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Thomas J. Marshall

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New Openings for Conventional Arms Control

THOMAS J. MARSHALL

This article provides an overview of the current status of conventional arms control, emphasizing the prospect of a new negotiating forum known as Conventional Forces in Europe. Several recent events have converged to redirect attention to conventional arms control: conclusion of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty; a liberalized Soviet leadership; prospects for Strategic Arms Reduction Talks; heightened awareness and receptivity concerning this issue on the part of the European publics; US budget constraints and calls for burdensharing; and presidential politics. Among these, a principal factor is the recent successful conclusion of the INF negotiations, causing many within European NATO and the United States to turn their attention now toward the long-standing imbalance in *conventional* forces. This was particularly evident in the comment of several key witnesses during the Senate ratification hearings on the INF Treaty.¹

Another principal motivation derives from the appearance on the international scene of Secretary General Gorbachev. The Soviet Secretary General has seized the initiative by his appeal to European publics. For example, his 1986 Budapest appeal called for a broad range of arms control measures, including conventional force reductions.² His speeches are scattered with such phrases as "our common European house," which attempt to curry Western support for his foreign policy by depicting the mutual concerns, history, and culture of greater Europe. Recently he has called for a European summit (which presumably would exclude the United States and Canada), and has urged that Moscow be the site of a conference on human rights.³

As with INF, the START negotiations are also creating greater interest in the conventional imbalance in Europe. This was recently evidenced

at the Nuclear Planning Group meeting where some participants expressed the belief that it was premature to plan for the modernization of NATO's nuclear forces without taking into account the prospects for START and even conventional arms control negotiations.⁴ It is not unexpected that with one nuclear arms control agreement in place and another in prospect (both having a large bearing on NATO's strategy), policymakers would turn to the third area—conventional arms control.

Looking toward Western Europe, one finds a large reservoir of support for conventional arms control among both the political elites and the general population. Such support is no better in evidence than in the Federal Republic of Germany. The German population, for obvious reasons, is highly sensitized to the ravages that would occur on its soil should a war be fought in Western Europe. For that reason, the West German population demands that its government pay constant attention to ameliorating East-West tension. One of the principal policy pillars for attending to that requirement is the maintenance of an ongoing arms control process. In countries of Western Europe such as the Netherlands and Belgium, where there is less support for strong defense policies than in the Federal Republic, it is even more urgent for governments to hold forth the prospect that arms control will be at least a small part of the solution to the problem of defense expenditures.

Several developments in the United States also provide an impetus for heightened interest in conventional arms control. For example, there is the recent US emphasis on NATO burdensharing, as well as defense budget constraints. Congresswoman Pat Schroeder recently held a series of hearings examining the US conventional role in Europe in which it was suggested that conventional arms control negotiations could be used as the vehicle for re-adjusting responsibilities among the NATO partners, i. e. burdensharing.⁵ It is hoped that any reductions which flowed from these negotiations would permit the United States to reduce its share of the NATO defense budget and provide a more rational allocation of responsibilities among the participating nations. Perhaps more important, President Bush emphasized during his campaign the need to increase the credibility of our conventional defense and called for conventional arms control as one of the means to accomplish this.

Colonel Thomas J. Marshall, USA Ret., is currently a senior arms control policy analyst with Science Applications International Corporation in McLean, Virginia. He served in the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the senior military advisor to the INF delegation from 1980 to 1983. Colonel Marshall has provided analysis and advice on a broad range of arms control topics to many government agencies, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and NATO's Standing Consultative Group. He is a graduate of the Army War College and commanded the 3/32 Infantry, 7th Division.

Notwithstanding all of these converging pressures for conventional arms control, the question remains: "Why a new forum when the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks were already formally established?" The answer lies partly in the fact that MBFR was essentially moribund and the prospect for a negotiated outcome in that framework was further away than ever.⁶ Second, there was a growing consensus that the framework of MBFR was geographically too narrow. Finally, MBFR's focus on personnel reductions was fraught with intractable problems of data verification and force comparability issues. With these circumstances in mind, NATO and the Warsaw Pact initiated a set of mandate talks in Vienna to carve out a basic agreement for a new negotiating forum with a revitalized agenda to replace the aging, static MBFR.

