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REFLECTIONS ON COLD WARS: THE 1983 OSLO ATLANTIC DEFENSE SYMPOSIUM

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In August 1983 the Norwegian National Defense College sponsored a symposium to discuss the effects on Western defense policies of the events and influences of the period from 1947 through 1953. The symposium was able to draw on newly accessible materials and the memories of some of the participants in the creation of NATO, but the lessons of "Cold War I," like most of the lessons of history, turn out to be generally ambiguous.

With "European and Atlantic Defense 1947-1953" as its theme, the Oslo International Symposium organized by the Norwegian National Defense College's Research Center for Defense History in August 1983 was ostensibly concerned with ancient history, the heyday of Cold War I thirty years ago. By happenstance the meeting was held the same week that the Defense Ministry in Oslo was preparing to release an official report on the latest (unidentified but presumably Soviet) submarine sightings and chases in Norwegian fjords, a puzzling episode in Cold War II and a lively topic of discussion during conference coffee breaks. The coincidence was an appropriate symbol of the way current events and scholarly reinterpretations of the first Cold War were bound to cast shadows on one another, inviting comparisons and reflections on the past as a guide to the present, or at least a source of useful lessons and monitions.

Such comparisons and reflections were not on the agenda or among the purposes of the Symposium, although they hung in the air and were occasional-

ly mentioned in passing ("if this seems familiar today, . . ."). They are, however, the purpose of this *Report*, which is therefore not an account of the Symposium or a summary of its findings and conclusions *per se*. The putative "moral of the story" for today's world will in most cases be left to the reader, in part because it is often ambiguous, which is what the "lessons" of history usually are.

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The Oslo Symposium was attended by scholars from nine NATO countries (Norway, West Germany, Great Britain, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Iceland, the United States, and Canada) and neutral Sweden. The discussions were enlivened and enlightened by the presence of senior Norwegian participants in the creation and early years of NATO, whose revisionist comments and reminiscences provided healthy reminders that documents from official archives and published memoirs, the principal grist of the historians' mills, rarely contain the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The decision to omit participants and topics from the Mediterranean flank of NATO was taken, despite some misgivings, to achieve greater depth of focus and detail at a three-day meeting.

"From War to Cold War" was the theme of the first day's sessions, based on papers describing American, British, and French attitudes to security questions and spheres of influence in the years 1945-50 and the formation of the Western Union and its expansion into a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1948-49. The second day was devoted to what Olav Riste, the Symposium's organizer and Director of the Oslo Research Center, called "North Atlantic Treaty Mark I: Limited Commitments." The third focused on developments after the outbreak of the

Korean War in June 1950, a period that Riste labeled "NATO Mark II: Defense Build-up and Integration." The penultimate paper that last day, entitled "NATO goes Nuclear," carried the story beyond 1953 and into a third phase in NATO history, characterized by strategic planning and political dilemmas that are still, or again, on the agendas of NATO commanders and political leaders in the 1980s.

The recent publication or opening of U.S. and some other NATO archives for the years and subject under study¹ provided one reason for holding the Symposium at this time. These newly accessible materials, frequently cited in Symposium papers and discussions, apparently contain no startling revelations. They do, however, suggest some minor revisions of Cold War I history, alternately confirming or raising new doubts about previous interpretations of particular events and policies.

Among these confirmations and revisions, those of greatest potential contemporary relevance and interest for non-specialists include the following:

- The Communist *coup d'état* in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950 were crucial in mobilizing public opinion, especially a critical mass of "elite" or policy-making opinion, behind the creation of the Western European Union and NATO ("Mark I") in 1948-49 and for effective rearmament, including that of West Germany, and integration of the latter after mid-1950 ("NATO Mark II"). Without these events, NATO Marks I and II either would not have happened at all, or would have assumed different and probably weaker forms. While this has long been common wisdom about the period, the Symposium shed new light on the who, when, and how of the impact of Prague '48 and Korea '50, and on the dimensions of their importance. In this process innocence, wisdom, *idées fixes*, and misunderstandings played a fascinating and often contradictory mixture of roles at various levels, all with suggestive analogies in Cold War II.

- Although the origins of the Korean War and the Soviet role in its outbreak seem to have been particularly and fatefully misunderstood at the time — another piece of now common but this time still contested wisdom — the NATO response may have been a significant case of doing the right thing, at least in the short term, for the wrong reasons. The longer-term effects of the way views of the nature of "the Soviet threat," and therefore of NATO's purposes and prior-

ities, were turned upside down by the Korean War pose a different, debatable, and contemporary set of questions. If there was a misunderstanding of what Korea signified, it is also interesting to discover, in today's different but partly analogous circumstances, that our European NATO partners shared it to a greater extent than most of us then knew and than many of them were later willing to admit.

- The extent to which NATO's military capability, including the American nuclear deterrent, was an empty scabbard in the early years of the Alliance was unknown even to most member-country ministers and senior officers with a clear "need-to-know." American military planners were fully aware and drew appropriate conclusions, as their war plans of the period show. Other recently accessible documents also reveal, however, that they tactfully refrained, as far as possible, from informing their European partners that these plans presumed an initial and unavoidable Red Army conquest of first all and in later versions almost all of continental Western Europe. For their part, the governments and high commands of NATO Europe found good reasons, including concern for their own and their peoples' morale, for going along with this game, indulging in self-delusion and not asking their American counterparts too many awkward questions.

- In the light of the above and other considerations, NATO's "going nuclear" in the Eisenhower era acquires a firmer aura of eventual inevitability and pertinence. The sigh of relief that passed through European chancelleries, including some neutral as well as NATO ones, emerged clearly from the scholars' papers and former participants' reminiscences at the Oslo Symposium. The perpetuation and modernization of NATO's nuclear dependence in later years, along with the nature and rationale of the Soviet nuclear buildup (anticipatory-offensive or responsive-defensive?), are of course separate questions that may have different answers. However this may be, it is instructive to know more about what NATO planners and politicians thought they knew in the 1950s, what they did not know or were wrong about, and other accidents of decision-making on what is again a critical and contentious subject.

Prague and Korea: From "Mark I" to "Mark II"

"Turning points" in history are a bane of historians, almost always

guaranteed to provoke disagreements. The Oslo Symposium, where the question concerned crucial turning points in Western attitudes to Soviet intentions and consequently in Cold War and NATO history, was only a partial exception. Although there was an initial and final consensus that February 1948 (the Prague coup) and June 1950 (the outbreak of the Korean War) deserved the label, several participants muddied the waters for a time by nominating other events and dates for the countries, issues, key individuals, or groups that were the focus of their own studies. This reminder that one must also ask "*Whose* turning point?" threatened at one stage to atomize the discussion and the concept, but it also suggested another way of approaching the subject. In this and many other cases, one suspects that the answers for different individuals and groups, weighted for their influence over policy or public opinion and charted over time, would point to specific moments when the accumulation achieves a "critical mass" that brings about the kind of larger-scale dramatic or fateful changes that do deserve to be called "historic turning points." Such an approach would surely help to explain how and why certain events in the history of Cold War I had a "turning point" impact while others that should and often did have equal or greater significance for individual actors in the drama were denied this honor. As for Cold War II, a current event, the same approach, with our definition of the quantity and quality of a turning point's critical mass sharpened by the historical exercise, might also give us a modestly improved predictive (and preventive?) capability.

