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**MBFR ASSAILED:
A CRITICAL VIEW OF THE PROPOSED
NEGOTIATION ON MUTUAL AND BALANCED
FORCE REDUCTIONS IN EUROPE**

by Ian Smart

Number 3

MBFR ASSAILED:
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FORCE REDUCTIONS IN EUROPE

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
RE: THE RESULTS OF THE MEASUREMENTS OF THE
SPEED OF LIGHT IN VACUUM
DURING THE YEAR 1972

Introduction

Pressure by NATO governments for negotiations which might lead to mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) in Europe has, since 1968, constituted what has probably been their major public response to previous and subsequent pressure by the Soviet Union and its European allies for a conference on security and co-operation in Europe (CSCE). In the minds of many in Western Europe and North America, the two proposals have become intertwined. Views differ on the exact form which their relationship should take. Essentially, however, an MBFR negotiation has been represented within NATO as complementary to the proposed CSCE: adding substance to it, giving it practical significance or merely rendering it less unpalatable. It is the purpose of this paper to suggest that, in any of its detailed forms, that view is an erroneous one. Far from being automatically complementary to, or supportive of, an effort to improve European security, the attempt to negotiate MBFR may impede and distort it, may create unnecessary and damaging tension within the Western alliance, and may indirectly serve Soviet interests in Eastern Europe.

The ultimate purpose of MBFR is said to be "to achieve a more stable East-West military balance in Europe at lower force levels."* Even a cursory examination, however, reveals

*Arms Control Report (11th Annual Report to the Congress of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1972), p. 25.

that at least four other motives have influenced those governments proposing an MBFR negotiation:

- (1) the need to find a diplomatic counter to Warsaw Pact pressure for a CSCE, which is seen as an attempt both to obtain the diplomatic limelight and to drive wedges into the Western alliance;
- (2) the associated desire to put the Soviet Government on the diplomatic defensive by focusing attention upon the size of Soviet conventional forces in Eastern Europe (including especially Czechoslovakia) and the extent to which they are allegedly required to enforce Soviet will within the Warsaw Pact;
- (3) the desire to contain and, if possible, redress the alleged imbalance of conventional military strength in Europe, which has been said to favour the Warsaw Pact and which, it is feared, may do so still more if pressures for the further reduction of NATO defence budgets become irresistible;
- (4) the need to oppose, or at least control, pressure for the unilateral reduction of forces by members of the Western alliance with troops in Europe, with particular reference to pressure for the further withdrawal of American troops from the European area.

At different times and in different minds, these motives have possessed different degrees of relative importance. Those which

refer principally to the East-West diplomatic context ((1) and (2) above) have had a significant effect upon the timing and phrasing of public initiatives by NATO. Those which relate rather to some version or other of the military "balance" in Europe ((3) and (4) above) have carried particular weight in the minds of individual West European governments, and especially of the government in Bonn. In particular, the desire to defend themselves, by this and other means, against the threat of large-scale U.S. troop withdrawals and the potential impact of the Mansfield Resolution has seemed to provide a number of West European governments with their primary interest in the MBFR proposal. It would not be too much to say that, to some of them, MBFR is attractive not as an adjunct to any process of European security negotiation but as the only apparent antidote to unilateral force reductions by the United States.

This confusion of motives, with the associated intermingling of public policies and private hopes, has made it possible, within NATO, to represent the negotiation of MBFR as a process which can offer almost all things to almost all men. To the diplomatists, it offers an area for bargaining in which the West has seized, and can presumably hold, the initiative. To the arms controllers, it offers a means of restoring substance to the discussion of arms limitation in Europe, in a manner which seems more realistic than many of the earlier proposals

for demilitarization, denuclearization or the inhibition of surprise attack. To the military experts, it offers a way of curbing the freedom of the Soviet Union to move additional components of its very large conventional forces into Central Europe. To the politicians, it offers an ostensibly intelligible goal whose enunciation carries all the desirable overtones of "peace," "security" and "economy." To West Europeans in general, it offers a chance to feel that they are somehow directly involved in the process of strategic bargaining between East and West, which might otherwise, in SALT and elsewhere, become the implicit prerogative of the super-powers alone.

Above all, to President Nixon, MBFR offers an opportunity to justify opposition to Congressional pressure for the precipitable reduction of U.S. troop levels in Europe. By contending that the West European members of NATO were actually increasing their own defence efforts and that, in those circumstances, it would be unreasonable to pre-empt an MBFR negotiation by reducing U.S. forces unilaterally, the President was able to achieve sufficient domestic political support for his pledge to NATO in December 1970 that "given a similar approach by our allies, the United States would maintain and improve its forces in Europe and not reduce them without reciprocal action by our adversaries."*

*U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970's: Building for Peace (A Report to the Congress by Richard Nixon, President of the United States, February 25, 1971), p. 36.