Vienna Mandate Talks

Mandate talks for conventional arms control began in Vienna in November 1986. Their purpose was to establish the broad parameters within which the Warsaw Pact and NATO could seek limits on conventional arms in Europe. One of the distinguishing features of the mandate talks was that the eventual negotiations would encompass a zone of coverage—extending from the Atlantic to the Urals (so-called ATTU)—which was much larger than that of MBFR.

A further distinguishing feature of the mandate talks was that the new negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe—which we'll refer to here as CFE—would occur within the larger process of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and include the 16 NATO and seven Warsaw Pact nations. Two things should not go unnoticed. One, France, which had not taken part in MBFR, would be included in the negotiations. Two, CFE negotiations will in some sense be responsive to the larger group of 35 nations that comprise the CSCE. The inclusion of France strengthens the Western position by bringing this forceful and articulate negotiating party to the table and unifying all Western European nations in behalf of a common purpose.

By being part of the larger CSCE process, the negotiation on conventional arms control is also indirectly linked to questions on human rights as well as to follow-up steps taken in the wake of the recent Stockholm accord on Security and Confidence-building Measures and Disarmament in Europe. The link between CFE and CSCE also means that neutral and non-aligned states can influence the actions of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This linkage was not looked upon favorably by the United States, but was one of many concessions made within the NATO partnership as part of the price for achieving consensus.⁷

Having resolved many nettlesome technical details, the concluding document of the CSCE, approved by the foreign ministers on 17 February of

this year, established the formal mandate for CFE negotiations to begin in Vienna on 9 March.⁸

Western Negotiating Framework

Of the several reference points from which one can assess the West's broad objectives for the CFE negotiations, the most authoritative is the March 1988 communique following a heads of state meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, which established several NATO criteria for CFE.⁹ Among the main criteria are:

- Atlantic to the Urals coverage;
- Limitations of key weapon systems such as tanks, artillery, and armored troop carriers;
- Limitations of stationed forces;
- Highly asymmetrical reductions in NATO's favor to redress imbalances;
- Greater openness, safeguarding the maintenance of lower force levels;
- Monitoring and verification, to include detailed data exchanges and the right to on-site inspection.

Using the NATO criteria as a guide, an alliance task force developed the Western negotiating framework, the broad outlines of which would include reductions of tanks, artillery, and armored troop carriers to equal ceilings below NATO's current level; sublimits on "stationed forces," i.e. national forces—weaponry in this case—stationed outside one's own territory; and focus on reductions in a central zone.

The US position at the task force sessions was largely influenced by the Rand study "Conventional Arms Control Revisited: Objectives in the New Phase."¹⁰ This study concluded that NATO requires Pact and especially Soviet reductions that are large *both* in their asymmetries and in absolute numbers. The Rand study pointed out two critical features for NATO's negotiating framework: One, the Soviets have such a large superiority in conventional forces that they could probably afford to absorb reductions of several division equivalents without substantially altering the character of the threat to NATO; two, regardless of the Soviet reductions, NATO probably cannot afford to reduce beyond approximately three or four division equivalents under any circumstances without jeopardizing its ability to sustain the current strategy calling for manning a 750-kilometer front.¹¹

The Rand study's conclusions point toward reductions on the order of three or four NATO divisions and 18 to 24 Warsaw Pact divisions. In terms of weapon systems—the main unit of limitation for CFE negotiations—these numbers of divisions convert to reductions of approximately 2000 NATO tanks versus 31,000 for the Warsaw Pact, 1000 artillery pieces versus 26,000

for the Pact, and 1000 armored troop carriers versus about 42,000 for the Pact. Such asymmetrical reductions would produce a level of parity between the two sides approximately as follows: 20,000 tanks, 16,500 artillery pieces, and 28,000 armored troop carriers.¹² To achieve these levels, the Pact would have to make reductions from their present levels slightly in excess of 60 percent, whereas NATO reductions would be only on the order of five percent. Additionally, there would be a "sufficiency" rule stipulating that no one nation could have in a particular weapon category more than 30 percent of the total held by all nations combined (i.e. NATO plus Pact). For example, the two sides would have 40,000 tanks combined; thus no country could have more than 30 percent of 40,000, or 12,000 tanks.

