

Johan Galtung:

A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR SECURITY

"I could see where you could have the exchange of tactical weapons against troops in the field without it bringing either one of the major powers to pushing the button"

US President Ronald Reagan
[International Herald Tribune
21 October 1981]

Can there be that much doubt about what is happening? Is it not common sense that it is in the interest of both superpowers that major wars, if they take place, are fought on the territory of third parties and - if possible - by these third parties themselves? Europeans are often so ethnocentric that they think the Cold War is limited to Europe. We easily forget this particular confrontation of ideologies and material/security interests is equally clearly articulated in East Asia. And that the superpowers have already done it twice: Korea 1950-1953, Vietnam 1955-75. In neither case did it come to strategic exchanges of ultimate weapons between the superpowers although threats were used by the US side against the proxy on the other side. Of course they had fewer qualms about doing this on Asian territory, with Asians bleeding to death for reasons only partly their own. Of course, nobody in his or her good senses will deny that it is in the interest of any country to manoeuvre in such a way that the likelihood of nuclear war on their own territory is minimized. But when close allies are involved, of the same race and culture on either side, the arguments become more complicated.

Thus, I think it is fair to say that Europeans both sides felt considerably better when the basic strategy was MAD, mutual assured destruction, Big Brother of Bolshoj Brat and vice versa. The human loss would be greatly lamented, but there is a difference between the bomb that hits yourself and the bomb that hits superpower heartland, an ocean or the vast Eastern plains away. Is it really strange if the two superpowers also found this MAD? In the almost inconceivable circumstance of a war against Norway and Finland, would not battle on Swedish territory have certain advantages, particularly if Sweden through non-proliferation treaties had pledged herself not to develop the kind of arms reserved for the Big only?

What I am hinting at² differs from the current concern with medium range missiles (SS20, Cruise-Pershing II) in two ways.

First, the focus on IRBM is only a mid-way station. Land-based IRBMs in continental Western Europe is certainly a way of "sharing costs and risks" (Weinberger, Rogers). They can serve to attract some of the Soviet ICBMs (which, it should be remembered, can also be used for the middle range although the converse is not true) away from US targets. Knowing this the Western European allies might prefer to agree to a first strike to hit Soviet missiles and to get rid of these awesome targets. But there is a serious flaw: the formula is asymmetric. The Soviet Union might decide both to hit where the bomb comes from and where the ultimate command comes from, from the US heartland. Only if the bombs do not hit the Soviet heartland, or the Soviet Union itself, could the war be kept limited in the sense of keeping the area, the targets limited - to us, to the 400 million Europeans. And this is where the less noticed build-up of the tactical capacity enters the picture, with arms stationed with the allies on both sides, the small brethren. This formula would be symmetric and this^{is} what Reagan was thinking of in his famous and simply honestly outspoken - formulation.

My prediction, hence, would be that after much verbiage on both sides the IRBMs might actually be withdrawn - meaning withdrawal of the SS20s and non-deployment of the Cruise-Pershing II formula on European soil. One might then be back to the SS4-SS5 pitted against submarines with Poseidon/Trident missiles - one sub¹⁶⁰ sufficient to destroy ~~all~~ big and intermediate size cities in the Soviet Union. The question of whether they are under US or SACEUR command will hardly impress the Russians very much. Obviously it is in US interest to withdraw them from SACEUR command in order to make the ground-launched cruise missiles more credible. But the asymmetry will still prevail - hence the building up (under cover of the IRBM debate?) of the tactical arsenal. And this includes Pershing¹⁶⁰

^{missile} Lance, the Buccaneer, F-104 and F-4 fighter-bombers and the very important 155mm and 203 mm howitzers (because they can be fitted with ERW, neutron grenades) on the US side and Scaleboard SS 12, Scud B SS-1c, SS-21, Scud A SS-1b and Frog 7 missiles and 203 mm howitzer and 240 mm mortar on the USSR side -- all of this well dispersed among the allies and with more modest range (not beyond 600 miles) ③

Second, I assume the motivation for a policy of this kind to be relatively symmetrically distributed between the superpowers. No one knows better than they the damage the bombs will make. No one knows better than they how disinclined they are to stop the arms race as both of them would want some edge over the other side (or at least that the other side has no such edge) and both are incapable of agreeing on what "rough parity" would mean, given the tremendous asymmetries and the role of non-quantifiable variables in the whole process. Both see their own armament as modernization and legitimate reaction to efforts by the other side to arrive at a first strike capability. Both are prisoners of their own logic. What would be more natural than a tacit superpower agreement to the effect of displacing the theater of war, even if it is a puppet theater with the superpowers both pulling the strings and being spectators? Of course they will vehemently deny this. They will overbid each other in saying that no area-limited war is possible in trying to assure their allies that the coupling is as firm as ever. Reagan's remark was the major gaffe: it would have been interesting to have attended the meeting he had with his advisors afterwards.

