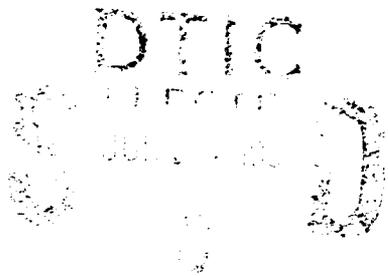


AD-A236 959



A RAND NOTE

**Keeping U.S. Troops in Europe:
The Real Reason Why**

Robert A. Levine

September 1990

RAND

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91-02178



The research reported here was sponsored by the United States Air Force under Contract F49620-86-C-0008. Further information may be obtained from the Long Range Planning and Doctrine Division, Directorate of Plans, Hq USAF.

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER N-3085-AF	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Keeping U.S. Troops in Europe: The Real Reason Why		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED interim
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s) R. A. Levine	8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s) F49620-91-C-0003	
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS RAND 1700 Main Street Santa Monica, CA 90401		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Long Range Planning & Doctrine Div. (AF/XOX) Direcotrate of Plans, Ofc. DC/Plans & Operations Hq. USAF Washington, DC 20301		12. REPORT DATE September 1990
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 16
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		18. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) unclassified
		18a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for Public Release; Distribution Unlimited		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report) No Restrictions		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Military Forces (United States) East West Relations Europe International Relations Deterrence Area Defense Western Europe		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) See reverse side		

The political capability to keep U.S. troops in Europe is suffering from the collapse of the explicit military rationale that has been used to support those forces: the need to deter and defend against a massive Soviet attack against Western Europe. The likelihood of such an all-out attack has been decreasing steadily for a long time; it is clearly close to zero now. For many years, the real reasons for the U.S. presence have been far broader than this expressed rationale, and the U.S. troop presence remains important to American interests for the same reasons. This Note explores this basic need for a continuing presence of U.S. troops in Europe to support continued U.S. interests, including (1) defense against military threats smaller than a massive Soviet attack, or stemming from a reversal of current favorable Soviet trends; (2) continuation of the favorable Soviet trends; (3) stability--rapid removal of U.S. troops could substitute revived suspicions and rivalries for hopes and cooperation; (4) continued democratization of Eastern Europe, which remains an American ideological as well as strategic interest; (5) U.S. prosperity, which is closely connected to European prosperity; and (6) the voice in many European economic, political, and security matters that the U.S. troop presence gives the United States.

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PREFACE

This Note was prepared at the request of General Michael Dugan, Commander in Chief, United States Air Forces, Europe (USAFE), as part of the project sponsored by USAFE on "The Air Force Role in a Changing Europe," under the National Security Strategies Program of RAND's Project AIR FORCE.

SUMMARY

The political capability to keep U.S. troops in Europe is suffering from the collapse of the explicit military rationale that has been used to support those forces: the need to deter and defend against a massive Soviet attack against Western Europe. The likelihood of such an all-out attack has been decreasing steadily for a long time; it is clearly close to zero now.

For many years, the real reasons for the U.S. presence have been far broader than this expressed rationale, and the U.S. troop presence remains important to American interests for the same real reasons. These reasons do not dictate an indefinite presence, nor do they indicate a particular size for the U.S. commitment. **They do suggest, however, that a current or near-term decision for a complete withdrawal would be unwise.**

U.S. forces in Europe support a continuing set of national interests:

- **Defense against military threats smaller than a massive Soviet attack, or stemming from a reversal of current favorable Soviet trends.**
- **Continuation of the favorable Soviet trends.** The U.S. troop presence has not forced these trends, which have stemmed primarily from internal Soviet factors. But their continuation depends on stability in Europe, and precipitate withdrawal of U.S. troops could threaten that stability.
- **Stability is in fact the central American interest in Europe.** Isolationism is no longer an American option, and the effects of European instability would cross the Atlantic through economic, political, and cultural channels. European stability, which depends on a very low likelihood of combat between European nations, together with acceleration of trade, economic cooperation, and overall openness, may be threatened by a number of European fears: residual fears of war and of the Soviets; fear of German power, albeit no longer military power but economic and political control; and more generally, fear of reversing the favorable trends of recent years in both Western and Eastern Europe. **American forces are part of the existing system which has worked well; rapid removal of U.S. troops could**

substitute revived suspicions and rivalries for hopes and cooperation.