In 1970 and again in 1971, pointing to the NATO initiatives on MBFR clearly strengthened the President's hand in dealing with Congressional attempts, focused upon the Mansfield Resolution, to impose further troop withdrawals from Europe. To many West European leaders, it has seemed unnecessary to look beyond that for a justification of the MBFR proposal itself.

It has to be recorded that this enthusiasm for MBFR negotiations has not been shared by East European governments and has been something less than unanimous even amongst those European countries which lie outside the Warsaw Pact. Few of the non-aligned European states have shown any great interest in MBFR, largely because they have felt themselves to be excluded in advance from negotiations so clearly, if implicitly, of an "inter-bloc" character. Some European states have stepped beyond apathy in the direction of opposition. Yugoslav officials, for example, have reportedly expressed private fears about the possibility that all or most U.S. forces might eventually be withdrawn from Europe as part of an agreement which left Soviet strength still poised perilously close to their own land and sea frontiers.

More publicly, French ministers, echoing the now traditional French objections to "inter-bloc" procedures, have recorded an opposition to MBFR negotiations which is no less definitive for being couched in sometimes Delphic terms. Both the Foreign

Minister, M. Schumann, and the Defence Minister, M. Debré, have referred to the possibility that an MBFR agreement, applied primarily, if not exclusively, to the area of the two Germanies, would establish an undesirable "zone of difference" within Europe--by which they seem to mean that the segregation of German and neighbouring territory for arms control purposes could only complicate intra-European politics, impede genuine European integration and hinder full East-West détente. In private, individuals close to the French Government have been heard to suggest that, by forcing the inhabitants of such a "zone of difference" together, as common proprietors of a unique situation, an MBFR agreement might actually promote--and be designed to promote--the ultimate reunification of Germany. In any case, for whatever reasons, the French Government has moved into a position in diametrical contrast to that of its NATO allies, in which it actively welcomes the idea of a CSCE while as actively questioning the wisdom and utility of an effort to negotiate MBFR.

The presentation of objections such as those voiced in Paris has the great merit that it demands a reasoned defence of MBFR proposals, which seem otherwise to have been in danger of mute acceptance as a self-evident good, akin to "peace" or "freedom." Such a defence has hardly yet been forthcoming in any terms higher than those of platitude. Eventually, however, it must

presumably be provided, if only because of the need to convince a recalcitrant minority in Paris, in Belgrade and in a few other European capitals. When that happens, it will be necessary for the proponents of MBFR to argue their case, publicly and privately, under at least three major headings:

- (a) the effect of MBFR upon political-military relations within the Western alliance;
- (b) the effect of MBFR upon political-military relations between East and West in Europe;
- (c) the effect of MBFR upon the broader process of security reinforcement within the European environment as a whole.

Those are the main issues which will therefore be addressed in the remainder of this paper. They will not, however, be addressed with reference to any idea of MBFR as a single, indivisible process. It is, or should be, a commonplace of diplomacy that the effects of any proposal for the inter-state negotiation of an international agreement fall to be considered in at least three separate categories: the impact of the proposal, the impact of the process of negotiation (including the impact of any inter-governmental preparation for negotiation) and the impact of any eventual agreement. In the case of MBFR, there seems to have been a deplorable tendency, at least in public statements, to telescope and confuse these three fundamentally distinct elements and to assume, for example, that, because the initial

NATO proposal of an MBFR negotiation has allegedly yielded useful dividends, those dividends can only be increased as negotiations begin and proceed--or that, because an agreement on MBFR offers apparent advantages, the pursuit of such an agreement through any available process of negotiation represents an automatically advantageous course.

It might be wise for potential negotiators in the West to reflect upon the fact that Soviet diplomatic method is one of the few which, in recent years, has shown a sensitive awareness of the basic differences between proposal, negotiation and agreement and of the possible dangers associated with treating those three activities as necessarily interdependent. The Soviet Union has, on occasion, been able to draw international dividends from public proposals which might have been dissipated if those proposals had even led to negotiations, just as it has been able to gain advantage from negotiations which have never led--and may never have been intended to lead--to agreement. Few Western countries have shown a parallel sophistication.

The main focus in this paper will, in fact, be on the middle element in the triad mentioned above: the actual process of MBFR negotiation and its potential effects. Inevitably, comments will be made on initial proposals, which are past history, and on possible agreements, which are long-range speculation. It should be clear, however, that judgements concerning any one of

the three elements or stages--proposal, negotiation and agreement--are not meant to be extrapolated to cover any other element unless that intention is made explicit.

What should also be made clear are certain general assumptions concerning the context within which any discussion of MBFR must proceed. The defence of these lies outside the scope of this essay; they can therefore be stated briefly by asserting:

- (a) that the relaxation of East-West tension and the associated reinforcement of the security of the European environment as a whole are desirable objectives which it is reasonable and possible to pursue;
- (b) that, in the context of East-West relaxation and of security reinforcement, it will be possible to reduce substantially the organized potential for military action now existing in Europe without thereby threatening the legitimate interests of any European or non-European state.

