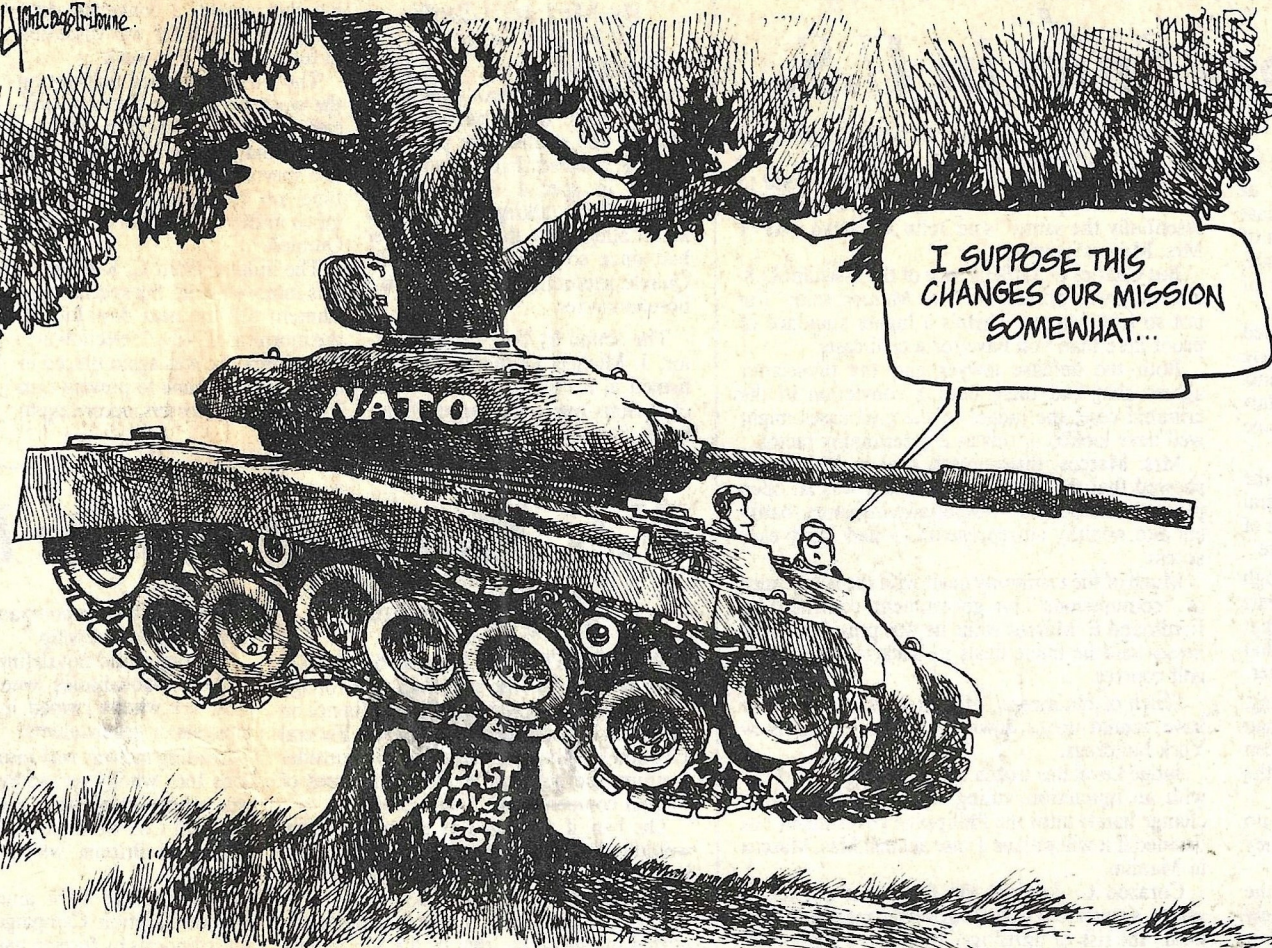


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OPINION

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NATO Should Offer a New Nuclear Equation

By Hans Binnendijk

LONDON — The NATO governments are seeking ways to manage a potentially explosive item on the agenda for the summit meeting here Thursday and Friday — negotiations on the future of nuclear deterrence in Europe. After weeks of consultation, the alliance is now in a position to offer the Soviets a new "double zero" proposal to eliminate

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from Europe all short-range nuclear missiles and nuclear artillery shells belonging to the superpowers.