- **Continued democratization of Eastern Europe remains an American ideological as well as strategic interest.** The troop presence may cut both ways on democratization, but this very ambiguity militates against a relatively irreversible decision to withdraw that presence now.
- **U.S. prosperity is closely connected to European prosperity.** One reason given for troop withdrawal is the burden on the U.S. budget of an "unnecessary" contribution to European defense. **But the destabilizing effects of withdrawal could slow down European economic integration,** now seen as an opportunity for the United States rather than a protectionist threat; and it could hurt the chances for American participation in European prosperity by removing our major connection to the members of the European community.
- **The last point can be generalized into a summary statement: U.S. troops give the the United States a seat at the European table and a voice in many economic and political matters as well as security affairs.** Not every future national interest is predictable, but it is certain that the United States will continue to have deep-seated interests in Europe. **Until an alternative instrument is found, U.S. forces in Europe provide the major representation for a wide variety of U.S. interests in Europe.**

As noted, none of the above dictates a force size or posture for U.S. forces in Europe or for NATO as a whole. A military rationale is needed for sizing. Such a rationale today, however, must be more credible than one based on defense against a massive Soviet attack. Three possible approaches for developing such a rationale are:

- **Size U.S. forces to represent a "serious" presence,** in the perception of Europeans and Americans. Troop numbers ranging from 50,000 to President Bush's 225,000 have been suggested.
- **Continue to plan NATO defense against some sort of Soviet threat,** based on an incursion or a reversion toward hostility. The former suggests a mobile force, the latter a capability for rapid reinforcement across the Atlantic.

- **Consider the possibilities of using Europe as the base for a mobile force capable of NATO power projection into areas such as the Middle East or Africa. This would make NATO a different sort of alliance, but the world is changing and such changes, difficult in the past, may become possible.**

Some combination of elements like these into an overall rationale is needed. The last two call for substantial mobility, which might mean a greater emphasis on air—both airlift and tactical aviation. All three rationales would lead to a somewhat lesser American role than at present; they might also lead to a European SACEUR. In any case, however, by far the most important point is that all of these elements are consistent with the basic need, explored here, for a continuing presence of U.S. troops in Europe to support continued U.S. interests in Europe.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful for substantial critical comments by his RAND colleagues: Brent Bradley, Fred Frostic, James Hodges, Richard Kugler, David Ochmanek, and Edward Warner.

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KEEPING U.S. TROOPS IN EUROPE: THE REAL REASONS WHY

THE EMPEROR'S CLOTHES ARE GETTING THREADBARE

To preserve the Alliance, . . . a [military] posture should try to satisfy (or at least not violate) the felt needs of the members, and we can thus arrive at a set of political criteria, based on these needs. . . . Since such political imperatives. . . will not suffice to obtain popular and governmental support for a posture, however, some military rationale is still needed, as a binding force for the chosen posture. . . . The threat of an all-out Soviet invasion of Western Europe seems to have outlived its usefulness as a rationale, primarily because few governments or people still believe it to be realistic.

—Robert A. Levine and Norman F. Jones, 1965¹

Rationale: 1. An explanation of controlling principles of opinion, belief, practice or phenomena.

—*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*²

An "explanation" of an opinion, belief, practice, or anything else, and the real reason for that opinion, belief, or practice are not synonymous, and therein lies the problem of U.S. troops in Europe in the 1990s. Norman Jones and I were some twenty years premature in our 1965 contention that the "all-out Soviet invasion" had worn out as the rationale for NATO's military posture; NATO's political and military leaders used it to justify military postures to themselves as well as their publics at least through the mid-1980s. Even so, however, hindsight shows that the real threat of such all-out aggression began to decline with the agreements that stabilized Berlin after the crises of the early 1960s. Gorbachev has now made that threat's obsolescence too obvious for it to serve even as a rationale.

One prop upholding the "all-out" rationale over the years was the continued real possibility of *some* sort of NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict in Western Europe. Indeed, even though political hindsight indicates the fading of the massive threat over many years, the fact that the Soviets continued to train and equip their forces to implement their doctrine of the conventional offensive meant that the Western military could not dismiss the

¹Quoted in Robert A. Levine, *Public Planning: Failure and Redirection*, Basic Books, New York, 1972, pp.121-122.

²*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Inc., Springfield, 1987.

threat. And in any case, the other major prop for the massive-invasion rationale was that it was devilishly difficult to build a concrete military posture around anything as evanescent as the wide range of less palpable dangers that might or might not be lesser included cases within the large one.

