A NEW CONCERT OF EUROPE

by John Mueller

It may be time to begin taking peace seriously. The major countries of the developed world have now remained at peace with each other for the longest continuous stretch of time since the days of the Roman Empire. Moreover, they have gone more than a quarter of a century without a significant confrontational crisis: Rather than drawing closer to war with each other, as characteristically happened during earlier eras of peace, the major countries seem to be drifting further away from it.

While war between East and West is not impossible in the foreseeable future, it seems far from heroic to regard it as wildly improbable. Since the consequences of even a nonnuclear major war would be horrendous, concern about it is, of course, sensible even if its likelihood is slight. Nevertheless, when the probabilities drop far enough, it becomes justified to relax even concern about calamity. A nuclear war between Great Britain and France, or between either of them and the United States, would be catastrophic; but because of its low probability, none of these once-hostile countries spends much money, psychological energy, or time guarding against the danger.

The likelihood of war between East and West may not be as low as it is between Britain and France, but it seems to be getting there. Lord Carrington, then secretary general of NATO, observed in an interview in 1988, "I don't think there's a threat in the sense that we're going to get an invasion by the Soviet Union. But what I do think is that the military potential is still there and we have to be prudent." Carrington's call for prudence is cer-

---

JOHN MUELLER, *a professor of political science at the University of Rochester, is the author of* Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War *(1989). This article is developed from an essay to appear in Robert Jervis and Seweryn Bialer, eds.,* Soviet-American Relations After the Cold War *(forthcoming).*

tainly sensible; but while it may never be wise to throw caution to the wind, there are times when it should be put out to air a bit. This seems to be one of those times.

In that spirit, this article incautiously advances two propositions. First, under present circumstances arms reduction is more likely to proceed effectively if it is allowed to evolve without explicit agreement. Second, the best way to resolve the divided and still- contentious condition of Europe would not be to fragment or eviscerate NATO and the Warsaw Pact but rather to combine them. Specifically, therefore, it is proposed that arms reduction talks be abandoned and that the European alliances be confederated.

Hans J. Morgenthau proclaimed in his 1948 book, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, that "men do not fight because they have arms"; rather, "they have arms because they deem it necessary to fight." It follows, then, that when countries no longer deem it necessary to fight, they will get rid of their arms. A country buys arms because its leaders espy a threat or opportunity that, it seems to them, requires them to arm. The United States and the Soviet Union have seen each other as threatening and have armed themselves accordingly. The British and the French do not find each other militarily threatening anymore and have not spent great sums on arms intended to counter each other.

Under the present condition of relaxed Cold War tension, it seems reasonable—even inevitable—that a certain degree of arms reduction will take place. Total disarmament is hardly in the offing, of course. Both sides would have to guard against resumed hostilities and, just to keep abreast of things and avoid unpleasant surprises, they would presumably want to maintain active research and development programs. Moreover, peripheral concerns might require military preparedness. The United States would certainly want to retain some military options in Latin America, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and elsewhere, while the Soviet Union faces various hostile countries along its Asian border and may also feel it needs troops to keep its fractionalized empire intact. Further, neither side would be pleased if an

arms reduction somehow triggered insecurities that led to the emergence of a vengeful, rearmed Germany or Japan. And both sides would no doubt want to retain some arms to aid their quest for influence around the globe.

It is not clear, however, that these needs call for ships in the hundreds, for thermonuclear weapons in the tens of thousands, or for standing armies in the millions. And neither side is likely to have difficulty envisioning other ways to spend its money. The United States has built up a burdensome deficit; and many argue that its overemphasis on arms expenditures has kept it from tending to problems at home and from competing effectively abroad. The pressures on the Soviet budget, terribly bloated by defense expenditures, are even more severe.

However, while the weapons that have been built up during the Cold War may seem increasingly burdensome—even parodic—and while reasons abound for wanting to reduce the burden, the mechanism for doing so may be difficult to engineer. These difficulties will be aggravated if it is required that arms reductions must be accomplished through explicit mutual agreement—that a delicately nuanced arrangement must be worked out for every abandoned nut and bolt.

The Trouble with Arms Control

Arms agreements tend to take an agonizingly long time to complete. The 1968 Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, a very mild measure that was clearly in everyone's best interest, was argued for six years. Moreover, arms agreements often become irrelevant, because while one weapons system is being controlled by laborious negotiations, a better one is being invented.

