

# THE RISE AND DECLINE OF NATO

## Can NATO Survive the Changing Conditions of Its Existence?

*William Pfaff*

NATO was born of a crisis, and its trouble today results from the fact that the crisis is gone. The ruins of war have been cleared away. The drama of 1949—of a clash between Germany's conquerors—has faded. The ambition of the Soviet Union to dominate Western Europe undoubtedly still exists, but it is a passive threat, a latent threat which no longer has in it an immediacy and power sufficient to compel great measures of defense. The states of Western Europe are no longer the unconfident nations they were in the last years of the 1940's; they no longer need rely upon the United States to defend them from the Soviet Union; and the Soviet Union is no longer quite the bizarre society it was in those years of menace.

But NATO, of course, has in the years since 1949 come to be something more than a military alliance. It has been held to be the foundation of a political association of Western states which is justifiable in its own terms, a political union which would be valid even if there were no Soviet threat. The policies of the Western states have not always distinguished between the two quite different goals of defense and political unification. Defense was the overriding need at first. Only as the defensive emergency passed was there time—and need—to turn to the political issue. But the political issue was seen differently in Europe and in America. And the problem has not merely been one of inadequately defined policies. There is a more crucial component: an American vision of Europe's future that conflicts with France's vision or even with Britain's, a conflict of reasoned policies but also of interest and of belief about the world. But before dealing with this deepest of the present problems of the Western alliance, it is necessary to say something about the conditions of NATO's founding and about the evolution of the military situation between 1949 and 1964.

---

William Pfaff is co-author (with Edmund Stillman) of the recently-published book, *The Politics of Hysteria: The Sources of Twentieth Century Conflict* (Harper & Row). He is a member of the professional staff of the Hudson Institute, an organization engaged in strategic and political studies.

NATO was created at a time when Europe had hardly begun its recovery from the Second World War. European military power was slight; the European governments were weak; the Communist parties of France and Italy enjoyed significant mass support, were armed from wartime Resistance stocks, were attempting to disrupt or destroy parliamentary government in Western Europe, and were potential sources of civil uprising in support of the Soviet army. The Soviet Union was ruled by a Stalin at the zenith of his power. Czechoslovakia had fallen to a Communist *coup d'état* a few months earlier, the last independent politics in Soviet-occupied Europe had been extinguished, and the suppression or destruction of non-Communist elements in the East European states was nearly complete. Yugoslavia had been expelled from the Comintern, the great purge of other East European Communist parties for "nationalist deviations" had begun, yet the Yugoslavs had not given up attempts at reconciliation with the USSR. The Chinese Communists were in control of nearly all of China, and a triumphant People's Republic would be proclaimed within six months. Explosion of the Soviet atom bomb was five months away. And American military forces were still in postwar disarray, serious rearmament and the Korean war being more than a year in the future.

This was a Europe of immense disorder and menace, and in 1949 war seemed all too probable. This was the period of which Churchill spoke when he credited the American atom bomb as alone holding Russia back. Today we know better the turmoil, fear, and caution that existed among the Soviets as well in this period; and we know that the American nuclear deterrent was a good deal less formidable than it was then believed to be. But the threat then perceived by Western leaders and governments and by the Western publics had an utterly convincing foundation in the political and military evidence of the day. NATO was a reasonable response to this crisis. It provided a means for rebuilding and coordinating Europe's own forces, a legal basis for a continued American military presence in Europe and for an American nuclear guarantee of NATO's Eu-

ropean states, and eventually a framework in which German rearmament could be carried out.

The profound contrast between this situation and the conditions of 1964 is in major part a vindication of NATO. The last years of Stalin were endured without a war. The discipline of the Soviet bloc, then perceived as something near to Orwell's fiction and as virtually immutable—has broken down so far that in 1964 the Department of State encourages Western journalists to avoid the very expression "Soviet bloc." Rumania's polite but stubborn defiance in 1964 of the USSR on economic matters, and Rumanian initiatives in treating with the Sino-Soviet controversy, are only the latest evidences of more than a decade of political erosion within the Soviet camp. Not only has China launched out on its own course, but Albania today defies the USSR. Yugoslavia deals with the Soviets on Yugoslav terms, the political victor in the struggle that began with the Cominform expulsion of 1948. The Soviet Union no longer quite rules Eastern Europe: it still is first and most powerful among a grouping of allied Communist parties and Communist governments, and the Soviet Army is still the unquestioned military arbiter of the area, but Soviet authority now is only an ultimate authority: it *could* carry out a military conquest in Eastern Europe (and it almost surely would have to be precisely that, an invasion and conquest) to enforce its will. Yet a mere ten years ago Soviet officers frankly controlled the armies and police forces of the satellite countries, and Soviet agents dictated the decisions of the satellite governments. Today it is the security interest that remains. The Eastern European states make up a buffer bloc between the USSR and Western Europe. An attempt to transform any one of them into an ally of the West undoubtedly would now, as in 1956, provoke the USSR to violence. But short of that, the USSR is today and will continue to be compelled to accept, and to rationalize, a diversity of intrabloc policies and actions that in 1949 would have seemed inconceivable.