Now that *any* threat of Soviet aggression is declining rapidly as a basis for NATO's posture, however, the result we are discovering is that our continued stress on the all-out rationale has painted us into a corner. As the radical nature of Gorbachev's changes in Soviet external as well as internal policies has become clear in the last years of the 1980s, culminating in the 1989 relinquishing of Soviet control in the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact states, the likelihood of *any* Alliance/Pact war in Europe seems to be approaching zero. And the concept of an all-out Warsaw Pact invasion has become patently absurd: as put by Defense Secretary Richard Cheney, "It doesn't make a lot of sense to spend a lot of time worrying about the Polish Army or the East German Army actively participating in an attack on Western Europe."³

Thus the easy negative syllogism based on the old rationale-but-not-real-reason is set forth as:

- U.S. troops have been in Europe to deter and defend against Soviet aggression against Western Europe, particularly a massive Soviet invasion;
- That threat no longer exists;
- Therefore, U.S. troops are no longer needed in Europe;

and, particularly in a time of budget stringency, they should be removed.

This logic may appear compelling, but only because of the first premise, the massive-invasion rationale which for twenty years or so has been becoming less and less relevant to the real case for the U.S. military presence in Europe. *The purpose of this analysis is to present the real case for a continued U.S. presence in Europe as we go into the 1990s—the reasoning that has been basic to our posture for many years.*

The next section of this paper sets forth the real reasoning behind U.S. forces in Europe—reasoning based on a broad set of continuing U.S. interests that has existed in unexpressed form for the past two decades, and that continues now and into the

³Quoted in Anthony Lewis's column, "Abroad at Home," *New York Times*, November 23, 1989.

immediate future. These American interests lead to the current need for some continuing U.S. military presence, but it should be made clear that they do not in themselves specify the duration, posture, or size of that presence. In particular, it is *not* being contended:

- That U.S. troops will be needed in Europe forever. By the end of the next decade, for example, Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union are likely to have changed so much that any current statement about what will be needed then would be meaningless. But such decisions for the year 2000 do not have to be made now. What is contended is that no decision should be made now to *remove* the U.S. presence.
- That the U.S. presence should be unconditional, even in the short run. If, for example, our European allies want us out, we should go. Such a determination would not be simple, however: What combination of views from what combination of political elements in what combination of allied nations would constitute a sufficient departure signal? In any case, no such signal seems imminent.
- That U.S. interests dictate a particular force size or posture. The brief final section of this paper makes some suggestions for determining size and posture, but they do not stem directly from the American interests at stake; it is impossible to draw lines from detailed interests to detailed postures.

The basic contention is simply that U.S. troops should remain in Europe for now; that while substantial cuts are possible and desirable, they should stop well short of full military withdrawal of the United States from Europe.

THE REAL REASON: U.S. INTERESTS IN THE 1990S

The real argument is based on two premises: the continued existence of major U.S. interests in Europe, and conservatism, at this time of high uncertainty, about changing the ways in which we have maintained these interests over forty years.

U.S. interests in Europe can be divided into six general categories, none of which is completely independent of the others:

- Defense against military threats.
- Continuation of favorable trends in the Soviet Union.
- European stability.
- Democratization and self-determination in Eastern Europe.
- European prosperity as it contributes to American prosperity.
- A "place at the table" in Europe.

Each of these can be related to the continued presence of U.S. troops in Europe.

Military Defense

In principle, the only tangible military threat to the United States itself stems from Soviet nuclear weapons. In some future era, other nations may mount credible nuclear threats or conventional threats to our borders, but not within any planning period currently relevant. For now, no other nation and no other set of weapons can directly threaten our domestic tranquility. Thus it is argued that although once upon a time the Soviet Union might have been perceived as attacking our security through our European interests, now that the Soviets are clearly in retreat in Europe the old continent is no longer relevant to U.S. security.

That argument is oversimple and false. If the years from 1985 to 1989 have taught us anything, it is that trends are reversible. The Soviet trend to non-aggressiveness is the most promising development in the last half of the twentieth century, but the Soviet Union remains a massive power heavily armed with nuclear and conventional weapons. So long as this is true, so long as Soviet doctrines include the potential use of force to reach their own national objectives,⁴ and so long as the United States maintains major transatlantic interests, the defense of Europe against Soviet attack or threats will remain highly relevant to the defense of the United States. U.S. forces in Europe—both because of their own capabilities and as a manifest of the ultimate nuclear guarantee to America's allies—remain an essential part of that overall defense. American troops have not seen combat in Europe since 1945, but their presence and their use to convey the military backing for U.S. political positions (notably in the Berlin crises), have been crucial for the protection and promotion of U.S. interests.