MBFR Negotiations and the Western Alliance

For 23 years, NATO governments have failed, in one way or another, to agree upon the scale and form of the military forces to be deployed in defence of Western Europe. On the one hand, disagreement about what is desirable has been chronic. Arguments

concerning the optimum balance between nuclear and conventional strength have continued, and still continue, without abatement, as do parallel arguments about the design and deployment of both nuclear and conventional forces. On the other hand, even those aspects of NATO's military posture on which agreement in principle has been forged have shown painfully little inclination to conform to such agreements in practice. The constant unwillingness or inability of most NATO governments to provide the forces called for in agreed SHAPE plans has become notorious. With few and partial exceptions, governments have been unwilling to commit to the integrated defence structure of the alliance forces whose quality and quantity have matched the optimum requirements stated by NATO commanders and endorsed by NATO ministers. In general, the forces deployed have only reached agreed standards, in numbers, equipment, training and location, when those standards have been relaxed, by political decisions, in order to conform to the prevailing reality.

These facts should not be taken to prove ineptitude on the part of NATO governments. An extraordinary degree of energy and talent has been devoted to the negotiation of NATO force plans. Understandably, however, energy and talent have never entirely concealed the fundamental differences of attitude and judgement which have always existed, and will always exist, within the alliance. This is not the place to explore, or even enunciate,

all those differences in detail. It is important, however, to indicate how deeply they run.

In the first place, there are differences of underlying attitude between the United States and its European allies--and to a lesser extent between West European governments--concerning the proper role of nuclear weapons in West European defence and its relation to the role of conventional forces. In the crudest possible terms, this boils down to the difference between the general assumption of West Europeans that nuclear weapons are exclusively destined to deter the initiation of war and the characteristically American view that, at least in Europe, appropriate nuclear weapons can provide a reasonable and effective instrument with which to fight a war. Despite the intellectual igenuity now embalmed in the formal NATO doctrine of flexible response, that basic ambivalence has never been overcome.

In the second place, there are the closely associated differences concerning the extent to which a Soviet attack on Western Europe must be seen as an attack upon a value so central to American security itself as to be effectively covered by the U.S. strategic deterrent. Again, this is largely, but not exclusively, a transatlantic issue. It is not, however, only a conceptual issue; the extent to which Western Europe is or is not felt to fall within the coverage of the U.S. strategic

deterrent has an obvious impact upon the extent to which Western Europe feels impelled to construct and maintain both conventional and nuclear forces adequate to its own defence. For its part, the United States has always been trapped in a dilemma. It has had no desire, at least in the past, to encourage the proliferation or expansion of West European nuclear forces, and has been at pains, therefore, to demonstrate their redundancy by arguing that its own strategic deterrent is fully effective in a European context. At the same time, it has been most anxious to encourage the reinforcement of West European conventional strength, for which reason it has had to argue that the conventional forces of its allies should be strong enough to withstand an all-out Soviet attack for at least a limited period--a requirement which assumes that the U.S. strategic deterrent may fail either to prevent such an attack or to retaliate if it occurs. It goes without saying that any substantial withdrawal of American troops from Europe may be widely interpreted in West European capitals as diminishing the credibility of the U.S. nuclear guarantee--to an even greater extent than it is seen to reduce NATO's conventional capability--and that, in those circumstances, it must become increasingly difficult to gloss over this particular inconsistency.

That points, in turn, to a third underlying difference of view within NATO: the difference which relates to the actual utility of U.S. conventional forces in Europe. These units have

traditionally combined the roles of hostage and bastion. The combination has never been a comfortable one. Moreover, it contains ambiguities which have yet to be resolved and which may very well become more acute in the context of force reductions. To the extent that U.S. forces are to be considered as a bastion--as an instrument for the conventional defence of West European territory--their deployment is, to use a cautious term, anomalous. NATO planning has always assumed that any major Warsaw Pact attack would have its main axis of advance across the North German plain towards the Rhine. The U.S. Seventh Army, without exception, is deployed far to the south of that line, and even the most optimistic assessment of its potential mobility gives it little chance of moving its major units far enough or fast enough to the north to meet an attack launched without substantial warning. In such circumstances, it is hard to regard it as the first bastion of West European territorial integrity. Understandably, therefore, heavy emphasis has been laid upon its hostage role: both in particular terms, as a national value which adds critical credibility to the American commitment to retaliate with nuclear weapons if Western Europe is attacked, and more generally, as an inescapable reason for the United States to remain psychologically involved in the defence of Western Europe.

Obviously, there is neither a precise level of strength below which U.S. forces become objectively incapable of playing

a hostage role in Europe nor a direct, proportional relationship between their strength and U.S. deterrent credibility; U.S. troop strength in Europe has already fallen gradually to some 25 per cent below its high point of over 400,000 without any apparently commensurate decline in its perceived hostage utility. At the same time, it is equally obvious that a comparably large but more rapid reduction in the U.S. force level would probably be taken as a significant signal of American intentions with regard to the defence of Western Europe and the deterrence of Soviet attack. The pace and direction of such a change would arguably have as much impact, from this point of view, as its scale. More importantly, the political context within which such a change occurred would colour the interpretation placed upon it. At a time such as the present, when the external military commitments of the United States are generally under pressure and when its political and, especially, economic relations with Western Europe are more than usually tense, West Europeans would inevitably be particularly sensitive to even ambiguous evidence of a weakening American guarantee.