In Western Europe, there has, of course, been a brilliant recovery, and economic growth far outstripping both the USSR and the United States, a reconstruction of society and of confidence—recovery of confidence that in France has challenged the institutions and assumptions of NATO unity.

What are those assumptions? Perhaps, as they exist in the United States (and the United States and Europe surely do not see NATO in identical terms), they may fairly be summarized as follows:

1. That in the nuclear age only the United States and the USSR deal with one another on effectively

equal terms; and that other states, even those with independent nuclear forces, are in fact inferior in power to the two great states. Hence that Europe requires a United States nuclear guarantee.

2. That the total Soviet military threat to Europe—conventional as well as nuclear—is so large that Europe alone is incapable of meeting it, and that an American military commitment to Europe thus is indispensable to European independence.

3. That the NATO alliance is not only a defensive military grouping but can and should be the basis for a political, economic and military association of the Western democratic states that in time might become a political federation—perhaps a federation that eventually could accommodate still other nations and provide the prototype, if not the foundation, for a new international system. Many who believe this would argue that the day of the nation-state has ended, that, as Henry Kissinger said of the Atlantic states some years ago, "none of (their) major problems . . . can be finally resolved on a national basis."

Each of these assumptions is complex in derivation and in what it implies, but some comment is possible upon the factual basis of each. Is Europe irredeemably inferior to the USSR and the United States in nuclear weapons systems? No strategist or scientist involved in modern weaponry would, of course, be so rash as to assign an irredeemable position of inferiority to any state; radical new weapons may revolutionize war once again. But even if the possible development of new weapons is ignored, it is not at all clear that Europe as a whole, or even in its major individual states, is doomed to a permanent inferiority in effective nuclear power.

•

It is fashionable in much current discussion to dismiss the French *force de frappe* (or RAF Bomber Command) as largely symbolic military forces—as "prestige" or "status" forces without real military value. This is not true. In professional military circles today it is readily acknowledged that there is no satisfactory solution to the problem of defense against low level supersonic intrusion of the kind which the French *Mirage IV* (and the British TSR2 and the newly planned American TFX) aircraft are designed to carry out. These aircraft fly at such speeds along the curvature of the earth that radar does not discover them in time for effective interception. For the present, and for the period in which these aircraft are designed to be in service, they will—barring quite unforeseen defensive developments—provide what is by any reasonable military

standard a plausible threat of successful attack upon Soviet targets. But is such a threat, or the threat that will be posed by the Polaris-type missile forces which are expected to succeed the French and British airborne forces late in the 1960's, a reasonable deterrent in our world?

To understand what kind of deterrent these forces provide, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the ability to fight a "sophisticated" nuclear war and the ability to pose a plausible threat to do unacceptable damage. Essentially, the difference is between being able to fight and being able to punish. The French and British make no pretense of being able to do more than to punish an enemy. Indeed, punishment may be carried out after effective destruction of the French or British nation itself; but the purpose of such a deterrent is to neutralize the opponent's nuclear forces—nothing more. Such a "minimum" deterrent force can hardly be used aggressively: it is not—in the jargon of nuclear strategy—a "first-strike" force. Its use would be suicidal, and the threat of its use absurd, in any situation other than as retaliation for attack upon the existence of the nation itself. It is a weapon of ultimate recourse—and only of that.

But the unhappy truth appears to be that this kind of indiscriminating punishment is fated to be the purpose of the nuclear strategies of the future, outmoding the creatively discriminating "war-fighting" strategies that for the last few years have been technically and conceptually possible. We are entering a period in which all major nuclear forces will be protected from enemy destruction either by "hardening" or by dispersion at sea. This entire subject, of course, is one of arcane theory and controversy, but it is true that the strategic forces of both the United States and the USSR are being reorganized today so as to be capable of surviving almost any conceivable attack and then retaliating in "second strikes." When this process is completed, the period in which one nuclear power could claim a useful advantage in the nuclear balance, or a logically justifiable competence to strike first and evade retaliation, will almost surely have been ended. This will mean that the United States will be in a dramatically altered condition of vulnerability. As Mr. McNamara put it at last year's budget hearings,

I [have] pointed out that "as the Soviet Union hardens and disperses its ICBM force and acquires a significant number of missile-launching submarines (as we must assume that they will do in the period under discussion) our problem will be further complicated." There is increasing evidence that this is the course the Soviet Union is following. . . .

