

# The Atomic Squeeze On Europe

ALASTAIR BUCHAN

CONCLUDING a brief and singularly unprofitable two-day meeting in Bonn, on May 3 the foreign ministers of NATO issued a communiqué stating that they had “considered the state of the alliance in the light of political developments. . . . They concluded that useful and concrete results had been achieved, and that the alliance was acquiring both greater maturity and solidarity.”

Three days later in Strasbourg, where the Council of Europe meets, a report was published that showed how ill-founded this complacency was. For the first time in three years of its existence the Defense Committee of the Assembly of Western European Union had decided to take a look at the larger alliance of which its members form a part, and within whose territory any war that NATO engages in is almost certain to be fought. The contents of the report went a long way toward removing West Germany's confidence in the alliance, which the ministers' meeting in Bonn had been specifically designed to encourage.

The report began by pointing out that on the central European front, Supreme Commander Lauris M. Norstad “has under his control not more than fifteen divisions, of which only the Americans are ready for immediate combat,” instead of the thirty divisions laid down as the requirement in 1954. There was no question, the committee had been

told by General Jean-Etienne Valluy, commander in chief of the central European sector, of giving battle on the line of the Iron Curtain, “but for political and psychological reasons he would try to protect the German population, and the industrial resources of the Ruhr.” Lack of uniformity in the size and equipment of divisions, as well as of vehicles and weapons, “gives the Central European Army such rigidity and sluggishness” that it would be difficult to move divisions from one sector to another.

At the same time, the Assembly considered—and defeated only by a technical majority—a resolution condemning its own Council of Ministers for having approved Britain's reduction of thirteen thousand men in its forces in Germany. According to Colonel J. J. Fens, the quiet conservative Dutch Senator who introduced the report, Mr. Dulles, “among whose gifts that of prophecy is absent,” was altogether wrong in assuming that the British action would not produce a chain reaction throughout the alliance, including the United States itself.

Finally, the committee demanded to know what London and Washington were doing to share their technical know-how with their European allies. It emphasized the point by describing a visit to the French guided-missile center, where

it was shown a missile developed from German wartime designs at a cost of \$28 million. The weapon proved to be almost identical with a three-year-old British ground-to-air rocket, which in turn was very similar to the American Nike.

## Shield or Trip Wire?

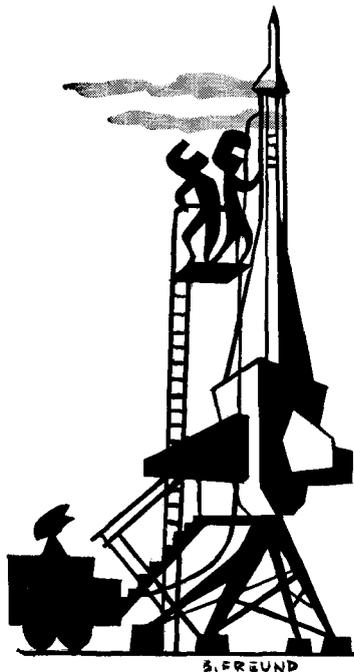
The WEU Assembly is not a body that exerts much influence in Europe, but the fact that it has produced so scathing a report is symptomatic of the confusion over NATO's military policy that has been precipitated throughout western Europe by a combination of the British Defense White Paper and constant Soviet propaganda directed against the weaker nations.

The cause of this confusion is that the European members of NATO, bewildered by so many unilateral British and American statements in recent years, no longer have any clear picture of what kind of war they are being asked to plan and make sacrifices for. Will the “shield” of NATO divisions be capable of halting a Soviet attack on western Europe without invoking strategic retaliation if it can be doubled in size and equipped throughout with atomic weapons? Or will it merely provide a “trip wire” to establish the fact that aggression has occurred and sound the alarm bells for the nuclear holocaust? If it is merely a trip wire, does it have to be even

as large as fifteen divisions, let alone twice that size? Can there be a limited war in Europe, and if there cannot, would it not be cheaper and sounder to modify the costly preparations to fight one?

