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139

NATO:
Casualty of a New
U.S.-Soviet Detente

By Burton Yale Pines



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by Burton Yale Pines

The recent pace of change in U.S.-Soviet relations has been dizzying. It is barely conceivable that just a few years have passed since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan triggered revulsion across the U.S.--and much of the world--or since an American President found general agreement around the country when he branded the Soviet Union an "evil empire" or since Soviet fighter jets shot down a Korean commercial airliner and killed 269 passengers, including a U.S. congressman.

Yet today we not only are fettering the Soviet leader, but are talking realistically about dismantling much of our nuclear arsenal. As with Richard Nixon and his whirlwind initiatives toward the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, it today is a conservative, unquestionably anti-communist President who is pushing ahead at a speed which he, were he out of office, would call dangerously breakneck--and worse.

We could speculate on why Washington is doing all this now, on whether it in fact is a grand victory for Ronald Reagan's strategy and world view (it well may be) or a virtuoso play for the history books (no President, after all, has won a Nobel Peace Prize since Woodrow Wilson) or simply a horrible miscalculation.

Comrade Yeltsin's Complaint. To be sure, the changes in U.S.-Soviet relations in the past couple of years could be very promising. There is something to be said for reducing the world's stock of nuclear weapons--though much could be said against reducing the stock too rapidly.

There also is much to be said for taking Mikhail Gorbachev at his word that a new era of *glasnost*' and *perestroika* has broken out across the Soviet Union--although Moscow's Comrade Yeltsin and intellectual and religious dissidents may dispute this. Certainly we cannot stand back and pretend that nothing is happening in the Soviet Union. We cannot reflexively invoke yesterday's policies and chant yesterday's slogans--as successful as they might have been. We have to be willing--cautiously--to call Gorbachev's bluff and to test his sincerity, his honesty, and his ability to deliver.

This is, I hope, what the President has been doing in his meetings these past two days. And this is, I hope, what we will continue to do.

I similarly hope that the White House and we remember that this is not the first time that we've waltzed across this ballroom floor. It's not the Kremlin's first peace offensive. Not its first New Look. Not its first United Front. Not its first

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Thaw. Not its first Spirit of Rapallo. Not its first Spirit of Geneva. Not its first Spirit of Camp David.

Unprecedented Relationship. Thus it serves great purpose to assess just where it is that this speeding train is taking us and just how the rapidly moving events are likely to affect the arrangements and relationships established by the U.S. in the past four decades, particularly our relationship with our NATO allies. It is prudent for us to ask whether there will be casualties of this new U.S.-Soviet detente and whether NATO could become the first casualty.

It is of course presumptuous of me to tell this audience about the critical importance of the U.S.-West European relationship. Yet, for the record, I must note that this relationship is without historical precedent for the U.S. It is the most important foreign relationship in American history. There is little need to catalogue what we have achieved from our intimate ties to our NATO allies--the strategic, economic, moral, spiritual dividends that we have banked. You know, and have experienced, this much more and much better than I have.

It is this special relationship with Western Europe which may be at risk as the U.S.-Soviet flirtation intensifies. Not only do the expanding and more intricate superpower ties and discussions make Europe something of a sideshow. This would be bad enough. But I fear even worse. I fear that Western Europe may become the ultimate grand prize in the new U.S.-Soviet game. And it is a prize that the U.S. can lose and Moscow win.

New Struggle for Europe. After all, if in the 19th Century the "Great Game" was the quest between Russia and England for control of Asia's Northern Tier, since World War II, the Great Game has been the battle for Europe. This, of course, was openly acknowledged at one time, when it was called a Cold War. As a result of a new U.S.-Soviet detente we may find ourselves engaged in a new, intense campaign in this struggle for Europe.

Let me state my conclusions up front.

The Atlantic Alliance faces serious dangers because of the emerging Washington-Moscow relationship. These dangers ultimately, of course, are military. But for now and the near future, the dangers are mainly, indeed almost entirely, political.