NATO also proposes limits on stationed forces, that is, weapons of one nation stationed in another. One promising idea is that forces stationed by one country could not exceed 20 percent of the total forces of all the individual countries. Thus the Soviets, for example, could not station more than 8000 tanks (20 percent of 40,000) outside its own borders. The rationale behind this proposal is to limit severely the Soviet ability to station offensively adapted forces in Eastern Europe. In order to limit further the ability of stationed forces to conduct a surprise attack, it has been suggested by some in NATO that half of those stationed forces should not be assigned to their authorized units, but should instead be in a condition of "monitored storage."

As for the weaponry to be reduced, it is not clear whether all of it would be moved outside the zone of limitation, put into storage at a different level of readiness, or destroyed. Many Western nations favor destruction. Furthermore, there is a consensus that there would have to be associated confidence-building and stabilization measures to assist the sides in reducing the opportunities for surprise attack, limiting the ability of either side to restore the capability which the treaty eliminated, and perhaps aiding in verification. The underlying and correct assumption behind the Western approach is that the negotiations will be conducted in a manner compatible with the existing NATO strategy of flexible response and forward defense embodied in the famous NATO planning document MC 14/3. That concept was included in the basic assumptions of the Rand study and has been reinforced in testimony by US policymakers.¹³

One other requirement that this negotiating framework satisfies is the need for an ongoing and promising arms control process to satisfy the political and public diplomacy requirements of our Western European allies. For example, political leaders in the Federal Republic of Germany promote, and their publics have come to expect, an arms control track as the price for supporting NATO's defense policies. In order to reassure those publics that arms control is in fact being seriously addressed, the major outline of the West's negotiating position must be understandable and supportable by European publics. Furthermore, NATO cohesion is strengthened by the CFE negotiations through the

consensus-building process inherent in the development of alliance positions. For example, the problem of German population decline and the consequent inability to provide manning levels to sustain force requirements, and the calls within the United States for burdensharing and addressing budget constraints, can be worked out within the framework of CFE negotiations, thereby promoting unity and common resolve among all the partners.

Allied Goals

It is absolutely essential that US policymakers keep in mind that CFE negotiations will be very much an *alliance* forum. Unlike START, where the United States takes unilateral action and keeps its allies informed, or INF, where the United States consulted with its NATO allies but negotiated bilaterally, CFE negotiations will require the continued maintenance of a multinational negotiating position. To underscore this point, it is useful to scan the differing agendas of three of our most important allies, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, and France.¹⁴

United Kingdom. The British tend to view CFE negotiations as a means to encourage a managed, go-slow approach to problems that could undermine the Western alliance. The British government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is genuinely concerned about the degree of the future US commitment to NATO. The British understand the domestic political pressures within the United States to reduce the defense budget and see congressional calls for burdensharing and US troop reductions in Europe as signals that the United States could in the future take unilateral action to reduce the cost of its commitment to NATO. Furthermore, the British are distinctly aware of the German demographic problem that will force the Federal Republic of Germany to reduce or at least thin out its forces in the early 1990s. Again, the United Kingdom would not want to see the Federal Republic take unilateral action to deal with this problem. The United Kingdom sees CFE negotiations as an opportunity to address such alliance issues collectively, thereby in fact strengthening the alliance.

Federal Republic of Germany. The political agenda for the Federal Republic derives from two facts. Of all the NATO participants, it has the highest public awareness of the Warsaw Pact threat due to its geographical position and the division of Germany. An arms control process, holding forth the prospect of ameliorating East-West differences and sustaining hope for the eventual reconciliation of the two Germanys, is essential to maintain West German public support for defense measures. For these reasons, the West Germans are more prone to seek consensus within the alliance and compromise when forming the alliance position, all to assure that the CFE negotiations show results at the earliest possible date. At the same time, the

Federal Republic tries to avoid separation from French policy, and is not prone to make concessions to the Warsaw Pact on security issues.

