the duty to help dissuade nuclear use by the Soviet Union. Hence, there is nowhere near a direct and absolute doctrinal opposition between "no first use" and flexible response. Given that NATO does place a heavy burden of possible second (and beyond) strike duties upon its nuclear forces, the strategic case for an assured second strike capability should be in no need of the additional ammunition that might be provided by a "no first use" declaration.<sup>24</sup> McGeorge Bundy and his friends would have been closer to the mark had they argued that the absence of an agreed employment doctrine for tactical nuclear forces means an absence of doctrinal guidance—really of agreed and militarily justifiable requirements—for the modernization of NATO's nuclear arsenal. "No first use," far from encouraging serious renewed endeavor to provide enduring survivability for NATO's nuclear forces, would more likely lead to those forces languishing in decreasing official interest.

(2) "A posture of no-first-use should also go far to meet the understandable anxieties that underlie much of the new interest in nuclear disarmament, both in Europe and in our own country."<sup>25</sup>

*Comment:* A "no first use" declaration by NATO likely would have negligible public relations value, because that particular piece of the high ground of nuclear disarmament rhetoric already has been occupied by the Soviet Union. Moreover, contrary to the expectations of Mr. Bundy and others, the political damage that "no first use" potentially could wreak in Western Europe—as a declaration lending itself to the interpretation that it expressed a U.S. determination to decouple—would have to be offset by a very considerable refurbishment of NATO's nuclear arsenal.

23. Bundy *et al.*, "Nuclear Weapons and the Atlantic Alliance," pp. 763-764.

24. A particularly informative discussion of the state of NATO's theater nuclear forces is Robert A. Moore, "Theatre Nuclear Forces: Thinking the Unthinkable" *International Defense Review*, Vol. 14 (1981), pp. 401-408.

25. Bundy *et al.*, "Nuclear Weapons . . .," p. 764.

That, at least, is what should occur. Rather more likely is the eventuality specified in the comment on the first argument above: namely, that the nuclear force posture would languish as it was devalued doctrinally, and that the postural assurances West German and other European audiences would need to sustain their confidence in the alliance to offset the clear negative implications of "no first use" would not be forthcoming. Finally, Mr. Bundy and other sophisticates may understand that a "no first use" declaration could not be effected until NATO's non-nuclear defenses had been rendered far more robust than they are today, but that opinion at home and abroad to which reference was made has shown no enthusiasm for a notable measure of conventional rearmament. In the appropriate words of the title of a recent article in *The Economist*, "Do you sincerely want to be non-nuclear?"<sup>26</sup> Adequate sincerity, by *The Economist's* calculations, would cost NATO countries a further 1 percent real increase per annum in defense expenditure over and above the 3 percent agreed to in 1978 (and widely honored in the breach thereafter). Much of the more strident antinuclear sentiment in NATO-Europe is not only antinuclear, it is generically antidefense. It is not sensible to adopt a militarily foolish, and really operationally meaningless, declaratory policy such as "no first use" in expectation of appeasing a body of opinion that is either ignorant of, or indifferent to, considerations of military balance.

(3) "An effective policy of no-first-use will also reduce the risk of conventional aggression in Europe."<sup>27</sup>

*Comment:* Given that the authors sensibly acknowledge that "no one on either side could guarantee beyond all possible doubt that if conventional warfare broke out on a large scale there would in fact be no use of nuclear weapons,"<sup>28</sup> it is difficult to understand what meaning should be ascribed to the important term "effective." NATO-Europeans may appear to be more resolute in their determination to resist aggression were nuclear use truly impossible. However, strategy and tactics serve national interests, not such an abstract "rule of the road" as "no first use" of nuclear weapons. No matter what NATO's public stance on nuclear use might be, NATO-Europe would fear nuclear employment. It must be admitted that Soviet leaders and planners may confidently