Window of Vulnerability. We find ourselves staring at a window of vulnerability. Ironically, when we started talking about the window of vulnerability in the mid-1970s, we meant it in military terms. We meant that a variety of new Soviet weapon systems would be deployed before offsetting NATO weapons would be ready. An enormous amount was written and discussed about this window of military vulnerability. And these discussions had much to do with alerting the American public and West Europeans that we all had to start doing more to defend ourselves against the Soviet threat. And all of us did start doing more.

What we approach now is not a 1970s-style window of military vulnerability, but a window of political vulnerability. On our side, we have an aging political

leadership. We have a White House that, if put most charitably, is confused and plagued by bad luck; to put it less delicately, it is in enormous disarray, lacking consistency and perseverance.

The situation will not improve very soon. We face, after all, a transition of power in Washington unlike any since 1968--or even since 1960. For the first time since 1968, there is no incumbent running for President. While this may be a very good thing in terms of invigorating Washington, it means that no matter who is elected President, we and he will be slowed by his climb up the learning curve. It will take time for him to grow accustomed to wielding presidential power and time before our allies will grow comfortable with his leadership. At best, it will be a period of some uncertainty and less than firm direction. This will be complicated, moreover, if--as seems likely--the White House and the Congress will remain in the hands of opposing parties.

Apprentice Leadership. Compare this with what we see in the Kremlin. In contrast to an aging American President, Gorbachev seems youthful and energetic. In contrast to an apprentice American leadership in 1989, Gorbachev presumably will be firmly in power, having completed his learning and consolidation curves. This certainly seems a lesson of the Yeltsin affair.

What this all means is that the U.S. today and for the next two to three years will be vulnerable to shrewd political and diplomatic moves from the Kremlin. This doesn't mean that there is nothing that we can do about it. To the contrary, there is much that we can do and I will get to that. But a premise from which I start is that we and our NATO allies have entered a window of political vulnerability which Gorbachev and the comrades can exploit.

I start also from a number of other premises.

First. The Soviet Union remains a threat to U.S. security, to NATO and to American interests in the Third World. Moscow is a threat because its nuclear and conventional arsenals continue to grow in size and diversity.

Second. The Soviet Union remains a threat because there has been no evidence so far that Moscow has changed any of its foreign policy or strategic aims. Kremlin foreign policy goals in Western Europe under Gorbachev are no different than they were under Brezhnev and Khrushchev. Tactics differ strikingly, but the goals remain the same--to drive a wedge between the U.S. and NATO's European members; to denuclearize Europe; to neutralize Germany; and, as a result, to dissolve NATO. I see no evidence that these do not remain the lodestar of Soviet foreign policy. A French official earlier this year wrote: "Never have the Soviets advertised so openly the objectives the West has always attributed to them: denuclearization of Europe, delinkage of Europe and the United States, and the creation of a new all European 'security system.'"

Third. Soviet goals in Eastern Europe remain fundamentally unchanged. Moscow wants East European states to remain sufficiently submissive so that they continue to be militarily useful for Moscow and, as important, so that they do nothing to make it more difficult for the Kremlin to rule the USSR. Moscow

further wants Eastern Europe to remain an assured source of goods, services, and products for the Soviet economy and a captive market for low-quality Soviet exports.

Of course, Moscow would like East European nations to grow economically; this would make them more valuable to the Soviet Union. But the price of such economic growth would be higher than Moscow surely wants to pay; East European economic growth would require more contacts with the West and thus lead to more independence from the Soviet Union. East European economic growth also would require a pace of reform and liberalization faster than that occurring in the Soviet Union. Are Gorbachev and the Politburo ready to risk this? I doubt it. We see no evidence of it.

Fourth. Soviet goals in the Third World also appear unchanged. To be sure, I see no grand strategy of conquest, other than Moscow's determination to develop and deploy weapons to project military power to just about every region of the world. Yet Moscow shows no signs of giving up the temptation to exploit targets of opportunity. If a power vacuum opens, as it did in southern Africa after Portugal's withdrawal in 1974 and 1975, Moscow will try to take advantage of it.

