A RAND NOTE

Crisis De-Escalation: A Relevant Concern in the "New Europe"?

James A. Winnefeld

July 1990

RAND

RAND/UCLA
Center for Soviet Studies

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PREFACE

An earlier version of this Note was prepared for the Conference on *NATO Crisis Management in a Changing Europe* held in Brussels on April 2–3, 1990, as part of a multi-year project on "Avoiding Nuclear War: Managing Conflict in the Nuclear Age." The project is being conducted jointly by The RAND Corporation and the RAND-UCLA Center for Soviet Studies, supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Note in its current version has been extended to provide a summary based on the author's introductory remarks at the conference and to incorporate some of the many useful revisions suggested by conference participants.

The views and conclusions expressed are those of the author and should not be interpreted as representing those of The RAND Corporation or any of the agencies sponsoring its research.

SUMMARY

This Note uses the neglected question of de-escalation dynamics to examine some military aspects of the broader subject of crisis management as it might be practiced by the NATO Alliance, and then goes on to explore the even larger question of the future role of the Alliance in European security.

Europe is undergoing what may be an extended period in relaxation of tensions between the two major power blocs. The past implausibility of rapid reduction of tensions should make us wary of forecasts that the current process is irreversible. The author draws an analog between the lack of Alliance preparation for the pace of relaxation of tensions currently in progress in Europe and a similar lack of planning and exercising for de-escalation in a future crisis. The Note presents an argument for greater Alliance attention to its need for crisis management capabilities, *and more specifically to the ability to manage de-escalation and force disengagement in crisis.*

A crisis is a necessary precondition for de-escalation, but the causes of future crises can't be known with certainty. Therefore, to suggest the capabilities the Alliance needs to de-escalate effectively and safely, the author posits four classes of scenarios:

- A major Soviet reentry in Eastern Europe
- Civil conflict in Eastern Europe
- A local cross-border war in Europe
- An out-of-area conflict with NATO implications

These scenarios suggest three classes of needed improvements: planning, forces and hardware, and political frameworks.

PLANNING

De-escalation is not directly addressed in current NATO plans. The operative assumption is that systems used to respond to warning and to manage escalation are somehow adequate to deal with de-escalation requirements. Moreover, existing plans are not sufficiently flexible to deal with a fast-changing crisis environment. Finally, the exercises that test plans and related control systems rarely deal with de-escalation issues. Because of the real political difficulties in addressing crisis management issues, the author

recommends that analysis and gaming substitute in part for the needed plans and planning capabilities. In particular, analysis is needed to develop guidelines (for use in crisis) that cover:

- The ordering of disengagement actions
- Checklists for selecting pull-back (disengagement) lines
- Verification requirements
- The role of military-to-military communication
- Modifications to rules of engagement
- Assessment of military "signals" for their observability, credibility, and penalties to combat posture
- "Logic trees" to guide disengagement decisionmaking.

FORCES AND HARDWARE

Long-range strategic planning should drive force characteristics and hardware, but circumstances in the near term usually dictate that hardware and forces available shape planning. Because of long-term neglect of de-escalation planning, it is not surprising that the military capabilities needed to support de-escalation are not in hand. Nevertheless, there are some existing capabilities to perform surveillance and observer duties. For example, the occupying powers currently maintain intelligence-gathering and observer units in the Germanies that might serve as a cadre for needed verification capabilities in the aftermath of a future crisis. However, these units might not survive German unification: in a crisis, substitute capabilities might have to be found.

As for possible future peacekeeping forces, NATO has potential tools in the Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force and the Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVLANT). These forces are, or can readily be placed, under NATO command in peacetime. While scenario-specific planning in the precrisis period would be valuable, its absence does not rule out useful training in peacekeeping duties.

Communication between opponents is a critical element in de-escalation. While communications at the political level have received attention, the military analog has not. The Crowe-Moiseyev Agreement binds only the Soviet Union and the United States. At an advanced stage in a crisis, after both sides have mobilized and deployed forces, there is likely to be a need for military-to-military communication to arrange the details in particular locations. This argues for communications links between adjacent opposing military

headquarters. In other conflict contexts, the communication requirement might argue for rapidly deployable compatible communications modules that could be located at the headquarters of the non-NATO and non-Soviet adversaries, modules manned by peacekeeping communications (and perhaps observer) staff.