**T**HE FIFTEEN divisions now in West Germany are made up of five good American divisions plus three armored cavalry regiments with the equivalent firepower of a sixth; four British divisions at about seventy per cent strength, which are now being reorganized (against the advice of SHAPE) into eight independent brigade groups that will give them the effective strength of about three American divisions; one Belgian division; two Dutch divisions, one of them newly formed; one Canadian brigade group, the best individual battle formation of them all; and half of two French divisions.

The build-up of the German forces has reached a point where two armored and three infantry divisions, with one mountain and one airborne combat group, will have



been allocated to NATO by the end of this year. The German divisions are well supplied, mostly with American equipment, but are very short of good junior and noncommissioned officers. It will probably be another year before they can be

considered fully battle-ready. By some time in early 1959, three more German divisions are scheduled to become available to NATO.

Whether the total figure ever rises above twenty-three divisions to the magic figure of thirty depends on three factors. The first of these is an end to the Algerian war and France's willingness and ability to return to NATO the remaining four divisions that it is committed to provide and that it has "borrowed" for service in North Africa. The second is the increasingly unlikely hypothesis that West Germany will provide the extra four divisions to bring its total contribution up to twelve, which was the target for its original rearmament plan. Both the French and the German figures are, therefore, entirely dependent on the course of domestic political situations. Finally, whether the figure of thirty divisions is ever reached depends on there being no further cutbacks in existing forces on the scale of Britain's two-year project for reducing its total force from seventy-six thousand to fifty thousand men—at the rate of thirteen thousand men a year.

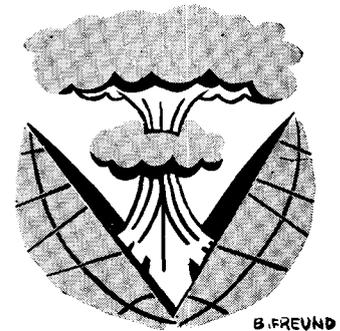
Thus it is obvious that a force of thirty divisions can only be produced by the very firmest agreement between the European, British, and American governments that such a force is absolutely essential.

**T**HE OFFICIAL argument for a strong shield of thirty divisions is based on three contingencies—a limited foray, a full-scale attack, and the situation that would develop after an exchange of thermonuclear blows. Only a conventional force of this size could give General Norstad and his subordinate commanders the necessary strength to deter or deal firmly with any limited foray across the Iron Curtain without having to invoke strategic retaliation and touch off a thermonuclear war. The West German border is a long one and at present is only lightly patrolled in many places. Without being able to specify what incident might occur, the NATO staffs feel that only strong conventional forces deployed near the satellite frontiers in West Germany can alleviate the appalling dilemma of accepting penetration and local defeat or risking

a world war. A commander's nightmare is to be left without any flexibility or freedom of choice, and on the basis of the present force the NATO commanders feel they have all too little.

### How Resistible a Force?

The crucial question about the size of the shield, fifteen, twenty-three, or thirty divisions, is now not whether they can deny West Ger-



many and thereby western Europe to the Russians, but for how long. In the view of the military staffs, as in that of the U.S. and British governments as a whole, a full-scale Soviet attack in central Europe would almost certainly invoke thermonuclear retaliation and precipitate a third world war.

But two factors are involved that make it essential to gain time. In the first place, it must be clear that such an attack is a full-scale affair, not a border foray by a vodka-happy battalion or divisional commander, or an attempt to involve the West German forces in some fracas in East Germany. A trip-wire force would have to shoot first and ask questions afterwards, possibly with disastrous results. In the second place, nuclear retaliation involves the most agonizing decision in world history on the part of the President of the United States and the prime minister of Great Britain, with thirteen reluctant NATO allies hanging on their coattails and Asian and neutral opinion arrayed implacably against them. Moreover, once the decision is taken, the retaliation must be effective before the Soviets have overrun western Europe and presented the United States with a *fait accompli*; as the nuclear deterrent becomes increasingly mutual, the United States will have greater

and greater temptation to accept such a *fait accompli*, however honorable and courageous its administration may be.