France. Somewhat like the United Kingdom, France is motivated to participate in the CFE negotiations because of its concern that the US commitment to Europe's defense is weakening. Furthermore, France fears that in the long term a lessening of the US commitment might cause the Federal Republic of Germany to assume a more neutral position in East-West relations. To underscore their concern about the United States, the French point to the INF Treaty. In their view, the United States went too far by eliminating all of the longer- and shorter-range nuclear missiles covered by INF, a step that was contrary to the rationale for their deployment in the first place. Furthermore, there is the US deficit problem and the American mood to seek reductions in its commitment to NATO. French concerns about the Federal Republic lead it to try to strengthen Franco-German ties, a good example of which is the recent formation of the joint FRG-French Brigade.¹⁵ France sees the CFE negotiations as a means to lessen pressure within the Federal Republic to adopt a more neutral position, to reinforce emerging Franco-German cooperation, and to dissuade the United States from acting unilaterally or even bilaterally in subsequent arms control negotiations with the Soviets. The French also have grave concern that CFE negotiations could undermine public support for nuclear deterrence. They argue that seeking parity of conventional forces between East and West somehow codifies an image of moral equivalence between the two sides and undermines NATO's requirement for nuclear forces to offset Warsaw Pact superiority. One of France's principal motives for joining these negotiations is to assure that they do not infringe in any way upon nuclear forces.

Negotiating Issues

As the negotiations develop, the Western alliance needs to resolve several negotiating issues. These include the systems and forces to be negotiated, the correct method of reductions (including how to apportion reductions among the alliance members), and of course verification. Additionally, as in any arms control negotiation, implications for force structure and research and development must also be considered. Finally, there is the ever-present question of the relationship of CFE negotiations to nuclear questions.

Systems to Include. Although there is consensus that the negotiating position should focus on weaponry, i.e. tanks, artillery, and armored troop carriers, much more analysis is required on the advisability of limitations in other areas such as logistics, support equipment, and particular types of units. Limiting only a few items of weaponry may not be enough to reduce Warsaw Pact capabilities for large-scale surprise attack. There is also the question of how to deal with aircraft. Except for the French, who adamantly oppose

including aircraft because of their nuclear role, many of the allies assume that at some point, even prior to resolving the question of ground combat forces, aircraft will have to be dealt with in a more realistic fashion. The United States successfully rejected the Soviet attempt to include aircraft in the INF negotiations, arguing among other things that to do so would only complicate the negotiations. At the same time, the United States held forth the idea that at some future time, following resolution of the missile question, aircraft would be dealt with. The Soviets will obviously say that the time has now come. Furthermore, public perceptions, especially in Western Europe, will make it difficult to sustain for long a NATO position that excludes air systems until agreement is reached on ground weaponry. The West, especially the United States, needs to develop sound arguments on how address this issue. Perhaps the real question is not whether aircraft will or will not be negotiated, but when, what price should the West extract, and what is in the West's interest.

Method of Reduction. There are several methods to deal with the forces to be reduced. Among these are redeployments outside of a defined zone, placing the equipment in storage (probably at some lesser level of readiness), and of course destruction. At first glance, it is difficult to conclude that any method except destruction would realistically satisfy the alliance goals of reducing Soviet and Warsaw Pact capability to mount a large-scale attack. Nevertheless, analysis to date has not yielded definitive answers as to the tradeoff between destruction, various levels of storage, and redeployment. Hence, what would be in the long-term Western interest on this score is yet to be determined. Associated with the issue of how to reduce forces is how to apportion reductions among the allies. The allies have differing requirements for forces. For example, the Federal Republic sees reductions as a way to respond to its demographic problem, perhaps by thinning out its forces. Turkey perceives direct threats that are not confined to the Warsaw Pact (e.g. from Cyprus and the Middle East), and it therefore would not want any reductions of its armed forces. Furthermore, there is the question of whether the United States should withdraw any of its forces from Western Europe and what would happen to those forces once returned to the United States.