Fifth. Gorbachev's attempts at economic and structural reforms are genuine--although I am less certain of this premise than I am of the others. There is a strong case to be made that these reforms are driven by need, by the realization that without significant reforms the Soviet economy will become progressively sclerotic. A crippled economy, of course, will not be able to fulfill Soviet military requirements. Thus Gorbachev's economic reform efforts may be genuine to a significant degree. What I do not view as genuine is the talk about political reforms and democracy. Political reforms would challenge the Bolsheviks' very control of their country.

Gorbachev's Dilemma. The dilemma a Gorbachev faces, of course, is that economic reform at a not-too-distant point must be accompanied by political liberalization. Decentralizing economic decision-making, as Beijing is finding out, requires a measure of political decentralization and devolution. A vigorous economy, as Beijing again is learning, requires something as basic as workers' geographic mobility--to an degree unheard of in the USSR during the past half-century. And a price system, which is the prerequisite for a responsive, vigorous economy, diminishes enormously the state's role in society.

Is Gorbachev ready to do this?

Would Gorbachev be allowed to do this?

I strongly doubt it. My premise here then is that while Gorbachev may be sincere about some economic reform and some restructuring of the Soviet system, he will achieve relatively little for he will balk (or will be blocked) when political liberalization becomes the essential corollary of economic reforms.

This probably is true too for Beijing's reform strategy, though not necessarily. Beijing, after all, enjoys a luxury that Moscow does not. Beijing has no empire of satellite nations ringing its border and no significant ethnic minority at home, both

of which could take advantage of liberalization to press for independence. Moscow has foreign policy and demographic constraints on its reform process. The Chinese do not.

Gorbachev's reforms--genuine and putative, modest and ambitious--pose important challenges for us.

How do we respond to them?

Do we try to help him--whatever that means?

Do we try to exploit them to bolster our own place in the world and to demand, as a price for our help, a Soviet rollback from some of the outposts of its empire?

INF Episode. These are questions which we must begin debating. But the issue facing us at this specific moment is the U.S.-Soviet treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces--or INF--and Gorbachev's meeting with Ronald Reagan. The INF episode is a paradigm of NATO's problems which a Gorbachev can exploit.

For our discussion, the details of the INF accord are of less interest than the INF process since 1979. This process has been exposing the Alliance's geological faults. Each key step in the process has strained the Alliance politically.

First a reluctant U.S. agreed to deploy Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe, acquiescing to West German and other allied urging to do something to counter the new Soviet SS-20s.

Washington Reverses Roles. Then, as deployment neared, anti-nuclear marches and other demonstrations cooled some West European leaders' enthusiasm for hosting those American missiles which, just a few years earlier, they had sought. This forced a somewhat perplexed Washington to reverse roles and invest enormous political resources in trying to convince the West Europeans why the Alliance needed European-based U.S. intermediate range missiles.

As we know, of course, the West Europeans went along with this. The price, however, was more than a year of extraordinary political conflict in key NATO European countries. One of the results of this conflict is the more radicalized Social Democratic Party in Germany and Labor Party in Britain.

Then, in the past year, roles reversed once more. As INF really seemed like a deal that Moscow and Washington would make, some West Europeans, mainly conservatives heading governments, urgently began signalling the U.S. that its missiles should stay in Europe. For one thing, said West European leaders, it would look absurd to withdraw the missiles after having had to shed so much political blood to allow them to be deployed.

Primordial Fear. For another thing, and much more important, removing intermediate range nuclear weapons from West European soil would remove one of the most important concrete links coupling the security of the U.S. with that of Western Europe.

Without those missiles in Western Europe, it was--and is--said that America's pledge to defend its NATO allies would be less credible. "Decoupling," of course, is the primordial fear of many West Europeans.

Making matters worse, or confirming West European fears, was the way the U.S.-Soviet talks were proceeding. West Europeans felt, generally correctly, that they were being ignored. While they were informed of what was going on, they were not being consulted. They thus could be forgiven if once again they began to be haunted, as they were during the halcyon days of Kissinger's detente, by the specter of Superpower Condominium. Ultimately, of course, the Allies fell in line, at least publicly. Kohl, Thatcher and even the French know a *fait accompli* when they see one. They--publicly--are making the best of the situation. Privately, what they say--to some of you, I'm sure--is something else.