The Prague coup undeniably was an event of this kind, an earthquake with more serious and lasting consequences than earlier tremors in the same series. By the end of 1947 many key individuals and groups on both sides of the Atlantic had already been converted, or needed no conversion, to what one may for brevity call a Cold War perspective, but other views of Soviet intentions and the appropriate responses were still competitive. Western foreign and military policies reflected this ambivalence. The Truman Doctrine of March 1947 and the launching of the Marshall Plan that summer had been significant harbingers, but the Truman Doctrine's commitments were explicitly limited to Greece and Turkey, two special and urgent cases outside what was then considered Western Europe. As for the Marshall Plan, it is now frequently forgotten that it was initially offered to all of war-

ravaged Europe, including the U.S.S.R. and its satellites. This was partly a feint but partly an honest indicator of mixed motivations, in which "one world" wartime and early post-war idealism continued to co-exist with "two-world" anxieties and reluctant American recognition that spheres of influence exist, whether one likes it or not, and that the United States had one and an interest in its defense.

The military alliance being negotiated that winter by Britain, France, and the three Benelux countries was in its genesis also a hybrid of older and newer perspectives. Ostensibly an instrument of collective security against a re-militarized Germany, still the only potential enemy listed in the text of the Brussels Treaty when it was signed in March 1948, the Western Union they were creating already had what a Symposium paper on the subject called a "hidden agenda" for many of its creators: as "an elaborate device to entangle the United States" in an otherwise hopeless defense against a different if still unnamed enemy, the Soviet Union.

Coming at this moment the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia eliminated the ambivalence, hastened the signing of the Brussels Treaty (with the hidden agenda now apparently foremost in the minds of those present), and precipitated the creation of NATO during the following twelve months — a remarkably brief period in view of the complexity and frequent contentiousness of the issues and the unprecedented nature of such a peacetime military alliance for the United States and several other signatories. Prague had this dramatic effect in large part because the coup suddenly and significantly enlarged the number of influential people, and of those who elect or consent to them, who believed that Soviet intentions were aggressive and expansionist rather than defensive and did indeed pose a serious and urgent threat to independence and multi-party democracy in Western Europe, beyond the limes of the Red Army's presence and of "legitimate" or at least "understandable" Soviet security concerns.

Czechoslovakia had also seemed to lie outside those boundaries. With its westward geographic orientation and history and thoroughly "Western" political and social values and institutions (now twice betrayed in a decade with Western connivance or impotent acquiescence, which intensified the emotional aspect of Western reactions), it was not generally regarded as belonging to Eastern Europe. On the contrary, it had been since 1945 a self-proclaimed bridge be-

tween East and West that the Soviet Union was believed to have a multifarious interest in maintaining. Furthermore, a Communist Party with a plurality won in genuinely free elections and leadership in a left-of-center and friendly coalition government, plus a traditionally Russophile population, had surely provided adequate guarantees that Soviet interests would be duly respected and domestic policies at least "progressive" social-democratic. The Red Army had withdrawn shortly after the liberation, technically because it had no legal reason to stay (as it did, on the basis of end-of-war Allied occupation agreements, elsewhere east of the Elbe and the Enns) but also in apparent recognition that Czechoslovakia was different. None of the extenuating circumstances heretofore invoked to explain a defensive Soviet hegemony over and limited to the backward countries of Eastern Europe, with their traditions of Russophobia, "reactionary" anti-Soviet autocracies, and use as invasion routes into Russia, seemed to apply. In the "satellitization" of Czechoslovakia the Soviet Union had, on this reckoning, flagrantly and ominously overstepped a boundary of what was beginning, reluctantly, to be accepted, and had done so in a westward direction.

As evidence presented in Oslo also makes clear, however, the "Soviet threat" confirmed by the Prague coup was still widely regarded, on both sides of the Atlantic, as primarily economic and political in nature. Without rapid economic reconstruction and related improvements in welfare and "social justice" to bolster social stability and existing regimes, it was feared that war-devastated and demoralized Western Europe would continue to be vulnerable, as Czechoslovakia had been, to satellitization and "Sovietization" through propaganda and political subversion by Soviet agents and local Communist parties acting on Stalin's orders. The role of domestic Communists in social unrest and a wave of strikes in several Western countries at this time seemed to prove that this was what Stalin was up to.

Soviet military adventurism, on the other hand, could be discounted for at least the rest of the first postwar decade, although war through misadventure could not. The awesome damage inflicted on Russia by World War II was too recent and unreconstructed, the new Soviet empire in Eastern Europe was still too unstable (witness Tito's defiance of Stalin, which became public in the months between the Prague coup and the establishment of NATO), and the

power of the United States with its nuclear monopoly was too overwhelming. In these circumstances the Red Army, still licking its own wartime wounds, could be expected to pose no more than the back-up threat of a *coup de grâce* in specifically propitious conditions — again as in Czechoslovakia.

NATO's priorities were to echo this rank-order of concerns. The traditional military definition of "collective security," the purpose of the Alliance, was expanded to include and in this case emphasize collective economic, social, and political security. NATO's primary function, therefore, was to facilitate and coordinate economic recovery and other forms of joint West-European and trans-Atlantic action designed to enhance the strength, political stability, and morale of its battered European members.

The hidden agenda of Western Union's founders, which included increasing awareness that the region's seriously diminished weight in the worldwide balance of power and control over its own destiny was permanent rather than temporary, provided another and devious reason for emphasizing NATO's economic and political over its military functions. An enduring and assured American engagement, reliably committing the New World to redress the balance of the Old in peace as well as war, was in this situation essential but could not be taken for granted. Despite the hopeful precedents of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan (and of a New York headquarters for the United Nations), statesmen both in Europe and Washington continued to fear America's isolationist tradition and a repetition of the 1920s, this time with even more disastrous and immediate consequences. The mood of the U.S. 80th Congress, which lagged behind public opinion (according to 1948 polls) in readiness for increased American commitments, reinforced these fears. Anti-colonialism, another tradition then still alive and influential in American political culture, also played a role in public as well as Congressional reluctance to supply Europe with arms and American forces that might encourage the French, Dutch, and British to release more of their own to hold restive or rebellious colonies in Asia and Africa. This, too, was well known in Western Europe.

Documents cited at Oslo reveal a widespread conviction that in these circumstances the easiest and perhaps the only way of banning the specter of isolationism and binding the United States to Europe for the long haul was to invoke traditional American idealism, while at

the same time deflecting historic American antipathy to "entangling alliances," by emphasizing NATO's role as an instrument for economic and political recovery and by playing down military commitments, which were therefore less clearcut in the final text of the North Atlantic Treaty than in early European drafts. This was a game that military planners and others concerned with the military side of the Soviet threat were quite willing to play for the sake of American security guarantees and arms.

The price of the game was less and slower rearmament than the military considered wise and a set of strategic defense plans largely devoid of effective coordination, honest information-sharing, — or even of forces and joint commands capable of fulfilling them. The dimensions and implications of the emptiness of the NATO scabbard in those years — and of illusions and self-delusion on the part of its European members, with the partial exception of the British — are only now becoming public information as archives of the period are selectively opened. If the assumptions about Soviet intentions that led to NATO's creation were correct, one must conclude, and be glad, that Soviet authorities were as ignorant and therefore excessively awed by American power and its NATO extension as were most of their West European counterparts.