Verification. Many observers of CFE negotiations wonder whether the traditional verification approaches embodied in the START proposal and the INF Treaty are adequate to deal with conventional arms reductions. In comparison with nuclear weaponry, conventional arms are smaller, many times more numerous, more mobile, more easily camouflaged, and harder to detect. Furthermore, they are frequently at different levels of readiness and alert, and are involved in various training and mobilization exercises, all of which compound the problem of verification. While it is the position of NATO that on-site inspection would be required and that data exchange is a critical element of any verification regime, there has been little definitive study as to how an agreement evolving out of the CFE negotiations would in fact be

verified. In the view of some, it is less important to verify precise conformity with the treaty limits than it is to monitor behavior that might circumvent the purpose of the accord by regenerating capabilities that had been cut back. There is also a connection between the confidence-building measures that could be applied during conventional force negotiations and the need for greater openness and understanding of what each side is doing, all of which could assist verification. It remains to be seen whether the US Senate will ratify an agreement whose verification provisions are radically different from what the public and the Congress have come to expect.

Modernization Research and Development. It is not at all clear how the CFE negotiations will affect US and NATO requirements for modernizing forces and for the continued application of Western research and development through the eventual deployment of the fruits of advanced technologies. Examples are the US Army Tactical Missile System and the Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System, both of which would be embodied in NATO's strategy of follow-on forces attack. A couple of observations are warranted. One can certainly expect that a prime motivation for the Soviet Union in this negotiation, as it has been in all others, is to slow and if possible deny the West's ability to apply its superior technological advantage. Second, signs are already emerging from Europe that favor linking modernization and arms control as had been done in the case of INF, where Western nuclear arms modernization and negotiations to limit nuclear arms proceeded concurrently.

As CFE negotiations are under way, some voices in the West will argue that modernizing NATO's conventional forces during negotiations wastes resources, is the wrong signal to send to the other side, and risks the loss of public support. While the INF experience might appear to teach the lesson that rigorous modernization programs can lead to fruitful arms control outcomes, one needs to be careful in applying this reasoning to the CFE negotiations. INF led to the elimination of the very systems being modernized. Conventional force modernization, however, will be *required* in a post-CFE environment. Specifically, NATO will require a more modernized force structure just to maintain the balance achieved during negotiations with the East.

Nuclear Forces. Although the CFE negotiations will not deal directly with nuclear forces, there are relationships between the CFE negotiations and nuclear issues. On one hand, there are those who view CFE as an opportunity to break the logjam holding up further negotiations on theater nuclear weapons. This point of view is prevalent in the Federal Republic where there is already discussion of resuming parallel negotiations for further reductions in theater nuclear forces. The West Germans realize that it is unlikely that the United States would be willing to enter further nuclear negotiations on theater forces following the INF agreement until some measures are taken to address the conventional imbalance. However, the West Germans are reluctant to wait the many years it might take to negotiate a conventional arms control treaty.

With CFE under way, they are likely to soon press the United States to resume theater nuclear negotiations.

The French, on the other hand, approach this problem from an entirely different direction. As we have seen, they have grave concern that conventional arms control could easily spill over into further eroding the West's nuclear deterrent capability and undermining the rationale for the West's nuclear deterrence strategy. They view negotiations on aircraft as one means by which this could happen. Another would be the early resumption of theater nuclear negotiations. It is one thing to say that nuclear arms are not part of the framework for CFE negotiations; it is quite another to deny that there is a close relationship between nuclear and conventional arms control.

Concluding Observations

As has been pointed out, probably more so than in any recent negotiation, public attitudes will be of critical importance. It ought to be recognized that there are significant differences between European public attitudes and those in the United States. The US public lacks a high degree of awareness of conventional force issues beyond two perceptions. One, the United States is burdened by an enormous American military presence in Western Europe, and two, NATO is substantially outmanned by the Warsaw Pact. Current public opinion seems to reconcile these two perceptions by viewing the American presence as a response to the Warsaw Pact threat. However, the US public will not understand how an outcome that achieved some degree of parity could fail to bring back to the United States substantial numbers of American conventional forces. Such an outcome may not be in the long-term interest of the United States and certainly would reduce the ability of the US Army to meet its global requirements because of consequent reductions in force structure.