A very large increase in the number of fully hard

Soviet ICBM's and nuclear-powered ballistic missile-launching submarines would considerably detract from our ability to destroy completely the Soviet strategic nuclear forces. It would become increasingly difficult, regardless of the form of the attack, to destroy a sufficiently large proportion of the Soviet's strategic nuclear forces to preclude major damage to the United States, regardless of how large or what kind of strategic forces we build. Even if we were to double and triple our forces we would not be able to destroy quickly all or almost all of the hardened ICBM sites. And even if we could do that, we know no way to destroy the enemy's missile-launching submarines at the same time. We do not anticipate that either the United States or the Soviet Union will acquire that capability in the foreseeable future. Moreover, to minimize damage to the United States, such a force would also have to be accompanied by an extensive missile defense system and a much more elaborate civil defense program than has thus far been contemplated. Even then we could not preclude casualties counted in the tens of millions. What we are proposing is a capability to strike back after absorbing the first blow.

Until now the United States could invoke its nuclear power as a deterrent to Soviet conventional attack on Europe, or to Soviet nuclear attack upon any target in the West, because the United States had, at first, a nuclear monopoly, and then reasonable defense against the weak long-range Soviet bomber forces, and most recently an ability on the ground. But when missile forces are protected, the much discussed "balance of terror" will at last really exist. Neither the United States nor the USSR will, in a nuclear war, have the power to disarm the other. Only retaliatory destruction will be possible. The deterrent will truly be mutual.

The difference, then, between a small nation with a small but relatively invulnerable force, and a large nation with a large and relatively invulnerable force, will to a potential attacker be the difference between the assured loss of one or several principal cities and a minority of the national population, and virtual obliteration—not a distinction, it may be argued, that is likely to make a difference.

There is, of course, much more that can be said about the possible ramifications of nuclear war and nuclear blackmail in an age of multilateral deterrence and effective nuclear parity among large and small nuclear powers. One may fear nuclear proliferation, one may fear accidents and miscalculations, one may imagine ways in which the fear and threat of nuclear war might be manipulated. Yet surely the experience of the cold war thus far has been of a retreat from risk by the powers who possessed nuclear weapons. Deterrence, thus far, has not been an invitation to adventure. And the French and British forces that exist today, and will

exist during the decade to come, constitute deterrents that are likely to prove the equivalents, *for any politically useful purposes*, of the enormous nuclear deterrent forces of the United States and Russia. The threat of "catalytic" war, which so concerns the great powers, can only reinforce the deterrent effect of small nuclear forces—as French theorists have argued. One must conclude that in such circumstances as can be foreseen, the states of Europe, individually or collectively, are and will continue to be perfectly capable of deploying independent nuclear deterrent forces adequate to defend their countries.

•

The second assumption that underlies much discussion of NATO is a wide-spread belief that Western Europe without America is inferior to the Soviet Union in conventional military forces and war potential. This is a curious assumption when it is recalled that in modern history individual European states have repeatedly invaded Russia and defeated Russian armies, and when the economic growth and technological vitality of today's Europe is considered, although it has some justification in the fact that the Soviet Union today is politically aggressive and possesses large military forces, whereas Europe, since 1945, has been relatively passive, and only now is undertaking an independent politics. Europe has seemed a spent society; and this view is only now being revised.

But in considering military forces, we are again too often the prisoners of beliefs derived from the immediate postwar situation. West European manpower today is roughly equal to that of the Soviet Union; the level of education and technical skills in Europe is much superior to the USSR. The European economic plant is generally superior in sophistication and nearly equal in total output to that of Russia. European communications are immensely superior to those of the USSR. The Soviet Union's size is an advantage in defensive conventional war, a disadvantage—compounded by relatively inferior communications—in any offensive war against Europe. Any Soviet army in Western Europe operates at the end of a 600 mile line of communication—composed of four first-class rail routes and six main road routes—through potentially hostile territory. In short, in conventional war potential, Western Europe—without the United States—suffers no marked disadvantage to the Soviet Union; and the European military tradition, of strategic originality, staff skills, technical innovation, is immensely more impressive than that of Russia.