⁴Or perhaps, on geopolitical and existential grounds, even after any changes in Soviet doctrine.

Were U.S. forces to leave Europe completely, it would be extremely difficult to send them back in case of reversal of the Soviet trend. *One reason for a continuing U.S. troop presence, therefore, is as a hedge against Soviet reversal.* Some day, under some military and political circumstances, the trend may be deemed irreversible. Not yet.

Continuation of Favorable Soviet Trends

The central issue here is not whether the "firm" Western policies of the past forty years helped initiate the trends. Some contrary contentions focus on the undoubted fact that the basic reasons for Gorbachev's changes were internal to the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the internal pressures seem to have been increased by Western refusal to allow the Soviets to relieve internal pressures by the achievement of external successes. In any case, it seems fatuous to argue that Soviet improvements took place *in spite of* Western policy.

Either way, however, the break in trend brought about by Gorbachev means that neither the past nor even the present provides much guidance for the future. Indeed, Western firmness exemplified by continuation of the U.S. troop presence in Europe does not seem likely in itself to either accelerate or inhibit further Soviet retreat. Current unilateral and negotiated drawdowns of Soviet forces are apparently based: first, on internal economic needs; second, perhaps on pressures from the newly freed Warsaw Pact allies; third, on reduced fears of NATO taking military advantage of Pact weakness. Of these reasons, only the third is directly relevant to the U.S. presence. And here it may be argued: (a) that Soviet perceptions of Western aggressiveness cannot have been high either for the recent past or the foreseeable future; (b) that the differential aggressive potential of zero U.S. forces as compared to sharply reduced U.S. forces is trivial; and, most important, (c) that to the extent the Soviets do fear military pressure in Europe, it is more likely to come from European neighbors—most prominently Germany, and perhaps some day Poland—than from the United States.

Nor, on the other hand, would U.S. withdrawal be likely to tempt renewed mischievousness, in the current and projected state of Soviet military and economic weakness. The best hopes of the Soviet Union lie in a Western Europe free, prosperous, and confident enough to provide economic support. On balance then, the continued presence of U.S. troops is likely to be neutral at worst with regard to the American interest in continuing current Soviet trends.

Two qualifications should be imposed on this statement, however. One is simple conservatism: *Things are working nicely now; why change them?* The other is based on the evident Soviet desire for overall European stability, and the role of the U.S. presence in maintaining that stability. Such stability is also in the American interest, and in fact provides the major real reason for continued U.S. presence. It is taken up next.

European Stability

This is the key, with its importance depending on the answers to three questions: What is stability? Why is European stability an important American interest? Why is a continued U.S. troop presence important to the preservation of European stability?

What is stability?

Stability is defined as:

the strength to stand or endure: . . . : the property of a body that causes it when disturbed from a condition of equilibrium or steady motion to develop forces or moments that restore the original condition . . .⁵

With regard to Europe, this implies a continental structure that is stable in at least three ways:

- *Military Stability.* The likelihood of combat among European nations is low and getting lower, and is perceived by the nations as being low enough that they need maintain no more than minor military safeguards against surprises.
- *Economic Stability.* Trade and economic cooperation among European nations are opening up and increasing, to the mutual benefit of all. Interwoven interests provide strong incentives to resolve differences consensually.
- *Political Stability.* East and West Europeans are satisfied with their domestic political arrangements and with their own nation's ability to determine its policies.

⁵*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.*

All of these should be *resilient*, with the inevitable rough spots tending toward solution and return to equilibrium rather than burgeoning crises.

This definition of stability in no way implies continuation of the internal status quo within East European nations, were that still possible; it certainly does not imply any kind of Soviet/American agreement imposing such an internal freeze. It does suggest, however, that accelerated change in the relations *among* East European states, between any of those states and the Soviet Union, or—even more emphatically—among the Soviet Republics, could be quite destabilizing.

Why is European stability an American interest?

The United States is inextricably bound up with Europe. Even if we were to withdraw all of our forces, we might have to return as we did in 1917 and 1941; stability is in our interest because we do not want to be called into combat if we have stayed in Europe or called back if we have not. But beyond such a seemingly improbable military involvement, our economic prosperity is tied to Europe as it has been for many decades; were instability to halt Europe's progress toward economic integration and openness, it would hurt our pocketbooks and standards of living. And less tangible but perhaps most important, our political, ideological, historical, cultural, and economic empathy for Europe and Europeans means that instability there may spill across the Atlantic in various unpredictable, small or large ways.⁶ Precise scenarios would be meaningless, but what it comes to is that political and economic withdrawal are impossible, and European instability runs the danger of becoming American instability.