26. July 31, 1982, pp. 30-32.

27. Bundy *et al.*, "Nuclear Weapons . . .," p. 765.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 766.



be expected to save us from our own folly—a NATO declaratory stance of “no first use” would influence Soviet intentions *vis à vis* nuclear use not at all. The Soviet Union knows that states behave as they believe best suits their interests at the time—regardless of peacetime declarations. In 1939 did anybody recall the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, which had outlawed war? This third argument is wrong on all counts. NATO is most unlikely to augment its conventional forces notably, either prior to or succeeding a declaration of “no first use.” NATO governments, like the Soviet government, would view such a declaration with total cynicism. The Soviet Union would not have to overcome much larger or more capable NATO conventional forces as a consequence of a “no first use” declaration. No NATO-European government capable of rational policy-making would choose to exchange the admittedly fragile and tenuous credibility of the flexible response concept—with which at least all parties, East and West, are long familiar (no small matter in the field of international stability)—for the vacuousness of a “no first use” declaration. First use of nuclear weapons may be incredible to many Western critics of NATO doctrine, but we do not know how Soviet leaders would assay that credibility were they approaching a decision to fight or not to fight in Europe. Since such a NATO declaration would have to weigh in the scales, if it did at all, on the side of lower risks and a greater freedom for Soviet military initiatives, it must be either neutral or of negative value for the stability of deterrence.

### Public Relations

- (4) “There is strong reason to believe that no-first-use can also help in our relations with the Soviet Union.”<sup>29</sup>

*Comment:* Signing a mildly updated SALT II and permitting the sale of American made or licensed compressors for the Siberian gas pipeline also would “help in our relations with the Soviet Union.” Even if they find it impolitic to say so in public, very often, NATO politicians know that the alliance must retain the contingent operational intention to use nuclear weapons first, for reason of the fundamental geopolitical asymmetries that divide the potentially hostile parties. NATO can resist a non-nuclear assault more or less effectively, with the trading of more or less space for time, but—notwithstanding Western mobilization potential—there is no way in which NATO could defeat, or even impose an indefinite

29. *Ibid.*, p. 766.

stalemate upon, the Soviet Union in a conventional war in Europe. "No first use" thinking encourages the public to neglect the facts of geopolitics. It is very difficult to understand why a NATO declaration of "no first use," which logically should be preceded by a large measure of conventional rearmament and a degree of strengthening of nuclear forces (for possible second use), should "help in our relations with the Soviet Union."

Mr. Bundy and his colleagues claim that "(t)he existence of such a clearly declared common pledge would increase the cost and risk of any sudden use of nuclear weapons by either side and correspondingly reduce the political force of spoken or unspoken threats of such use."<sup>30</sup> This reasoning might be excused, perhaps even found to be admirable, in an undergraduate student, but it is sobering to find it advanced by four very experienced former officials. What the authors are saying is that a Soviet leadership would (not should, or might) deem the cost and risk (of what?) of first nuclear use, intended either to avert defeat or promote the prospect of military victory, increased by the very fact of the bilateral pledge. Given the stakes of such a conflict, and the prior fact of massive cross-border aggression, can these authors seriously suggest that the fact of a declaration of intent would have any operational significance whatsoever? Whether Soviet arms were successful or were defeated, the breaking of a "no first use" pledge would be a matter of supreme indifference in Moscow.

(5) "A posture and policy of no-first-use could help to open the path toward serious reduction of nuclear armaments on both sides."<sup>31</sup>

*Comment:* There are several reasons why both sides, one day, might wish to reduce nuclear armaments in, and bearing upon, Europe. However, declarations—and even genuinely operational policies—of "no first use" are not among those reasons. A robust second-use policy by NATO requires an impressive scale and diversity of theater-nuclear assets. Moreover, as noted already, the political concomitant of a "no first use" pledge by NATO should be a strengthening of the nuclear arsenal, including those elements of the arsenal which are most visible and least survivable. Notwithstanding the contemporary difficulties attending the planned deployment of GLCM and *Pershing II* in Western Europe, traditionally it has been the case that NATO-Europeans

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 766–767.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 767.

like to be able to “kick the tires” of U.S. nuclear weapon delivery systems in order to reassure themselves that the U.S. nuclear guarantee is a reality. Promises in the form of submarines, for example, can sail away all too easily.

