Pan-European Security: A Soviet Scholar’s View

by Henry Trofimenko

The Demise of the Postwar Confrontation

Postwar relations between the Soviet Union and the United States split Europe into two conflicting systems. The Cold War itself was in great measure the practical result of the “two systems” conception of international relations propounded and practiced by the Soviet Union. However, once the Soviet Union achieved strategic nuclear parity with the United States in the mid-1970s, the Cold War temporarily ground to a standstill.

The Helsinki Final Act of 1975 seemed to be a formal confirmation that the Cold War in Europe had been played to a draw. The Soviet Union received Western recognition of the “existing territorial-political realities,” and the West received from the Soviet Union a formal acceptance of the possibility of a peaceful change of borders in Europe and a recognition of the importance of human rights—previously mentioned by Soviet authors only with the addition of the term “so-called”—as a sort of pledge not to impede democratic developments in Eastern Europe, should they occur. The Soviet presence in Eastern Europe was so inorganic that the moment the Soviet Union was unable to impose discipline, the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe crumbled. Political scientists and leaders in the West rushed to claim victory in the Cold War; the Soviet Union had not only been contained, but rolled back, essentially to its 1941 borders.

Paradoxical as it may sound, this victory was beneficial to the Soviet people. The strain and burden that Cold War competition imposed on Soviet society is now forcing the Soviet leadership to critically review the requirements for peaceful coexistence in the atomic age and the potential of an unreformed Soviet economy to

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compete with the West. It has brought about the mellowing of the Soviet state, prophetically anticipated by George Kennan, the father of the strategy of containment. The crucial question is whether the colossal military machine, ostensibly created for the defense of Soviet society from an external “threat,” actually weakened the society to such an extent that the military itself became the main danger for society’s survival.²

Mutual Security Concerns and Relevant Strategies

Whatever each side said during the heated polemics of the Cold War, it is absolutely clear now that neither side, while preparing for war, really intended to attack the other; the political aim of military planning was essentially defensive. A U.S. nuclear attack against the Soviet Union would prompt a Soviet conventional or nuclear attack on Western Europe, which would be overrun, by U.S. assessments, in only three weeks.³ Because of this, Soviet strategists believed that the United States would be unable to start a prolonged land war with the Soviet Union. The U.S. leadership would be reluctant to target the Soviet forces that broke into Central and Western Europe, because using American nuclear weapons there was impossible in view of the tremendous collateral damage to the allied populations. Thus, Western Europe became the Soviet Union’s hostage in a U.S.-Soviet nuclear confrontation. Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, the former chief of General Staff of the Soviet armed forces and current military adviser to President Gorbachev, has confirmed that this was indeed the Soviet defense posture during the Cold War.⁴

After the Soviet attainment of strategic parity, the Soviet Union no longer needed to think of Western Europe as a hostage. Under any scenario of a U.S. attack, the Soviet Union would retain sufficient strategic nuclear forces for a really unacceptable retali-

2. President Gorbachev admitted in his speech at a workers’ meeting in Minsk that the Soviet economy “has been the most militarized economy in the world with the biggest defense expenditures.” Izvestiya, 28 February 1991.


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However, instead of being satisfied with this historic achievement, as it was billed in the Soviet Union, Soviet generals decided to up the ante. By using Brezhnev’s chronic illness and his semi-detachment from the affairs of state, they not only did not release Western Europe from its hostage status, they deployed very effective and precise SS-20s, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) missiles. This created the possibility of a limited nuclear war in Europe and a Soviet victory if strategic parity deterred the United States from making a nuclear reply against Soviet territory proper because the Soviet Union would be refraining from an attack against the continental United States.

Such a situation could not be accepted by NATO and led to the well-known double-track decision of December 1979, in which NATO decided to respond to the Soviet deployment of the new missiles with counter-deployment of the new U.S. INF missiles in Western Europe, which were good for theater wide nuclear strikes. On top of that, President Reagan restarted the strategic arms race by shelving SALT II and pouring new money into a strategic build-up. This challenged the Soviet Union to a more intensive military-technology race, including a new realm of strategic competition: strategic defense in space.