But this is war potential, not forces in being. In men under arms, the unclassified figures generally accepted today demonstrate the following balance of forces (divisions being calculated not in terms of actual formations but of fighting units of equivalent size with necessary support): the Soviet Army totals 75 to 100 divisions (Mr. McNamara has cited the smaller figure). Twenty of these divisions are in East Germany, and roughly half a dozen are elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The remainder are in the USSR, a substantial portion in Far Eastern Russia. The total satellite divisions are about thirty, their political reliability varying greatly according to the character of the mission they are given and the political character of the war they are in.

Total equivalent NATO forces available on the Central European front, *excluding* United States' forces, are some thirty divisions: twelve German, six French, five British, four Belgian and three Dutch. In addition, there are some fourteen Italian, Portuguese, Danish, and Norwegian divisions available to NATO, and some twenty-seven Greek and Turkish divisions.

Thus the European forces available on the Central European front outnumber the Soviet divisions deployed in the West. Total European forces in being, excluding the United States but including Greek and Turkish divisions, are nearly equal to total Soviet forces in being. Only if satellite divisions are regarded as effective parts of the Soviet force, or only if all Soviet Army forces are committed in the West, denuding the Soviet Far East, would the Soviet Union command a conventional army in Europe superior in numbers to that which the continental Western powers by themselves today deploy.

Obviously this again is a matter in which there are factors more important than sheer numbers. But the numbers themselves may be sufficient to make a fundamental point: neither in forces-in-being nor in war potential is Western Europe necessarily inferior to Russia.

•

The third of the assumptions underlying the American attitude towards NATO is the least easy to discuss; as often as not it is an expression not of an evaluation of NATO's particular potentialities but of an individual view of history's trends, or of a particular conviction about the nature of world politics. Perhaps the best and simplest statement of the view that NATO should provide the nucleus for a world organization was made by Senator William Fulbright in an article published in 1963: "The Atlantic conception is built upon the premise that

an international system based on unlimited national sovereignty has become an intolerably dangerous anachronism in the nuclear age. . . . The collapse of the League of Nations and the failure of the United Nations thus far to achieve the hopes that attended its creation were . . . the result of an effort to out-run history, to move in a single leap from world anarchy to world community. . . . We must therefore focus our efforts on the more modest goal of building new bonds among those people of the free world who have some feeling of shared values and interests. . . .”

Of the two elements in such an argument about the purpose of NATO, the second is perhaps more easily justified than the first. The first is that war may be eliminated by eliminating the agency which has fought most, although by no means all, of the major wars of recent times: the nation-state. The second is that it is a valid political goal to extend and strengthen the cooperation, and the organs of collaboration, of states which not only have interests in common but a common culture and form of political life. This surely is a program that can be justified in itself, whether one accepts or not the conclusion that such a grouping can or should assimilate other states to it, or can provide a foundation for a new international political order.

But can NATO, this defensive military alliance born of a particular emergency, be transformed into a real political federation? The evidence thus far, surely, is that NATO reached a peak of unity that coincided with the apparent maximum danger of war with the Soviet Union, but that alliance unity has declined since the 1950s. Cooperation has been strongest when the common interest, and primarily the common military interest, has been strong. And cooperation has broken down in those matters on which national interests have diverged. The United States itself, though it has been the most anxious to promote the unity of the alliance, has not permitted its NATO partners to alter or block American policies in Asia, in Africa, the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, which—even though they may have damaged or offended the interests of the European states—seemed necessary to the United States.

This would seem to be the heart of the matter. The United States has wanted NATO unity, but it has been unity on American terms. One cannot properly advocate common policies for an alliance and yet reserve independence in all major matters; and yet few advocates of a NATO federation are likely to wish the United States committed to support of the 1956 attack on Suez, to a separatist Kattanga, to recognition of Communist China, to trade

with Cuba, to support of a colonial war in Algeria, to support of possible future German claims in what now are the Polish western territories—or even to establishing a veto-free nuclear force in Europe or nuclear strike forces in the individual European states. Yet all of these are perfectly possible results of majority policy votes in the NATO Council.

The American view of NATO has been of a federation led by America, a federation responsive to the American interest in all major matters. It is, perhaps, evidence of a certain sentimentality that many Americans have assumed that the American interest necessarily coincides with the European. It does not, of course; the coincidence of interest that has sustained NATO has been in defending the independence of Europe.

NATO has thus far existed as an American-led alliance, with the European powers enjoying consultation but not the power of decision in major matters, because this relationship reflected the real relationship of power and was a necessity imposed by the Soviet danger. Europe was weak. But it is weak no longer: it has formidable military forces today, and it could have even more formidable ones if it wished to have them or believed that it needed them. Two of NATO's members have nuclear strike forces which, for defensive purposes, could adequately replace the American nuclear guarantee, and which will increase in military significance as the United States and the USSR move into a condition of relative nuclear “parity.” Meanwhile, the American ability to guarantee Europe without seriously risking a nuclear attack upon the American mainland is being brought to an end.