Europeans Right--and Wrong. Parenthetically, I want to note that the Europeans initially were right in wanting the Pershing IIs and cruise missiles; they then were wrong in seeming to be reluctant to accept INF deployment a few years ago; and then they again are right in worrying about INF removal.

Though the Pershings and cruises, in fact, were deployed not to couple U.S. security tighter to Western Europe's but to offset the Soviet SS-20s, the unintended beneficial result of deployment was to link more tightly together both sides of the Atlantic. Moscow understands this; NATO commanders understand this; Washington apparently does not. In this sense, Moscow's deployment of its SS-20 was an enormous blunder because it brought American INF bases to Europe. It is a blunder, however, from which the Soviets are recovering completely with the treaty which Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev are about to sign.

Is this so bad? After all, the INF agreement simply restores the European nuclear balance to the *status quo ante*--the situation of 1979. And we were pretty satisfied with the 1979 balance of theater nuclear forces.

Trying to Erase History. It is bad for two reasons. First, even though it was somewhat inadvertent, the result of sending intermediate range U.S. missiles to Europe has given NATO commanders added flexibility, thus strengthening the Alliance militarily; withdrawing the missiles weakens the Alliance.

Second, history cannot be erased. We cannot pretend that we can return to 1979 as if intervening events never occurred. Although removing INF from Europe leaves the U.S. coupled as tightly to Western Europe as it was in 1979, it is not as tight as it is right now, with the Pershings and cruises in place. Psychologically, therefore, it is a serious mistake to pull the missiles out. The West Europeans will be justified in feeling that the U.S. is pulling away from them a bit.

This probably would not matter all that much if the INF episode were an isolated occurrence. It of course is not. It takes place in the context that I sketched earlier--of a changing U.S.-Soviet relationship and of an opening window of political vulnerability. The INF process, and Moscow's ability to exploit it, is a preview of the challenges and dangers the Alliance will be facing.

Bruised West Germans. For a moment, let's look at what these dangers could mean in West Germany. No government in the INF process has been put to as much of a test as has Helmut Kohl's in proving its loyalty as a member of the Alliance. In no country was a government more strained by the anti-INF demonstrations. Kohl and his colleagues have got to feel bruised--and younger West German leaders have got to feel that there is a lesson to be learned--by the way Washington has decided to remove the missiles.

This probably includes Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher. Even though he endorsed the INF agreement from the start, he still must bristle at the way that Washington conducted the process.

To make matters worse for the Alliance, and better for Moscow, in the public jockeying between the U.S. and Soviet Union on INF treaty terms, it was Bonn which came to be depicted as the obstacle. It was Bonn's "unreasonable" reluctance, it was said, to demobilize all of the intermediate range missiles on its soil that was blocking a superpower agreement. Ultimately, after enormous U.S. pressure, Kohl capitulated.

Reminding Germans of their Fate. This has had to be extremely painful for the West Germans. More painful has to be the West German calculation of a European battlefield without the American INFs. In such a battlefield it is Germany on which the remaining European-based nuclear weapons will explode. And it is mainly Germany in which a possible conventional East-West war will be fought. While the political geography of the East-West divide has meant that Germany always was to bear the brunt of a potential war, the recent events remind Germans dramatically that their country alone is guaranteed to be a wartime theater.

This, of course, bolsters the neutralist argument inside West Germany and makes it easier for Moscow to appeal to West German pacifism. Josef Joffe wrote recently in *The New Republic*: "An unwritten law of NATO states that Germany must not be what geography has condemned it to be: the venue and victim of East-West war in Europe...In their classic nightmare, the Germans play host and target for weapons that will devastate Germany only, and that nightmare presents diplomatic opportunities for the Russians that hardly need belaboring."

In such a situation, Moscow's call for a "nuclear free zone" for Central Europe may find increasing support in West Germany--even perhaps from West German conservatives and centrists who today may question the intensity of the U.S. commitment to NATO. We know, of course, that a long-term Soviet goal has been the alienation of the West German Right and Center from the U.S.

This, I believe, is the reality of the present situation.

How do we deal with it?

How do we reassure the West Germans?

How do we close the window of political vulnerability?