A Swing Away from the Seemingly Endless Road

When President Gorbachev started to assess all the implications of the resumed arms race—both in Europe and on the U.S.-Soviet strategic level—he came to the same conclusion that Henry Kissinger arrived at earlier, namely that the road is endless. In this competition, the prevailing side would be the one with the stronger and more innovative economy, not the one with the more formidable military machine. The vaunted strategic parity began to look more and more like a mirage: Now you see it, now you don’t.

Gorbachev’s first impulse was to enhance the development of the Soviet military-industrial base by investing heavily in the machine-building industries that fill the orders of the military-industrial complex. Soon, it became evident to the Soviet leadership
that the hoped-for economic acceleration would not happen without basic structural economic and social reforms. When Gorbachev's initial attempt to impose some arms-control "solutions" on the United States through the perception of Soviet strategic superiority failed, the Soviet civilian and military leadership began in earnest to look for a way out of the quickening arms race, which culminated in two seminal decisions. The first was to agree to the mutual liquidation of all Soviet and U.S. INF missiles, as well as other nuclear missiles with a range greater than five hundred kilometers. After the December 1987 agreement started to be successfully implemented, Gorbachev and his colleagues made another fateful decision: to agree to the establishment of equal levels of conventional arms between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces from the Atlantic to the Urals. This latter decision led to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, signed in Paris in November 1990.

The CFE Treaty requires more extensive cuts in tanks, artillery and armored vehicles for the Soviet Union than for any other large country among the 22 participating in the treaty. Its implementation will mean that by 1994, Soviet forces will no longer have numerical superiority in Europe. With the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1991 and the agreed-upon withdrawal of Soviet troops from Germany by 1994—and evidently from Poland as well—there will no longer be forward-deployed Soviet troops in Eastern Europe. In this new situation, the Soviet capacity for a sudden offensive operation in Europe will vanish, and there will no longer be a strategic zone of allied states to allow the Soviet Union some defensive depth next to its own territory.

The Cold War situation is now reversed: It is the Soviet Union, not NATO, that will have to repulse aggression against its territory with the peacetime composition of forces for defensive operations. In accordance with its new defensive posture, the Soviet Union is

5. President Gorbachev admitted that "We wanted to make a dash in labor productivity. We invested 10 billion [rubles] in the country's machine building in order to pull it up, but soon realized that the job was not really being done; it was ground to a halt by the command structures, inflexible planning and distribution by quotas." Izvestiya, 28 February 1991.
reforming the structure of its conventional military forces. Combined-arms divisions are to be shifted to more defensive positions, the number of tanks will be reduced by 20 to 40 percent and the number of aircraft in air force regiments is to be reduced from 40 to 32. This does not mean, of course, as some Soviet authors suggest, that the Soviet military command totally renounces the possibility of offensive operations in the event of an armed conflict. However,

the launching of the first preemptive strike by the Soviet military forces is absolutely excluded. If aggression [against the Soviet Union] is undertaken the main type of military activities will be defense. The follow-on actions of the Soviet armed forces are to be determined by the character of military activities of the enemy and will depend on the means and methods of military struggle employed by the latter.6

The Pentagon and the White House have responded to these developments by announcing that the United States and NATO would have a two-year warning period before a Soviet conventional military attack. This, in effect, means that the perennial Soviet military threat to Western Europe has disappeared. More importantly, it means that the hostage status of Western Europe in U.S.-Soviet confrontation has been abolished in both theory and practice, leading to a new era of stable European peace.

Although the rational calculations of security considerations of former Soviet allies in Eastern Europe may advise them to be neutral, these countries may well seek some connections with Western defensive organizations, especially if the mechanisms for Pan-European security created within the framework of the Conference for Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) prove feeble and ineffective. High-level statements about the need to join NATO are frequently heard today in both Prague and Warsaw; Hungary has already managed to become an associate member of the North Atlantic Assembly.