POLITICAL FRAMEWORKS

In the political arena, two categories of frameworks for crisis management and de-escalation come to mind. The first is a framework within the Alliance that accommodates the new realities of a reduced Soviet threat, increasing economic integration, the concomitant expansion of common security interests outside the North Atlantic treaty area, and the likelihood of continuing instability in Eastern Europe. This framework would serve to advance the Alliance's interests in nontraditional roles such as peacekeeping and provide a basis for Alliance action in out-of-area contingencies when needed.

The second framework lies outside the Alliance and would provide a larger forum for European security cooperation. The CSCE forum provides a venue for discussion, and some resolution, of the longer-term causes of instability. But the CSCE is not structured as a crisis management body. Some means must be found to engage constructively the larger European community that CSCE represents in crisis management. A posited future crisis in Yugoslavia illustrates the need for this larger framework. Many of the proposals advanced in this Note for improved capabilities for safe and effective de-escalation would apply to a larger European framework as well as to NATO itself.

The need for these two frameworks suggests that NATO should define "new tasks for the Alliance," much as the Harmel Report did almost 25 years ago. The Alliance needs to adapt its crisis management tools to the new environment and seek others in the larger European security framework.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Many RAND colleagues have helped me think through the de-escalation problem. Those who require special acknowledgement include Robert Levine, Preston Niblack, Arnold Horelick, and Dean Millot. The author, of course, assumes full responsibility for the errors and oversights that remain.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Europe is undergoing what may be an extended period of relaxation of tensions between the two major power blocs. While events are moving rapidly in terms of what passes for "peacetime," they are unfolding slowly compared to the "crises" of the past 45 years. This reduction of tensions has long been the object of NATO's efforts. But it has not been the subject of systematic planning in NATO capitals or at NATO Headquarters. The reasons are not difficult to find. Reduced tensions bring their own political problems, problems that are conveniently put out of mind before the event. Until the past year, moreover, reduction of tensions on the scale we have seen recently was implausible. Planning for the plausible is difficult enough; planning for the implausible is well-nigh impossible—unless it involves nuclear war.

The past implausibility of rapid reduction of tensions should make us wary of forecasts that the current process is irreversible. What can be de-escalated can be reescalated. Moreover, new conflicts will emerge from the current changes to engage the attention of statesmen and military leaders. This paper presents an argument for greater Alliance attention to its need for crisis management capabilities, *and more specifically to managing de-escalation and force disengagement in crisis.*[1] In short, the focus is on the political-military dimension of de-escalation signaling and safe military disengagement. This focus is not exclusively on renewed East-West conflict, but rather on a broader range of possible future conflict possibilities that might involve the NATO Alliance.

At the outset I should admit to some skepticism about the Alliance's willingness, or even its capability, to think about crisis management capabilities before they are needed to deal with unfolding international developments. An example of this lack of will or capacity can be found in the history of recent major NATO exercises. The Alliance's biennial high-level exercises (HILEX) that focus on crisis management have either resulted in significant disagreements or been summarily cancelled rather than postponed because of schedule

[1]There are two de-escalation processes. The first is a longer-term relaxation of tensions such as we are seeing now in Europe. The second is associated with the de-escalation of a *crisis*. The focus of this paper is on the latter, but our deficiencies in preparing for the former underline the need for thinking ahead about de-escalating in crisis. I define a "crisis" in the NATO context as a series of events in which the vital security interests of the Alliance or one of its members are at stake and the use of military force is not ruled out.

conflicts or sensitivities.[2] Turning from exercises to the "real world," NATO's performance in past crises has not been its strong suit.[3]