Naturally there is no slide rule that equates the number of divisions with the number of days the shield will hold. The best estimate is that a shield of fourteen divisions could hold the Russians east of the Rhine for between forty-eight and seventy-two hours. Whether they would have enough strength and cohesion left at the end of this time to deny the Rhine crossings, and thereby France and the Channel ports, is anybody's guess.

Clearly this is not enough time for London and Washington—not noticeably good at speedy co-operation in recent years—to make the most momentous joint decision in their history, let alone to consult their allies and give the strategic bombers enough time to bite off the tail of the Red Army and bring it to a halt. Nor would fourteen divisions be sufficient to ensure that Russian guerrillas did not take over Europe after the exchange of thermonuclear blows had reduced its cities to ashes and destroyed its civilization.

Twenty-three divisions might hold for a week; certainly thirty well-trained divisions could hold for that length of time, and could even give a respectable account of themselves if the decision to invoke strategic retaliation were not forthcoming. They could not “defend” Europe in the conventional sense, but they could provide the essential elements of time and information to enable intelligent strategic decisions to be made, and to prevent border incidents from getting out of hand.

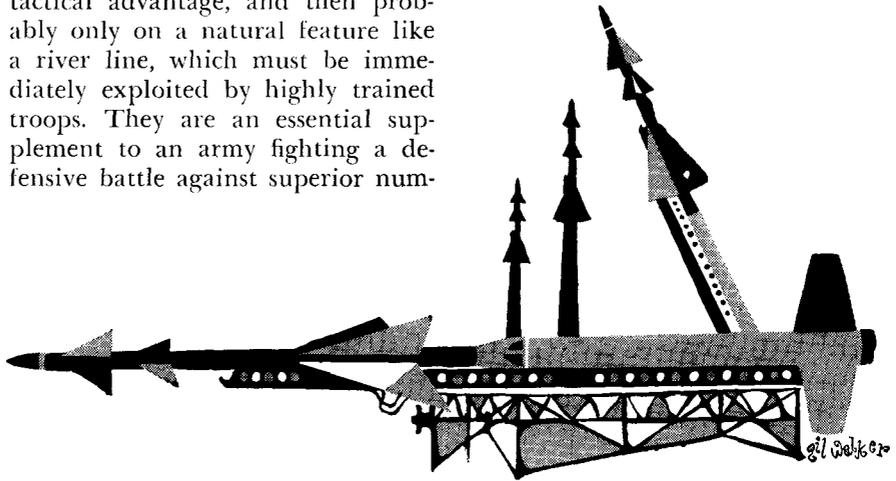
### No Magic Cloak

How much do tactical atomic weapons strengthen the shield? In the two and a half years since SHAPE decided to base its strategy upon their use, there has been much complacent talk about their ability to replace conventional manpower with their enormous firepower.

Today there is considerably less optimism, because there has been more practical study about the extent to which tactical atomic weapons, whether launched from aircraft or missiles, can supplement the defensive power of conventional forces.

A theory known as “*la grande vide*”—that whole areas of territories could be sealed off to the enemy by the dropping of atomic weapons, forcing him to concentrate only where he could be met by ground forces—has had to be scrapped. It has become evident that enemy troops in tanks and armored carriers can penetrate through areas thus devastated very shortly after an atomic explosion.

As the yield of the tactical atomic weapons is decreased in order to fit them into smaller and more mobile compass and to enable them to be used without danger to a nation's own troops, it has become clearer that they provide only a temporary tactical advantage, and then probably only on a natural feature like a river line, which must be immediately exploited by highly trained troops. They are an essential supplement to an army fighting a defensive battle against superior num-



bers. Without them the shield would probably buckle and crack in a matter of hours. But they provide no alternative to conventional forces, or any magic supplement to their strength. Their rate of fire is slow, and a matter of hours is needed to bring long-range missiles such as the Corporal into action. Against an enemy attacking with great speed on a wide front, as the Russians would through central Europe's open country and innumerable roads, with complete air superiority and a preponderance in tanks of the order of three to one (7,500 to about 2,500), tactical atomic weapons provide by no means the final answer, even supposing that the political lines had been sufficiently well cleared to authorize their immediate use. Moreover, at present only the U.S. formations possess them, though Britain will have two Corporal regiments by the beginning of next year. It will be at least two

years before the NATO forces as a whole are equipped or trained with them, and it may be that in the course of this fall's German election campaign the Adenauer government will be driven to pledge that it will refuse to accept such weapons for the Bundeswehr.

