

# Rethinking the Unthinkable

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Just two weeks after the Reagan administration came into office, a second neutron bomb debate suddenly erupted. Thus far, it has borne striking similarity to the debate which began in June 1977, and it has ended in essentially the same way—namely, another U.S. decision to postpone the deployment of enhanced radiation weapons (ERW) in Europe.

At first contemplation, the decision not to decide on deployment seems to be reasonable enough as well as politically expeditious. The neutron warheads would be produced and stockpiled in the U.S., and therefore, at least be available for incorporation in the missiles when the need arose. Were European governments, which are currently resisting ERW deployment (in particular West Germany) to relent at a later time, they could then be deployed. Or if a prolonged crisis arose, of sufficient severity to break down NATO European resistance, there would be ample time to fly the warheads over to the location of the delivery units. Or, if a war were to begin with a surprise nuclear attack on NATO's nuclear weapon facilities (the stated first-priority Soviet target system), a decision not to deploy the weapons during peacetime could prove to be perversely fortuitous. NATO's battlefield nuclear warheads are stored in only a limited number of stockpile sites (fewer than 100) which, in all probability, would be destroyed. In this case, the U.S. could have the dubious advantage of not having the neutron warheads destroyed along with the warheads stockpiled in Europe.

However, the case for storage of the components in the United States may be less convincing. For in yielding to European domestic political problems, the U.S. may also have yielded too far in not asserting what its commitment to NATO is all about—the military *defense* of Europe. The U.S. also may have yielded too far on another, more fundamental commitment—the security of its own combat forces in Europe.

Beginning in 1961, with the Kennedy administration, a new defense policy was established which, in effect, ruled against achiev-

ing discriminate tactical nuclear capabilities, such as ERW for NATO. (The use of tactical nuclear weapons in other areas, e.g., Northeast Asia, effectively was rejected irrespective of weapon characteristics. For these areas, it was assumed that conventional defense was feasible and overwhelmingly preferable to nuclear defense.) In fact, in 1963, when a very successfully tested ER warhead was proposed for Army battlefield missiles, the Kennedy administration openly argued against such production. Although there have been changes in official rhetoric affecting ERW since that time, including Secretary of Defense Weinberger's positive remarks early this year, for all intents and purposes this U.S. policy attitude has persisted.

Moreover, because of NATO's basic policy governing the employment of nuclear weapons — the so-called Flexible Response policy — it has been extremely difficult to convince European political leaders that ERW should be incorporated into NATO's battlefield nuclear arsenal.

### **Flexible Response**

There is no room here to debate the efficacy and credibility of NATO's Flexible Response policy, which conceptually is now more than twenty years old. It will be briefly summarized, however, as it relates to nuclear weapons policy and the role of ERW in this policy context will be examined. Flexible Response assumes, for planning purposes, a war scenario something like this:

1. After extensive preparation, giving NATO ample time to prepare its defenses, the Soviet/Warsaw Pact armies invade Western Europe with conventional forces. (No nuclear weapons are employed by the Soviets.) In this initial phase of the war, NATO will defend only by conventional means.
2. If NATO's conventional defenses fail and deep enemy penetrations into West Germany seem imminent and unavoidable, battlefield nuclear weapons now come into play to prevent such incursion and the overrunning of NATO forces. (It is assumed here that the Soviets still will not employ their own nuclear weapons.) This will involve some number of these weapons, ranging from tens to perhaps a couple of hundred, used against the forward enemy armored echelons to neutralize these forces and bring the attack to a halt. Whereupon, it is expected that the Soviets will choose to end hostilities and move to the conference table.
3. If this tactical nuclear gambit does not succeed in bringing

hostilities to a halt and the Soviets persist, then, in accordance with its long-standing pledges, the U.S. will broaden the war to include nuclear attacks against the Soviet Union itself. The expectation is that such drastic reprisal will bring Soviet aggression to an end, if indeed the threat of such action hasn't already succeeded in this purpose.

It is in this second phase that ERW comes into the perspective of official thinking. The U.S. government has maintained that using ERW in this battlefield role—in the context of the Flexible Response scenario just described—will enable highly effective attacks to be made against forward enemy armored echelons, while at the same time significantly abating the danger to friendly defending troops and substantially reducing the extent of civil damage in West Germany. On this basis, ERW would seem distinctly preferable to the currently-stockpiled battlefield nuclear weapons. Former President Jimmy Carter made this preference very clear, when he argued for ERW in 1977:

It must be recognized that NATO is a defensive alliance which might have to fight on its own territory. An aggressor would be faced with uncertainty as to whether NATO would use nuclear weapons against its forward echelons. For these purposes, the capability for discrete application of force—which the ER weapons may provide—present (at least in this sense) an attractive option. . . .