If it is difficult to get the Alliance to anticipate its requirements for crisis management, it has been impossible to get it to think about the requirements associated with de-escalation and military disengagement outside of the arms control context in the Vienna talks. The result of the past failures in Alliance planning for today's gradual relaxation of tensions has been a continuing series of surprises, documented in the daily headlines, and an untidy process of ad hoc decisionmaking undertaken with few clear images of objectives and feasible options. In short, the uneasy feeling that events in Europe today are escaping our control may have an analog in a future crisis, an analog sharing common roots in the Alliance's unwillingness to take de-escalation as seriously as escalation. *A thesis of this paper is that in the future we may face a problem—largely unanticipated—in crisis de-escalation parallel to the one that we confront today in the gradual decrease in tensions between the two blocs.* If the rush of events clouds our thinking in today's environment, it is not too difficult to imagine their effect in the compressed time for decisionmaking in a future crisis.

Some will argue that de-escalation is inherently less dangerous than escalation. One need not differ with that observation to point out that in war, athletics, and other forms of competition, the final moves of the game are often the most important. Sloppy de-escalation or peacemaking can sow the seeds of future conflict or result in the reversal of otherwise favorable trends. As we reduce East-West tensions in Europe, who would have predicted two years ago that a democratically elected government in Poland would be contemplating a request that Soviet troops remain in that country? Or that U.S. troops in non-Soviet Europe might someday outnumber their Soviet counterparts in the region? Or that ongoing CFE negotiations would lag rather than lead events? Or that many in the West would worry that German reunification was proceeding too rapidly?

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[2]HILEXs 11 and 12 in 1984 and 1986 occasioned significant disagreements among the NATO allies on how to manage crises. These disagreements centered on the military reinforcement decision. HILEX 13 in 1988 was cancelled, not postponed, because of a hastily scheduled NATO summit. HILEX 14, scheduled for early March 1990, was cancelled—reportedly in deference to FRG sensitivities. Last year's winter exercise (WINTEX 89), while pronounced successful, was the center of much wrangling within the Alliance—to such an extent that WINTEX 91 was cancelled.

[3]NATO's responses to the invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968), the invasion of Afghanistan (1979), and the Polish crisis (1980-1981) were deficient in terms of Alliance *processes* (intelligence sharing, consultation, planning), if not in terms of *substance*. I would argue that its strong suit has been in devising responses to changed circumstances where there has been adequate time for full consultation. The NATO role in INF and CFE decisionmaking and its substantial unity are testimonials to this strength.

DE-ESCALATION: A STEPCHILD OF ALLIANCE PLANNING

Turning from our current experience with the discomfiting aspects of an extended reduction in tensions, we will look more closely at crisis de-escalation. Let us acknowledge first that escalation and de-escalation are inextricably intertwined. Both are processes, but de-escalation is usually an objective as well. Although to focus exclusively on de-escalation is somewhat artificial, I believe it is warranted in this analysis. The fact is that crisis de-escalation has long been a stepchild in NATO planning and exercising. Most NATO planning and exercising has been oriented to the important needs of identifying a warning and responding to it—with particular emphasis on alerting, mobilizing, and reinforcing forces. Crisis management has been addressed in planning mainly by identifying lists of candidate political and military response measures and in the biennial HILEX.[4] Only rarely has much thought been given to de-escalating a crisis. Some of the questions seldom addressed are: How would forces be withdrawn, stood down, and demobilized? In what order, in what regions, under what verification schemes? What military factors should influence the political negotiations?

The need for more thought on the de-escalation process was fairly clear, even if generally ignored, when the threat to NATO was of the canonical sort. There were favorite scenarios—usually initiated by events in Berlin or the GDR—that resulted in mobilization races and the brink of war or war itself. Within the Alliance the specific scenarios were often chosen as much for their ability to gain broad political acceptance as for their correspondence with reality. The events of the past year in Eastern Europe have gone far toward demolishing these comfortable escalation scenarios. The new scenarios that must provide the underpinnings of Alliance planning have not yet emerged. In the absence of a consensus, let us examine some illustrative scenarios and suggest the de-escalation capabilities the NATO alliance might most value under those circumstances.

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[4]These response measures are documented in the Political Committee's "Inventory of Preventive Measures," and the Military Committee's "Catalog of Potential Military Response Options" (MC 294). The HILEX series of exercises is intended to focus on political communications between NATO Headquarters and the NATO capitals as all confront a crisis scenario.

II. ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIOS

Scenarios are one way to confront the widespread belief that unfolding developments in Europe have so fundamentally changed the possibilities for and likely character of future crises that preparing for them is either unneeded or a futile expenditure of scarce policy planning resources and political capital.[1] Some would make a more general point: prior planning for de-escalation is important but rarely feasible. My response is that, feasible or not, these judgments should be made on the basis of systematic analysis to clarify the planning issues and their relevance. The illustrative scenarios that follow are a step down that path.

SCENARIO BACKGROUND[2]

The assumptions underpinning the scenarios are that most U.S. and Soviet forces have been removed from the NATO-Warsaw Pact center, and that the mobilization and reinforcement calculus on both sides has changed significantly. Germany is reunified and remains a member of NATO. But there is a significant belt in Eastern Germany and Western Poland where there are no foreign forces. A surprise invasion of NATO or the Pact is simply not credible. Eastern Europe is still experiencing political instability resulting from economic troubles and the usual vicissitudes accompanying domestic power shifts. Political and economic difficulties are exacerbated by ethnic and irredentist unrest in several East European states and in parts of the Soviet Union itself.

NATO Europe is not immune to some of these developments. The Europe of 1992 experiences both the benefits and pains of economic integration. Some states have second thoughts about remaining within the Community and become more obstructionist in resisting further efforts at integration. Economic tensions are not long in spilling over into the political arena. The NATO organization appears to many to be less relevant in view of the receding Soviet threat. Antinuclear sentiment reaches a point where nuclear forces are prohibited in more states. The future role of American forces in European security is the

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[1]This rationale, it should be observed, is much the same one that NATO members have used often at more stable times in the past when confronted with the need to consider contingency planning that involved political sensitivities.

[2]The reader should not take the details and assumptions of the scenarios too seriously; they are an analytic device intended to illuminate issues and suggest remedial options.

subject of full-scale political debate on both sides of the Atlantic as host nation support agreements are adjusted to fit the new circumstances.

Looking at Europe as a whole we see some halting movement toward establishing an operational arm for the successive Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). While CSCE has been successful in many dimensions, it has lacked a continuity and focus suitable for dealing with specific crises. As NATO and Warsaw Pact roles change, the CSCE takes on a more institutionalized role in reducing tensions that either transcend or lie outside the two old blocs. Many believe the CSCE is the emerging security organization for the "new Europe" and fulfills the regional security role envisioned in Article 52 of the United Nations Charter. In this construct NATO would become the Western caucus in ongoing CSCE negotiations.

While some of this may appear to be a gloomy projection, it is certainly not *worst* case. Moreover, such projections are the mother's milk of strategic planning. One builds crisis management and war plans, and exercises them, on the basis that a future worse than the present is possible if not probable.[3] What are the classes of interesting scenarios that might be examined under these assumptions? One categorization might be as follows:

1. A major Soviet reentry into Eastern Europe, based on some combination of one or more of the following:
   a. Civil conflict in one or more East European states, in which one side receives direct Soviet military support.
   b. A reactionary Soviet leadership's accession to power and its attempts to reacquire some of its old empire by capitalizing on unrest in Eastern Europe.[4]
   c. An Eastern Europe that feared aggression from a reunified Germany and sought Soviet military assistance.

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[3]Indeed, this penchant for *worse* casing in projecting alternate futures is what leads to neglect of de-escalation in planning. We are so busy planning for failure (of deterrence), we neglect planning for success. While success would seem to take care of itself, history shows that success brings its own problems and that initial success can quickly turn into failure unless great care is exercised. The Versailles Treaties of 1919 and the rapid descent into the Cold War after 1945 are two monuments to such folly.

[4]I have excluded from my analysis the implications for NATO of political upheaval and possible civil war in the Soviet Union. The subject is important, but is left for future research.

d. Conflict between two East European states, with the Soviets reentering (with or without invitation) as "peacemakers."