• NATO no longer is indispensable to Europe. An American commitment to Europe's independence is desired, to be sure—but it is a necessity to the United States as well as to Europe: America could hardly, however provoked, acquiesce in Soviet control of this unique concentration of wealth, industrial power, and skilled manpower. Thus the conditions which made NATO necessary have faded; can the alliance then survive? Germany remains the most serious European supporter of the idea of Atlantic community, but one may suspect that Germany still fears independence. The American tie, the NATO alliance, have shielded Germany not only from the Soviet Union but from itself. But Germany cannot indefinitely avoid an independent politics: Germany lives in central Europe, and it is a dynamic and vigorous—and divided—nation.

In 1945 America, with Russia, was inheritor of

a Europe which had ruined itself in two great wars, and the United States imposed a pattern on Western Europe—imposed peace, gave leadership, gave economic support. But America failed to pass beyond this limited and defensive role. It resisted in the mid-1950's an attempt by Europeans to recast the postwar pattern; like Russia, America in 1955–1960 preferred to confirm the division of Europe and to resist the novel and disturbing impulses launched by the East European revolts and the disengagement debate. In the early 1960's America again made a fateful choice, to support a particular form of West European unification that seemed not to threaten the essential postwar pattern. But this form was inadequate to the new Europe, and a version of European political self-assertion emerged that challenged the postwar division of Europe between American and Soviet zones of influence.

NATO might once have been transformed into a political union, had there been a generous American abdication of dominance, a willing acceptance of a place as (perhaps) first among equals, a genuine determination to accept the fact that European interests were not identical with American. This did not happen. The slogans of Atlantic union were professed, but in reality a series of different choices were made. America resisted change; it resisted not merely President de Gaulle but that wholly European conception of European interests of which Gaullist policy was a single expression. To have done so may indeed have been in the American national interest, but it was also to attempt to continue to dominate the course of events in Western Europe. And that was an effort which, in the long run, could only fail. Europe is another continent, its nations products of another history, its fate bound up in the relations of the European peoples—from the Atlantic to the Urals. Union with the United States might have been possible had the United States been able to accept its share of the European concern not merely to defend against the Soviets but to act within this continent. America did not, perhaps could not, perhaps should not have done so.

But Europe today has the power, and increasingly it has the will, to act upon those relationships and to define a Europe freed of its postwar political condition. Russians and Americans met on the Elbe in 1945 amidst the ruins of a Europe which had ravaged itself. But now the ruins are gone, and in both Eastern and Western Europe the two great non-European states who were drawn into the European convulsion of 1914–1945 now are being pressed to withdraw again. For better or for worse, Europe is reclaiming its autonomy.

## other voices

### PEACE WITHOUT PACIFISM?

*In an article which appears in the February issue of Liberation magazine, Alex and Sue D. Gottfried have distinguished between two kinds of groups caught up in the burgeoning peace movement in America: those which adhere to what the authors call "traditional pacifism" and those "new" organizations which have risen to the challenge of nuclear war. Excerpts from that article follow.*

Every cause, it goes without saying, must have its *ethos*, its moral motivation and aspirational character. The peace-cause in America has long had such an *ethos*; indeed, in the opinion of many critics, until recently it had little else. This *ethos* was provided by the stand of the traditional pacifist, and by the organized groups through which this stand was expressed. During the period of peace activity in the last half-decade, there have been three striking latter-day developments which are designed to provide other elements heretofore lacking to the peace-cause. These three developments are (1) electoral politics for peace; (2) the effort to join all the democratic peace forces under the single banner of Turn Toward Peace; and (3) the birth of what is called "peace research," attracting men and women in varied areas of professional competence. Together with the passive-resistance and non-violent direct action techniques evolved by traditional pacifists, these developments—the effort to capture the ballot; the effort to build a mass movement which would have access to decision-makers; and the effort to develop theories and concrete proposals based upon a body of knowledge—substantially encompass the approaches, short of armed revolution, open to a minority cause in our society; and with these developments many hope that the American peace movement has come of age.

Disparate as these three developments may be in some respects, they are alike in that their architects and supporters view them as being addressed to the practical realities of achieving a world freed of war. This distinguishes them from traditional pacifism, which is fundamentally addressed to the moral issues of war. . . .

It seems fair to say that if traditional pacifism provides the *ethos* for the "new" movement, it does so by default, because the emergent movement has no other moral base upon which to stand. The new movement has grown out of rational fear of man's