It is for this reason that one of the more troublesome issues within any MBFR negotiation is likely to be the distinction between "stationed" and "indigenous" forces. On the one hand, the removal of extraneous, "stationed" forces from any zone of limitation is one of the more obvious approaches to an overall

reduction of strength. On the other hand, removing "stationed" American forces from the zone is tantamount to the removal of a double value: hostages as well as warriors. Already, the West European fear of that contingency is reflected in part in the nervous condemnation of any tendency towards a bilateral, Soviet-American negotiation over MBFR, the outcome of which would presumably bear heavily upon "stationed" forces alone.

Finally, there are the differences which have consistently existed within NATO--and as much between its European members as between them and the United States--concerning those strategic and tactical concepts which determine the design and deployment of conventional forces within Europe. The United States, Britain and West Germany, for example, have adopted and implemented a strategy of forward defence, expressly intended to hold as much of West German territory as possible in the face of any attack, while France, for example, has shown little inclination to follow suit, apparently preferring to regard some part of German territory as the necessary glacis area on which a battle for France itself might be fought. The political implications of such divergences aside, they have a particular effect upon one issue of central importance to systematic force reductions: the relative value of different military formations and weapons. The relative values attached to tanks, tactical aircraft or particular missiles, for example, may depend heavily upon the

military doctrine with which they are associated. Without agreement on doctrine between members of the Western alliance, agreement on such bargaining values for use within an MBFR negotiation will inevitably be harder to obtain.

In terms of relationships at this intra-alliance level, neither the MBFR proposal nor any step towards its implementation has yet had a major impact upon such doctrinal disputes as those outlined above. Indeed, the possible impact of MBFR negotiations within the Western alliance has, in general, been overshadowed by the perceived impact of the MBFR proposal upon just one apparently urgent, practical issue of intra-alliance relations which, although it touches upon almost every major doctrinal problem, has been largely considered in isolation: the issue of U.S. troop levels in Europe. In that area, the effect of the MBFR proposal has so far been broadly as intended: to give President Nixon one of the weapons he needed for his joust with Senator Mansfield. Equipped also with the other--the European Defence Improvement Programme (EDIP)--he has held off his Congressional assailants in two successive years.

There is an understandable scepticism about any President's ability to continue in this way for much longer. Most bargaining assets diminish in value over time, especially when they are both intangible and promissory, and it would be as rash to suppose that mere reference to the MBFR proposal will remain

indefinitely potent in the Congress as it would to assume that West European governments (which, in this connection, means the governments in Bonn and London) will indefinitely be able and willing to add fresh increments to their annual defence budgets. Those two factors were apparently effective on Capitol Hill in 1970. In 1971, their effect already seemed to be waning, and the Administration might have faced a much harder struggle had it not received such timely and influential assistance as that provided by the Soviet Government, in the form of Mr. Brezhnev's brusque but unambiguous acceptance of the MBFR idea in his report to the 24th Party Congress and in his subsequent speech at Tbilisi. The combination of these disparate factors may again prove powerful enough to tip the Washington balance in 1972, especially if overt progress in SALT regenerates faith in the potential for East-West arms control. By 1973, however, it seems less likely that President Nixon or his successor will find the MBFR proposal--in isolation from any process of negotiation--of much remaining use in countering Congressional pressure for troop cuts in Europe; it will have served its purpose well, but serving that purpose for longer will depend upon progress with MBFR negotiations themselves.

A superficial judgement might suggest that what is therefore required in order to continue this type of support for the U.S. military presence in Europe is to ensure that, by 1973, there is

at least the imminent prospect of a substantial East-West negotiation on MBFR. If that prospect is evident--or, a fortiori, if negotiations have begun--the U.S. Administration will be able to assert, with still greater force, the danger of pre-empting negotiating positions by cutting troop strength unilaterally. Moreover, for as long as negotiations continue, the President, whoever he is, will be able to maintain his opposition to any reduction which has not been matched by the Soviet Union.

Unfortunately, that judgement ignores not only the general difficulty of extrapolating from the impact of a negotiating proposal to the impact of a negotiation itself but also the particular fact that, although it has been possible to by-pass the major intra-alliance differences mentioned above in presenting the MBFR proposal, it will be impossible to avoid them when it comes to actual negotiations on MBFR. Even if these differences can be kept out of an East-West negotiating forum (which, given the attitude of countries such as France, is unlikely), they can not be excluded from the negotiation between NATO governments which must precede and run in parallel with any East-West talks. Indeed, they will inevitably shape the agenda for such an intra-alliance negotiation. Just as SALT has shown that agreement between the super-powers demands prior agreement on both principles and details within each of their national bureaucracies, so an MBFR negotiation will have its site within

and between allied capitals as much as on any neutral ground between East and West.

