

# Rethinking the NATO Deterrent in a World of Uncertain Threat

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By Hans Binnendijk

LONDON — The rapid pace of arms control and the democratic reforms in Eastern Europe may doom the modernization of the Lance missile, that contentious issue so neatly evaded by NATO leaders at their May summit meeting. It is time that the West reconsidered its stance and needs in this matter.

Several developments have undercut the public rationale for new missile deployments. NATO has mistakenly rested much of its justification for maintaining nuclear forces on the need to offset the overwhelming conventional superiority of Warsaw Pact forces. With the Vienna talks on conventional force reductions, known as CFE, looking increasingly likely to produce parity in ground forces, that rationale could disappear.

The case for a Lance replacement is complicated by the fact that the extended range of such a missile would put Poland and Hungary in the bull's eye. Opponents of Lance modernization now say these countries need aid, not threats.

Replacing Lance with missiles deployed on multiple-launched rocket systems, or MLRS, makes military sense, but it would make the number of NATO short-range launchers appear to increase from 88 to 1,000. This is because the old system was deployed solely for nuclear weapons while the new system, though primarily for conventional weapons, has a nuclear capability. The distinction will be hard for the public to grasp.

Finally, the Soviets are cleverly telling Westerners in private that they want minimum nuclear deterrence in Europe, not a so-called third zero that rids NATO of its nuclear protection. The Soviets appear willing to make major new asymmetrical reductions in short-range missiles to a level of parity above zero, but their price will be a freeze on significant upgrading of equipment. This may be hard to turn down in the proposed negotiations on short-range nuclear forces, or SNF, and it would put an end to the Lance replacement program.

The modernization issue is sure to come up in next year's federal elections in West Germany. Most European defense analysts already say that unless there is a dramatic reversal in Moscow, NATO will be unable to deploy a replacement for Lance in its MLRS configuration.

NATO must return to the basics. Fundamental needs, force sizes and force structures need re-examination.

The alliance probably will find that the underlying need for nuclear weapons in Europe is becoming even greater than in the past. For recent political developments have not altered two basic requirements: deterrence and alliance cohesion.

The threat from Moscow may be at a low ebb. But Europe faces a time of potential instability and transition, when the stabilizing effects of nuclear weapons may be particularly valuable.

Instability in Poland or East Germany, for example, could lead to broader conflict. Similarly, the promise of a slow transition from massive forward defense to a less threatening "defensive defense" requires heavy reliance on mobilization.

The advantages of early mobilization in these circumstances raise the specter of August 1914. In both cases, a sobering reminder that each superpower retains nuclear weapons in Europe could avoid miscalculations.

Nuclear weapons will also be needed to maintain alliance cohesion after the INF Treaty and in the midst of a serious debate on "burden shedding." NATO's doctrine of flexible response envisions a seamless web of potential responses to aggression that, by providing an option for everyone, has furthered cohesion. That web is developing gaping holes. Without some U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe, flexible response will cease to exist and American troops will go home.

So some nuclear weapons should stay. But if the arms control process continues, the size and structure of the force could change fairly dramati-

cally without undercutting either deterrence or alliance cohesion.

A recent study by the supreme allied commander, General John Galvin, takes a step in this direction. He suggests that the current 4,000 nuclear weapons could be cut by more than one-fourth if the remaining force were modernized. He would maintain a force of missiles, nuclear artillery shells and air-launched weapons.

But that formula is not saleable in today's political environment — and it need not be. The alliance could make do with less.

Force size and structure should be determined primarily by targeting and survivability requirements. Targeting requirements, already reduced by the INF Treaty, will shrink dramatically if the Vienna talks yield major Warsaw Pact cuts in conventional forces, on the order of the destruction of 40,000 tanks. Similarly, a potential SNF agreement could remove more than 1,000 of the Soviet missiles now targeted by NATO. And with the development of longer-range smart weapons, conventional munitions can target sites previously reserved for nuclear munitions.

Maintaining a force that can survive a first strike presents a more difficult problem. Currently, NATO has a diversified force that is hard to strike because of the mobility and dual capability (nuclear and conventional) of the weapons. Elimination of categories of weapons would create greater vulnerability, which could be offset only partly by Warsaw Pact cuts in aircraft and short-range missiles.

Still, if the arms control process continues to be successful, 500 to 1,000 tactical nuclear weapons could provide credible deterrence and alliance cohesion. The composition of that force remains at issue.

If NATO fails to modernize its theater nuclear weapons, such a deterrent force could consist solely of aircraft carrying gravity bombs. The Lance would be retired. West Ger-

man opinion could force the removal of nuclear artillery. And deployment of the tactical air-to-surface missile, or TASM, could be rejected.

That force posture would not provide a credible deterrent because it is not survivable and it would have difficulty penetrating Soviet air defenses. NATO nuclear-capable aircraft are located on perhaps two dozen airfields vulnerable to attack. With Warsaw Pact air defenses, aircraft carrying gravity bombs would have high attrition rates.

So NATO can develop a credible minimum deterrence force only if what remains is modern and survivable. The alliance must develop the concept of a new force that it can sell to its citizens and negotiate with the Soviets. It should consist of about

1,000 U.S. nuclear warheads, one-fourth the current number. Deployment of tactical air-to-surface missiles on NATO aircraft would be required to ensure that NATO retains the capability to implement flexible response. A small number of surface-to-surface missiles, with ranges and missions like the existing Lance, would ensure survivability of the deterrent force and might be acceptable to Moscow.

If NATO fails to act soon in developing a new concept of minimum deterrence, public support for even that limited deployment may be lost.

*The writer is director of studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He contributed this view to the International Herald Tribune.*

## 100, 75 AND 50 YEARS AGO

### 1889: Unrivaled Comédie

PARIS — *The Herald says in an editorial:* We publish a sketch of the history of the Comédie Française — from the decree of November 17, 1548, when it was established in the Hotel de Bourgogne, down to its present stewardship in the rue de Richelieu theatre. The Comédie Française is almost the only institution of Royal France which survived the Revolution, and, since 1680, when Louis XIV amalgamated the two classic theatres — that of the Hotel de Bourgogne and the troupe of Molière — it has had no real rival. Under the present stewardship of M. Jules Claretie its fortunes have attained the greatest financial success in its history.

### 1914: A Russian Victory

PETROGRAD — The battle of Augustovo has ended in a victory for the Russian armies. The defeat of the German troops is complete. The enemy, in disorderly retreat, is flying toward the

frontiers of East Prussia with the gallant Russian troops in vigorous pursuit. The Germans are abandoning convoys of guns and munitions, and have no time to pick up their wounded. The German invasion of Russia from East Prussia has completely failed.

### 1939: Hitler's 'Diktat'

PARIS — While warfare on all land fronts yesterday [Oct. 5] was confined to skirmishing, artillery and air duels, Chancellor Hitler made a rather tame "triumphal" entry into Warsaw and called the Reichstag so that at least that body could hear his peace "diktat" which no one else will listen to. European capitals are concentrating on Hitler's plans in the West, particularly at the two ends of the Maginot Line, facing neutral territories. Meanwhile, the expansion of Russia's power over the Baltic States was marked by ratification of the Russo-Estonian pact of mutual assistance. Latvia has reportedly signed an accord with Russia similar to the Russo-Estonian pact.