Attitudes of the US Congress will impinge on these talks. We have already witnessed calls for policies of burdensharing, implying a restructuring in the allocation of responsibilities among NATO members. Furthermore, there is mounting evidence that the Bush Administration will not be able to obtain approval of a defense budget much larger than today's. The questions will then be how scarcer resources are to be allocated and whether there will be pressure for a conventional arms agreement to lessen the burden. Congresswoman Pat Schroeder and Congressman Andrew Ireland—the latter a conservative, incidentally—are already proposing a unilateral US withdrawal of 25,000 servicemen from Europe, a move which may cause the Soviets to wonder whether it is necessary to make *any* concessions to induce the Yankees to go home.¹⁶

Finally, there is the question of being prepared to deal with Gorbachev. In the early months of 1988, the United States expected that the Soviet Union was about ready to announce the unilateral withdrawal of some of its forces in Hungary.¹⁷ Then, on 7 December, a date renowned for preemption,

Gorbachev preempted the conventional arms agenda by his dramatic announcement of unilateral Soviet conventional force cuts. He declared that over the next two years Soviet forces will be reduced by 500,000 men, 10,000 tanks, 8500 artillery systems, and 800 combat aircraft.¹⁸ Having announced unilateral action, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact are now positioned to obtain support for proposals that are unfavorable to Western security. As has been pointed out in many studies, including that conducted by Rand, it is not in the interest of the West to respond tit-for-tat to Soviet reductions. To do so could eventually render the Western strategy of forward defense untenable. There has been little clear thinking on how precisely the West should respond to the inevitable Gorbachev initiatives of the future, much less seize the initiative on its own part.

NOTES

1. US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings on NATO Defense and the INF Treaty*, 100th Congress, 1988. See especially the testimony of Mr. Charles Thomas, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs.

2. See "Address of Warsaw Treaty Member States," 11 June 1986, commonly referred to as the Budapest Appeal, in *Soviet Weekly Supplement*, 21 June 1986.

3. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S.-Paris Dispute on Armies Erupts," *The New York Times*, 18 November 1988, p. A7.

4. Robert Mauther, "NATO Agrees Need to Update N-Missiles," *The Financial Times*, 29 October 1988, p. 2.

5. US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *Interim Report of the Defense Burdensharing Panel*, 100th Congress, 1988.

6. See Stanley R. Sloan, "Conventional Arms Control in Europe: Prospects for Accord" (Congressional Research Service, 5 April 1988).

7. "France, U.S. at Odds Over New Arms Talks," *The Washington Post*, 19 November 1988, p. A28.

8. Elaine Sciolino, "Dispute Seen as a Threat to Talks on Armed Forces Cuts in Europe," *The New York Times*, 12 January 1989, p. A5.

9. North Atlantic Council, "Conventional Arms Control: The Way Ahead," *NATO Press Communique M-1(88)12*, 2-3 March 1988.

10. James A. Thomson and Nanette C. Gantz, "Conventional Arms Control Revisited: Objectives in the New Phase," Rand Note N-2697-AF, December 1987.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

12. At this early stage of the negotiations, to support their positions both sides are releasing data that does not lend itself to comparison. Precise accounting is not possible. For a gross comparison as accurate and current as any, see "Arms Control: Down to Business," *The Economist*, 11-17 March 1989, p. 51.

13. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Jim E. Hinds, "Conventional Defense Negotiations," testimony given to House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Military Personnel and Compensation, 17 March 1988.

14. Country analysis developed by Science Applications International Corp., directed by the author for the Office of the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations under the auspices of the Deputy Under Secretary of the Army (Operations Research), July 1988.

15. See Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "Between the Rhine and the Elbe: France and the Conventional Defense of Central Europe," *Comparative Strategy*, 6 (1987), 471-512; and Edward Cody, "Paris, Bonn Broaden Military Cooperation," *The Washington Post*, 13 January 1988, p. A15.

16. Rick Maze, "Battle Begins Anew over Bringing Troops Back from Europe," *Army Times*, 13 March 1989, p. 8.

17. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Says Soviets May Pull Troops Out of Hungary," *The New York Times*, 9 July 1988, p. 1.

18. Phillip A. Karber, "The Military Impact of the Gorbachev Reductions," *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1989, pp. 54-64. This is an excellent early analysis of Gorbachev's initiative.