The United States recently moved dramatically in this direction. President George Bush announced in May that America would not modernize the short-range Lance missile. Earlier this week, U.S. officials indicated a readiness to withdraw nuclear artillery from Europe.

The double-zero proposal is less radical than it first appears. The phased withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe removes the basic justification for keeping in place any short-range U.S. nuclear systems that are only capable of striking such areas as eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia.

For NATO, the major advantage of a double-zero proposal is that nuclear-capable aircraft would not be subject to negotiation, at least in the early phases of the talks. The Soviets have indicated their desire to ban the modernization of air-delivered nuclear weapons during the talks on short-range nuclear forces. These are scheduled to begin as soon as agreement is reached at the Vienna talks on conventional forces in Europe.

Such a ban is unacceptable since it would affect the long-term credibility of NATO's last instrument for nuclear deterrence. Placing that issue on the table early in the negotiations puts NATO in a vulnerable position.

The Soviets may not like this double-zero proposal. They may wish to retain a short-range nuclear missile capability to offset strategic losses in Eastern Europe. At the same time, they are seeking limitations on NATO's dual-capable aircraft. NATO's price for addressing these concerns should be a Soviet understanding in advance that NATO will be allowed to modernize its remaining

air-based nuclear deterrent forces.

The double-zero proposal should also be confined to the Atlantic-to-the-Urals area. During negotiations on intermediate-range nuclear forces, Japan convinced NATO to make the INF ban a global one. But that would be unwise for SNF because short-range systems are still needed for deterrence in places like Korea and because Congress is unlikely to agree to scrap weapons that countries like Iran and Iraq will retain.

A regional ban on warheads for short-range nuclear missiles and nuclear artillery should be verifiable. There are elaborate security measures for nuclear warheads, allowing each side to know precisely where the other side stores them. In a clearly defined region, verification is thus primarily a matter of political will to allow highly intrusive inspections of nuclear storage sites.

A zero-warhead option for missiles and artillery shells has the additional advantage that finding just one warhead of either type in the zone means a fundamental treaty violation. If warhead verification proves inadequate, however, an alternative would be to verify removal of SNF missiles and to ban nuclear artillery shells by simultaneous unilateral declaration.

Implementation of the double-zero

proposal would mean reducing the estimated 4,000 U.S. theater nuclear warheads by between 75 percent and 90 percent. The remaining deterrent force, if modernized and deployed on a dual-capable aircraft, should be consistent with a modified version of NATO's flexible response doctrine.

That doctrine needs modification. A NATO review of nuclear weapons policy is beginning and should be given direction at the London summit. Results may come in stages and may not be completed for over a year. The SNF negotiation may take place in the absence of a clear new doctrine for nuclear employment.

The direction given to NATO planners in London might focus on coordinating efforts among member countries to share nuclear risks than on the specific details of targeting doctrine. The preoccupation of the flexible response doctrine with targeting has left the impression of a willingness to engage in nuclear war. The modified doctrine must avoid this pitfall and shift the focus to shared risks and responsibilities within NATO. A doctrine of coordinated, response rather than flexible, response might have the desired effect.

Earlier this week, the United States suggested another means to take the spotlight off nuclear warfighting by

making nuclear systems "weapons of last resort." This has some European allies worried because it appears to make U.S. conventional forces more vulnerable and hence more likely to be withdrawn. They should not worry. The U.S. suggestion stops well short of a "no first use" doctrine, which would delink European and American security. Without a compromise, it may prove impossible to retain nuclear weapons in Germany. No doctrine is useful without the means to implement it.

Close consultative procedures need to be developed within NATO for these bilateral negotiations. In the INF talks, a special consultative group provided an effective mechanism; NATO's leaders might now take the opportunity to reactivate that group.

Maintaining minimal nuclear deterrence in the uncertainty of the post-Cold War world may not be easy. Adopting a double-zero option, modifying flexible response, and establishing a coordinating mechanism for the negotiations are three important steps along that path.

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