

U.S. troops and keeping the peace in Western Europe

by the Editors

This autumn's annual North Atlantic Treaty Organization exercises were more critical than ever before in the alliance's history.

They took place at a time when Soviet military strength is at an all-time height, when Western conventional and nuclear inferiority in Western Europe, in particular, is the most pronounced, and, worst of all, at a time when the United States government, in fact the traditional nuclear guarantor of Western European defense, has announced that it has reached an "agreement in principle" to withdraw its Intermediate Range Nuclear weapons from Western Europe, in return for the Soviets' withdrawing a similar class of their weapons from the Warsaw Pact nations of Eastern Europe.

As it has been widely emphasized, if this "agreement in principle" becomes, in fact, an implemented reality, the result will be that Western Europe's minuscule conventional forces will be at the mercy of the terrifying overwhelming superiority of Soviet conventional forces already deployed there.

This year's Reforger and Certain Strike exercises served notice more than ever before that without a totally unconditional American nuclear guarantee for Europe's defense, Europe is indefensible.

The importance of the presence of 300,000 American soldiers in Europe is this: If the Warsaw Pact threatens these soldiers, and if it challenges their assigned job of defending Western Europe, the full might of the American strategic nuclear arsenal will, presumably, stand behind them.

This assumption, at least, has kept the peace, so far, since the end of the last war.

The end of Flexible Response

When, during the late 1960s, the question was posed whether it would be worthwhile for the United States to launch its missiles and to risk a general Soviet thermonuclear assault in order to defend Europe, no straight answer was given. Instead, then-national security adviser McGeorge Bundy developed the theory of Flexible Response, which was designed not to answer this question.



The new deadly Apache attack helicopter used by the 6th Cavalry Brigade of the III U.S. Army Corps.

From the days of McGeorge Bundy to date, Flexible Response is the official doctrine of the NATO alliance. The doctrine states that in case of a Soviet conventional attack against Western Europe, NATO will try to stick to a "conventional only" defense, and bring into the action battlefield nuclear arms, and eventually tactical and intermediate-range nuclear arms only if the possibility of defense at lower weapons thresholds has been exhausted.

The idea of Flexible Response was that the United States would not be willing to risk a general thermonuclear exchange with Russia for the sake of Europe's defense. Therefore, according to the Flexible Response doctrine, intermediate nuclear weapons were useful to be deployed in Europe so as to make it unnecessary for the United States to run the risk of an all-out strategic showdown for Europe's sake.

So, now with the "agreement in principle" respecting INF, the question is: Without these intermediate nuclear forces in Europe, how will America defend Europe from a Russian attack? The existing number of American soldiers in Europe is no match, numerically, to what the other side has. Without tactical nuclear weapons to protect them, would the United States be willing to use its strategic nuclear weapons to defend both its G.I.s in Europe, and Europe itself?

The 'Munich II' factor

If the INF agreement is signed, then the choices for the United States are only two: either withdraw all its troops from Europe, abandon all pretense at defending Europe and dissolve the alliance; or, abandon the Flexible Response doctrine, return to the earlier doctrine of Massive Retaliation,

with a massive rearmament drive throughout the alliance.

In the first case, the United States, bereft of alliance, becomes totally indefensible.

In the second case, the world will commence its rapid march toward World War III.

A signing of the INF Treaty, in this instance, will lead as surely to world war, as the Munich Pact of 1938 led to World War II.

In this sense, this year's exercises were very memorable because they are likely to be the last of their kind, i.e., the last to be designed and held under the assumptions of the Flexible Response doctrine. Even though the exercises were observed by hundreds of journalists from many nations and news organizations, very few have provided coverage for the general public.

The *Executive Intelligence Review* is of the opinion that this year's exercises were too important to be ignored, and deserve the attention of the public.

The basic lesson drawn from them can be summarized in the comments made during the opening press conference of Certain Strike by NATO's new Supreme Commander, General John Galvin, who said: "I do not see a way to defend Europe without nuclear weapons. . . . It is not a question of a nuclear-free Europe but a war-free Europe."

On the question of U.S. troop withdrawal, the general underlined the absolute necessity for the current level of American troops in West Germany: "Their presence is needed to deal with the possibility of a surprise attack from the Warsaw Pact . . . if we drop their size the possibility for surprise attack increases."