
**NUCLEAR CRIES, CONVENTIONAL WHISPERS: THE
EUROPEAN PEACE MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON
PUBLIC OPINION**

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foolish to exaggerate its concern. Twenty years ago, only 16% of the British people thought that such a war was very likely; today, at least 60% believe it could well break out in their lifetime. Yet only a minority believe — despite all the claims to the contrary — that NATO's own policies, including the modernisation of theatre nuclear weapons has made such an outcome more likely.

NATO has managed to retain public confidence because the Alliance itself is still seen to be a more viable peace movement than the organisations which condemn it or peddle alternative defence policies. But that consensus may be very fragile. It is not predicated on whether or not NATO subscribes to any particular nuclear doctrine, but on public recognition that war between the blocs is still unlikely.

Any serious attempt to increase defence expenditure beyond present levels; or to adopt limited war fighting contingency plans; or to trust to deterrence alone in default of detente and deterrence might very well undermine NATO's claim to be an effective guarantor of peace.

In 1983 a Louis Harris poll taken in five major NATO countries found that only the British would be prepared to accept higher defence spending, and even they were divided almost equally on the issue. A massive majority in the Federal Republic was opposed completely to any attempt to alter major spending priorities. The one comfort NATO can draw from these figures is that membership of the alliance is still seen as a more effective way of averting war than taking a dangerous if calculated leap into the dark by embracing unilateralism or neutralism. But equally, there is clearly no evidence of public support for the type of re-armament programmes on which the United States has just embarked. Indeed, anti-American sentiment derives largely from the perception that Reagan's rapidly rising defence budgets will threaten the existing military balance and make the world a less safe place.

Unfortunately, the US media and the right in the United States frequently draw the wrong conclusions from these indications of European

sional classes who have retreated from a belief in nuclear power as the technology of the future into a Tolkeian fantasy world of alternative energy sources such as solar power. One of the most remarkable phenomena of the most recent recession was that, in contrast to the Great Depression fifty years ago, there was little demand for alternative political alignments. Instead of renouncing politics as a mean of remedying society's ills, the recession seemed to reinforce popular belief in the efficacy of political solutions. There was no sign of the antipolitical mood which Thomas Mann captured so well in his *Reflections of a Non-political Man*.

Indeed, compared with the 1930's, there was little support for mass populist movements outside the traditional party structure. There was no significant resurgence of fascism or communism in Western Europe, and the eurocommunist parties, that still maintained their hold in Italy and France, remained publicly committed to nuclear deterrence. There was no sign of that «journey from dialectic to magic» which Klaus Mehnert detected in the German peoples journey two generations ago from Lieknecht to Hitler.

The resurgence of the extreme right was largely confined to France, the one country which did not boast a peace movement of any importance. Left-wing political extremism never recovered from its defeat in the streets of Paris in the summer of 1968. Catchphrases such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit's ringing affirmation «We refuse a world where the certainty of not dying of hunger is gained at the risk of dying of boredom» found no echo in the early 1980's; even Cohn-Bendit himself was «socialised» when he joined the Greens in 1984 — his first political party.

At the very time that thousands took to the streets to urge their governments to contract out of the arms race, many millions more voted into office political parties who not only supported nuclear deterrence and the deployment of cruise missiles, but also offered no quick fix solutions to the problem of mass unemployment. For the 100 000 peace marchers that heckled Haig in Berlin, 3,5 millions voters in the city threw the SPD out of office in large part because they distrusted its economic programmes.

It would be quite wrong to conclude, however, that the public was unconcerned about the prospect of a nuclear war, just as it would be equally

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE FEAR OF WAR

Anxiety, as Heidegger says, is the source of all public disquiet; to that extent it is a perfectly normal and functional symptom of human existence. It is only when fear becomes conscious of itself that it becomes anguish, a state the Germans describe as *Angst vor der Angst*. There is a world of difference, therefore, between the popular apprehension about war and the prevailing anxieties of the peace marchers. The latter appear to stem not from an extraneous source (the cold war) but from an intense and widespread anxiety about war itself, in its original, stark, unqualified and ineluctably tragic form.

The causes of this crisis are complex. They reflect the anxieties of a post-materialist age in which individuals have become so isolated and anxious that they are acutely sensitive to the predicament of mankind, and concerned in response to exalt human relationships based not on reason but emotion. As one Labour MP said of the women of Greenham Common, they had affirmed family values in a way that combined all that best was within the feminist movement — the qualities «women frequently show — the desire to nurse, nourish, care and tolerate, improve and preserve». Their most profound experience is that of faith — faith in basic human goodness; in the power to set a moral example; in the possibility of contracting out of the arms race without provoking the very catastrophe they wish to avoid.