American war plans in NATO's early years were the most realistic, if only because those who wrote them knew the limits of American capabilities and so harbored fewer illusions. While continental West European planners and their governments insisted from the beginning on a meaningful defense "as far east in Germany as possible" or at least on the Rhine, early American plans — the ones that would have been activated, by the way, if the Prague coup or the Berlin blockade had led to war in 1948 — anticipated token resistance and then a quick withdrawal of all American (and allied?) forces from the continent, to be followed in due course by liberation from bases in North Africa, Britain, and farther west. Revised versions in the next eighteen months were slightly more optimistic and included bridgeheads to be held in non-NATO southern Spain and variously in Brittany, Norway, or elsewhere after the rest of continental Europe had been abandoned.

The primary reason for American reluctance to share these plans with their European partners, except for the British, is obvious, but a second reason is ironic in view of what shortly became known about Soviet moles and other

spying species in the heart of the British citadel: only the British could be trusted with the awful truth, since the governments of key continental allies like France and Italy were either penetrated or porous. In any case the ignorance of the continental allies was sustained by a reluctance to ask pointed questions that were likely to produce demoralizing answers and compounded by flattering illusions (which the British seem to have shared) of virtually infinite American resources and power. The Europeans were thereby condemned to producing defense plans and blueprints for American-supplied rearmament that bore little relationship to American capabilities and intentions and therefore to reality. Quite often sensing that this was so, they took comfort from America's monopoly of nuclear weapons and delivery systems, the trump card they desperately hoped would make their own planning and forces matter only for the opening trick of a general war. Here too they were ignorant. As we now know, the American nuclear arsenal in those years was so small and of such quality that, if it failed to deter merely by existing, it could not have stopped a determined invader who had presumably discounted even greater damage from it in deciding to invade.

What the Oslo Symposium called "North Atlantic Treaty Mark I" was indeed a NATO of limited commitments and capabilities and no effective joint planning and command structures. Awareness of just how limited was bound to spread and penetrate over time, and in fact was doing so by early 1950. The net effect, in conjunction with other and competing concerns, was more perverse than positive for a militarily stronger alliance. It was increasingly realized that an even halfway credible conventional defense of the continent would be impossible, if the Russians one day really came, without a major military build-up by NATO members and a significant German contribution. The first was politically impossible everywhere. Still serious balance-of-payments and other economic problems continued to command more attention, and to seem more urgent, than the putative threat of a Red Army that had stomachached the relief of the Berlin blockade and Yugoslav defection, and whose readiness for a major war most European strategists had now postponed to the mid-1950s. In these circumstances no government had the will, and few saw an overwhelming need, to opt for more guns rather than more butter. The second, a rearmed Germany, was still anathema to some NATO governments and to most of the public

in those NATO countries — i.e., all European members — where unpleasant memories of an armed and brutally aggressive Germany were still fresh. Since nothing less than one or both of these unpalatable options would really help, there was little incentive to do anything else.

These barriers to a better armed West were being reinforced by the apparent success of containment without much rearmament. The good guys, the anti-Communists, had won the Greek civil war with the help of American aid and the Communist guerillas' loss of their Yugoslav sanctuaries as a by-product of Yugoslavia's quarrel with Stalin. Yugoslavia itself had successfully spun out of the Soviet orbit, to the West's significant geo-strategic advantage, and the Red Army had only rattled its sabers around the frontier, provoking a few border incidents. This and its failure to challenge the Berlin airlift seemed to confirm an unwillingness to risk general war, or even a local one that might escalate, despite Soviet predominance in conventional weapons.

On the Western home front Communists were no longer part of any government, having resigned or been ousted from governing coalitions in France and Italy in 1947 and even in occupied Austria, where a lone Communist Minister had been a propitiatory gesture to the Soviet occupation authorities, in 1949. They had failed (if they actually intended, which they probably did) to turn strikes and social unrest into insurrection or a coup in these same three countries and elsewhere. And they seemed to have reached the apogee of their voting strength without anywhere again achieving the relative majority which had played a major role in their takeover of Czechoslovakia, and which they had briefly enjoyed in two early postwar elections in France.

All in all there seemed to be little reason to rock the boat with unpopular increases in defense budgets at cost to other sectors or by forcing the German question, and good reasons not to. Just then, however, North Korean forces invaded South Korea in an attempt to reunite the divided Korean nation by force and under Communist rule.

Few of those who played roles in the Atlantic Community's reaction to this event seem to have had doubts about its significance:

1. The North Koreans were acting on Soviet orders, as what would now be called Soviet proxies, and were testing Western resolve to resist armed Communist aggression in a situation and

place where the experiment could be contained if it went wrong.

2. If the West failed the test, all previous bets were off in Europe as well.

3. Regardless of the outcome in Korea, the invasion proved that the Soviet threat was also military after all, and now rather than later, implying that NATO's rank-order of concerns and priorities must be reversed forthwith.

Thirty years later few if any of the experts attending the Oslo Seminar seemed to doubt that the first of these propositions, and with it the "proof" part of the third, was wrong and a serious misinterpretation of Soviet intentions and the way the Soviet bloc worked. Several mentioned and none dissented from the now widespread (but still contested) view that the North Koreans acted on their own initiative, although they would certainly have informed Moscow of their intentions. Soviet culpability, in this interpretation, was limited to failure to impose a preventive veto, which was equally certainly within Moscow's power. If this is true, it tells us nothing about Soviet intentions elsewhere in the world and neither proves nor indicates that the Kremlin was planning to launch the Red Army westward, or in any other direction, with or without American resistance in Korea.

On the other hand it was, as things turned out, a grave Soviet/North Korean miscalculation, probably encouraged (according to both the original and the currently favored interpretations) by thoughtless high level American statements that had seemed to imply that South Korea lay outside the American protective and defensive perimeter. Not only did the United States respond in Korea after all, along with other countries, but the repercussions in Europe were immense. One discussant at the Oslo Symposium used the term *grande peur*, with its suggestion of mass panic, to describe the atmosphere and emotion that gripped many West European governments — but not always public opinion in their countries — when the attack on South Korea was taken as a sign that the bear was loose, hungry, and on the hunt in all directions. Several high officials in Europe and the United States anticipated a Soviet attack on Western Europe within eighteen months. The Atlantic Community's priorities were reversed, and forthwith. "NATO Mark I," with such limited military commitments and capabilities that one Oslo discussant called it "an instrument for reassurance, not a true military alliance," gave way to "NATO Mark II" with its serious defense buildup, integrated planning and com-

mands, and Greece, Turkey, and a rearmed and fully sovereign West Germany as additional members. In the words of the same discussant, "A series of calculated steps transformed NATO into a full-scale military alliance."