(6) “Finally and in sum, we think a policy of no-first-use, especially if shared with the Soviet Union, would bring new hope to everyone in every country whose life is shadowed by the hideous possibility of a third great twentieth-century conflict in Europe—conventional or nuclear. It seems timely and even urgent to begin the careful study of a policy that could help to sweep this threat clear off the board of international affairs.”<sup>32</sup>

*Comment:* Unfortunately, a “no first use” declaration would have authority only until a superpower judged it to be strongly in its interest to break it. “No first use,” as a policy idea, helps not “to sweep this threat clean off the board of international affairs,” but rather to foster the illusion that there is some escape from the central dilemma of nuclear deterrence—that dilemma being that the ultimate guarantee of Western security is the threat of a nuclear employment that Western governments are motivated extremely highly never to exercise. As Theodore Draper has remarked: “The only cure-all for nuclear war is the complete and absolute abolition of nuclear weapons everywhere and for all time.”<sup>33</sup>

“No first use” will not blind the hard-nosed men in the Kremlin to the realities of power politics, but such a pledge has no little capacity to encourage mischievous illusions in Western democracies. Great powers will use nuclear weapons if the anticipated net advantage is judged to be sufficiently great. Well designed, complementary NATO forces, conventional and nuclear, backstopped by invulnerable U.S. strategic forces that can threaten convincingly the more important coercive instruments of the Soviet state, should offer strong encouragement for Soviet leaders never to judge that the first use of nuclear weapons would be in their interest. Above all else, to point to a familiar European theme, NATO’s overriding duty to its citizens is not to prevent nuclear war, it is to prevent war *per se* in Europe. If major conflict ever is joined in Europe, the fine edifice of Western strategic theory, with its distinctions between levels of conflict and its focus

32. *Ibid.*, p. 767.

33. “How Not to Think About Nuclear War,” *The New York Times Review of Books*, July 15, 1982, p. 42.

upon risk manipulation and escalation control and the like, very probably will fall early victim to the dynamic and inherent logic of military events.

### The Fallacy of the Conventional Solution

Nuclear weapons are an inconvenience for the planner of land, tactical air, and sea forces. Given the total absence of historical data on bilateral nuclear use, the nuclear factor tends to loom almost as a wild card, threatening to upset the analysis of the kinds of combat engagement that the planner thinks he understands. Of course, nuclear weapons are by no means the only wild card that may upset calculations—one also has to consider such variables as weather, quality of leadership, morale and steadiness of soldiers, and the stability of the home front. In addition, it can be easy to forget that the high-technology armies of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, in their non-nuclear aspects, are near totally untested instruments. Their technology has not been field-tested realistically over terrain or in the weather conditions prevalent in Central and Western Europe, and very few of their soldiers have heard shots fired in anger. Indeed, so many are the factors that should be considered in any attempt to answer the deceptively simple question, “How well would NATO fare in the event of a Pact invasion?,” that no authoritative answer is possible.

Proponents of a nuclear deemphasis for NATO tend to argue that Soviet military strength is exaggerated, and they then proceed to offer their preferred prescription that will enable NATO to hold the foe without having recourse to nuclear weapons. Not only is the Soviet Union, typically, judged conveniently to be deterred from initiating nuclear employment, but the Soviet threat is fashioned, somewhat roughly, in a form that renders it susceptible to the preferred attributes of NATO's non-nuclear defenses.

The absence of persuasive looking historical data directly applicable to the conflict in question,<sup>34</sup> the horrific novelty of the nuclear shadow over the prospective battlefield, and the awesome complexity of the subject mean that there are no true experts on

34. John Keegan is probably correct, and he is in a company of growing size, in maintaining that the closest historical parallel available to the task faced by NATO on the Central Front is the evidence of the performance of Army Group B of the *Wehrmacht* in its endeavors to contain the Normandy beachhead in June, July, and August 1944. See John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy* (New York: Viking, 1982), particularly the Epilogue.

future military conflict in Europe. That fact admitted, policy-makers, unlike scholars and editorial writers, are required to make guesses—their ignorance notwithstanding. It is the view of this author that although NATO's military preparations are deficient in many details, the basic architecture of policy is sound. Forward defense to contest nearly every foot of West German territory is a condition for West German loyalty to the alliance. But, forward defense happens also to offer the best prospect for deterrence and denial, notwithstanding the denunciations offered by recent advocates of strategic maneuver.