The anxiety which plaques so many millions of European citizens has much less to do with any innate loss of confidence in nuclear deterrence than an acute fear of technical progress. To cite a phrase common on the German left, we fear the Soviet Union much less than we fear nuclear weapons; technology itself has become the enemy. Unlike the 1930's our own age demonstrates — to use Freud's terminology — neurotic anxiety rather than 'reality anxiety' — a sense of social alienation, not a sense of personal or economic loss.

In contrast to the 1930's, in fact, there is very little evidence of *mass* unease. Ludditism, where it exists at all, is to be found much less among Europe's 12 millions unemployed workers than among the employed profes-

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Looking back at the massive peace rallies in Bonn, Brussels and London in the summer of 1982 we might well ask whether the peace movement is quite as significant as it was the defeat of the German Social Democratic and British Labour parties in the most recent elections have led to the deployment of cruise missiles on schedule. In Britain public interest in the nuclear debate has fallen far short of the 33% of the voters in 1960 who believed it to be the fundamental issue in British political life. On the continent the peace movement is in apparent disarray, uncertain where to go or how best to proceed. At a conference in Copenhagen in 1984 involving 64 different peace groups, the participants found themselves unable to reach any broad consensus on either issue.

Clearly, however, the peace debate is not over. In the United States much is still made of Europe's apparent inability to meet the challenge of public opinion. In Europe images of a confused and profoundly troubled public still weigh heavily with newspaper pundits and military experts who are inclined rather too readily to assume that the peace movement can be pacified or bought off, or even outflanked and outmanoeuvred by introducing new strategic doctrines instead.

This view exaggerates the importance of the peace debate and pays far too much attention to the nuclear issue. Yet it also represents a dangerous trend. In attempting to devise new conventional strategies to meet public disquiet, NATO may actually succeed where the peace movement has failed. The impact of the latter on public opinion may be far more marked in the debate over conventional defence than in that over nuclear doctrine. Only an unwarranted pre-occupation with nuclear weapons obscures this dilemma.

opinion. It is quite wrong to suppose that because 7 out of 10 Europeans in 1981 were opposed to any increase in defence spending that they were prepared to live with a strong United States but not with a US stronger than the Soviet Union. It was more a case of European public opinion being more anxious about the rapid rate of American re-armament than about the persistent but also consistent armaments programmes carried out by successive Soviet governments since 1965.

To its credit, European public accepted a real increase of 26% in defence spending between 1971-81, at a time when defence expenditure in the United States actually declined by 7%. It did so, however, because the increase was not sudden but spaced over ten years, and did not jump with each change of administration. More to the point, these increases were implemented at a time of detente between the superpowers when relations were arguably better than at any time since the second world war. Today, most opinion polls show a much greater anxiety about the possibility of conflict between them, even if they also show a widespread disbelief in the likelihood of a Soviet attack on western Europe. Nowhere is there at present any trace of «that faint smell of burning in the air» which Jung detected as early as 1933 and which did so much to convince a disbelieving Europe that the world was heading towards eventual catastrophe at unusual speed. It must be asked whether support for the alliance, as opposed to faith in appeasement, would be so widespread if the likelihood of a Soviet attack were any greater.

In other words, Western public opinion has lived in an armed peace for so long that it seems to have become reconciled to deterrence as a way of life and to nuclear weapons as the most credible deterrent available. Were NATO ever to convey an impression of preparing for the unthinkable and believing it to be imminent, public acquiescence could rapidly erode.

That is indeed, the great danger of those who want much higher spending on conventional forces in order to raise the nuclear threshold, or those in the United States who would like to refashion deterrence on the basis of a new set of conventional doctrines which are almost, if not more, fightful

than the nuclear doctrines now in place. Those defence experts who have raised serious questions about the stability of the strategic balance, the credibility of deterrence and the credibility of mutually assured destruction as a deterrent strategy have themselves contributed (consciously or not) to public anxiety by advancing a bewildering series of conventional strategies to raise the nuclear threshold which are almost as frightening and unconvincing as those they feel so concern European opinion.