A few influential people worried that reversing priorities to this extent was a mistake that put the military cart before the socio-economic horse and invited disputes over the German question and guns-versus-butter that would undermine a still fragile pro-NATO consensus. In their view the strength and stability of Western societies were still the crucial elements in Western defense, and the anticipated accompaniments of a major buildup of NATO arsenals and armies — inflation, deferred increases in still unsatisfactory levels of non-military production and consumption, and associated political strains — would ultimately prove more damaging to that defense and the Western cause than continuing to tolerate some degree of Soviet preponderance in conventional weapons. Some further argued that the Soviet Union's rulers, given their own nature and that of their system, could and would manage to retain this preponderance in any case, leading either to an endless arms race or to the same imbalance on a higher plateau of weaponry and risk.

But these were now the voices crying in the wilderness that advocates of serious Western rearmament had been before June 1950. By the second half of the decade NATO had a formidable arsenal, unified commands with multinational forces committed to them in case of war and for joint peacetime exercises, and plans for a serious if not wholly adequate defense beginning where the Europeans wanted it, on the frontier with the Soviet Bloc.

On this reckoning the story is one of an isolated Soviet miscalculation on the other side of the world, misinterpreted as conclusive evidence of aggressive military expansionism everywhere and at the earliest opportunity, producing enormous and lasting consequences in Europe and for the future of East-West relations that were not justified by the event. It is still possible, however, that NATO's reaction to Korea was a case of doing the right things for the wrong reasons. In other words, Korea, the misinterpreted event, did not warrant the reaction but Soviet intentions did, because in fact (and with no Korean connection) these intentions were now, or would otherwise have become, or perhaps always had been, what NATO's response incorrectly assumed that Korea "proved." If so, it is not unlikely that an

American failure to come to South Korea's aid would have encouraged the Soviet leadership to re-evaluate the risks of such adventures elsewhere, whether or not the Korean "test" was consciously designed as such by Moscow. It is similarly quite possible that the Soviet side might have behaved more aggressively in Europe, and to the point of war, in any of several East-West crises after the mid-'50s (when Western analysts had anticipated Soviet readiness for a major war) if the West had not by then achieved a more credible level of preparedness, stimulated in large part by that fateful misinterpretation of the events in Korea.

Possible, but not certain. It obviously depends on what Soviet intentions really were, then or at any other moment. And this, it was said repeatedly and in various contexts at the Oslo Symposium, is the crucial imponderable, what one participant called "the 64-billion kroner question." Failing a convincing answer, no judgment on the appropriateness of Western responses to "the Soviet threat" at any point in postwar (or in fact post-1917) history can be fully confident and competent. Tacitly or explicitly conceding this point, those who raised the question invariably disqualified themselves from attempting an answer, pleading lack of evidence of the kind a careful historian needs. Would someone else in the group please give it a try? No one did. On two occasions someone suggested, wryly, that the organizers should have invited a Soviet scholar with access to the relevant Soviet archives and a willingness to tell us what is there. The implications are considered at the end of this *Report*.

Intriguing By-products

Three other aspects of consequences of this part of the story also merit some comment for their contemporary relevance before proceeding to other issues:

1. Since the late 1960s there has been a tendency on both sides of the Atlantic to assume or to remember that NATO and Western re-armament in its "Mark II" variant were basically American creations, born of earlier and greater American alarm over Soviet actions and purported intentions that was later variously regarded as prescient or as excessive and possibly quite unwarranted. West European governments went along, despite reservations based on differing interpretations and priorities, because the United States was too powerful and too important to European recovery and security to be gainsaid. Today this historical memory serves to rein-

force a more general view that has gained many new adherents, and probably a majority of European public opinion, since the advent of the Reagan Administration: the American perception of the Soviet Union has tended to be paranoid and Manichean at least most of the time; the European has usually been better balanced and closer to reality. It is only a step further to what a British historian at Oslo, who said he has found "no supporting evidence" to confirm it in the British papers of the period, called the "fashionable view" that the entire Cold War "was an American invention, a cloak of respectability under which the United States, dragging along a dependent Britain, unnecessarily divided Europe and polarized the world."

It is thus instructive to rediscover, with confirmation from new evidence collected by both European and American scholars from archives on both continents, that these historical memories and reconstructions are not entirely accurate. One must still ask "Whose turning point?" for each individual and government, but West European hidden agendas in 1947-48, grande peur after June 1950, and other ministerial or mass perceptions and military policy preferences described at the Symposium are reminders that alarm and consequent enthusiasm for NATO and rearmament were frequently greater and earlier in Europe, at least for key individual and collective policy-makers, than in America. If many in Washington were wrong in their interpretation of Korea — or wrong the other way around in being surprised by the Prague coup — they had plenty of company across the Atlantic.

It is equally useful to be reminded that Socialist ministers and governments, for example but not only in Britain, were frequently among the earliest and most apocalyptic in defining the threat and calling for collective Western action to combat Communist subversion and deter Soviet aggression. Often, as in the case of Ernest Bevin, earlier personal experience with Communists in their own trade union movements and other conflicts on the political left seems to have predisposed them to recognize nefarious intentions emanating from that quarter more quickly, if not necessarily more accurately, than many of their colleagues on the political right. However that may be, the views and policies of these Socialist ministers and governments regarding the Soviet Union constituted a logical extension to inter-state relations of a long history of deep mutual suspicions and conflict-prone relations between Socialist and Communist

movements, whose fundamentally divergent values and aims, aggravated by their common origin and competition for the same constituencies, have periodically led to a kind of civil war on the political left. It is also worth noting that in Stalin's last years the present generation of Western European Socialist and Social-democratic leaders, at that time junior party, trade union, or government officials, was imbibing an experience of Communist and Soviet behavior, and of disputes and splits within the non-Communist left over its interpretation, that was similar to the experiences that had shaped the attitudes of the previous generation.

Considering both this older and recent history, there is no reason except ignorance to be surprised and unprepared or disbelieving when a François Mitterand, Bettino Craxi, or Bruno Kreisky turns out to have views of the Soviet Union and Communism very similar to those of Bevin, Clement Attlee, Karl Renner, and other European Socialists who were pioneer advocates and practitioners of tough political, diplomatic, and military responses some 35 years ago.

On the other hand, ordinary West Europeans ("public opinion"), often with recent and positive experience of native Communist and Soviet partnership in the struggle against fascism before and during the war, were frequently less prepared for the transition from Russians-as-good-allies to Cold War views than their political elites, both left and right, whose personal experience or privileged knowledge of unpleasant and ominous Soviet behavior during and after the war was usually not shared by the general public. For a number of reasons American public opinion seems by and large to have made the transition more quickly and also more vehemently. At this level the currently fashionable presumption that West European and American perceptions of the Soviet threat were even then out of sync may therefore have some validity. "Ami go home" and "Eisenhower assassin" graffiti of the early 1950s were not all the work of Communists and fellow-travelers. The legacy, reinforced by later developments, lives on in some circles — along with the legacy, in other circles, of gratitude to the same "Ami" for saving Western Europe from hunger and the Reds.

2. There is a German saying that nothing is ever eaten as hot as it is cooked. So it was with NATO rearmament plans cooked over the fire of the Korean panic but served only after a

cooling period in cabinet and parliament pantries. The battle of the budget is a law of politics even in times of stress, as more recent NATO governments and planners have also discovered. Force increases were considerable, even leaving out American increases earmarked for Korea, but almost everywhere less than military planners and their supporters considered desirable or even necessary. European defense ministers generally encountered greater difficulty and took more cuts from colleagues in cabinets and parliaments, not usually because European concern with defense was less than American but because European economies and social budgets were still hard-pressed in the early 1950s. West European increases in force levels and armaments consistently fell behind what the Americans, in particular, wanted. Across the Atlantic, meanwhile, the battle of the larger budget among the three services was conspicuously won by the Air Force, and within the Air Force by the Strategic Air Command under the formidable Curtis LeMay.

