Disquiet on the Rhine

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Nato must develop a new security consensus without upsetting the delicate German political balance. This week's meeting of Nato heads of state provides an opportunity to begin, argues Hans Binnendijk

Nato heads of state will endorse the INF Treaty during their Brussels summit this week, but they are unlikely to face up to the fundamental challenge laid down recently by West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. As a result, they may delay a consensus-building effort which is needed if Nato is to settle an important debate about the future of short-range nuclear weapons.

During his visit to Washington last week, Mr Kohl reassured the Allies that Germany does not favour a non-nuclear Europe. But he added that Bonn could accept modernisation of ageing short-range nuclear missiles only if Nato developed a comprehensive strategic concept which placed modernisation in a broader context.

The Allies have debated for months about whether it is necessary to review Nato strategy [illegible] in the Harmel II report. (In 1967, the first Harmel report unified Nato around the doctrine of flexible response and *détente* with the Soviets.) Now Kohl has made it clear that he needs such a review to sell nuclear modernisation to several quite different but temporarily allied German constituencies. While the heads of state will certainly not be able to settle the issue next week, they should set up a mechanism to address it.

German conservatives, such as Christian Democratic parliamentary leader Alfred Dregger, are dismayed by what they see as inconsistency in recent implementation of the flexible response doctrine. For several years, Nato planners have been shifting their emphasis from reliance on shorter-range to relatively longer-range weapons. This provided both greater survivability for the weapons and greater nuclear risk sharing for the Germans.

Recently, however, several events seem to have reversed this trend. The US emphasis on strategic defence and eventual elimination of ballistic missiles raises questions about American willingness to defend Europe with strategic weapons. The INF Treaty eliminates the principal US medium-range weapons which could strike Soviet targets from Europe and which thus conceptually linked European security to US strategic weapons.

The "second zero" of that treaty was particularly painful for conservative Germans because it eliminated weapons in the 500km-1000km range and left mainly those that could strike German territory. And then, in January, a Pentagon advisory committee's report called *Discriminate Deterrence* reinforced German concerns by appearing to stress limited nuclear war rather than deterrence.

Another conservative German politician, Volker Rühe, summed up this concern: "the shorter the range, the deader the Germans". Germany prefers longer-range missiles or no missiles to the current situation. Efforts by the rest of Nato to point out that the nuclear risk remains shared, together with an apparent threat by US Defence Secretary Frank Carlucci to withdraw troops, have quieted some German voices but have not eased conservative German anxiety.

Many German Social Democrats, on the other hand, welcome the INF Treaty as a first step towards a nuclear-free Europe. They are pressing for a "third zero" and hope to ride the issue to power in 1990. East German President Erich Honecker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze have encouraged them by calling for new negotiations on "those systems which threaten Germany almost exclusively", and by criticising Nato's nuclear modernisation plans as circumvention of the INF treaty.

West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, leader of the centrist Free Democrats, plays to the public's concern about nuclear arms and favours early negotiations with the Soviets to reduce short-range systems. This runs counter to Nato's desire, expressed in vague terms at Reykjavik, to complete conventional arms control negotiations before turning to further nuclear matters.

Nato military leaders, meanwhile, are concerned that Nato's only remaining surface-to-surface missiles, the 125km-range Lances, are ageing and need to be replaced to prevent functional denuclearisation. The 88 Lance launchers compare unfavourably with the Warsaw Pact's 1,400 SS-21s, Frogs and Scuds.

Nato must therefore move ahead to develop a new security consensus, but it must do so without putting undue pressure on the delicate German political balance. The process could take 12-18 months, and the Brussels summit provides a good opportunity to get the ball rolling.

The elements of a renewed consensus would probably include a reaffirmation of Nato's flexible response doctrine plus some recognition of new trends in Soviet foreign policy. It would also include a review of Nato's conventional and nuclear options.

There is already general consensus within Nato concerning conventional military needs for the next decade, based on the planning document *The Conventional Military Framework*. The only major issues are how quickly to proceed and who will pay the bills.

There is also an emerging consensus on Nato's conventional arms control position. It would focus on reducing equipment useful for surprise attack (such as tanks, artillery, armoured helicopters) rather than on manpower. It envisions equal ceilings for such weapons at near the current Nato levels. The central front would constitute a zone of maximum reduction. There would be no discrimination against stationed forces. Nuclear warheads would be excluded from these talks, but dual-use launchers could be discussed.

A consensus on nuclear weapons will be more difficult to forge. It might consist of two fundamental parts.

First, the United States needs to re-establish European confidence in extended nuclear deterrence by enhancing its capability to strike the Soviet homeland from Europe. This can be done by deploying an additional 55 to 60 F-111s to Britain and arming them with stand-off missiles. The British have already agreed to such deployments in principle. In addition, the US should dedicate several hundred sea-launched cruise missiles to Nato's supreme European command. These measures can be taken quickly, with minimum political disruption and without circumvention of the INF Treaty.

Second, Nato should restructure its battlefield nuclear force in light of the INF Treaty. This follow-up to the 1983 Montebello decision, which called for both reduction and modernisation, should shift the balance further away from the shortest-range weapons in favour of those in the 200km-400km range. In addition, the total force of 4,000 battlefield nuclear weapons might be reduced by about 25 per cent. The resulting force might include modern W-79 and W-82 artillery shells, but it would be made up primarily of new air-launched stand-off missiles and a Lance follow-on.

A nuclear deployment such as this would provide minimal deterrence by discouraging the concentration of Soviet forces on the front line and maintaining pressure on the Soviet second echelon. It would reassure nervous Europeans by restabilising coupling between European security and US strategic forces. It would address German concerns by shifting to slightly longer-range weapons and thus spreading the nuclear risk. And it would offer the European public the further reduction of 1,000 nuclear weapons.

Nato's decisions on its remaining nuclear weapons should be the product primarily of internal decisions, and not of negotiations with the Soviet Union. Once a new Nato consensus is reached, it should be presented to the Soviets and they should be challenged to match it. Negotiations without careful preparation could lead to a non-nuclear Europe and a severing of transatlantic security ties.

The Nato summit which starts today should therefore take steps to meet Chancellor Kohl's challenge. While efforts to generate a new consensus are under way, the United States must be careful not to betray Europe by reneging on the INF Treaty or by threatening Europe with troop withdrawals. If Nato moves decisively, it can emerge from its current difficulties more united and more secure.

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