A British staff officer in a NATO headquarters illustrated the problem graphically. When I asked him to give me an idea of the effect and role of tactical atomic weapons, he walked over to a six-foot wall map showing the six-hundred-mile central front from Lübeck to the Austrian border. With a cigarette he burned a series of small holes in the

isinglass covering of the map along the Iron Curtain boundary, holes barely visible in the vast networks of roads. “There,” he said, “that's about the over-all defensive effect of the low-yield weapons. Don't let any politician fool you or himself that they are a substitute for chaps on the ground. We couldn't do without them, but they can't do our job for us.”

In other words, though the low-yield atomic weapons could double the firepower of thirty divisions, they could not convert fifteen divisions into the equivalent of thirty.

THE COMMON accusation against military staffs is that they tend to overinsure. I put this point to a distinguished American commander in Germany. He replied: “Sure, we like to overinsure. When I was the WPA engineer in Galveston in the 1930's, they asked me to build a twelve-foot sea wall, and told me

they had never had a flood higher than eleven feet. I made them build it fourteen foot, and hell, they had a thirteen-foot flood the next year."

**T**HUS the element in the British White Paper that most disturbs SHAPE and the NATO staffs is not the assertion that the thermonuclear deterrent is the overriding consideration in military planning, which is only a glimpse of the obvious, but Britain's unilateral use of this argument to justify reductions in its conventional forces in Germany and its contribution to the shield.

For what they fear is that the British government has in its heart accepted the thesis of the trip wire as against the shield, whatever lip service it may pay to the latter concept. The admiring noises that the British White Paper evoked in Washington have also convinced many Europeans that the United States will soon begin to think along the same lines despite recent Dulles statements.

True, there are advocates of the trip-wire thesis in the British government, as there are in the Pentagon. Talk of local incidents and the necessity for a delaying force is the sheerest fantasy to them. They argue that while limited war is a likely hypothesis on the northern or southern flanks of NATO, in the Middle East, or elsewhere in the world, western Europe is so vital a target that it will never be attacked unless the attacker has counted the risk of total war. They point out that never since the inception of NATO and the development of the American hydrogen bomb has Russia made any false military move against western Europe. As its strength in bombers and missiles increases, Russia is less and less likely to give warning of its intentions by attacking on the ground and is much more likely to attempt a surprise attack on European cities and bases.

According to this thesis, it would be sounder to reduce the shield to a gendarmery to deal only with local incidents while making absolutely and publicly clear, both to ourselves and to the Russians, that there will be no element of discretion in the use of strategic retaliation on this front but that it will be directly contingent on any aggression. It is the hint in the British White Paper that

this thesis may be getting the upper hand which accounts for much anxiety in European minds.

There is an additional sense of surprise and resentment that Britain should have taken this decision, first because its troops are stationed in the flat northern sector, which is the most vulnerable, and second because they protect the vital forward radar stations on which the air defense of Great Britain itself depends.

The feeling in NATO is that Britain has presented a challenge to the authority of General Norstad as the formulator of NATO's strategy. Either the European governments will decide to follow Britain's lead, in which case Norstad might feel it necessary to force the issue by offering his resignation, or they will refuse to acquiesce in any further British reductions when the question comes before the WEU in August. Either course will put a severe strain on the organization of the alliance.

### **The Myth of Choice**

But the problem is made doubly complicated by the fact that owing to the waywardness and confusion of American and British leadership in NATO, awareness of military realities among European politicians and their electors has lagged behind military developments, both Soviet and Allied. As the debates of the parliamentarians at Strasbourg and the speeches of the foreign ministers of many of the European NATO countries at Bonn clearly showed, most Europeans still imagine that they have an alternative between conventional and nuclear war in Europe. With a few exceptions, such as Paul-Henri Spaak, until last month Belgium's foreign minister and now the new secretary-general of NATO, most Europeans take the concept of the shield literally, a ring of steel which, if strong enough, could defend Europe without recourse to atomic weapons, tactical or strategic.