The net results were continued American military preponderance within the alliance, continued heavy European dependence on American protection, and an American protective shield heavily tilted in favor of air power and of the long-distance strategic bombing component of that air power.

At Oslo the further consequences were discussed on the basis of papers entitled "The Decision for a West German Defense Contribution" and "NATO Goes Nuclear."

3. Meanwhile (and beyond the period under discussion at Oslo), those who had worried that "NATO Mark II" was putting the military cart before the socio-economic horse were silenced for a time by more modest increases in military expenditures than they had feared, and for a longer period by another generally unanticipated development. On balance more stimulated than braked by the Korean War, which increased American demand for European goods as well as American military assistance to the European allies, Western Europe's prolonged economic boom, the fat years when it was possible to have more guns and more butter at the same time (literally, in fact a notorious "butter mountain"), made the critics' concerns seem irrelevant for more than two decades.

A similar fate more briefly befell those who maintained, with or without undertones of anti-Americanism or Communist sympathies, that American perceptions and policies were wrong-headed, provocative, and a threat to

peace. Several developments tended, sometimes paradoxically, to take the wind out of their sails. Stalin's successors were trumpeting "peaceful coexistence" instead of class warfare translated to inter-state relations and were attempting to prove their sincerity with significant gestures, including a belated evacuation of eastern Austria in the framework of a State Treaty guaranteeing that country's neutrality and recognition of Yugoslavia's "separate road," complete with a public apology for previous Soviet behavior. Soviet-American and East-West relations were on balance gradually improving, despite periodic and sometimes dramatic setbacks. It could be argued, and was, that all this reflected the inner-directed and genuinely more pacific policies of a new "de-Stalinizing" Soviet leadership rather than the influence of Western resolve and rearmament, and that the excuse for NATO, large military forces, and subservience to American views for the sake of American protection and arms was melting in pace with the Cold War's thawing. It was equally arguable, however, that precisely Western toughness and cohesion endowing containment and deterrence with credibility, were responsible for Soviet restraint, improved relations, and reduced risk of war; their retention and perfection provided the best guarantee that these benefits would endure, there being no persuasive evidence that the Bear had really changed his character and intentions. The level and posture of Soviet forces, Soviet activities elsewhere in the world, and perhaps especially the nature and significance ascribed to the most dramatic European setbacks to improved relations in those years — Hungary in 1956, the Berlin Wall in 1961, and Czechoslovakia in 1968² — appeared to confirm the second view, which continued to prevail.

In the relaxed and hopeful atmosphere of the thaw even alarm over nuclear weapons proved hard to sustain, and the once impressive anti-nuclear movement in northwest Europe dwindled into insignificance. Except where passions were refueled by domestic events, as in Greece in 1967 and after, anti-American and anti-NATO graffiti and the sentiments they represented were increasingly a Communist and further-left monopoly — until, with the defection of "Euro-Communists" who came to regard the U.S. as a lesser threat than the U.S.S.R., they became a further-left and extreme right monopoly.

The end of the fat years in 1974 and the coming of lean ones later in the decade, preceded by Vietnam and

followed by the demise of détente, reopened all these questions and disputes, thereby also incidentally making the "true" history of Cold War I and its lessons matters of more than academic importance. Among the old issues again on the agenda, the nuclear and German ones, since 1979 themselves linked by the key West German role in the invention and subsequent vicissitudes of NATO's *Doppelbeschluss* or "duel track decision," are as serious and divisive as the underlying question of the reasons and responsibility for Cold Wars that can destroy the world if they turn hot.

Germany in the Middle

The German question, as it was posed in the post-1945 context of a Europe in the process of division into opposing Eastern and Western blocs and a small group of neutrals, was actually comprised of three interdependent questions: re-unification or partition; neutrality or alignment; disarmed or rearmed — a set that yields, in various combinations, up to a dozen theoretically possible solutions.³ The choice would basically be made, jointly or separately and deliberately or adventitiously, by the major erstwhile allies who had conquered and occupied Germany and were now ranged in the two opposing camps. Smaller members of the recent anti-Hitler coalition had at best a moral right to a small say. Soon, however, an additional but initially muffled voice was admitted to the debate, the Western powers having decided that the answer, if it was to be durable and not dangerously destabilizing, must be at least tolerable to the Germans themselves, and that a West German contribution to Western defense, increasingly regarded as necessary if not entirely desirable, could not be obtained without giving the West Germans a say in their own future. Each of these parties — French, British, American, *et al.* to the west, Soviet to the east, and German in the middle — had a number of sometimes conflicting concerns and interests to consider, not all connected to the developing East-West confrontation and some subject to change over time. Different and changing Western attitudes to West German rearmament are merely the clearest and most important case in point.

For all, however, the German question was of acute importance and fraught with special danger. The boundary between Western and Eastern occupation zones in Germany was the principal and potentially most explosive point of geographic contact between the two

blocs, and after 1948 Germany itself was the only major European prize not yet clearly awarded to either side.

We all know how the story turned out, partly as a result of deliberate policies and partly adventitiously: two Germanies, one of them Western and a full member of NATO, the other Eastern and a member of the Warsaw Pact, both armed and with an indeterminate number of citizens unreconciled to the imposed division of their nation and/or to the socio-economic system and Superpower hegemony under which they live. It has been so since 1955, when the German Federal Republic was formally admitted to NATO on May 9 and the Warsaw Pact was signed in retaliation on May 14, but it has never achieved a fully convincing appearance of permanence. The boundary between East and West Germany is still the principal and most sensitive point of East-West physical contact, a special gate in times of détente and a special danger in times of tension, and some people already see signs that the pressure of Cold War II is reopening two parts of the original postwar German question. Some of the issues raised on the long road from the breakdown of Four-Power talks on Germany in 1947 to the double ratification of German partition, alignment, and rearmament in May 1955 are therefore worth recalling — and not only, as at Oslo, as a fateful and fascinatingly might-have-been-otherwise bit of history.

Three interdependent dilemmas with up to a dozen theoretical solutions inevitably give rise to complicated questions with many dependent phrases, even when some solutions are eliminated *a priori* because they were never contemplated and could not have happened or endured (e.g., a partitioned Germany with *both* states neutral, which was in nobody's interest and would not have lasted if tried). The same themes reappear in a series of Baroque variations. Here is a sample, with the distinguishing focus of each variation italicized for clarity as well as emphasis:

- Would a reunified and perhaps formally disarmed but certainly neutral Germany (guaranteed neutrality would be a necessary ingredient because neither bloc would surrender its occupation zone, or later its dependency, to a united Germany free to join the other bloc) be better or worse for *European stability and peace in the long run* than a Germany divided, against the will of most Germans, into client states of the blocs, with both armed or (as a seriously considered option) with the western one an unarmed semi-sovereign defen-

sive glacis for its bloc?