Why is a continuing U.S. troop presence important for stability?

Stability remains in part military. As noted, current favorable Soviet trends are reversible and were U.S. troops to leave Europe completely it would be extremely difficult to send them back in case of such reversal.

More crucial than the military need for continued U.S. forces in Europe, however, is their importance for political stability. American troops provide a tangible symbol of U.S. security and other stakes in Europe; and for better or worse, European nations—and

⁶In this regard, see Robert A. Levine, "The strategic rationale for U.S. forces in Europe: U.S. perspective," *Militaire Spectator*, July 1989, particularly pp.299-300 on "Empathy."

not only West European nations—have come to depend on both these symbols and the real involvement they represent.

Europeans remain heir to four destabilizing fears, fears which the American troop presence helps to allay:

Fear of war—not nuclear war, but war. Europeans did not enjoy "conventional" World War II. Western Europe's primary interest in keeping American forces in Europe for the last forty years has been as a connection to the strategic nuclear power of the United States, not because our allies wanted a nuclear war, but because they felt that only this massive power could be relied upon to guarantee deterrence of *any* war. That is why Europeans have always been less concerned than Americans with the details of conventional war-fighting, and why some have feared that too great a NATO conventional capability might erode deterrence by enabling the United States to avoid nuclear decisions.⁷

Removal of U.S. troops would thus be destabilizing because it would throw into question the ultimate American nuclear sanction. Specific symptoms of such destabilization would likely include the building up of existing European nuclear forces and perhaps the initiating of new ones, e.g., by Germany, Italy, or Czechoslovakia.

Fear of the Soviet Union. This is shared by all of Europe except the Soviet Union itself. Much of the argument runs parallel to that concerning the fear of war; it is war initiated by the Soviet Union that West European nations have wanted deterred by American nuclear might. But more realistic than Soviet attack (so long as it was deterred) has been West European fear of the Platonic shadow of such an attack, "Finlandization," defined as the felt need by otherwise free nations to consider Soviet military might in making policy decisions. One of the striking developments of 1989 has been the concomitant fading out of West European fears of Finlandization, together with the rise of East European *hopes* for Finlandization, a far freer status than they had enjoyed as Soviet satellites.

U.S. troops in Europe remain important as a stabilizing guarantee against Western Europe's residual fears of the Soviet Union—as noted, trends do reverse—but also as an increasing element weighing in favor of Eastern Europe's independent status vis-à-vis the Soviets.

⁷See, for example, Karl Kaiser, George Leber, Alois Mertes, and Franz-Joseph Schulze, "Nuclear Weapons and the Preservation of Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1982.

Fear of Germany. This is shared by all Europeans including the Germans. It is not fear of renewal of military aggression or Nazism; these are seen as obsolete in an era of nuclear weapons and of thoroughgoing and successful West German democracy. But Europeans feared Germany before Hitler, and the economic and political power of the rapidly reunified Germany that is foreseen throughout Europe causes substantial discomfort in many places. The U.S. presence provides a balance; not that U.S. troops are going to combat a German militarism that does not exist anyhow, but that the United States is the only nation (aside from the Soviet Union, which for obvious reasons will not do) large enough to present an economic, political, and military counterweight to Germany.

True, American troops in Europe do not change the real economic or political balance on the continent, but they provide a symbol of the participation and interest of a nation with more than three times the population and GNP of even a reunified Germany, and that is comforting. Indeed, the U.S. presence reassures the Germans as well as other Europeans. Part of the transatlantic bargain was the U.S. commitment to the defense of Germany, including nuclear defense if necessary, and that remains important so long as nuclear weapons remain relevant to European and world power politics. These points are more psychological than logical, but politics depends much more on psychology than on logic.