It cannot be over-emphasized that, in the end, the ability of NATO governments to negotiate a substantial MBFR agreement with the Soviet Government and its allies--as opposed to indulging in the rhetoric of MBFR proposals--will depend upon their ability to agree amongst themselves not only about technical military details but also about such doctrinal issues as the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe, the future status of the U.S. nuclear guarantee, the development of West European nuclear forces, the proper balance between U.S. and European conventional forces and the correct choice of strategic and tactical concepts for the European theatre.

The implicit optimism of many Western MBFR proponents on this score is astonishing, given that NATO leaders have reportedly failed to reach such agreement in the past, when time was less pressing and discussion more private. The fact of an East-West MBFR negotiation might, of course, spur them to extraordinary efforts and to unprecedented success. But there is little evidence from NATO's history to prove that it will, particularly as the Soviet Union can hardly be expected to turn its back on the opportunity to exploit differences within the Western alliance once negotiations are under way--differences which are likely to be enhanced in negotiating circumstances which, unlike current

NATO deliberations on MBFR, demand the direct involvement of France. The Soviet Government may have accepted the idea of an MBFR negotiation, but its refusal to entertain Sig. Brosio in Moscow as the nominated representative of the idea's sponsors is an indication--if one were needed--that acceptance in principle does not mean the Soviet Union will be altruistically inclined to help NATO governments out of their own tactical difficulties, any more than they will be inclined to help Moscow in its parallel dealings with East European governments.

In these circumstances, the weakness of the superficial, optimistic view is self-evident. Although NATO governments, in part by acting without France, have presented an ostensibly united front in proposing MBFR, the Soviet Union, in addition to its obvious ability to influence the pace of further developments, will have ample opportunity in an active MBFR negotiation to exploit the deep underlying differences within the Western alliance, especially when the negotiation touches, as it must, upon those so-called "tactical" nuclear delivery systems which have been excluded from SALT and upon those "stationed" conventional forces whose dual role, at least on the Western side, has already been noted. As that happens, not only will NATO governments face the continuing embarrassment of having their internal disputes aired in public but also the U.S. Administration will face the prospect of placing its influence with the U.S.

Congress partially at the mercy of the Soviet Union, as well as of its own allies.

If the negotiations, in pace or direction, seem to reveal serious conflicts between the United States and the West European nations over defence policy--as well they may--and if the Soviet Union chooses to highlight these, either by playing upon them or by appearing to support the U.S. side of the argument, an American President could rapidly encounter great difficulty in pressing the Congress to delay further troop withdrawals from Europe in the interest of MBFR. At the extreme, the President might find himself seeming to resist an available agreement with the Soviet Union for the mutual withdrawal of U.S. and Soviet troops from Central Europe simply because of West European objections. The prospect for U.S.-West European political-military relations in circumstances such as those does not seem any more encouraging than the prospect for the indefinite maintenance of American troop strength at a level acceptable to West European governments.

That prognosis may seem gloomy, but it is not clearly unrealistic. After all, the underlying issues at stake in an MBFR negotiation--few of which have been relevant to the mere proposal so far made--include a number which have already proved seriously divisive within the Western alliance, contributing, for example, to the final withdrawal of French forces from the

integrated NATO structure in 1966. When divisions of this magnitude have emerged from private, relatively leisured discussions, confined to and controlled by close allies, it might well be regarded as naive to suppose that they can be resolved by transposing the discussions into an inter-bloc negotiation with putative adversaries. For some years, NATO governments have been trying, with very limited success, to negotiate an intra-Western "MBFR agreement"--balancing national cuts against each other and trying to hold U.S. withdrawals within tolerable limits. In a sense, the NATO proposal for an East-West MBFR was as much a move in that intra-Western negotiation as in its overt and explicit context of detente. Now, some in the West seem to hope that an East-West negotiation may indirectly yield the fruit which intra-Western discussions have been so reluctant to bear. Unfortunately, it is easier to sympathize with that hope than to find grounds for it.

MBFR Negotiations and East-West Relations in Europe

Again, the emphasis here should be upon the effect of an MBFR negotiation. Persistent NATO reiteration of the MBFR proposal has had its tactical impact in the East-West context, but that impact is necessarily diminishing. Much of its weight was extracted by the Soviet Government's acceptance of the proposal in principle. Some, of course, remained while the

Soviet Union delayed the opening of exploratory talks, but that was the lesser part. With such talks now in prospect, the more important question is what impact the process of MBFR negotiation, as distinct from either previous proposal or subsequent agreement, is likely to have on the East-West relationship in Europe.