How do we ensure that NATO does not become the first casualty of a new U.S.- Soviet detente?

I'll take advantage of your hospitality to offer a few observations.

1) We probably cannot go back on INF. But we can make the ratification process a public event which carefully scrutinizes the emerging U.S.-Soviet relationship. We must use prolonged and intensive Senate hearings to define the limits and dangers of this relationship. We must use the hearings to make certain that we know to what we are agreeing, why we are agreeing to it, and what we expect from ourselves and the Soviets. We must not permit the hurried ratification which there was with SALT I which, in its wake, left serious ambiguities. And the hearings must educate the U.S. public about the fundamental issues raised by INF and a new superpower detente--the effect, for instance, on the American commitment to NATO's defense.

Just as the public learned from two congressional hearings in the past year an enormous amount about Robert Bork and about Administration policy towards the Contras, so the public can learn about the nature of the U.S. commitment to NATO and the threats which NATO faces. The main point of testimony by Members of Congress, Administration officials and private experts should be to signal Moscow and reassure NATO that America understands the dangers inherent in the new superpower dynamic and that the U.S. will not abandon NATO.

2) We must be ready to give Gorbachev the chance to demonstrate that he is different--not only in terms of Soviet domestic matters, but in foreign policy as well. As my Fundamentalist friends tell me, one always must be ready to welcome the Messiah. And maybe a new day in the Kremlin really is dawning. Then again, as my Fundamentalist friends are quick to add, there are many false Messiahs.

3) We should recognize too that despite U.S. clumsiness on INF and the haste in concluding the agreement, we deserve credit for bringing Gorbachev to the negotiating table. Deployment of the Pershing IIs and the cruise missiles probably took Moscow by surprise. Soviet ability to block the neutron bomb in the mid-1970s surely gave the Kremlin confidence that it could veto major Western weapons decisions. Moscow must have been surprised too by Reagan's success at winning support for the modernization of the U.S. arsenal--building the B-1 bomber, the MX missile, the 600-ship navy. Similarly, the swift American military action in Grenada and the escalation of military support for the Afghan and Angolan Freedom Fighters probably were unexpected by the Soviets.

How was Moscow to read these events? It certainly is plausible that it concluded that Brezhnev-style bluster, as successful as it had been in the 1970s in intimidating the West, would not work in the 1980s. It is just possible that the firm U.S. defense policy of the 1980s may have forced the Soviets to become more crafty--and Gorbachev is.

One of the things which opens the window of political vulnerability, in fact, is that no longer can we count on Soviet saber-rattling to unify the West. In place of the tactics of intimidation practiced by Brezhnev, we now seem to be facing

Gorbachev's tactics of seduction. In this he is being advised by three skilled former Soviet ambassadors to the West--Dobrynin who served in the U.S., Falin in West Germany, and Yakovlev in Canada.

4) The U.S. must continue to modernize its arsenal, including the deployment of strategic defenses, so that it will be able to deter and check the Soviet strategic threat and, with a combination of arms, check a conventional force attack in Europe. The U.S. also must have forces sufficient for quick, flexible action in the Third World--in Central America, the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, the Philippines.

At the same time, of course, we have to work on finding ways to strengthen U.S.-NATO ties to prevent the appearance of decoupling.

NATO Buttrressing Measures. To compensate for the eventual withdrawal of U.S. INF systems, we should begin taking, as NATO Commander John Galvin urges, "buttrressing measures," such as the modernization of the 3,250 nuclear artillery shells, gravity bombs, and other tactical weapons that will remain in NATO's arsenal. Other compensatory measures include assigning U.S.-based B-52 bombers armed with air-launched cruise missiles to NATO, deploying nuclear sea-launched cruise missiles in NATO waters, and assigning additional ballistic missile submarines to NATO.

And, of course, we and especially the West Europeans, really have to do more to strengthen our conventional forces. We can, for example, fulfill NATO's proclaimed force goals, improve NATO air defenses, provide more operational reserve forces, and enhance anti-tank, command and control, and strategic lift capabilities.