NATO does not have a first strike strategy for nuclear employment, but it does insist prudently upon the necessity for retaining the option of having first resort to nuclear weapons in case of dire need. This author wishes that NATO as a whole had the political will and courage to declare a willingness to have relatively early resort to nuclear use for the purpose of fatally disrupting a Pact attack. He suspects that escalation to central strategic employment is virtually guaranteed, because NATO would use nuclear weapons in the theater too late and too lightly for them to have a truly decisive shock effect upon an enemy that, by that time, would likely be very deep into West Germany. Nonetheless, to cite the problems in the Western defenses at all levels suggests, to this author, the need for the alliance to perform better within the political framework of the compromise strategy of flexible response.

Improvements in the tactics and weapons of conventional warfare are greatly to be desired. But, if NATO permits itself to be out thought with respect to planning for conventional combat in a "nuclear scared" context, to planning for the transition from non-nuclear (and chemical) to nuclear combat, and to planning for the conduct simultaneously of conventional and nuclear combat, then it invites the prospect of being outfought. NATO politicians and planners should never forget that a Soviet Union sufficiently desperate or bold as to launch a massive invasion of Western Europe, prudently has to be assumed to be a Soviet Union that already has crossed the Rubicon with respect to its willingness to use nuclear weapons if need be.

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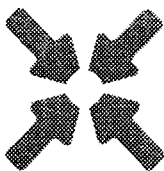
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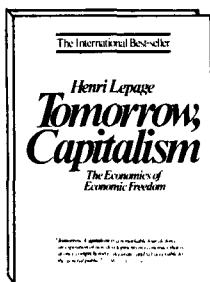
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# Why People Riot

LOUIS BOLCE

On the sweltering evening of August 11, 1965, a routine drunken-driving arrest, in the Watts section of Los Angeles, touched off an outburst of lawlessness that radically changed the nature of racial violence in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The conflagration raged for six days, resulting in thirty-four deaths, thousands of personal injuries, and damages estimated at \$40 million. An estimated 31,000 blacks participated in the disorder, cheered on by another 64,000 to 72,000 "close spectators." About 4,000 rioters were arrested.<sup>2</sup> For the next five years, rampages of looting and arson would explode across inner-city streets like fireballs in the night, depositing in the ashes and rubble losses of life and property unequalled since the Civil War. And every spring hence, with numbing familiarity, speculation about the threat of more "long-hot summers" would become a favorite pastime of pundits, politicians, and civil rights leaders.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the mood of black America had changed radically. Why?

That the riots erupted on the heels of the most far-reaching civil-rights legislation enacted in the United States struck most white Americans as surprising, if not outright shocking. That most disorders did not occur in the South, the bastion of resistance, but instead erupted in states and cities generally known for their liberalism and progressive views on race, added to the sense of confusion. The mass public, at a loss for explanation, generally expressed anger and bewilderment at the escalation of black violence; these were not the feelings expressed in the articles and books by social scientists.

"Ghetto rioting," write social scientists Joe Feagin and Harlan

1. A technical version of this article can be found in "Uncertainty and the Black Urban Riots," paper presented at the Annual CUNY Political Science Conference, December 11, 1981.

2. David O. Sears and John B. McConahay, *The Politics of Violence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), pp. 9-13.

3. Some recent examples of riot speculation are found in Melinda Beck et al., "A Long Jobless Summer," *Newsweek*, May 31, 1982, pp. 28-29; Iver Peterson, "Young Seen Facing Dim Prospect on Summer Jobs," *New York Times*, June 5, 1982, p. 9; and Nicholas Pileggi, "A Long Smoldery Summer?" *New Yorker*, June 21, 1982, pp. 28-31.