Given the number of countries involved and the variety of alternative MBFR possibilities, a detailed, country-by-country analysis of the impact of MBFR in this respect would, at this stage, be both over-speculative and over-ambitious. The central criticism of the role which an MBFR negotiation is likely to play in shaping East-West relations can, however, be stated briefly: that it is peculiarly calculated to check the diversification of European inter-state relationships and to press those relationships back into a bipolar mould, necessarily dominated by relations between the two super-powers, one non-European and the other, at most, quasi-European.

Some might, I suppose, consider that reversion to a more rigid, more predictable bipolarity should be welcomed, and that this is not, in fact, a criticism at all. Be that as it may, the grounds for the judgement itself are not difficult to find. The earlier discussion of the abortive attempts to reach a durable "MBFR agreement" within the Western alliance has revealed the extent to which that issue is dominated by, and focused upon, American military forces, serving as both hostage and bastion.

Intra-Western "MBFR" has turned out to involve a set of problems which revolve around U.S. policies and actions. Clearly, the same is true, mutatis mutandis, within the Warsaw Pact. The critical issue there is Soviet military strength in the eastern part of Central Europe; whether the Warsaw Treaty Organization will accept any particular proposal for force reductions depends, above all, on whether the Soviet Union will regard the impact on its own military deployment as acceptable. Again, moreover, Soviet military forces are unique within the Eastern alliance, as American forces are in the West, by virtue of their relevance to more than one basic purpose. Just as U.S. military units, being hostages as well as warriors, must be evaluated in MBFR by standards separate from those applied to other NATO forces, so Soviet military units demand a standard of valuation unique within the Warsaw Pact: partly because they too may be thought to have a hostage utility, but even more because they must be seen to play a special part in ensuring the maintenance of ultimate Soviet political control within Eastern Europe as well as in defending that area against the West.

For these reasons, an East-West MBFR negotiation, whatever efforts are made to embrace the question of "indigenous" forces, will inevitably find itself giving primacy to the question of the "stationed" forces of the two super-powers--explicitly in terms of the balance between them, but implicitly also in terms

of their roles within their own alliances. Formally speaking, the super-powers will not be allowed by their allies, at least on the Western side, to negotiate bilaterally, simply because those allies have particular reasons for wishing to influence the absolute and relative valuation of super-power military forces. Nevertheless, the East-West negotiation, while multilateral in form, must be largely bilateral in substance. Only if an agreement can be reached on the bilateral U.S.-Soviet balance in Europe will it become relevant to negotiate also on the balance between non-super-power military strengths in that area.

With this in mind, it becomes evident that an East-West MBFR negotiation, far from being a simple process of inter-bloc bargaining, will in fact consist of at least three separate but parallel negotiations: a renewed, multilateral negotiation within the Western alliance (including France) concerning both specific force level questions and the chronic intra-alliance differences over doctrine, a formal, inter-bloc negotiation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and an informal or even indirect--but inevitably more substantial--negotiation between the super-powers themselves.

The gap in that pattern is equally obvious: there is unlikely to be any substantial multilateral negotiation within the Warsaw Pact, at least as far as the disposition of Soviet military forces

in Europe is concerned. That is not to say that there will not be a process of active discussion between Warsaw Pact governments concerning tactics for use in the East-West MBFR forum. But it is to say that the East European members of the Warsaw Pact lack the ability, in the final analysis, to constrain the policies of the Soviet Government either in regard to its own troop deployments in Central Europe or in regard to its bargaining with the United States.

In these circumstances, the tendency of the MBFR negotiating process to force East-West relations in Europe back into a predominantly bipolar mould will bear particularly heavily upon the East European states who, in this context, will tend to be treated by all other parties as nothing more than Soviet puppets. Whatever the superficial merits of that tendency from the NATO point of view--and it has, at least, the merit of crude simplicity--it is not calculated to encourage that development of a more independent diplomatic identity by East European states within the European context to which many West Europeans purport to attach some importance. Diplomatic, economic, technological and cultural negotiations between Eastern and Western components of the European continent have helped to reduce intra-bloc rigidities and to generate greater flexibility and resilience, especially in Eastern Europe; military negotiations, at least in the MBFR context, can only have a reverse effect, emphasizing again the politics of inter-bloc confrontation.

The implications of this for East-West relations as a whole should not be under-estimated. A number of Western politicians and officials have couched their suspicion of the Soviet CSCE proposal in terms of the opportunity which it might provide for Moscow to obtain Western ratification of a status quo which includes its own political dominion over Eastern Europe. It is all the more ironical, and even tragic, that, in these circumstances, Western governments should have been responsible for promoting the idea of a negotiation the only clear characteristic of which is that it will provide a unique opportunity and incentive for the re-assertion and acceptance of Soviet primacy in Eastern Europe. An agreement on MBFR which entailed a substantial reduction of Soviet military strength in that area might, in the long run, have a different effect. But the negotiation of MBFR will not. In striving to avoid a trap which they took the Soviet Union to be laying for them, with the object of reinforcing and legitimizing the Soviet empire, Western governments seem determined to walk backwards into a similar but deeper pit of their own digging.