Indeed, the existence of arms control talks often hampers arms reduction. In 1973, for example, a proposal for a unilateral reduction of U.S. troops in Western Europe failed in Congress because lawmakers felt that this would undercut upcoming arms control negotiations—which have been running on unproductively ever since. Similarly, opponents of the MX strategic nuclear missile and of former President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative failed in Congress in part because

some of those who consider the weapons systems dangerous or worthless nevertheless supported them because the weapons seemed to be useful as bargaining chips in arms control talks. Whether or not those proposals for reducing arms and avoiding new arms were wise, they failed in considerable measure because of the existence of arms control talks.

If arms are reduced by agreement, both sides will strain to ensure that all dangers and contingencies are covered; and they will naturally try, if at all possible, to come out with the better deal. Reduction is certainly possible under these circumstances, but it is likely to be slow and inflexible. Arms control is essentially a form of centralized regulation and it carries with it the usual defects of that approach. Participants volunteer for such regulation only with extreme caution because once under regulation they are often unable to adjust subtly to unanticipated changes. Moreover, they are often encouraged, perversely, to follow developments that are unwise. For example, the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) treaty of 1972 limited the number of missiles each side could have, but allowed them to embellish their missiles with multiple warheads and to improve missile accuracy, thereby encouraging them to develop a first-strike capability.

There is an alternative: Just *do* it. The arms buildup, after all, was not accomplished through written agreement; instead, a sort of free market arose in which each side, keeping a wary eye on the other, sought security by purchasing varying amounts of weapons and troops. As requirements and perspectives changed, so did the force structure of each side.

If arms can be built up that way, they can be discarded in the same manner. It would be a negative arms race, similar to the one that began more than a century ago between the United States and British Canada.

Americans and Canadians are so accustomed to living peacefully side by side that it is easy to assume this has always been the case. But enormous hostility once divided the United States and British Canada, and it was registered in wars in 1775–83 and 1812–14. After the second war the contestants lapsed into a long period of wary coexistence—of cold war, in fact. They

did manage to agree to one arms control measure: the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817, which placed limits on the armament, number, and size of warships. But there was no provision actually to destroy warships, and both sides left some in dockyards where they could be put into action should the need arise. Further, both sides engaged in evasion and technical violation over the next half-century, and both built ships that could be converted easily to military use. Each continued to build forts along the border, and the British created an extensive and expensive canal system in Canada as a military supply line. This arms race was accompanied by a series of border clashes and severe territorial disputes, and many Americans were caught up in the romantic notion that it was their "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of [their] yearly multiplying millions."

By the early 1870s, however, most claims and controversies had been settled. Canada was granted independence, in part because British taxpayers were tired of paying to defend their large, distant colony. And with the Americans focused on settling the West and recovering from their calamitous civil war, it seemed safe to begin to withdraw the British army from Canada. Without formal agreement the two countries gradually disarmed. Their forts became museums where obsolete cannon still point accusingly but impotently in the direction of the nearby former enemy; they have been allowed—as the bumper sticker would have it—to "rust in peace." "Disarmament became a reality," observes C.P. Stacey in *The Undefended Border: The Myth and the Reality* (1967), "not by international agreement, but simply because there was no longer any serious international disagreement."

If the Cold War and the ideological contest have now truly been dampened, a similar arms reduction could come about between East and West. The weaponry is obviously more lethal than in the American-Canadian case, and the forces available are more nearly equal. Thus any arms reversal ought to be handled carefully, particularly at first, with a sensible if perhaps overly sensitive concern that a severe arms imbalance in favor of one side could in-

spire that side to contemplate blackmail. But yearly reductions need not be large or traumatic. After all, over the last four years of the Reagan administration defense budget authorizations declined some 1–4 per cent per year in real dollars, with little pain or alarm.

But as in the American-Canadian case, arms reduction can happen without formal agreement. It seems, in fact, to have begun already. In December 1988 Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev dramatically announced that he was going to begin to reduce Soviet arms unilaterally. Months before Gorbachev's announcement, in an article in the June 1988 *NATO Review*, Carrington warned about "involuntary or structural disarmament" within NATO where a relaxation of East-West tensions "has made support for defense spending harder to win." This is of concern, he held, because while Gorbachev clearly "has a real interest in reducing military expenditures," he had apparently not done so yet. However, if the Soviet buildup did begin to swing into reverse, Carrington conceded, NATO's tendency toward structural disarmament "would not matter." As if on cue, the *Wall Street Journal* within days of Gorbachev's announcement observed a "new reluctance to spend for defense" within NATO. In a month, reports were noting that Gorbachev's pronouncements "make it harder for Western governments to justify large sums for military machines. . . . Western perceptions [are] that the Soviet threat is receding and that big armies are expensive and inconvenient—perhaps even irrelevant." A few months later, as both sides spun out more proposals and counterproposals, the press was calling the process a "race to demilitarize." Some U.S. officials, alarmed by the disarmament impetus, are reportedly hoping to use formal arms control negotiations to slow the process.