In light of the new situation in Europe, President Gorbachev, in his address to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in July 1989, advanced the idea of a “common European home,” to be built by

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"restructuring the existing international order in Europe in such a way that common European values will come firmly to the forefront and it will become possible to replace the traditional balance of forces with a balance of interest." According to Gorbachev, the security foundation of the common European home should be a framework of multifaceted cooperation among its dwellers. He also said that "the formation of a vast economic expanse from the Atlantic to the Urals, with high level of interconnection between its eastern and western parts" is a realistic prospect, "though not an imminent one."

In view of the Soviet outline of the common home and the background of the well-known decisions of the Paris summit of November 1990, the important question to be asked today is: What are the current prospects for a common European home built on the foundation of common security?

The New Security Perspective

The eradication of the disparity in conventional military power in Europe that had favored the Soviet Union is a major step toward enhancing European security. In all probability, however, it is a move toward a more equitable balance of forces, not interests. This currently seems to be the favorite strategic notion in Moscow. The notion of a balance of interests is rather convoluted; how can it be achieved in the international arena when it is often not achievable even in domestic politics? It seems, for instance, that the 500-days economic-reform program for bailing the Soviet economy out of its present crisis was collectively hammered out on the basis of the balance of interests of all the Soviet republics and their leaders. However, it was dismissed by the central government to the detriment of every republic and, as is now evident, the Union as a whole.

Internationally, the balance-of-interests lexicon was widely used last at the end of the Second World War, when Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin determined their respective zones of influence. The reason why the balance of interests in postwar Europe

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7. See Gorbachev's address to the Council of Europe, Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 61, no.27 (1989) pp. 6-7.
was stable for the past 45 years was that the balance of forces between the two opposing blocs, though constantly increasing in volume and lethality, was also rather stable. The moment one of the main participants became too preoccupied with internal problems, the balance of forces changed and, evidently, so did the balance of interests. Among those interests is the NATO governments’ desire to keep the bloc intact in a situation in which the opposing military bloc no longer exists, and the clear intention of some elements in the West to draw a new line on the western borders of the Soviet Union, if not on the eastern borders of the Baltic republics.

Both the political and military leaders of the Soviet Union think that NATO is in no hurry to reciprocate Soviet moves toward the demilitarization of politics with any steps of its own. I suppose this feeling of frustration helps to explain, though not to justify, the moves of the Soviet High Command to transfer some tanks behind the Urals before the CFE-mandated reductions started and to reclassify three Soviet divisions within the treaty zone into “marine” ones, which they hoped would allow them to save about one thousand tanks from destruction, a move that in the final analysis has not succeeded.

While Soviet generals resort to petty tricks to reverse what they claim was Shevardnadze’s capitulation policy in which, as U.S. negotiators noted, “every dispute seemed to be resolved with the Soviets giving 80 percent and the Americans 20 percent,”8 NATO remains the same, still preparing to repel the now mythical “Soviet threat.” Washington cautions that radically curtailing U.S. troop strength in Europe is premature, and it is reported that the military planners of NATO have agreed on a plan to expand their multinational rapid-reaction force to as many as one hundred thousand troops “to meet new demands inside and outside the alliance’s area of operations.”9 Also, the promised drastic revision of NATO strategy in Europe with an emphasis on defense is long in coming.

The new balance of forces in Europe requires a new organizational framework. The new situation will be monitored by the new

bodies created within the CSCE process by the 34 states party to CSCE: the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all the countries, the Permanent Administrative Secretariat in Prague, the Conflict-Prevention Center in Vienna and the Office for Free Elections in Warsaw.

These organizations form the framework for future Pan-European cooperation with greater cohesion than any before. However, they are all fragile and powerless at present, and the procedures envisaged, for instance, for emergency situations, have yet to be established. It is clear that for the time being, they will be able to hold conferences and meetings, but not to manage Pan-European security.

On the positive side, though, there has been progress in confidence- and security-building measures in Europe as stipulated in the Vienna Document of 1990, adopted by the 34 current CSCE-member countries. If exchanges of military information and observations are supplemented by the inspection mechanisms set up by the INF and CFE treaties, the concept of military transparency will really take hold in a very wide area. The detailed mechanism of verification that would be part of the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) Treaty and the possibility that the “open-skies” project may also be realized would further codify this transparency.