Despite literally hundreds of briefings on the subject by Generals Gruenther and Norstad, the myth of a choice between conventional and nuclear war in western Europe persists. The consequence is that in the public debate that has developed in West Germany everyone is arguing

from different premises: the politicians that the British troop reductions in Europe are increasing the likelihood that Germany would become an atomic battlefield; the soldiers that the reductions increase the chances of being driven off a battlefield that is virtually certain to be atomic in any case.

### **Headaches for Adenauer**

Nowhere is the debate so confused and angry as in Germany. The publication of the British White Paper at the beginning of April, just six months before the Bundestag elections, made it certain that the issue of arming the Bundeswehr with tactical atomic weapons will be a dominant theme in the campaign.

Dr. Adenauer has a number of bones to pick with Britain, notably what the Germans choose to consider a deliberate British attempt to sabotage the European Common Market, to which so much pro-European idealism in the chancellor's Christian Democratic Union is now committed, in favor of the loose Free Trade Area plan. But his real grievance is that Britain, by raising the uncomfortable topic of atomic weapons at this time instead of letting it slumber in the top-secret files for a few more months, has presented his opponents with an issue that makes a strong appeal to an electorate which is both ill-informed and apprehensive. A campaign that for lack of domestic grievances had hitherto presented few handholds for the Social Democrats now appears to be running strongly in their favor. Adenauer, by the offhand manner with which he first tried to turn aside the questions, clearly underestimated the strength of a public opinion that had never been told the facts of military life. The denunciations of atomic weapons by the Göttingen scientists and Dr. Albert Schweitzer have had a profound effect.

Moscow has lost no opportunity of reminding the Germans of the horror of having their homeland turned into an atomic battlefield. Moreover, even tactical atomic weapons assume a different aspect if the mile or so they would devastate has been your family farm or town for generations.

The German opinion polls, though

unreliable, now show well over fifty per cent of the electorate opposed to giving atomic weapons to the German forces, compared with thirty-three per cent in favor. And since the Social Democrats base all their military thinking on the hypothesis of a reunified Germany outside NATO, of a Europe in which the political tensions have been resolved, they feel free to oppose the use of atomic weapons without being called upon to justify the military implications of their policy.

ONE IRONIC aspect of this situation is that the U.S. forces in Germany, which have hitherto been proud to display their strength in tactical atomic weapons, are now anxious to draw a veil over their existence. Recently I was invited to visit a U.S. Corporal battalion in southern Germany. After a long journey, I was met by a flustered Army press officer who had just received a message from Washington that no more journalists were to be shown around. (Even so, I did manage to see some of the sights.)

Nor did the NATO meeting in Bonn do anything to strengthen Adenauer's position, though the holding of it in that curious uncomfortable transient camp of a capital—where the styles of Charles Addams and Conrad Hilton fight for architectural predominance—was largely designed to do just that. The final communiqué to which the German foreign minister, Heinrich von Brentano, had perforce to put his name implied very clearly that tactical nuclear weapons were essential to the alliance. Worse still, Lord Ismay, the retiring secretary-general, publicly reminded the press that in the last instance the decision of whether to accept these weapons was a matter for governments to make, not the NATO Council, thus rebutting the attempt of Brentano and Adenauer to pass the buck to NATO.

### Tiptoe Tactics?

This has been one of the most unsettled springs in the long memory of Europe's farmers, with snow lying thick beneath the blossoming cherry trees in May. And the same is true of the political climate. For while the thunderhead of the atomic debate rolls up and down the Rhine, the



shadow of a larger cloud is spread across Germany, namely the possibility that the two superpowers have succeeded in alarming each other about the future implications of nuclear warfare to a point where they will agree to some form of limited disarmament or inspection system in Europe without settling the future of a divided Germany.