It may not be entirely fair to characterize disarmament as an effort to cure a fever by destroying the thermometer, but the analogy is instructive when reversed: When the fever subsides, the instrument designed to measure it loses its usefulness and is often soon misplaced. The arms-reversal process would be as ambiguous, chaotic, halting, reversible, and self-interested as the arms race itself; but arms would

gradually be reduced. There might be a role for agreements focused purely on arms *control* measures that cannot be accomplished unilaterally—such as improved communication links, mechanisms to detect surprise attack preparations, or improved methods of verifying the size of the other's military forces. But arms *reduction* will proceed most expeditiously if each side feels free to reverse any reduction it later comes to regret. Formal disarmament agreements are likely simply to slow and pedantify this process.

Soothing the Bear

It seems clear that the Soviet Union's internal contradictions have now caught up with it, leaving it on view in its true colors as a "third world country with rockets," as one Polish intellectual put it. It follows that the USSR will experience a substantial decline in status if economic variables are used to measure status as, increasingly, they are. To begin to reverse their economic slide, the Soviets need to embrace such efficient capitalist remedies as bankruptcy, unemployment, and massive inflation in the prices of essentials like food and housing—remedies which, however, are likely to exacerbate problems of class, ethnicity, nationality, and region. It is possible, of course, that the reformers will be able to turn things around after a period of trauma and dislocation. If they can, decline will be more or less temporary and more or less moderate. If they cannot, decline could persist for decades or even centuries, with the USSR following the well-trammeled path of such pathetic predecessors as the Ottoman Empire and the Qing (Manchu) dynasty of China. Imperial collapse is also a possibility.

In this process the danger always exists that the Soviets will resort to boisterous behavior or to dangerous rocket-rattling in order to remind the rest of the world that they still exist. Accordingly, the West might engage in useful stroking measures to make the Soviets feel that they are important no matter what dismal news the economists may bring. Such measures might also help raise the domestic prestige of Soviet reformers, something that many analysts see as beneficial. Arms agreements can help in this strategy; and if, as suggested, they are fo-

cused on arms control measures, they would not hamper genuine arms reduction. Other methods might also be explored, such as working with the Soviet Union in the United Nations to resolve issues in troubled areas like the Middle East: Whether the issues are resolved or not, the Soviets will at least be made to feel important. Space ventures could serve a similar function; and if carried out in a cooperative mood rather than in a competitive one, they will proceed at a leisurely pace and save money for all sides. And of course we can all stride shoulder-to-shoulder in the various marches against such consensual evils as forest fires, global warming, oil slicks, and whale depletion.

But East-West coordination can be most productively directed toward resolving the divided condition of Europe. Here the Soviet Union has a substantial role to play, not merely an atmospheric one. Although an unprecedented peace has prevailed in Europe since 1945, serious unresolved problems remain. Chief among these are the unnatural division of the Continent into two camps and the anachronistic empire the Soviet Union has forced upon the unwilling peoples of Eastern Europe.

The division separates two alliances arrayed in military opposition. If war is becoming progressively less likely, the two alliances will become unnecessary. Indeed, if Western politicians were trying to create NATO today, few people would see its virtue or necessity. Yet NATO and its Eastern counterpart linger on because of political inertia.

Equally unnecessary is the Soviet Union's empire. While the Soviets might once have justified it on economic and military grounds, these rationales have lost whatever force they had. Eastern Europe is an economic burden on the Soviet Union, and its military usefulness in the days of long-range missiles and diminished war threat is highly questionable. Ideological justifications for the empire can still be manufactured, of course; but ideology seems to be in pronounced decline in the Soviet Union, particularly when it runs up against unpleasant economic realities.

The logical eventual outcome of all this would be the abandonment of the costly and useless alliances and empires—a sort of conti-

nentwide Finlandization or Austrianization as each country wanders off to pursue its independent destiny. There are two major problems with this process, however. One is Germany. Without the involvement of the United States and the USSR, Germany will become the most formidable country in Europe. Given the history of the last century or two, it is too easy to visualize, on one hand, eventual conflict or war between two independent Germanies or, on the other, a reunification of the two entities leading eventually to hegemonic domination, militarization, nuclear weapons acquisition, and war. Neither of these dire possibilities may be likely. For the foreseeable future—say, 10 or 20 years—it is most likely that Germany, whether unified or not, will follow the direction of postwar Japan and continue a quest for prosperity without military conquest. Indeed, over the last century or two in the developed world, war seems to have become progressively obsolescent, following the pattern of other once-ubiquitous institutions like dueling and slavery.