In these conditions, even without the last two mechanisms of verification, CSCE participants could be quite sure that the danger of a sudden aggression in Europe had finally been eradicated. One hopes that these mechanisms and arrangements will gradually gain in strength and authority and become effective instruments for promoting common security in Europe. Also, there are many other organizational, informational, political, military and economic ways that, if and when implemented, would contribute to a new European order based on unity and cooperation, not on division and domination.

Organizationally, the newly established bodies of Pan-European security management should be turned from formal arrangements into working mechanisms. It could be done, first, by strengthening their technical information base and, second, by widening the scope of their authority, especially in handling emer-
gency conflict situations.

In the final analysis, the decisions of the top CSCE bodies should take precedence over the decisions of other groups, whether NATO, the West European Union (WEU) or, for example, any new group that might be created by the East European states.

There should be further progress in the CFE II negotiations that are now being conducted on a non-bloc basis, including further steps in confidence- and security-building arrangements. While convergence of the military doctrines of the main participating powers can hardly be envisaged at the present time, commonly binding principles of a defensive nature could be distilled to serve as guidelines for the European Conflict Prevention Center and for planning the character and volume of further arms and troops reductions.

One of the remaining problems of Cold War competition is the problem of U.S. and Soviet tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. The concept of minimal deterrence associated with those weapons is hardly applicable in the new situation. Clearly the unification of Germany, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the swing of the Soviet Union to the doctrine of reasonable sufficiency and the forthcoming changes in NATO's military doctrine toward greater defensive orientation undercut the utility of short-range nuclear forces (SNF) in Europe.

Similarly, the U.S. concept of a follow-on-forces attack to repel a Soviet invasion of Western Europe now seems to have lost any realistic strategic ground. At the same time, the presence of SNF weapons on German territory increases the danger of nuclear accidents in a climate of expanding terrorist activities.\(^{10}\) If these problems cannot be solved collectively through CSCE procedures, they at least ought to be seriously reviewed by NATO and the WEU in light of the new security situation in Europe.

It is encouraging to observe that the process of intra-European and transatlantic political debate on the future of the new Europe is intensifying. Only such scholarly and public debate can provide substance for the foreign ministers of the 34 countries to compose agendas for future deliberations. In this regard, the role of the

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media is crucial, and one of the prerequisites for advancing toward common security is not only to ensure transparency in military activities, but also the unimpeded circulation of ideas regarding the building of the new Europe through the free dissemination of information. This requirement now pertains mainly to the Soviet Union, which in the second half of the 1980s has made some bold steps toward freedom of information for its citizens, but recently Moscow has been showing signs of reversing directions.

And, of course, much work is expected in the field of European economic and cultural integration, which is necessary for the political and military division of Europe to be superseded, as Gorbachev described it, by the single “vast economic expanse from the Atlantic to the Urals.” Is such integration possible in the near future? Culturally and educationally, it is feasible. East European countries and Soviet society have always been spiritually close to European culture, despite all the communist attempts to sever practical ties of this nature. Recent developments suggest that the restoration of close cultural ties between Western and Eastern Europe is not a very difficult matter: In February 1991, the Soviet Union officially acceded to the European Cultural Convention, thus formally confirming its identification with European cultural heritage and tradition.

As for the creation of a single economic space, some developments on this score are also forthcoming. The new European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was officially inaugurated in London in April 1991. According to its president, Jacques Attali, the EBRD should gradually be transformed into “a really purely global, Pan-European institution.”11 The European Community’s (E.C.) Commission drafted a version of a European Energy Charter that envisages the creation of a common European energy market with the participation of the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which will be a very important step on the road to economic integration since the European Community imports 10 percent of its oil and even more of its gas from the Soviet Union.