The new deep strike and Follow-on Forces (FOFA) concepts. As well as those embodied in Airland Battle and Airland Battle 2000, have begun to attract critical attention by the peace movement. In 1983 the European Nuclear Disarmament Group (END) began to claim that the United States intended to switch from a traditional «hold the line» defence to a more ambitious policy of counter-attack which might well involve the earlier use of nuclear weapons, even the possibility of a first-strike or preemptive attack. These strategies would leave the Federal Republic almost as devastated at the end of a conventional war as at the conclusion of a nuclear confrontation.

The new mood has been put clearly, and eloquently, if rather simplistically, by END's President, E. P. Thompson. Writing in *New Society*, Thompson suggested:

«The conventional weapons of the First and Second world wars were hideous and their 'modernised' successors will be hideous in the extreme. It is no longer sufficient to clamour for nuclear disarmament. If European nations should go to war, the distinction between nuclear and conventional will soon be lost. We must enlarge our objectives; we must work to dissallow any kind of recourse to war».

For Thompson and the many who share his views, suggestions that conventional weapons are somehow more tolerable, are deeply misleading. It follows that the emerging technologies that are at the bottom of the new doctrines and the various attempts to raise the nuclear threshold by the deployment of 'smart' weapons are almost as objectionable, if not more, than nuclear weapons themselves.

This criticism is not confined to the peace lobby. It has been taken up in earnest by those political parties that have close links to the peace movement, and whose own defence policies have been deeply influenced by the peace debate. The SPD's 1983 report on the 'New Strategies' rejected the concept of 'forward defence' in favour of NATO's old policy of 'forward-based defense'. The party viewed the Airland Battle Strategy as not only dangerously offensive with regard to planned strikes deep into Warsaw Pact territory, but also as encompassing the worst aspects of the integrated battlefield strategy in which the firebreak between nuclear and conventional weapons is not sufficiently appreciated.

In Britain the Labour Party is equally hostile to the new defence options being discussed by SHAPE. Its defence paper published in 1984 is against deep strikes into enemy territory and highly critical of the 'emerging technologies'. It is wholly opposed to Airland Battle 2000 which one of its defence spokesmen has likened to the policy of *blitzkrieg*, a characteristic manoeuvre of an 'aggressive and expansionist power'. «Such a posture could not exist in harmony with the ostensibly defensive nature of NATO».

As the peace movement throughout Europe begins to come to grips with this new conventional 'threat to peace'—with a new generation of weapons the very destructiveness of which may begin to blur the distinction in the public mind between nuclear and non-nuclear defence on the battlefield—a party so closely allied to the peace lobby can hardly be expected to embrace the conventional future with open arms, or to expect that it hold out very much promise of non-nuclear defence.

It would appear that what the Labour Party and the SPD would prefer is a 1967 flexible response posture without the *European* nuclear component. What they now term rather euphemistically 'non-provocative' defence would mean more anti-tank weapons and fewer tanks, more interceptor Tornados and fewer long range strike aircraft, a defense posture which the Pentagon is likely to find sterile and unrewarding.

What is really interesting, however, is that the criticism of the new doctrines has also begun to encompass the European military, and those poli-

tical parties whose confidence in nuclear deterrence is still unshakable. As the Dutch deputy chief of Planning remarked recently:

«Europeans generally feel that a more offensive attitude does not contribute to NATO's security. They feel it would further strain relations with the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries which in turn might lead to a higher risk of war.»

Or to quote a former French ambassador Bernard Vernier-Palliez:

«We Europeans do not believe in conventional deterrence. Twenty centuries of history have taught us that conventional deterrence does not work... It would be very dangerous if this country lost its belief in nuclear deterrence.»

Thus from rather different premises the peace lobbyists and the generals are capable of reaching similar conclusions; an unforeseen and ironic outcome of the great peace debate of 1979-83.

The problem is compounded by the curious picture of the United States pushing in one direction at a time that the Soviet Union appears to be pushing in another far more congenial to European opinion. To many European governments, not only citizens, it seems madness to base western doctrine on that of one's opponent or to draw lessons from former Soviet strategic thinking which posits the operational, and possibly prolonged use, of offensive nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. A doctrine which may well be appropriate for a totalitarian society is unlikely to meet with much favour in a democratic coalition.

This is all the more ironic in that Soviet military doctrine has actually changed since the peace movement first began to make headway. The change was skilfully tailored to reassure Western opinion that the Soviet Union was genuinely interested in deterring a war, rather than fighting one. Prior to 1979 most Soviet writers espoused quite a different belief — that the nuclear era had not changed Lenin's thesis about the inevitability of war between the capitalist and socialist systems and that the final conflict would be fought with all available weapons.