2. Civil conflict in one or more East European states in which the opposing sides request assistance from NATO or the USSR. Current candidates would include Romania, Yugoslavia, and the Baltic states.
3. Local cross-border war in Europe. Examples might include a Bulgarian-Greek border war with Turkey, or conflict along the Hungarian-Romanian frontier.
4. An "out-of-area" conflict with major implications for NATO. Examples might include an Israeli-Syrian conflict with major superpower involvement, a renewed threat to Gulf oil supplies, or a Greek-Turkish conflict over Cyprus.

This thumbnail sketch of illustrative crisis scenarios provides a series of powder trains to conflict that would probably involve NATO even if the Soviet Union was not directly involved.[5] How crises are managed during the escalation phase does influence the de-escalation process but is beyond the focus of this paper. Our focus is on the transition to de-escalation and the de-escalation process itself. Specifically, what political-military capabilities are needed to de-escalate? We will use our scenarios to suggest some possible answers.

SCENARIO 1: A MAJOR SOVIET REENTRY IN EASTERN EUROPE

While this reentry could take many forms and occur in more than one East European state, the pivot would be a Soviet decision to reenter Poland. The causal factors of reentry might vary from Soviet concern about a hostile Polish government (possibly contemplating joining NATO) to worry about the rise of a German government contemplating actions inimical to Soviet interests. The critical element in this scenario would be whether or not the Poles resisted. A Soviet invasion of Poland, if it involved significant force, would be of vital importance to NATO. If it contravened the terms of a European security settlement, it would likely prompt NATO to consider deployment of forces to the Polish-German border. It is at this point that escalation and de-escalation might first intersect. As part of its crisis management process, the Alliance might warn the Soviets that reentry of Soviet forces into Poland would require the Alliance to respond by moving up some of its forces to the Polish

[5]Gert Krell has suggested a different categorization of future crises: whether or not the USSR is involved, with several subcategories in each. The scheme suggested here would accommodate his under the more generic typology I employ.

border. De-escalation would probably involve mutual and verifiable restraint in moving forces to Poland (by the Soviets) and into eastern Germany (by NATO).

The second possible intersection between escalation and de-escalation would occur when and if, because of prior de-escalation failure, NATO and Soviet forces faced each other on the German-Polish border. In large measure this would replicate qualitatively the current military situation, but with the scene of confrontation on the Oder-Neisse instead of the inter-German border.

Let us now turn to an examination of the de-escalation dynamics and requisite capabilities at these two transition points between escalation and de-escalation.

1. De-escalating Before Soviet Reentry

The escalation phase would probably be accompanied by an increase in the political rhetoric and the readying of forces for deployment into Poland and the former GDR portion of Germany. This phase raises a host of questions:

- Could NATO plan for movement of forces into eastern Germany in time of crisis if the Genscher Plan were in force?
- Could the United States and the United Kingdom plan to do so using bilateral agreements with the new German state?
- Would a Soviet movement into *any* country in Eastern Europe be a sufficient cause for NATO's mobilization or other military response?
- Would Soviet reentry (or the threat of it) into Eastern Europe occasion a different NATO response from those used in 1956 and 1968?

For purposes of this analysis, my answer to these questions is yes. What would the NATO response be? With the respective forces so distant from one another initially, the de-escalation moves can include the incremental stand down of alerted forces, cancellation of mobilization preparatory orders, and offers of a joint declaration of noninterference in Poland's internal affairs. While surprise is always a factor in crisis bargaining and the onset of warfare, in this case it carries fewer advantages or penalties because of the geographical separation of the forces. Establishing clear firebreaks and reducing the penalties and advantages of surprise emphasize the importance of keeping space between the forces of the two blocs in peacetime.

But the major unknown in this case would be unilateral actions by the FRG and Poland to safeguard their interests. Unguarded borders are an anomaly in international relations. The details of FRG and Polish actions would depend on the circumstances of the scenario. In those cases where the Soviets were invited in by a Polish government, there would be a need for both NATO and the Pact to ensure that their involved ally did not take any military action that would make the situation even more unstable.[6]

In those cases where the Soviets were not invited in, but were considering a reentry to Poland anyway, the calculus would be much different. Here the components of de-escalation include obtaining guarantees of nonintervention by both sides and standing down capabilities on both sides that could effect intervention in Poland.