The ER weapons, then, would be designed to enhance deterrence, but if deterrence fails, to satisfy dual criteria:

—First, to enhance NATO's capability to inflict significant military damage on the aggressor.

—Second, to minimize damage and casualties to individuals not in the immediate target area, including friendly troops and civilians.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these advantages, NATO Europeans, most importantly the West Germans, have made it clear that they do not want these weapons deployed on their soil. No matter that the battlefield fission warheads they long have accepted (and will again accept with the new fission warheads—devoid of neutron components) will neutralize Pact armies through prompt nuclear radiation effects just as ERW do; for domestic political reasons—totally lacking in technical and military logic—ERW are rejected.

However, there is a U.S. side to this problem, with its own do-

1. Letter from President Jimmy Carter to Senator John Stennis, July 11, 1977

mestic political considerations, which complicates the issue. The territory West Germany wants to spare from nuclear weapon employment also happens to be occupied by almost 200,000 troops that the United States has provided to help protect Europe.

The President may feel obliged by Treaty to help protect NATO Europe by keeping U.S. troops in Germany to honor Alliance commitments, and, for the sake of Alliance harmony, to cater to European political sensitivities. At the same time, however, he also is obliged to protect these American forces with the best possible military means to prevent their defeat and capture in the event of war. Thus, if ERW are perceived to represent a means of accomplishing this objective,<sup>2</sup> then from an American standpoint, in all due deference to European opinion, the President should want to have them deployed at least by U.S. forces in Germany.

### **Euromissiles**

But a higher priority is apparently placed on installing so-called Euromissiles (ground launched cruise missiles and Pershing-II ballistic missiles) in Europe. It should be realized however, that in the context of NATO's preferred war scenario described above, the use of such weapons would have little direct military effect on stopping the Soviet/Warsaw Pact armored forces. It is possible that, by striking targets in eastern Europe and western Russia, they might have a beneficial effect in the event that the war were to be prolonged. But by themselves they would hardly represent a nuclear means to prevent NATO ground forces from being overrun on the battlefield. They represent rather an escalation toward general nuclear war in the event that battlefield nuclear weapons fail in their intended purpose.

These missiles properly belong to the third phase of Flexible Response in which the United States invokes its strategic nuclear pledges to NATO. In this respect, they represent an intra-war deterrent threat following a military disaster to U.S.-NATO ground forces. But the actual employment could bring disaster to the U.S. itself if the Soviets were to respond to Euromissiles by directly attacking the United States.

2. This seems to be the Administration's view: "When you look at the number of Russian tanks and the other items, the enhanced radiation warhead could do quite a lot to restore some kind of balance there." Caspar Weinberger, Interview, February 11, 1981.

**Defense of NATO Europe**

At least symbolically, the current revival of the ERW issue represents a fundamental conflict of belief between Europe and America over Europe's defense. Is NATO Europe seriously willing to defend itself against ground invasion, or does it prefer to use the strategic nuclear guarantees of the United States as a reason (or rationalization, as many see it) to avoid establishing a credible ground defense? Will the Alliance choose to continue a defense policy (and its corresponding military capabilities) which is decreasing in credibility—as the Soviet conventional and nuclear forces continue to increase and exceed those of the West? Or will the Alliance change course toward a more realistic solution?

While the United States may continue to feel obliged to perpetuate the NATO Alliance, it also has fundamental obligations to itself. These may have been neglected for too long in a period when expanded Soviet ground and strategic threats have placed both U.S. forces in Europe and the U.S. itself in increasing jeopardy. From an American standpoint, the idea of bowing to European resistance to deployment of a weapon, whose use might save American ground forces from defeat, may not be too acceptable. More important, for the U.S. to have gained European acceptance for Euromissiles at the expense of a credible battlefield nuclear capability (whose employment might forestall or even prevent the escalation of war to strategic nuclear proportions) may be even less acceptable to Americans once it is fully understood.

Underlying this difficulty is the inherent difficulty of selecting a credible scenario for possible NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict. How such a conflict might begin and progress is almost anyone's guess (although some guesses are more logically founded than others.) But, whatever the unfolding scenario turns out to be, what is essential is that the United States take every measure during peacetime to ensure maximum military capabilities for its own forces in Europe should war come. If ERW represent the best nuclear weapons for battlefield defense, as the Defense Department has maintained, these weapons should enter the European inventory for U.S. use at least.