- Would an armed, sovereign, and presumably soon again economically vigorous and commercially aggressive Germany, either united and neutral or divided and respectively bound to the two blocs, turn out (in one or both either-or permutations) to be *more threatening to Soviet pretensions to eastern- or pan-European hegemony or to French and other West European interests and identities*, all of them so often challenged in the past century by overweening German economic and military power?

- In a variation on both of the above of particular salience in NATO's early years, which of the following would on balance best serve the concept of *Western defense "as far east as possible"* while also accommodating other particular Western concerns: (1) a disarmed Western Germany occupied by Western forces who could use it as a forward battlefield but had no formal obligation to protect and defend German territory; (2) an armed West Germany contributing to Western defense, but with sovereignty, equality, and NATO security guarantees that would be hard and perhaps dangerous to honor as a minimum necessary price for this contribution; or (3) a united, neutral, and perhaps formally disarmed Germany as an unusually large buffer state that (a) would require Soviet forces to withdraw from the Elbe to the Oder and contribute to stability by separating the blocs, but might instead (b) tempt the Russians by its patent inability to defend itself against the Red Army alone and without allies, or (c) seek relief from this danger and an outlet for German ambitions by "doing a Rapallo" and seeking security guarantees and economic privileges through closer relations with the East?

- Finally, which solutions would contribute most, and which would contribute least, to making the *dangerous and generally undesirable division of Europe* permanent — or conversely, to eliminating it?

Having plagued NATO from its founding until 1954, these questions and others concerning Germany's role in Europe and German rearmament are still partly or wholly open or re-openable, although the die appeared to have been cast thirty years ago. Of the concerns that underlay them then, only French and other West Europeans' fear of recidivistic German militarism, diminishing over the years if not yet extinguished, has ceased to be a significant factor. Of the ingredients of the 1954 solution, only German rearmament appears non-repealable in almost all conceivable

circumstances.

Even the way that solution finally came about gives the observer of contemporary East-West and NATO affairs a feeling of *déjà vu*. There is the Soviet Union, then as now frantically attempting to prevent a significant addition to Western military capacity. Threats of reprisals if the West goes ahead with West German rearmament and integration into NATO alternate with "peace offensives" and calls for a pan-European security conference; there is overt and covert Soviet encouragement and attempted exploitation of those in the West who are also, for a variety of reasons, opposed to the same things; and there are periodic Soviet diplomatic initiatives for a peace treaty with a reunified and neutralized Germany, "which most of the NATO leaders," as an Oslo participant noted, "viewed as mischievous attempts to disrupt the solidarity of the alliance and prevent German rearmament." Opposition in Western Europe is there, variously based on antipathy to the Cold War and the division of Europe, fear of Germans bearing arms again or the arms race in general, fear of provoking the Soviet Union into rash action, latent neutralist and anti-American sentiments, etc.; it is in origins and aims autonomous of Soviet interests and intrigues but in some cases vulnerable to penetration or manipulation.

The American administration presses for a European initiative that it believes will be more easily accepted than an American one. The most appropriate European government in the circumstances, in this instance French, produces one, the European Defense Community (EDC), that appears to cut the Gordian knot of conflicting concerns by absorbing future West German forces into integrated European ones with a single unified command. This solution is accepted by the other six countries involved, but successive French governments waver and the scheme is ultimately killed when the French National Assembly, apparently moved by a false impression that most of the country is against it, rejects the EDC treaty two years after all had signed it. All of this delays the formation of operational West German units by several years, until 1957, but intervening developments and changing attitudes within Western Europe and between East and West have meanwhile withered the opposition and made the new *Wehrmacht* generally acceptable and even welcome. The Soviet "counter-measure" for West German integration into NATO is the Warsaw Pact, which merely gives *de jure*

status to the existing military position in Eastern Europe. The West German contribution to Western defense takes almost precisely the form some had wanted and considered only a matter of time and timing as early as 1948, although a lot of china had been broken along the way.

If this seems familiar (but only up to a point, since the dénouement of the contemporary analogy is still in the future at this time), some cardinal differences are equally suggestive.

Most obviously, the armaments that are presently in contention are nuclear, which makes the current issue intrinsically more serious and likely to arouse more intense emotions in more people than a question concerning conventional arms, even in German hands and involving the emotional issue of Germany's role in Europe.

Second, the German question was posed in a period otherwise marked by initially frigid and tense but after Stalin's death slowly thawing East-West relations, by a modest number of what are today called "confidence-building measures," and by a Western near-monopoly of a then small pool of nuclear weapons. The current context includes the demise of détente and the popular hopes it aroused, seriously deteriorating Soviet-American relations and mutual lack of trust, and rough parity in nuclear arms at horrendous levels. The dangers inherent in the second of these combinations can reasonably be regarded as greater, and dashed hopes tend to make the present danger seem even more unbearable to many people.

Third — and often overlooked in America — there are today demonstrably far fewer people in Western Europe who view the Soviet Union as a positive model and are prepared to believe that Soviet intentions are always or usually benign. This change is reflected, *inter alia*, in the character of most (but not all) contemporary Western European peace movements and demonstrations. Their slogans and banners, like some of the weapons they are protesting, are usually "MIRVed" for multiple targets — the Soviet Union, SS-20 missiles, etc. as well as the United States, Pershing and cruise missiles, etc. Observers of the European scene twenty years earlier can seldom recall a single slogan or banner from those days that denounced East German rearmament or otherwise treated both sides as equally or in varying degrees co-responsible for what the demonstrators then considered obnoxious. West European leaders, unlike their American counterparts, generally appear

to be aware of this difference as they weigh the potential political costs of various choices they will have to make.

Finally, Western Europe in the 1980s is not the Western Europe of the 1950s, a still sorely wounded economic and hence political dependency of the United States. It is collectively America's equal, in several countries with standards of living and what these reflect that are higher than American levels. Assertiveness is the natural accompaniment of equality and consciousness of same. West European governments and nations — even the hold-out Germans — have long since ceased to be humbly if resentfully willing to accept automatic American leadership and to choke back objections when they think they have not been adequately consulted in matters affecting their interests. The European "third force" that many Americans as well as Europeans thought would be healthy and vainly tried to conjure into life in the late 1940s exists, for better or for worse.

Meanwhile, and as suggested above, many of the questions and alternative answers that characterized and prolonged the German problem from 1945 to 1954 are still or again relevant. This is particularly true of those that weighed the comparative virtues and vices of a reunited and neutral or still divided and aligned Germany.

Late in 1948 George Kennan, who a year earlier had preferred a partitioned Germany to reunification under conditions that might be "giving the Russians the chance to dominate the whole country," was instead making the case that an independent, demilitarized, neutral, and unified German state was preferable after all, and was advocating a new effort to secure Soviet agreement. The argument underlying Kennan's "Program A" proposal of November 1948 was paraphrased in a paper for the Oslo Symposium as follows: "A permanently divided Germany, with each half the client of a rival non-European superpower, would not only ruin chances for a mutual withdrawal of Soviet and American forces and preclude any possibility of weaning away Moscow's East European satellites; it would also, by leaving a highly skilled and highly nationalistic people artificially separated, create a volatile and unstable political balance, subject to revanchist pressures from both sides of the line."