However, the present situation inside the Soviet Union makes

envisaging a substantial move toward economic integration rather
difficult. The main obstacle is that the Soviet economy, which
used to be one of the most integrated economies in the world, is
slowly disintegrating, reverting to the barter exchange of com-
modities between the various republics. If internal integration is
the task facing Moscow today, the possibility of real European
economic integration looks remote.

The Hard Road to Unity in Peace

It would be insincere for a Soviet scholar not to mention the
suspicion nurtured by quite a few Soviet academics and political
leaders: that Western countries accepted the Pan-European ar-
rangements framed by CSCE as a concession to the Soviet Union
for its contribution to the demilitarization of Europe.

The suspicion is that the Western countries would stop there and
not go further because they believe that active participation of the
Soviet Union in the development and consolidation of Pan-Euro-
pean security mechanisms would undermine the process of West
European integration. Such apprehensions are not unfounded. As
reported in February 1991, the nine members of the WEU released
a paper suggesting a strengthened defense policy for the organiza-
tion that would link it to both the European Community and NATO.

At the same time, Jacques Delors, president of the European
Commission, urged that defense should be written into the new
political-union treaty now being negotiated between the 12 E.C.
members. Britain, as the true U.S. commissioner in Europe,
appealed to France and Spain to devote their efforts first and
foremost to renovating NATO’s structure and command arrange-
ments. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd preached that “renewing
the alliance and deciding how European defense should be
strengthened are two of our most important tasks in 1991....”

With all the haggling between Paris and London, the most heated
debate still concerns the security of “integrated Europe” between
Brest and Brest. So, while the Western powers are not very

enthusiastic about the strengthening of CSCE Pan-European institutions, they are working to consolidate the West European ones.

It would be preposterous to expect that because of the demise of the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Eastern Europe, the respective West European or Atlantic institutions based in Europe will quickly wither away. On the other hand, Western leaders must realize that their appeals to strengthen NATO or the WEU, or both, to give the European Community defense functions, have a very negative impact not only on Soviet politicians, but also on the public at large. This is especially true when such appeals are accompanied by calls to “orchestrate” the Soviet retreat from Europe and build a “common democratic home” west of the Soviet Union. The West’s position gives the impression that the Soviet withdrawal from Europe is its most urgent goal.

The cynics might retort, “Who cares? Isn’t the Soviet Union disintegrating anyway, and won’t whatever is left of it be forced to play by Western rules?”

Will it be? The first response to such reasoning is to rekindle the famous verses that Aleksandr Blok, the outstanding Russian poet, addressed to Europe at the turn of the century. He wrote that if Europe would not take Russia into its brotherly embrace, as Russia hoped, it would turn to Europe her “Asiatic mug,” which it actually did in 1917! Does the West want a repetition of that? And this is not the only possibility. Some Western leaders supposedly concerned with the Soviet Union’s democratic development are actually more interested in its dismemberment. This strongly implies that the two-systems concept of the Cold War period remains the guiding principle of the politics of the Western powers, even after Moscow has abandoned such an approach.

The Soviet central government, as well as the republican leaders, might feel betrayed by the West at a time when the mellowing of the Soviet regime created the conditions for the abandonment of the Manichaean philosophy of two irreconcilable worlds. Al-

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though a nightmarish scenario of 15 nuclear states replacing the Union is being brandished by some Soviet journalists, it is highly unlikely. However, the prospect of the republics and their leaders being alienated by the West and left to their own designs is hardly encouraging for a “new European order,” especially if some republics do acquire nuclear weapons.

In other words, whatever the West’s past political strategies were, the continuation of the strategy of confrontation, no matter how the pressure is hidden, will be absolutely disastrous for all. This will only contribute to “Balkanization” in Europe and will destroy the desire of even liberal Soviet leaders and groups to continue the process of genuine European detente.

That is why, however difficult it is for the West to part with past stereotypes and institutions, the creation of a new humanistic and peaceful order in Europe requires Western concessions and constructive actions, not only endless expectations and debates about what else might be torn off or stolen from the state entity or entities east of the Polish border. The leaders of Germany, aware of their country’s painful history and immense present problems, seem to understand well the necessity of not making the Soviet Union an outcast. Do its allies?