Will this transfer of the nuclear battlefield work? Only insofar as the Europeans permit it. No doubt the US (and the USSR) have a strong argument: the Europeans were egoistic in preferring a deterrence based on the mutual assured destruction of the superpowers, with the Europeans living, even prospering, under this (dubious) nuclear umbrella. The Europeans are equally right that

the opposite position, a transfer to tactical exchange in the European (meaning also non-USSR) theater would be utter superpower egotism, of the type demonstrated in East Asia. Had the US strategic missiles been stationed in areas as densely populated with well educated, politically conscious people as is the case for the missiles now to be emplaced in Western Europe the US would have had a peace movement at least of the magnitude of the European one. ④

One possible outcome of this would be that the transition towards a limited European theater is halted and that the IRBM capacity is built up according to the plans. This would, of course, lead to an enormous pressure on the Russians to have something similar. It is quite clear what that would be: IRBMs land-based on Caribbean or Central American soil - in other words a replay of the Cuba scenario 1962. There are few things the US would be so sensitive to, and few places where the US is so vulnerable due to her imperialistic policies. Hence the Caribbean Rapid Deployment Force. Possibly the Soviet Union might give up such designs. In that case they would continue their ~~unplanned~~ production of ICBMs and IRBMs to be launched in all possible ways against all possible targets. That they should come to the conclusion after Cruise-Pershing II have been emplaced that they have to back down is clear metaphysics, as can also be seen from one simple counter-question. If the USSR is now too strong, why do the United States not back down? Why do they expect the USSR to do what they do not?

So the arms race continues with no delay, as a tactical Europe-limited arms race (with Norway-Denmark included through the prepositioning schemes), or as a strategic ICBM/IRBM race as before. Or both. Till there is that incident, that military confrontation that triggers off the whole thing.- According to Michael Wallace there is a correlation of very close to 1 between being participants in an arms race and being participants in a war after a military incident (Journal of Peace Research, 1981)

So, what is there to be done? About this much can be said, but let me focus on four answers derived from asking a very simple question: which countries in Europe are today the most secure, meaning the least insecure? My own tentative answer would be in terms of four classes of countries:

- (1) Most secure: Switzerland
- (2) Second: Finland, Austria, Yugoslavia
- (3) Third: Sweden, France, Greece, Romania
- (4) Most insecure: the client states in the NATO and WTO systems

This is not the place to go into any details. but the logic of the argument, the dimensions of reasoning, can be made explicit. There are four such dimensions.

First, the degree of decoupling from the superpowers. In a war what matters is the extent to which the country is a part of a superpower design, and membership in blocs in times of peace does matter. No country in the world today feels threatened by Switzerland or the countries in class 2 above - hence they are not likely to be exposed to any major threat or attack either. But this is, then, coupled to:

Second, the extent to which the country has a credible non-aggressive defense, and not an offensive military capacity. There are three types here: ~~non~~conventional military defense with short range but high fire power, mobile and dispersed in order to be as invulnerable as possible and as unworthy of a nuclear attack as possible; paramilitary defense (guerilla) and nonmilitary defense. These three are certainly combinable, with the first being more important as a front line defense, the other two as in-depth defense. Switzerland and Yugoslavia both have come very far in this direction: the client states not at all, dependent, as they are. on superpower strategies.

Third, the extent to which the country has made itself invulnerable, by being reasonably self-reliant in essentials (food, energy, health, defense), not being too centralized, having some reservoir of intermediate technology to fall back upon, not being too easily fragmented by class and ^{ethnic} ~~race~~ conflicts. Again Switzerland is a good case, systematically working (see its 1972 defense plan) along such lines. So does Yugoslavia. The client states have plans but little action, hence are bad providers of security for their own citizens, and should be exposed as such.

Fourth, the extent to which the country is ~~useful~~ more ~~useful~~ alive than dead - something Switzerland does through its banking services, the Red Cross, the conference sites (all of Switzerland is a site of that kind), and so on. Most countries in Europe have something in that direction, but so often overshadowed by the aggressive defense policy they have been engaging in.

I would say that although no policy today is without risk it would be considerably less risky for a country to follow these four leads than to be a party to superpower strategy, even with the ever increasing probability of becoming the theater of war. For this to happen the country does not even have to leave NATO: it could do like France and Greece, leaving the military integration (Romania is very similar to this on the other side), continuing in the political alliance. It could also try to change the military strategy. It could develop its defense, building down the offensive components - a look at the defense budget of Switzerland will show that the expenses per capita are quite low relative to many NATO countries. It could become less vulnerable economically and structurally - something it probably has to do anyhow. And it could engage more actively in peace policies.

Is this not worth a major European war prevention conference? And then with the superpowers as observers, not a co-presidency. To listen to what Europeans might have to say.