The principle of forward deployment of battlefield nuclear weapons long has been established by NATO—witness the thousands of such weapons now positioned in Europe. Yet, there has been a haggling over the alleged price that must be paid to gain European acceptance. The U.S. has apparently decided that the price is too high in terms of threatening Alliance solidarity. But in so

doing, it may have paid another price: risking the security of its own forces in Europe and the survival of America itself.

### **ERW and South Korea**

It is strange that, in both recent neutron bomb debates, the United States has argued with allies who plainly preferred not to see ERW deployed on their soil, while apparently paying no attention to allies who might have been greatly appreciative of such deployment and in need of weapons to keep their territory from being devastated by war. Why has the Reagan administration not moved toward discussions with South Korea on ERW deployment to this Asian ally? Considering the low ebb that U.S.-South Korean relations reached during the Carter administration, it is understandable that no such move was made. But one of the first foreign policy steps taken by the new administration was to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to South Korea. Why had ERW not been considered as part of this commitment?

Contrary to the claim made by the Carter administration that ERW were designed solely for European deployment, the truth of the matter is that the original neutron bomb concept was formulated in 1958 primarily with Asian limited war scenarios in mind. For the Korean War and all its frustrations was fresh in everyone's minds.

Today, moreover, there are good reasons for using ERW to defend South Korea:

First, the U.S. has sizeable military forces in South Korea—about 40,000 troops. (Very recently, President Reagan pledged to keep these forces there.) If the U.S. has a requirement to best protect American troops in Europe the same surely holds true in Korea.

Second, contrary to European repugnance for ERW, the South Koreans would almost certainly welcome its deployment on their soil. Augmenting Korea's defense with ERW—the alleged battlefield “super weapons”—could substantially strengthen an alliance which has seen considerable tension and divisiveness in recent years.

Third, the introduction of these weapons by the U.S. would, without doubt, greatly enhance the deterrence of aggression by the North.

Fourth, should deterrence fail and, as happened in 1950, war occur, Seoul, which is only twenty-five miles below the DMZ and

a vital economic and political artery for South Korea, may again become a major battleground. Were ERW available for Seoul's defense, the almost total devastation of the first Korean War could be avoided.

If, indeed, the issue of ERW deployment has not been broached to the South Koreans, then one might again ask: Why not? Surely, the U.S. ought to prefer to conduct its nuclear diplomacy with allies and friends who are more sympathetic to U.S. military objectives for their defense. Or is it that the U.S. still prefers to provide battlefield nuclear defense for allies who don't want it?

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# An American Foreign Legion?

ERNEST VAN DEN HAAG

It is generally agreed that American strategic superiority to the Soviet Union — were it achieved — would not suffice to deter or defend against Soviet attacks on comparatively remote or minor targets of interest to the United States. Strategic superiority would help us little in Angola, or Yemen, since we won't start a nuclear war for their sake and nobody will believe that we are likely to.

Yet, the Soviet Union will attempt to weaken our defenses by overthrowing the governments of Third World nations, or conquering them, so as to produce regimes friendly to Soviet aims, which may provide military bases, or military forces hostile to the U.S. (e.g., Afghanistan). These military forces then can be used as proxies to attack still other nations friendly to the United States. New Soviet satellites are thus produced in part by domestic-political means, partially (e.g., in Ethiopia) by using Soviet conventional forces, or with the military help of other Soviet satellites (e.g., those of Cuba). In all these activities the availability of Soviet or Soviet allied conventional forces plays a major role as does the unavailability of American conventional forces. Any conflict other than a world conflagration, be it in Europe, Africa, the Near East or in the Persian Gulf area, is likely to be fought by conventional, non-nuclear forces. It is easy to conceive of scenarios about Yugoslavia, or Norway, or Berlin, let alone Iran, or the Far East.

Our conventional forces are inferior by far to those of the Soviet Union. They would remain inferior even with a draft. And if draftees were available, it is politically unlikely that we would readily send them to defend a pro-American regime in, say, Africa. Nor do we have proxies, such as the Cubans to help support faltering friendly regimes.

## U.S. Conventional Forces

There are several ways of meeting the problem just outlined. We could beef up our conventional forces. Although this is highly desirable it would be unrealistic to believe that we can do so to a degree sufficient to discourage adventures by the Soviet Union and its proxies in Africa, the Persian Gulf area, or even in South