MBFR Negotiations and the European Security Process

Much of what might be said under this heading is already implied in previous comments, and especially in the immediately preceding discussion of East-West relations. The implications should, at least, however, be made articulate.

The process of improving security as a quality of the pan-European environment is in no sense coterminous with the CSCE proposal or its implementation. A conference on European security and cooperation--or, as is far more likely, a series of conferences and mini-conferences--will constitute only one, unusually formal stage in that process of revising the concept of security within Europe which is already in train. Other formal landmarks have included, so far, the Four-Power Berlin Agreement and the Soviet-West German and Polish-West German treaties. All such formal activity must, however, be seen as set into an informal matrix of changing assumptions and perceptions about the nature of security itself.

Ten years ago, "European security" meant "West European security" in Bonn or London and, presumably, "East European security" in Warsaw or Pankow; today, in any of those cities, it is accepted without hesitation as meaning the security of the European environment as a whole--not with any implication that confrontation is ended but with the implication that the security of East and West in Europe must now be regarded as interdependent. That largely unconscious change of usage is only the most obtrusive indication of a wide-ranging reformation of European perceptions, the overall tendency of which has been to move thought and action away from the simple premises of undifferentiated East-West confrontation. The confrontational frontier in Europe has not disappeared and will not, in any

circumstances, do so for many years to come. But it has become more permeable and more functionally selective, allowing a degree of commercial, cultural and, above all, intellectual interpenetration which would have been inconceivable even a decade ago. And one product of that interpenetration has been a growing, if often tacit, recognition that security in Europe is a multi-dimensional concept, within which the perception of security as a direct product of sectional military strength is balanced by the perception of security as the quality of a situation in which both allies and adversaries co-exist.

By the "European security process," we have come, therefore, to mean the continued, if cautious, movement away from the brittle, rigid security of strength in confrontation and towards the more flexible, albeit more complex, security which emerges from the ability of an international situation to absorb salient pressures for change without any fundamental modification of its structure. While some European nations, in the East and the West, believed that others, with their super-power allies, sought a basic change in the structure of the European situation, there was no possibility of such movement. The precondition of the European security process which now occupies so much attention is that the East-West confrontation, however persistent as a phenomenon, should no longer be seen to reflect active, imminent and conflicting threats to impose structural change upon Europe.

For some time to come, a conviction of adequate military capability will continue to be an essential requirement on both sides of the established confrontational frontier. Apart from its direct role as an insurance against deliberate or accidental retrogression, military capability must provide one source of the underlying confidence without which European governments will not be willing to accept the risks inherent in exploring and promoting the recently unfamiliar idea of non-confrontational, pan-European security. But the context in which military strength is to be related to European security in its newly emergent sense is basically different from that in which military strength has, in the past, supported perceptions of separate, sectional securities in an era of acute confrontation. In particular, the concept of a military "balance" between East and West in Europe has ceased to embrace and reflect the concept of security as a whole.

What contribution the CSCE proposal, or any negotiation which follows from it, may make to the process of revising and broadening the European concept of security is still open to question. At best, it will do no more than codify or ratify some part of that process; it cannot generate or maintain it in isolation from other factors. At worst, however, it cannot apparently impede the process; it can only be irrelevant to it. But the same is not true of MBFR, of which it might be said that, at best, it may be irrelevant to the European security process while, at worst, it may impede, interrupt or even reverse it.

In order to see the foundation for such a pessimistic assertion, we only have to consider the earlier comments in this paper. Whatever bearing the MBFR proposal has had on European security--and that bearing seems to have been indirect, tenuous and limited to relations within the Western alliance--an East-West negotiation on MBFR is bound to have a direct bearing, simply because it will force the negotiators back upon assumptions which have been relevant to exactly that undifferentiated confrontation from which the European security process is striving to escape. Apart from specific reasons for believing that this will, in fact, be the effect, there is a general reason indicated by the inclusion of the "B" in "MBFR"--and by the emphasis already laid upon its signification within NATO. "Balanced" force reductions can only be designed or negotiated on the assumption that a more or less exact relationship is to be established between the military strengths of NATO and the Warsaw Pact within Central Europe. Behind that lies, of course, the further assumption that the creation and preservation of such a relationship is intrinsic to the achievement or maintenance, by each of the negotiating blocs, of its own "security." In fact, the very idea of a "balance" is founded upon the concept of military confrontation and upon the concept of sectional security which goes with it.

Even if the negotiators of MBFR do not wish to re-emphasize such concepts as these, they will be unable to avoid doing so.