With the experience of two world wars behind them, however, many in the Soviet Union and elsewhere will have difficulty finding sufficient satisfaction even in an ironclad guarantee that Germany will not rise again for 20 years. They want an arrangement that will keep Germany under wraps permanently. Thus, any resolution of the European situation needs to include such a perpetual—or at least seemingly perpetual—guarantee.

A second problem with abandoning the alliances is that it will leave the Soviet Union, even with significant arms reductions, as the dominant military entity in Europe. One analyst, Colin Gray, warned in the Winter 1987–88 issue of *The National Interest* that "history does teach that predatory countries abhor a power vacuum. It is as certain as anything in politics can be that the Soviet Union would hasten to exploit the American withdrawal. . . . [and] press for unilateral advantage over the economically well-endowed former security clients of the United States." Others may question whether things are so certain. It has become difficult to imagine the Soviets seeing much virtue in policies that risk a large war or pro-

voke substantial discontent in Europe. But there is no final guarantee that they will not attempt to fill some power vacuum. Clearly, any plan for a lasting resolution of the European situation must guard against the possibility that Gray is right.

Two propositions follow from these considerations. First, since it would permit German revanchism, the withdrawal of the United States and the Soviet Union from the affairs of central Europe ought not be part of a resolution of Europe's divisions; rather, these two guarantors against German military resurgence should be tightly bound into the fate of Europe. And second, since it would permit Soviet domination of Europe, a U.S. withdrawal from the affairs of the area is additionally undesirable; a solution should keep the American counterweight in place. In short, Europe is too important to be left to the Europeans alone.

Confederating the Alliances

An economic blending of West and East could be part of a solution. However, mutual economic dependence has been no guarantee against war in the past; it would be wise to build a structure for political and military dependence as well. This could be accomplished with greatest dispatch by confederating the two alliances in some way.

It is true that the alliances are in place to oppose each other militarily and that an essential mission of each is to defend against attack by the other. But traditionally, mutual defense has not been the only function of alliances. As historian Paul Schroeder has pointed out in his illuminating 1976 study, "Alliances, 1815–1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management," all alliances of that era in part restrained or controlled the actions of the partners in the alliance, and "frequently the desire to exercise such control over an ally's policy was the main reason" for the alliance.

The generalization clearly holds for alliances in the post-1945 era as well. Few would deny that the Soviet Union has used the Warsaw Pact to help maintain its control over its East European satellites, and a virtue of NATO to members (and nonmembers) is that it affords some measure of control over possible German

yearning for nuclear weapons or for revenge. American alliances with Taiwan and Japan have been designed in part to control the smaller partners even while guaranteeing their safety from invasion.

In addition, Schroeder observes that alliances were frequently employed to "conciliate an opponent, in the interest of managing the system and avoiding overt conflict." That is, it "need not be true, as is often supposed, that powers must have generally harmonious aims and outlooks if they are to become allies." Schroeder also speculates that détente between America and the USSR could develop into an alliance for peaceful purposes.

A major barrier to an East-West alliance has been Soviet devotion to an ideology built on the notion that the capitalist political and economic system is fundamentally evil and must ultimately be overthrown. While communists have sometimes productively united with capitalists to confront a common enemy (most notably during World War II), their belief in the supreme desirability and necessity of anticapitalist revolution has prevented any of these fronts from becoming permanent. It is this component of postwar international politics that has divided the world into two camps and has kept the two alliances rigid and separate, unlike the situation in much of the previous 150 years when alliance patterns were often remarkably flexible and fluid.

If this ideological component of Soviet foreign policy fades away, it follows that alliance patterns could then take on a 19th-century flexibility and that East and West could find it possible and advantageous to confederate themselves. Something like this has already happened with the Chinese. When they abandoned their commitment to worldwide anticapitalist revolution in the 1970s, they were quickly embraced by the capitalist world and, a current strain in the relationship notwithstanding, may now be in a sort of alliance with the United States. If the Soviet Union had contemplated invading China in the 1950s, it would not have had to worry much about the possibility that the United States would come to China's defense; today, it would. And after the Yugoslavs broke with the Soviet Union in

the late 1940s, the United States sent military equipment to Yugoslavia, declaring that the country was "of direct importance to the defense of the North Atlantic area," and that its "ability to defend itself" was important to U.S. security. For a while Yugoslavia was close to becoming an informal participant in NATO.