Today few would argue with the thesis that the division of Germany, which became progressively harder to undo after a series of Cold War measures that began with separate civil administrations in western and eastern

occupation zones in 1949, has also made the broader East-West division of Europe harder to undo. It is less clear what would have happened — and to whose advantage — if Soviet initiatives in 1951-52 and perhaps 1953, indicating a willingness to abandon the Soviet Zone and accept a reunified and neutral Germany in order to avoid an armed West Germany in NATO, had been tested, found genuine, and led to such a solution. They were not so tested, and the very existence of the last one, sometimes attributed to Beria after Stalin's death and before his own fall, is disputed.

Yesterday's might-have-been could in principle appear again as a might-be, a prospect that has lately attracted renewed attention and speculation in Germany and elsewhere. If it were to happen, how would both sets of concerns that Kennan articulated 35 years ago — in 1947 as well as in 1948 — be reappraised? In today's world, would a united but neutral Germany be a contribution to peace and stability or a source of new tensions and dangers? Might it lead to the "Finlandization" of all Western Europe (meaning foreign policy subordinated to Soviet interests and concerns in exchange for freedom to choose one's own governments, policies, and social system), or might it perhaps lead instead to the "Finlandization" of Eastern Europe, the maximum hope of most people there? Would it be more or less satisfying and therefore more or less pacifying to German aspirations, East and West, than the present situation?

The realism of such might-have-been's and might-be's, then and now, depends in large part on what Soviet desires "really" were and are. As far as the past is concerned, participants at the Oslo Symposium again raised and again avoided the question.

Going Nuclear

The Bomb was already there, waiting to become the Great Deterrent, when the Cold War began. Until well into the 1950s, however, it loomed larger in the calculations of political leaders and the anxieties of ordinary people than in anybody's arsenal. As already noted, the number and quality of nuclear weapons in American possession in the late 1940s, when nobody else had any, could not alone have defeated a determined aggressor of Soviet size and conventional brawn who had not been deterred by their mere existence. Nor were they dominant in American strategic planning. As the Oslo Symposium heard from a leading American specialist on the subject, the U.S. military had concluded by

1947, at latest, that the Bomb had been contributory but not decisive in the defeat of Japan and were looking at the future in the same light, although their Soviet counterparts "concluded almost immediately" that nuclear weapons would indeed be decisive in future wars.

Like the German question in those same early postwar years, the nuclear one might therefore have turned out otherwise that it did. NATO's "going nuclear" was a phenomenon of the 1950's and took place in stages. These included an increasingly diversified and sophisticated American nuclear arsenal grown to about 1,000 weapons by 1953 and nearly 18,000 by 1960; development of a fusion "superbomb," first detonated in October 1952; a new strategy of "massive retaliation" based on a strategic nuclear capability that critics were soon calling "overkill"; and going nuclear on the battlefield as well, with small-warhead "tactical" weapons deployed in Europe in 1953 and after. The British first tested their own A-bomb in October 1952, the French theirs in February 1960. Each time there were corresponding Soviet developments, one jump behind or occasionally ahead — but almost always sooner than predicted on the basis of Western estimates of Soviet scientific and technological capabilities. As one Symposium participant put it, "The Golden Age of NATO nuclear supremacy lasted only months." The "balance of terror" was a dominating reality before the decade was over, although Soviet achievement of full global parity with the West was still several years in the future.

The review of this story at Oslo, based on presentations by two American specialists, did not go much beyond published and usually well-known sources, but it was a useful and at times suggestive summary of how and why it all happened. Afterward the present writer picked out what he wanted for a deliberately heterogeneous list of some of the things that led to what several Symposium participants described as over-dependence on nuclear weapons in NATO arsenals and plans:

- The explosion of the first Soviet atom bomb in September 1949, heralding the end of the American nuclear monopoly, was obviously a factor. It led immediately and directly to President Truman's approval of accelerated research to determine the feasibility of a fusion or hydrogen bomb. At the same time, and reportedly as a concession to critics who argued that the "superbomb" would not increase American security, he ordered a broad review of national

security policy in the light of the new Soviet nuclear capability. The product, a National Security Council study of April 1950 known as NSC 68 and frequently quoted at the Symposium, called — inter alia — for a major conventional and nuclear military buildup.

- NSC 68 was a straw in the wind, but the wind was not yet strong. Truman, at the time more opposed to major increases in defense spending than fearful of Soviet forces armed with nuclear weapons, significantly failed to endorse the NSC study until “the North Korean invasion provided the catalyst to reverse budgetary priorities,” as a Symposium paper laconically put it. A revised version was finally approved on September 30, 1950. This, however, was still part of the broader story of the Korean “turning point”: rearmament there would be, but it was not yet clear what mix of conventional and nuclear buildup it would contain. The equation was incomplete.

- The impediments to a major increase in conventional weapons and men in uniform to bear them included, as already suggested, political and social as well as financial costs; and the first category was bound to be more serious in a heterogeneous alliance where the burden would vary from member to member, inviting disagreements among them as well as within each political class. Whether a nuclear buildup would be financially cheaper than a conventional one was arguable, but it was certainly cheaper politically and less of a social disrupter. For the European partners, moreover, it was cheaper on all three counts, because the Bomb was then (and apart from modest British and French deterrents would remain) an exclusively American burden. The sigh of relief discernible in European archives and reminiscences from the period when the American nuclear deterrent began to grow registers a heightened sense of security, but also a happy feeling that the need and pressure for ever more European arms and armies would in consequence be eased. If more “nukes” meant fewer troops, the temptation to give priority to the former was great and likely to be greatest for those who would have to supply troops but not nukes. This was not, of course, the last time an addition to the American nuclear force would be quietly applauded, or even perhaps initiated, in the same countries where opposition to it would also be fiercest.

- The answer to the German question that was emerging in a similarly piecemeal fashion in those same years also played a role in the nuclear build-

up. This was in a way ironic: the argument for West German rearmament was not only its absolute necessity for a forward defense of Western Europe but because it, too, would ease the need and pressure for still more rearmament, by implication nuclear as well as conventional, by the original NATO members. It turned out to be the other way round, as far as nuclear weapons were concerned, because West German membership in NATO created a new context for “defense as far east as possible.” Western Germany was now part of the fortress the Atlantic alliance was pledged to defend, not an expendable glacis before its gates; the devastation of its territory and population “was no longer a matter of indifference to NATO,” as a non-German participant in the Oslo discussion indelicately put it. How to defend the West further east became a more complicated question that only a more credible nuclear arsenal seemed to answer. In the early years, however, these weapons were seen primarily as a device to buy time — time, that is, to get American forces to Europe in sufficient numbers to hold the line well east of the Rhine — and not, as later, for the last battle, the *Endschlacht*, when all else had failed to halt the conquest of NATO’s Germany. In conjunction with the Soviet nuclear build-up, this change would still further increase the demand for a more diversified as well as larger nuclear arsenal. Another chapter with a modern parallel?