2. De-escalation After Soviet Reentry

After Soviet reentry there is a matrix of considerations that further defines the resulting environment: there is or is not Polish resistance, and NATO has or has not responded with significant military deployments and readiness improvement actions. Each cell of that matrix, displayed in Table 1, would have a grouping of actions that would be appropriate to the escalation phase of the crisis.

De-escalation might involve some form of agreement for the Soviets to hold in place, with an eventual commitment to leave Poland, balanced by some NATO guarantee not to interfere in Poland. De-escalation would involve the selective withdrawal of some NATO units from the FRG-Poland border at a rate commensurate with Soviet withdrawal. If the NATO Rapid Reinforcement Plans (RRP) were in execution, it would be necessary to suspend them—at least in the NATO center.[7]

3. Required De-escalation Capabilities

De-escalation capabilities of most use would be those that provide for military-to-military communications so that force readiness changes or movements and their rationales could be rapidly and accurately described and explained to the other side. In this context it is vital that the Alliance speak with one voice on the delicate matters of military stand down. If national forces have already been placed under SACEUR command, he

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[6]The Soviets might consider reentry to shore up a weakened pro-Soviet government *and* to reestablish their military position over the longer term in Eastern Europe. The threat to Germany and NATO in these circumstances could be ambiguous.

[7]Later we will discuss the difficulties that flow from changing the Rapid Reinforcement Plans once they are executed.

Table 1

ILLUSTRATIVE MILITARY RESPONSE ACTIONS

	Polish Response	
	Acquiescence to Soviet Return	Resistance to Soviet Return
NATO Response		
Major Response (based on fear of subsequent Soviet aggression against NATO)	1. Move FRG forces up to Polish border 2. Increase readiness in NATO center	1. Move NATO forces up to Polish border 2. Provide military aid to Polish resisters 3. Reinforce NATO center
Weak Response (based on avoiding provoking Soviets)	1. Token military readiness improvement actions 2. Some unilateral FRG security measures	1. Threaten movement of NATO forces to Polish border 2. Provide arms to Polish resisters

should be able to reassure his Soviet counterpart (and vice versa) that he is in control of force status and movement. If the NATO forces remain under national command, the Defense Planning Committee (DPC) needs to gain assurances from the various national authorities that the actions of their forces will conform to DPC guidance during negotiations on disengagement.[8]

Another needed de-escalation capability is an open-skies regime over the area of interest—Poland, eastern Germany, and western USSR in this example—and the ability to develop and assess the necessary intelligence on Soviet force movements. Under some

[8]This simple statement of needed capabilities flies in the face of current political realities. Some NATO states would not trust *any* military officer with the responsibility of communicating with an opponent on such politically sensitive matters. Even less likely is the prospect that SACEUR will gain command of national forces in crises short of impending invasion of NATO territory.

verification regimes, on-site observers would be needed. It would be helpful if such observers were in place in the precrisis environment. In crisis the observer teams could be expanded in size and number, but the modalities of their operation would already be established and agreed on.

A key de-escalation tool in this crisis would be the ability to quickly adjust readiness enhancement actions and force movements to reflect de-escalation agreements. NATO's current ability to do this is suspect. While lip service is paid to the need for de-escalation of alert levels, it is never exercised. Increasing alert levels in a coordinated way is immensely complicated and the subject of much exercising. Reversing those alert levels involves a complex web of Alliance and national actions that creates military vulnerabilities during transitions, as well as room for misinterpretation by the opponent.[9] NATO's Rapid Reinforcement Plans are similarly fragile. Once put in motion, they are difficult to adjust because of all the interlocking national actions in play in the form of transportation and host nation support. To stop or significantly adjust those actions creates a major risk of confusion and the sacrifice of capabilities to rapidly reimplement the plans.

A hypothetical example suggests some of many possible problems. With the RRP in full swing and reinforcing divisions moving forward from their ports of debarkation to their general defense positions, the DPC decides as a de-escalation move to cease reinforcement, withdraw some main battle forces from border areas, and reduce alert levels in some regions.

