
Rogers on the Zero Option

'We must reconsider what we're doing'

On July 26, Gen. (ret.) Bernard W. Rogers appeared in a live interview on the NBC "One-on-One" show, and reiterated his recent warnings about the proposed agreement for withdrawing intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe. Before leaving his position as supreme commander of NATO in July of this year, Rogers gave numerous speeches and interviews from Europe, opposing the agreement as a step toward "decoupling" Europe and the United States. Within three days of this latest interview, the Soviet Union issued new bargaining terms for the "zero-zero option," which make Rogers's warnings even more urgent. The following report summarizes the analysis presented by General Rogers, who was interviewed by John McLaughlin.

"The mission we have set ourselves in NATO is deterrence," explained General Rogers. He stressed that if the weapons are removed, there will be no credible or actual deterrence. "The vital interests of this country are linked to Europe. Therefore, we need to keep our forces credible."

Rogers said that the two rationalizations given to justify the zero-zero option are wrong: first, that there can be 4,000 nuclear-type weapons left in Western Europe, and that this will be an effective deterrent. He pointed out that many of these have no significant range and have other potential drawbacks: maritime depth charges have zero range, field artillery pieces have a 1,500-kilometer range; dual-capable-aircraft weapons have a 200-250-km range, but only if they can penetrate enemy territory, which only the F-111s can do, and they're unavailable.

In any case, "It's not the numbers that count. Do we have the weapons platforms, the systems, the infrastructure . . . to give them pain? That's what we're giving up."

Second, the argument is bogus that the Soviets are going to be giving up a great deal. "If we continue to move down the slope of de-nuclearization" and into "the valley of de-nuclearization," then we will accelerate the Soviet ability to intimidate, coerce, neutralize, and blackmail Western Europe without ever firing a shot. "Deterrence is in the mind of the beholder. Russia must understand that "she will get great-

er pain than gain," if she moves. "There is no evidence that I have seen that would lead one to believe that they have changed their goal from expansionism."

Rogers reported that "top-ranking people in Europe, almost without exception," agree with him. "The greatest moral imperative of a nation is to keep people alive and free," which requires a credible military deterrence. Substituting "political credibility" will not work. The problem is that there has been an insistence on talk of nuclear weapons elimination since 1981. Political leaders have been "selling it to their populations," so that "there is no way you can walk that cat back into the sack." But we need to keep our forces credible.

As to why President Reagan is pursuing an agreement so strenuously, "I'm not sure what the logic is. You would have to ask the President." Rogers stressed that he himself is for giving up nuclear weapons, but only so long as that does not jeopardize deterrence. That the President must be pursuing the zero-zero option to take the spotlight off the Iran-Contra affair, and so to establish his credibility. This is how it is viewed by leaders in Europe, almost without exception.

When asked about the Iran-Contra affair, and the testimony of Adm. (ret.) John Poindexter that Poindexter had withheld information, Rogers replied that whatever he could say would be "hypothetical." He explained that, "I've been involved in covert operations," but he kept his immediate superiors informed. "What bothers me about this whole thing: When is it that a person can take it unto himself to lie, to mislead, to falsify, to misinform . . . ?" Operations have become covert to whom? "Covert to Congress and covert to the American people." What kind of "perception of foreign policy" does this imply? A person can lie, he can cheat. "You have to decide when you give up your honor. It can't be taken away for you."

The information war

Those who say that Gorbachov is running ahead by a big margin, as a peacemaker, are wrong, Rogers said. "The Soviets are winning the information battle in Europe." Gorbachov may be a "reformer in his own country," but the peace that he wants is "peace under his own terms." The Soviets are so bent on expansionism that they are "obsessed with using intimidation, coercion, neutralization, and blackmail, without taking the troops out of the barracks."

"I don't want greater Soviet influence" in the Persian Gulf. It is right that Reagan has not met with Gorbachov over the issue of the Gulf, Rogers said. President Reagan believes that the U.N. can handle it. Rogers's concern was whether the U.S. forces there have been authorized to use "proper rules of enforcement." The point at stake in the Gulf is, "freedom of navigation of the seas." In response to those who ask, "No matter where or what the cost?" Rogers's reply is, Yes. "We put our ships at the Black Sea . . . near shorelines of the Soviet Union" to make the point. And we send ships into the Gulf of Sidra, to rein in Qaddafi.