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New Realities Call for a New Line on Arms Control

By Hans Binnendijk

LONDON — The European revolutions of 1989 have created a new reality, and European arms control will have to adjust or become irrelevant.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the purpose of arms control, as far as the West was concerned, was to reduce the threat posed by the Warsaw Pact's large advantage in conventional and theater nuclear forces. Three months of reform in the East are helping to accomplish what 15 years of arm control did not. Now the very existence of the Warsaw Pact is in question.

Western leaders must modify the goals of arms control. They must seek arms reductions that facilitate the inevitable move toward German reuni-

fication and the creation of a stable new security framework for Europe.

The first step must come in Vienna at the Conference on Conventional Forces in Europe, or CFE. Negotiators must complete the business of cutting conventional forces on both sides to about 85 percent of current NATO levels. Speed is essential, both to lock in critical Soviet concessions on ground forces while Mikhail Gorbachev retains full powers and to clear the way for new negotiations that can directly address the German issue.

Negotiators in Vienna are optimistic that an agreement will be reached this year, though the difficult issues

of aircraft and manpower ceilings remain. Soviet officials indicate that they might drop these items (inserted at Kremlin insistence) from the current talks if serious delays seem likely. NATO should be prepared to settle this year for a treaty that limits only the equipment for ground forces.

A mandate for the follow-on CFE talks, which officials hope will begin next year, must not simply be to repeat earlier negotiations with deeper cuts — that would cause the British and French to dig in their heels and delay. Officials in London and Paris know that the negotiating zone, stretching from the Atlantic to the

Urals, discriminates in favor of the superpowers (most of whose territory is outside the zone) and against the European powers. In these conditions, 15 percent reductions might be tolerable, but not 50 percent cuts.

One option is for the follow-on talks to focus on the so-called NATO Guidelines Area zone, which includes the two Germanys, the Benelux countries, Poland and Czechoslovakia. This zone might be expanded to include Hungary and Denmark if the Soviets insist. Reductions outside this zone could be made unilaterally as nations see fit.

Radical cuts of 50 percent or more plus agreement on nonprovocative defense measures in this smaller zone could increase confidence between a united Germany and its neighbors. Major cuts in German forces could also give Moscow a basis for abandoning its unacceptable position that a reunited Germany must be neutral.

These talks must also allow for a reversal of the situation in which the Warsaw Pact has for decades held an advantage in conventional forces. As the Warsaw Pact disintegrates, pressures for the withdrawal of Soviet forces will mount from within Eastern Europe; Moscow may have no choice.

The goal of equal force levels may have to be dropped in the follow-on talks. There is no reason U.S. forces must depart at the same pace as Soviet forces, unless the West Europeans ask them to do so. U.S. forces can be a stabilizing influence in a time of rapid change, and might even be more in the Soviet interest than would a Germany cut off from a solid security framework.

Concentrating arms control efforts on Germany may smooth the way for reunification, but the new state must feel secure to prevent a re-emergence of the sort of sentiments that prevailed between the world wars.

Who will provide a credible nuclear guarantee for the new state? That is the key question for those who will negotiate on short-range nuclear forces, or SNF, in Europe. The answer must be primarily the United States, though France and Britain can gradually assume more of the burden. Otherwise, the Germans may feel compelled to do it themselves.

The Soviets must also reconsider their theater nuclear posture. As the Warsaw Pact wavers, their buffer will disappear just as their old nemesis is reuniting. A key difference between June 1941 and today is nuclear weapons, and the Soviets may be reluctant to let go of their theater deterrence.

So NATO should be able to approach the SNF talks with new confidence. The talks should be neither an effort to remove all nuclear weapons from Europe nor an effort to sanction deployment of the replacement for the Lance missile. What is needed is the acceptance of a minimal deterrence, so Germany can feel comfortable with a relatively demilitarized posture.

Some argue that the arms control process in Europe is growing obsolete. Unless the process and its goals are modified, they may be correct. But as statesmen seek to redesign the security architecture of Europe, the confidence that can flow from arms agreements is sorely needed.