- At the Oslo Symposium particular attention was paid to yet another factor, already mentioned in passing earlier in this *Report*. In the United States the battle for the largest share of the Korean-inspired increase in defense spending was won by the Air Force, and within the Air Force by the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and its boss from October 1948 to June 1957, General LeMay. The Air Force grew from 87 wings in mid-1951 to 137 by 1957, with the lion’s share going to SAC. From 962 operational aircraft at the end of 1950 (with most of the long-range bombers obsolescent B-29s), SAC’s force grew to 1,850 by the end of 1953 and 3,068 at the end of 1955 (with one-third of these last all-jet B-47s and 18 of them the first B-52s to come on line). With this expanding force structure, the Symposium was told, SAC developed a broader mission with three principal elements: “to destroy those bases from which the Soviet Union could launch an atomic attack against the United States, to eliminate Russian industrial capability, and to attack massed conventional forces and retard

their advance against NATO lines.” At the same time, “this atomic offensive strategy would undergo numerous refinements for presentation within the defense establishment, before the key committees of Congress, and to the American public. The campaign of selling the Strategic Air Command and its deterrent mission was extremely successful . . .” The final result was “a strategic nuclear capacity which one recent scholar aptly calls “overkill.”

- As had happened in the beginning, with the first atomic bomb, the West’s “overkill capacity” was soon matched by the Soviet Union. By the end of the 1950s both sides were sufficiently alarmed, and the Soviet side apparently thought itself sufficiently close to parity, for control of the awful weapon to find a simultaneous place on both of their agendas for the first time. The Americans had tried before, and even in the middle of the first great American nuclear build-up President Dwight Eisenhower had written, in a letter to a friend first published in the fall of 1983:

When we get to the point, as we one day will, that both sides know that in any outbreak of general hostilities, regardless of the element of surprise, destruction will be both reciprocal and complete, possibly we will have sense enough to meet at the conference table with the understanding that the era of armaments had ended and the human race must conform its actions to this truth or die.⁴

Somebody on the other side now apparently agreed. The long, unended process of negotiation, frequently blocked or set back by new crises and the lack of the minimum degree of mutual confidence that is the prerequisite of any disarmament, began. It eventually encompassed conventional as well as nuclear weapons, so far equally in vain. The week this *Report* was completed the author dutifully attended two Vienna press conferences “celebrating” the tenth anniversary of the start in this city of Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) negotiations. One was by the Dutch Ambassador to MBFR, speaking for “the West,” the other by the Soviet Ambassador speaking for “the East.” At the first of these the BBC’s Vienna correspondent asked whether we should anticipate a twentieth anniversary press conference in ten years time. Willem J. De Voss Van Steenwijk, the Dutch Ambassador, declined to prophesy.

* * * * *

The putative “lessons” of Cold War I history implicit and occasionally explicit

in the foregoing pages are generally ambiguous and can be misleading. The lessons of history usually are. Sources quoted at Oslo reveal, for example, that the authors of NATO and Western rearmament were often partly motivated and sometimes downright obsessed by historical analogies in their own lifetime — Hitler and appeasement and the Rhineland and Munich⁵ — when Stalin, Soviet intentions, the satellization of Eastern Europe, and the Prague coup that was so reminiscent of the Anschluss of 1938 were not really “history repeating itself” but distinct phenomena requiring autonomous analysis.

The tricks that history plays may also be subtler. The Western interpretation of the Soviet role and purpose in the outbreak of the Korean War, which made Korea a crucial “turning point” in Cold War I, was probably a grave misinterpretation. The significance attributed to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, a similarly crucial “turning point” in Cold War II, was nearly identical and was based in part on the “lesson” of Korea, as understood in 1950, and others from recent Soviet and world history. If the interpretation of Korea was a misinterpretation, it is obviously not necessary, logically or factually, that the role and intentions usually ascribed to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1978-79 constituted an analogous misreading. But it may have been so, and some historically unburdened and authoritative analyses have argued that it was.⁶

On the other hand there is the

possibility, already mentioned in the Korean case, that a false historical analogy or misinterpretation of an event may provide a wrong reason for doing the right thing. Soviet ambitions and intentions, whether as fruit of Communist ideology, Russian imperialism, traditional paranoia, or all of these and more, may indeed be quite different from Hitler's and wrongly incriminated in specific cases like Korea and Afghanistan but still a grave threat to Western interests and values. If so, Western responses have basically been correct in principle, however often miscalculated, self-damaging, or based on misinterpretations in specific instances.

It ultimately depends on what Soviet intentions and capabilities “really” were and are. The capabilities side is hard to calculate, with wide margins for error and disagreements. The only certainty (a point also made at the Symposium) is that intelligence estimates are likely to err on the side of exaggeration, because in that business the penalties for overestimating a threat are small and the penalties for underestimating one are great. As for intentions, we have seen how this vital question was repeatedly raised, only to be left unanswered on grounds of professional lack of competence and evidence, at the Oslo Symposium. The caution of the scholars is justified. We do not really know, in the way historians and social scientists want to and policy makers ought to know. The relevant archives are closed. The knowledgeable actors prevaricate, which is true everywhere but in this instance

without the partial remedy of an inquiring press and other forms of public access to some of what goes on behind closed doors. “Kremlinology” that reads between the lines and inferential reasoning which attempts to construe private thoughts and purposes out of public acts and statements are poor substitutes. We operate largely in the dark, a condition that encourages paranoia and Manichean views of the world.

Personal exposure to Soviet views of the West, including those of supposedly well-informed sources, confirms that the other side does not do much better, despite the advantages they should enjoy from the “asymmetry of information” (a charming bureaucratic phrase recently used in the context of the MBFR negotiations) between what is available to the East and to the West about one another.

Henry Kissinger, who has some claim to privileged knowledge and experience, has described the net results in an ominous metaphor:

The superpowers often behaved like two heavily armed blind men feeling their way around the room, each believing himself in mortal peril from the other, whom he assumed to have perfect vision. Each tends to ascribe to the other a consistency, foresight and coherence that its own experience belies. . . . Over time, even two blind men can do enormous damage to each other, not to speak of the room.⁷

[October 1983]

NOTES

1. But only some materials in the newly accessible archives. See Ian Black, “Historians Attack Strict U.S. Rules on Declassifying Papers” (*Washington Post Service*, here cited from the *International Herald Tribune* of September 13, 1983), for complaints about overly-restrictive access to documents from the 1950-54 period also heard at Oslo and with reference to other countries as well.

2. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962, although it caused particular alarm in Europe, is not on this list because, unlike those that are, it was widely regarded as partly or primarily an American rather than exclusively a Soviet transgression.

3. I.e., more than the obvious eight because in any answer that includes partition it is possible that one part might be neutral and another aligned, one part disarmed and another armed.

4. The full text of the letter, dated March 28, 1956, and sent to Richard L. Simon, president of Simon and Schuster, was published by columnist David S. Broder in the *Washington Post*, *International Herald Tribune* etc. in September 1983.

5. This was true of Americans as well as Europeans. An Oslo paper notes that President Harry Truman, returning to Washington

from his Missouri home on being notified of the North Korean invasion of South Korea, “reflected on the way in which Hitler had built up his strength by piecemeal aggression in the late 1930s and concluded that the United States must resist the North Korean attack.”

6. See for example Louis Dupree, “Afghanistan 1980,” *AUFS Report* No. 37, 1980.

7. As quoted by Philip Geyelin, “Superpower Metaphor: Blind Misreading the Blind,” in the *International Herald Tribune*, October 7, 1983.