Were the United States to rapidly remove its troops from Europe, and with them its tangible stake, the destabilizing results would likely include deceleration of European economic integration out of fear of German domination. They could also include a slowdown of disarmament throughout Europe, perhaps a turn by Germany to building its own nuclear weapons, and a new European alliance system that would either try to tie Germany into the rest of Europe (but in doing so without the United States would almost certainly be dominated by Germany), or possibly draw an informal *cordon sanitaire* around Germany.⁸

⁸This analysis steers around the issues raised by German reunification in the short run, which are clearly relevant but will be discussed in a future paper. As stated in the introduction, the arguments here are not for all time, but for a decade or less. The initial premise has been that reunification will take place slowly, within the "confederal structures" of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Phase II, allowing continued NATO membership by the Federal Republic of Germany and continued presence of U.S. troops in the FRG. The analysis is also consistent, however, with more rapid reunification under the condition espoused by both the U.S. and FRG of continued German membership in

Fear of change. This is the summary fear: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. The Western Europe that has developed *with* the American presence over forty years has been free and prosperous, with current and prospective acceleration in both of these directions. In 1989 the freedom of the West began, suddenly and excitingly, to extend to the East. The American military presence in Europe certainly did not inhibit this new development; perhaps it even helped bring it about, as it had helped the slower development in the West. Perhaps all the fears listed above are mere superstitions, and Europeans should look forward eagerly to building a bold new world on their own. But they do not, and rapid removal of U.S. troops would revive suspicions, rivalries, and reconsiderations on all of these dimensions.

The most likely result would be a marked increase in European instability, and not at all in the interest of the United States.

This section has referred throughout to Europeans. Europeans are, of course, a very heterogeneous group, and none of the contentions that follow could possibly cover all Europeans. Countercontentions may point both to members of intellectual elites and to general populations (e.g., Germans who object to NATO aircraft falling on them) who might like to get all Americans out. The fact is, however, that both the governing and the major opposition parties in all of the West European countries favor a continued U.S. presence, and it seems extremely likely that the new democratic governments to be elected in the East will do so too. So do the Soviets, as made clear by Gorbachev at Malta. This may change in the future, and if it does, the presence of U.S. forces in Europe should and will undergo radical reconsideration. *But it has not changed yet.* Stability is an attractive concept.

Democratization and Self-Determination in Eastern Europe

A pure and cold practitioner of *realpolitik* might argue that ideology has nothing to do with a nation's real interests, and that the democratization of Eastern Europe should be no concern of the United States. Such an argument would be wrong, for three reasons.

First, a nation's interests are what its people say they are, and the American people have shown themselves ready to fight for democratic ideology many times during

in the FRG. The analysis is also consistent, however, with more rapid reunification under the condition espoused by both the U.S. and FRG of continued German membership in NATO.

the twentieth century. True, the Vietnam experience raised many questions about ideology, interests, and willingness to do battle; and equally true, since the East Berlin uprising of 1953 we have made it clear that we were unwilling to go to war in the nuclear era for the liberties of the unfortunates in the Soviet sphere of influence in Europe. Nor would we today, nor are we likely to have to. Indeed, the new Soviet Union itself might even provide military backing for these liberties, as almost seemed likely in Romania. Nonetheless, the repeated thrills that ran down many American spines in 1989, as successive members of the Warsaw Pact declared their democratic destinies, indicated that we as a nation very much want such democratization. We will have to be wary about outcomes that irritate our sensibilities. Democracy and self-determination are not identical: the street demonstrations soon after the overthrow of the Zhivkov regime in Bulgaria, to continue the repression of ethnic Turks that had been reversed by Zhivkov's successors, were not inspiring; and they will not provide the only example. Nonetheless the emotions of Americans as they see the breakup of the "evil empire" are and will remain strong enough to legitimize a national interest, whether or not it fits within *realpolitik*.

Second, however, the *realpolitiker* would be wrong even on his own criteria: for U.S. interests in Eastern Europe, sound geopolitics go hand in hand with democratic emotions. If Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary are successful in building democratic political institutions, Eastern Europe would play a very different role than it has in the security calculations of NATO and the Soviet Union. Since the formation of the Warsaw Pact, NATO military planners have had to reckon with the possibility that the armed forces of East European states would fight alongside Soviet forces in wartime. Obviously, in light of the changes that have swept over Eastern Europe in 1989, this assumption is already questionable, to say the least. If a war were somehow to occur in Eastern Europe under present conditions, it seems most likely that the best Moscow could hope for from its "allies" would be passive acquiescence to the use of their territories as a springboard for attacks on NATO. Within a few years, given present trends, the Soviet Union's strategic "access" to Central Europe will be seriously compromised by long lines of communication through nations that could be expected to offer substantial resistance to Soviet military encroachment on their territories.