NATO Summit. To coordinate our effort in the wake of the INF agreement, the U.S. should call for a NATO summit. Atop the agenda should be the discussion of how the Alliance can offset the loss of INF through improvements in conventional forces and through nuclear arms permitted by the accord.

To signal further its commitment to NATO, Congress should abandon any attempts to restrict allied participation in our Strategic Defense Initiative. Congress, for example, should repudiate the protectionist efforts by Senator John Glenn to restrict the foreign--this means mainly West European--role in the SDI program entirely to projects which cannot be fulfilled by U.S. firms. Rather, a broad allied role in SDI should be encouraged.

Political Deterrence. Because it is political vulnerability which the U.S. and the West face, political deterrence and counter-measures are as important as military. Here the major battlefields are American and West European public opinion. Our publics must understand what is going on so that they do not fall for Gorbachev's new politics and new tactics.

We therefore must devise a political response. Among other things:

◆◆ We must ensure that the Soviet Union is viewed in perspective. This means that we must describe to our countrymen how the USSR remains a military threat to the U.S., the West, and Third World countries. We must explain that

Gorbachev is not the first Soviet leader to sing seductively of freedom and peaceful coexistence.

◆◆ We must expose Soviet disinformation efforts vigorously to demonstrate to Americans and West Europeans that the Soviets, despite their sweeter rhetoric, remain on the ideological offensive. This is what George Shultz did when he complained about Soviet-spread stories that AIDS was created by U.S. Army laboratories. Dozens of other Soviet lies go unchallenged--such as that the U.S. routinely kidnaps Latin American children to use their organs for transplants, that U.S. intelligence agents killed young Samantha Smith because she was working for peace, that the CIA was behind the assassination of Indira Gandhi and so forth. Unmasking Moscow as the source of such stories not only reminds Americans and West Europeans about the nature of the enemy we face, but also may force Moscow to stop lying.

◆◆ We must expose more vigorously than we have in the past Soviet violations of its treaty promises. If we continue to be reluctant to do so, we cannot expect Americans or West Europeans to be realistic in their assessment of Soviet promises.

◆◆ We must expose Soviet KGB activities and expand U.S. covert action capabilities and counter-espionage forces.

◆◆ We must encourage East European countries to wiggle away a bit from Moscow. This will expose the limits of Gorbachev's new line. If Moscow cracks down on Eastern Europe in the fashion of 1956, 1968, or 1981, this will demonstrate how little Gorbachev differs from his predecessors.

◆◆ We must insist on massive cultural and student exchanges between the U.S. and USSR. These, of course, must be symmetrical to prevent Moscow from taking advantage of exchanges as it has in the past. Applications for the program, moreover, must be available freely inside the Soviet Union. Currently, about three dozen Soviet students are studying in the U.S., compared to about 20,000 from the People's Republic of China. If Gorbachev allows 20,000 Soviet students to come to the U.S. to study and imbibe American ideas, it will be one indication that things may be different in Moscow.

◆◆ We must insist on strict linkage between Soviet strategic agreements and improved Soviet behavior in selected areas--such as improved human rights inside the Soviet Union or reduced Soviet support of terrorists or an end to Moscow's troublemaking in the Third World.

◆◆ We must speak often and publicly about the enormous problems involved in conventional force reduction. Policymakers, the press, and the public must understand the situation sufficiently not to be fooled, for instance, by a Soviet offer to withdraw Soviet troops from Eastern Europe in exchange for an American pullout from Western Europe.

◆◆ We must devise litmus tests by which Moscow can prove that there genuinely is a Soviet New Reality. We can echo, for instance, Ronald Reagan's call

for Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall or that there be a public repudiation of the Brezhnev Doctrine or that a definite timetable be announced for Soviet troop withdrawals from Afghanistan.

To sum up. NATO has confronted and weathered many so-called crises. It has demonstrated that it is one of history's most unusual and resilient alliances.

The events of the past year or so that are culminating in this week's Reagan-Gorbachev summit pose a new challenge to NATO. It is a major challenge. That the Alliance will survive intact is probable--but not assured.

To assure this, a number of military measures are needed. Much more important, a political strategy and deft tactics are required if NATO is to make it safely through the window of political vulnerability now opening.