Harold Macmillan recently spent two days in Bonn reassuring Adenauer that, in his own phrase, Britain was not "tiptoeing out of Europe," and that suggestions for an agreement with the Russians for the "neutralization" of Germany, now being aired by Hugh Gaitskell and other Opposition speakers, formed no part of his official policy. Then President Eisenhower's statement at his press conference of May 8 that the United States would study "very sympathetically" plans for disarmament test areas in East and West Germany sent Bonn ten feet off the ground again. As with the furor over the purported Radford plan for withdrawing American troops last summer, no amount of subsequent soothing on the part of lesser American officials can succeed in allaying the fear that America's interests are no longer identical with Germany's. The nightmare that the United States and Britain, mesmerized by their own atomic arms race with the Russians, may conclude an agreement that leaves Soviet conventional forces in Europe as strong as ever haunts not only Germany but the whole of western Europe.

EVERY great European question is for the moment in flux. Will the NATO plan for a strong shield ever be completed? Is a limited disarmament agreement near fruition, as the ever-buoyant Harold Stassen insists it is? Will Germany emerge from the elections neutralist under the Social Democrats? If not, will its present deep distrust in the consistency of Washington and its even deeper distrust of the intentions of London make it decide to assume the leadership of a new military bloc in western Europe? France is within inches of deciding to become the fourth nuclear power, and will be swayed one way or another by the course of this year's disarmament negotiations. In consequence, the thoughts of more and more German officials are turning to the desirability of merging France's considerable ingenuity in the design of new weapons with their own fast-growing industrial power.

As a consequence of America's increasing detachment from the problems of its European allies and of Britain's threat to follow America into a position of atomic isolationism, the European members of NATO feel thrown back upon their own resources.

What they can do about it remains unclear even in their own minds. But they are not going to be second-class members of the club, providing the foot soldiers and the atomic battlefields while the Anglo-Saxon powers contribute gamma rays and strontium 90.



## *Controls, Inspection, And Limited War*

HENRY A. KISSINGER

ONE REMARKABLE ASPECT of the nuclear age has been a penchant for absolute solutions. In strategy it has led to our theory of deterrence, which identifies deterrence with the threat of maximum destruction. In diplomacy its symptom has been the quest for total peace, of which our approach to disarmament negotiations is the most notable example.

During the same month that Great Britain pressed the implications of our own strategic doctrine to their most rigorous conclusion, the major powers were negotiating about disarmament as if the perils of the nuclear age could be avoided at one fell swoop by a diplomatic instrument. From Korea to Indo-China to the Middle East, the real security problem has been the Communists' strategy of ambiguity. This Communist strategy, which is designed to multiply the hesitations and doubts

of opponents, graduates its challenges to a point well below that likely to provoke a final showdown.

By leaving no middle ground between total war and total peace, both our strategic doctrine and our approach to disarmament prevent the attainment of a less dramatic but perhaps more realizable objective: the establishment of a military and diplomatic framework which would cause war, if it does come, to take less absolute forms and which might spare humanity at least the worst horrors of nuclear conflict.

As things now stand, the major powers could conceivably be drawn into a war entirely against their wishes. The conflict over the Suez Canal was hardly foreseen by the western powers and perhaps not even by the Soviet Union. And the Hungarian revolution came as a rude shock to the Kremlin. Both upheavals resulted in military action

that prevailing strategic doctrines might easily have spread to an all-out war. Similar Soviet moves in East Germany or Poland would be fraught with even more danger.

The absence of any generally understood limits to war undermines the psychological framework of resistance to Communist moves. Where war is considered tantamount to national suicide, surrender may appear the lesser of two evils. A gap is thus opened between the quest for total peace and the military doctrine of total war—a gap in which the Soviet leadership can operate with relative impunity. Both strategy and diplomacy should therefore seek to pose less absolute alternatives; the former by developing a doctrine for limited war, the latter by using disarmament negotiations to obtain an understanding of the doctrine by other powers.

### **The Race Is in the Laboratories**

The always difficult task of disarmament negotiations is made nearly impossible by the instability and complexity of weapons technology, which has made it difficult to agree either on reduction of forces or on control over the development of new weapons.

A reduction of forces is difficult to negotiate because it seeks to com-