And finally, the United States has an interest in the democratization of Eastern Europe because, as discussed above, we have a major interest in the success of reform in

the Soviet Union, and democratization—and economic liberalization—of East European nations may ironically provide the Soviets with some role models. If the experiments ongoing in Hungary, Poland, and other East European nations show that peaceful change can establish legitimate governments and modernize moribund economies, that will strengthen the hands of those in Moscow who back similar reforms for the Soviet Union.

So far as all this relates to U.S. troop presence in Europe, the issue is no longer (if it ever was) the weight of American military power somehow forcing the Soviet Union to liberalize its European empire.⁹ As has been noted, it would be fatuous to contend that the exciting changes of 1989 took place *in spite of* forty years of Western "firmness"; it seems much more likely that Finlandization of the West, had NATO permitted it, would have precluded Finlandization of the East. Even so, with the Soviet Union now apparently in full retreat, Western military posture, including the presence or absence of U.S. troops, would seem unlikely to have much direct influence on what happens next.

One indirect connection may be made through the last section on stability: Economic reconstruction in the East, particularly as it may require assistance from the West, depends on stability throughout Europe, and the role of the U.S. troop presence in maintaining that stability remains important. On the other side, however, an argument is heard in Europe that democracy and economic reconstruction in the East require the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from the soil of other Pact members, and that the Soviet Union will not undertake such a withdrawal without a parallel withdrawal of American forces from West Germany and other allied nations.

None of these contentions on either side is yet demonstrable; to conjoin them, it is quite possible that the Soviets, realizing their own need for stability and the role of the American presence in maintaining that stability, would be willing to withdraw troops *without* demanding U.S. reciprocity. Indeed, the point here as throughout is uncertainty: *Lacking any real foreknowledge of how the withdrawal of American troops would bear on democratization, it would be foolish in the extreme to use that as the basis for a*

⁹Robert Strausz-Hupe, William Kintner, and Stefan Possony's 1961 book, *A Forward Strategy for America* (Harper, New York, 1961), provided about the last serious gasp of the theory that the Soviets could be forced back in Europe, although Barry Goldwater flirted with such ideas before and during his disastrous 1964 presidential campaign. Much more relevant during the same period was Zbigniew Brzezinski and William Griffith's "Peaceful Engagement in Eastern Europe" (*Foreign Affairs*, July 1961), which foreshadowed the subtler less-than-military strategies that have tended to guide U.S. policy from then until now.

relatively irreversible near-term decision to withdraw. The future is too rich in possibilities.

European/American Prosperity

Economic interests are second only to national defense in the classical pantheon of the "vital interests" of a nation. In fact, in the last half-century they have been largely subordinated to ideological interests, but they still weigh heavily in many decisions. And indeed, probably the strongest pressure for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Europe stems from economics—the joint pressure created by American budget stringency and by "burdensharing," the feeling that we are overcontributing to the defense of West European nations unwilling to devote as large a portion of their national product to their own defenses. These pressures may be somewhat overblown by politics: the process of withdrawing troops from Europe might cost more initially than the continuing charges for maintaining them; and burdensharing is more of a political concept than an economic one, let alone having anything to do with the strategic use of the military resources in question.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the word "political" is not the opposite of "real," and economic pressures operating through politics do bear heavily on the American military presence in Europe.

If U.S. prosperity is the summary economic interest at stake, however, the question should still be asked whether our prosperity would best be served on balance by troop withdrawal. Against potential short-run savings from withdrawal must be put the effect of withdrawal on European prosperity, on the American stake in that prosperity, and on the American connection to the European economy.

To some degree, the issue is again one of stability. The economy of Western Europe is headed toward integration, a goal and process that is expected to add substantially to the productivity of the continent, particularly as its benefits are extended to the East as well as the West. But integration depends on cooperation, and if, as discussed above, cooperation is replaced by suspicions, rivalries, and reconsiderations because of the withdrawal of U.S. forces, economic integration will be slower, and perhaps even reversed.

¹⁰See Charles Cooper and Benjamin Zycher, *Perceptions of NATO Burden-Sharing*, RAND Corporation Report R-3750-FF/RC, Santa Monica, June 1989.

At one time it was feared that an integrated West European economy would become an economic "Fortress Europe," surrounded by protectionist walls that would exclude the United States from sharing the benefits. Although these fears have not disappeared, they have begun to fade, as trade difficulties are worked out and as the European Economic Community is looked upon by more and more American businesses as a carrier of opportunities rather than threats. One reason for the increasing optimism is that the members of the Community themselves see openness as being in their own benefit. Another reason, however, is that the United States is considered a partner of the West European nations that form the Community. And the major instrument for that partnership is NATO.