A similar opportunity may now be arising with the Soviets. In December 1988 Gorbachev called for "de-ideologizing relations among states" and, while referring to the communist revolution in Russia as "a most precious spiritual heritage," proclaimed that "today we face a different world, for which we must seek a different road to the future."

Arms reduction talks ought to be abandoned.

If the Soviet Union now becomes merely a normal, old-fashioned great power—albeit perhaps one with some lingering expansionary instincts—it can be comfortably incorporated into classical patterns of diplomacy and alliance. On December 8, 1988, in his last presidential press conference, Reagan was asked if the Soviets might once again become allies with the United States as they were during World War II. He responded, essentially, in the affirmative: "If it can be definitely established that they no longer are following the expansionary policy that was instituted in the Communist revolution, that their goal must be a one-world Communist state . . . and certainly there are indications that . . . they don't like being the pariah, [then] they might want to join the family of nations and join them with the idea of bringing about or establishing peace." Six months later his successor, George Bush, was urging, without Reagan's tentativeness, that Western policy should move "beyond containment" and seek to "integrate the Soviet Union into the community of nations."

Moreover, this development is not contingent on the progress of Soviet domestic reform. As long as the Soviet Union, like China in the 1970s or Yugoslavia after 1948, continues to neglect its expansionary and revolutionary ide-

ology, it can be embraced by the West. Illiberal, nonexpansionist Portugal, after all, was a founding member of NATO.

Initially, of course, any confederation of the alliances would feel awkward. It could begin with political consultations and lead to a rough coordination of military planning. After all, the Voice of America (VOA) is far more likely to bring about a collapse of the Soviet regime than is NATO. The VOA has opened an office in Moscow; why not NATO? Observers already routinely watch over each alliance's maneuvers under a 1986 agreement, and the sanctity of each alliance's bases is often violated by inspectors from the opposite side under the terms of the 1987 Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces—two ideas that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. Maneuvers might be coordinated and political consultations could lead to agreement about rules of the game in Europe. Eventually, bases or training camps might even be exchanged. The bases would be at once guarantors of cooperation and hostages to it. This might lead in time to elements of joint command.

Whatever the procedures of implementation, the goal would be to create a situation in which every country in the area feels that it has some control over the military destiny of every other country and, specifically, one in which both the United States and the Soviet Union maintain control over the military potential of both Germanies. As Schroeder suggests, such alliances of mutual management have been quite common. In this case the pattern might roughly resemble the Concert of Europe, the alliance-of-the-whole that flourished for decades after 1814 despite the absence of an external enemy.

Should something like a new Concert come about, the Soviets would find it feasible to relax their grip on their useless and costly empire in Eastern Europe. Countries like Hungary or Poland would not need to leave the Warsaw Pact; rather they would merge along with the alliance into a broader political and military structure. And such an umbrella alliance could eventually permit the confederation of the two Germanies while establishing a continentwide watch over military developments in the new

entity. Without such a resolution to the German problem, Soviet satellites will be able to pry themselves free of the Warsaw Pact only by causing dangerous unease in Moscow.

The Soviets are likely to approve of a plan that promises at once to solve the German problem and to remove their East European albatross. And a plan that promises to concede autonomy to Eastern Europe only gradually is likely to reduce Soviet problems by relieving the explosive frustration of East European peoples and giving them a future to work for. To accept the plan, however, the Soviets would have to abandon any hegemonic notions about Europe they might still cherish. If they are still dedicated Stalinists at heart, they will not assent to the plan; if they have genuinely changed, they will. It would be a useful test.

An East-West alliance would facilitate further peaceful cooperation in what used to be the world's most warlike continent. It could also eventually facilitate political unity of the Continent and of the developed world. But this end is not necessary or perhaps even particularly desirable. The goal should not be to stop conflict but to keep it from taking military form: A wide alliance does not mean that perpetual bliss and perfect harmony would automatically break out. Indeed, a merging of the alliances would not even render war impossible in the area. The Soviet Union and Hungary managed to get into a war in 1956 even though they were members of the same alliance, and an intra-alliance war of sorts took place in Czechoslovakia in 1968. At present, wars between Greece and Turkey within NATO, between Hungary and Romania in the East, or between ethnic factions in neutral Yugoslavia are far from inconceivable.

But a confederated alliance would help contain such conflicts and prevent any single member or cluster from possessing undue influence based on military (as opposed to diplomatic, economic, or political) clout. Hostility, rivalry, xenophobia, suspicion, arrogance, and pettiness would continue to flourish in Europe; but some of the Continent's major problems would be resolved and the prospect of major war would be further diminished.