MBFR is explicitly related to the two great military alliances, rather than to Europe as a whole; in substance as well as in form, it is an affair of the blocs. Moreover, the issues which it raises are, as we have seen, exactly those whose discussion must entail a re-assertion of the primacy of the super-powers, together with a consequent polarization of their respective alliances. Finally, on a strictly practical level, the negotiators of MBFR will have no way of assessing the "balance" which they are to discuss--and thus the merit of detailed proposals--other than in terms of hypothetical military action by one bloc against the other. Each side will necessarily be forced, in that connection, to assume that the other is the potential aggressor. The political and psychological effects of such an assumption aside, history provides all too much evidence that an arms control negotiation conducted on the basis of conflicting assumptions about intention and in the context of mirror-image offence/defence scenarios may generate a case, at best, for "freezing" forces or for restricting their growth but is more unlikely to produce a case for reducing them. In addition, reason itself provides the evidence for judging that, in the present context, a negotiation founded upon such premises much exert pressures on both policies and perceptions which are directly opposed to the allegedly desired trend of thinking about security in Europe.

Reason also points to another conclusion which sits uncomfortably with the idea of improving security within Europe as a whole. The MBFR proposal, in addition to its inter-bloc implications, is related exclusively to what is commonly described as the "central area" of Europe. Although the exact scope of the zone for restriction is obviously in doubt, it would certainly not include Scandinavia or the European nations of the Mediterranean littoral, and seems unlikely to include Britain and France in the West or Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania in the East. The attempt to negotiate such an agreement, in addition to excluding the non-aligned European states, would thus tend to dissect the area which the European security process seeks to render more coherent and interdependent. There is nothing incompatible between the idea of a coherent European security environment and an emphasis on lesser regionalisms within Europe for other purposes or on other levels. There is, however, an intrinsic incompatibility between that former idea and the encouragement of a functional regionalism for the same purpose and on the same level, especially when the European history of the last 200 years has demonstrated the impracticability of isolating any sub-area within Europe for the purpose of a security settlement--whether that sub-area covers the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire or the two Germanies.

Conclusion

None of the polemical comments made in this paper should be taken to imply ignorance of those arguments which have, from time to time and in somewhat piecemeal fashion, been advanced in favour of MBFR. Unfortunately, such arguments seem to have been accepted so far with a dangerous facility, despite the reasons stated here for judging that counter-arguments exist and should, perhaps, prevail. For that reason, one purpose of this paper has been to present these counter-arguments in terms which, without being exaggerated, may have some compensatory effect, even at the risk of apparent bias.

Still less should any of the comments made here be taken to imply opposition to the reduction of military forces in Europe. Indeed, as the assumptions initially stated should have indicated, exactly the reverse is true. The fact is that military forces have been reduced and are being reduced within Europe--not as the result of formal negotiation but as the result of changing perceptions. On the Western side, the United States, France, Britain, Canada and Belgium are amongst those which have made significant cuts in their defence efforts. However much those cuts may be explained, in terms of proximate cause, by financial stringency, it is fair to say that they would not have been made had the perception of defence needs and of security itself remained as it was in, say, 1962.

That, in fact, is the manner in which it is reasonable to hope that further, substantial reductions of the military establishments in Europe can be achieved: by revising perceptions of security, and by allowing the effect of successive revisions to be felt in the modification of military efforts and deployments. The most fundamental criticism of MBFR may be that it threatens to supersede that delicate, slow but fundamentally reasonable process of interactive arms control and, in doing so, to inhibit rather than promote both the intelligent re-examination of security needs and the prudent reduction of military forces to the extent which such a re-examination would permit.

By emphasizing the status of the blocs, by re-asserting the primacy of the super-powers, by subordinating the East European states to Moscow, by focusing upon a limited area of Central Europe alone and, above all, by assuming a view of security based upon undiluted confrontation, MBFR negotiations offer, in fact, to play a unique role in souring and distorting the process of prudent but progressive revision of the European security environment. There is no reason to suppose that their major sponsors have intended such an effect, or that they would do other than deplore it. No doubt, NATO governments, in proposing an MBFR negotiation, have wished not only to alleviate some of their own, short-term, intra-alliance problems--although

that may well have been their principal objective--but also to make a real contribution to the improvement of security in Europe. In this case, however, good intentions are irrelevant.

Whatever transient merit the MBFR proposal may have had-- and whatever the real attractions of a substantial and well-designed reduction of forces might be--the effects of a formal MBFR negotiation are likely to be no more welcome to its sponsors than to others. Doctrinal differences within the Western alliance, many of them of dubious relevance to the 1970s, will be resurrected and exacerbated to an extent which may cause serious friction between the United States and its allies. The level of military strength in Europe is unlikely to be reduced more rapidly or more symmetrically than would otherwise be the case and, in some respects, may even be supported beyond its natural term. The Soviet Union, the only nation which might conceivably profit from an MBFR negotiation, will be encouraged and enabled to re-assert its dominant role within the Warsaw Pact. Above all, the implicit but almost atavistic reinforcement of those assumptions relevant to the sectional security of the 1950s will confuse and hamper the prudent formulation of assumptions relevant to the sort of coherent, situational security which seems to be demanded by the Europe of the 1970s. Even with all of this, the charge against the sponsors of an MBFR negotiation should not be one of malice. But it might fairly be one of naiveté.

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