Soviet doctrine, uncompromising as it was clear, seems to have changed with the growth of the European peace movement and its first successes. As Leonid Brezhnev told *Pravda* in October 1981 «Only a candidate to suicide can start a nuclear war with the hope of emerging victorious whatever the power of the attacking side, whatever the means chosen to start a nuclear war, the attacker will not prevail. Punishment will be unavoidable.»

We may therefore ask why NATO should begin to adapt a doctrine more akin to earlier Soviet thinking at a time when the Soviet Union has begun to publicly disavow a war-winning strategy (in the hope of winning the public debate). Surely, it would be better for the Alliance to insist that any war must go nuclear however high the nuclear threshold. The Soviet Union can never win the propaganda debate, but the West may well lose it; may never convince the man in the street that its intentions are more peaceful than NATO's; but the Alliance could inadvertently lose its non-aggressive image. Clearly Airland Battle and FOFA are open to attack by the peace movement on the grounds that only by minimising offensive systems at the same time as strengthening defensive capabilities can NATO demonstrate its lack of aggressive *intent*. In that sense the alliance confronts a rather awkward dilemma — that at the very time the peace movement is so weak in its arguments for a non-nuclear defence posture, it is quite plausible, if not convincing, in its arguments for 'defensive deterrence' or 'non-provocative defence'.

TRANSARMAMENT VERSUS NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

There are many different versions of non-provocative defence but most of them rule out the deployment of any offensive weapons systems. Many set a 20 ton weight for armoured vehicles, 100 m calibre limit on artillery and missiles; as well as significant limitations on surface to air missiles so as to pose no threat to the opponent's peacetime air surveillance.

It is a defence strategy aimed to channel Soviet forces on the outbreak of hostilities to special points of defence where the defender would have both the physical advantage and higher firepower, which would enable NATO to direct massive reinforcements along the main axes of attack.

In this paper I am not interested in disputing the wisdom of these proposals, only in discussing the use of them made by the peace movement. For what is so important about the discussion is that the peace lobby has begun to embrace a completely new and profound mean of looking at disarmament, one which aims to remove the perception of a threat rather than weapons, a conversion which is intended to be less provocative to the military establishment at home than attempting overnight to convert swords into ploughshares.

Transarmament is directed to ones own audience as well as the adversary outside. In addition, it can be implemented at many different levels at several different times. A country like the Federal Republic could in principle at least, go on to a non-provocative footing while its allies stayed much as they were. Undoubtedly, it is a form of unilateralism, but a less controversial form than nuclear disarmament even though its advocates hope that eventually 'defensive deterrence' would be able to operate in a nuclear free zone.

In the words of two of its apologists:

«The immediate challenge is to design gradualist approaches towards non-provocative defence and to feed the ideas into the political process(es).»

It promises, in short, a chance to disarm some of the opposition at home; to win over the civil servants and the generals; to pre-empt the public opposition which unadulterated nuclear disarmament would undoubtedly provoke. It is a strategy which identifies the enemy within as well as the enemy without. As Heolf and Lodgaard contend:

«A unilateral switch to a non-provocative defence would be a formidable challenge to the opponent. In the absence of any reciprocal action, the opponent would risk being unmasked as having aggressive intent.»

It is not an argument, of course which is likely to persuade the Soviet Union, but it is one which could have an immediate impact upon the enemy

from 'within'—upon NATO itself were it ever to press ahead with 'aggressive' non-nuclear strategies of the kind which even its most loyal supporters might well find it difficult to come to terms.

It would also be unfortunate, however, if the alliance were ever to be persuaded to adopt alternative defence policies along the lines just discussed. Offensive weapons systems aside, there is no evidence that public opinion is unhappy with the doctrine of flexible response, even if it may no longer be able to withstand the attack of rigorous military analysis. As Josef Joffe has argued, the fact that it still commands broad public support is eloquent testimony to the balance of political interests it still embodies.

There should be no doubt in anyones minds that defensive deterrence, or non-provocative defence, like non-nuclear defence or in its own way the nuclear Maginot line thinking favoured by so many French experts, would be but a prelude to what Finland identifies as its own policy of 'dynamic neutrality'. That is what some cynics think will happen to Western Europe, and in politics the cynics are often right.