It may not fit the preconceptions of simply-drawn organizational charts—politics frequently fails this test—but U.S. forces provide our major stake on the European table. The poker metaphor is an appropriate one. We have many other connections with Europe—official ones such as our membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and, probably more important, the unofficial ones summarizable as empathy. But our *stake* in Europe is most strongly represented by our military contribution within NATO. Removal of the stake from the table would turn us into mere kibbitzers about matters that remain a major part of our own vital interests.

A Place at the Table

The relationship of American partnership in NATO to the American stake in the European Community is one example of a broader phenomenon that summarizes all the rest: the role of the U.S. troop presence in giving the United States a voice in a wide variety of political and economic matters in which we have an interest, or may have in the future. Few of these can be specified in advance, but the world in general, and Europe in particular at a time of rapid transition, contain the seeds of such potential events, each of which is unlikely in itself, but some of which will occur. The United States will have a stake in many such events, and U.S. forces in Europe form the instrument and symbol of the American role.

There is no return to isolationism. The United States is an important player in Europe, on behalf of a wide variety of American interests. The major existing expression of the U.S. role is the membership in the North Atlantic Alliance and the troop presence which expresses that membership. The role is unlikely to change; until an alternative instrument is found, U.S. forces should remain in Europe to represent it.

FORCE SIZE

None of the above reasoning specifies any size for the forces representing the American interests in Europe. It is clear that they need not be as large as they are now: the initial target for U.S. forces in the negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) is a small reduction, to below the current 300,000+ level. Matters are moving faster than that, however; President Bush has proposed negotiated reductions of U.S. troops on the Central Front and Soviet troops outside their own borders to 195,000 (plus 30,000 U.S. troops elsewhere in Europe). The President apparently intends this as a floor on the American presence in Europe, but it seems more of a bargaining point with our allies as well as the Soviets than a firm final target; neither military nor political reasoning establishes that number—or any other.

Indeed, this brings up again the issue with which this analysis opened: The required military rationale for forces whose major function is not military defense as such. Three approaches can be suggested. The first has the advantage of bearing some relationship to the political requirements for the troop presence, but the disadvantage of having the least military logic. The basis for the other two tends away from the political and toward the more specifically military. It may be possible to build a rationale by combining all three.

- Choose a number of U.S. troops that would represent a "serious" American presence, in the perceptions of the Europeans and ourselves. Suggestions for such a number generally fall between 50,000 and 150,000. Some number around 100,000, divisible into appropriate "division slices," brigades, and air squadrons, suggests itself.
- Continue to plan a NATO defense against *some* Soviet or other military threat. Clearly the massive Warsaw Pact invasion will no longer do, but more plausible may be a combination of two threat elements: a small, perhaps not entirely deliberate, incursion from East to West, based on some sort of renewed political hostilities (perhaps not even involving the Soviet Union); and the sort of reversal of Soviet trends mentioned above, leading again to a major military threat. The incursion scenario suggests some sort of mobile defense capable of rapid reinforcement of threatened sectors, perhaps incorporating elements of the "defensive defenses" favored by much of the

European left. The U.S. role in such a defensive posture might be to provide much of the air power, with the ground efforts being supplied by European troops including German reserves. The trend reversal scenario would stress rapid buildup, with U.S. troops functioning as the cadre for reinforcement from North America.

- Think of U.S. troops in Europe as a mobile expeditionary force, based there in some measure for European military as well as political purposes, but also as a means of power projection into areas such as the Middle East and Africa. This would recast NATO into an alliance about the world rather than about Europe alone, and the European members have resisted such a revamping in the past. As the world changes, however, and North/South issues become more important relative to East/West, European thinking may change, particularly if the need is felt to create a new rationale to retain the American troops.

All of these rationales would lead to a new mix of allied forces in Western Europe, one more like the current posture in South Korea in which U.S. troops are an important but relatively small portion of the entire defensive force. Such a remixing would probably lead to a European SACEUR (which differs from Korea, in which the allied—for historical reasons, the United Nations—military commander remains American.) The last of the three rationales, and probably the middle one as well, would call for major changes in the current structure of U.S. forces in Europe. Both of these call for substantial mobility, which might mean a greater emphasis on air, transport as well as tactical.

All of the rationales, however, and all of the force mixes, are consistent with the basic need explored in this analysis, the continued need for U.S. troops in Europe to support continued U.S. interests in Europe.