Problems:

1. Forces in movement must go *somewhere*. They can seldom stop where they are. Often the only place they can get adequate sustaining support is *forward*, not back, particularly if their support is racing forward to meet them.
2. Forces arriving in theater are often *followed* by necessary round-out support. To keep these forces in theater without their support incurs serious military readiness and sustainability penalties if the crisis were to reescalate.
3. The forces withdrawn from their general defense positions must go somewhere where they can be supported. Those alternative positions are not likely to be a

[9]This point has been raised on occasion in the periodic Major NATO Commander (MNC) conferences on the NATO Alert System. These concerns have typically been brushed aside on the assumption that the current alert system is adequately flexible. The fact that such flexibility has not been demonstrated in exercises is conveniently overlooked.

happy compromise between military prudence (Can the forces defend themselves? Are they in defensible terrain?) and support needs.

4. Host nation support for deploying forces is built on very finely tuned location, timing, and buildup rate assumptions. Changing those assumptions results in dysfunctional support within the theater. Other plans also are disrupted. Since host nation support comes largely from civilian resources, there would be immense pressure to release unneeded (at that moment, in that place) support back to the civilian sector.
5. Changing alert levels has different effects in different countries because some tailor their host nation support and force movement actions to alert levels and others do not. A fast reduction in alert levels raises the possibility of needed cross-national support disappearing before the forces do, of forces crossing intra-NATO borders not being properly received and supported, etc.

To summarize, a complex of political difficulties and narrowly focused planning argues against having great confidence in the Alliance's ability to de-escalate a crisis using, *inter alia*, a careful orchestration of prudent and feasible military actions. First, there is the new environment in Europe that is rapidly making current military plans and exercises irrelevant. Second, there is the fixation on being able to handle escalation well; that is, to alert, mobilize, and deploy forces quickly and effectively to meet wartime requirements. De-escalation is hardly a factor in planning.[10] Third, complex current plans, based on fragile assumptions of simultaneous national execution *performance*, carry within them the seeds of confusion if adjustments must be made on an ad hoc basis in an actual crisis. Fourth, since NATO scarcely addresses de-escalation in its exercises, it has no basis for confidence that it can be done. And finally, since the military command structure of the Alliance has not thought much about de-escalation, it follows that the political leadership of the Alliance has little or no understanding of military considerations that should guide their efforts to de-escalate *safely*.

These difficulties argue for an expansion of planning and exercising to address de-escalation issues more directly. If such planning and exercising is infeasible, at least the

[10]Outside of exercise critiques and conference reports, the author could find only one general reference to de-escalation in NATO documents. "International Military Staff Instructions for Tension, Crisis, and War (IMSSOP No. 3)" offers a series of homilies on the desired characteristics of de-escalation measures.

necessary analysis and gaming should be conducted to better understand the issues involved and to develop some rudimentary guidelines to inform the de-escalation process. *Such analysis might identify the relevant DPC and national decisions, their combinations and sequencing, the information needed to make them, the sources of that information, and the de-escalation mechanisms that should be in place before the crisis erupts.*

SCENARIO 2: CIVIL CONFLICT IN EASTERN EUROPE

1. The Case of Yugoslavia

The case that comes most immediately to mind is the current deteriorating situation in Yugoslavia. While civil conflict in that conglomerate state does not directly involve NATO and the Warsaw Pact, Yugoslavia's critical position and its relationships with its neighbors suggest that a full-blown civil war (or the threat of it) would have major implications for both alliances. Neighbors would be tempted to take sides, a temptation holding many of the seeds of rapid escalation to a crisis among and within the nations of the two blocs.

Some sort of peacekeeping force, perhaps under UN auspices, is indicated in such circumstances. It is less easy to imagine a NATO or Warsaw Pact role, but an appeal by one or both sides to the blocs for assistance would present difficult problems. If there were Soviet intervention, NATO would be faced with the thorny question of whether and how to respond. Soviet forces in Yugoslavia, or major Soviet assistance to a faction in that state, would be a significant departure from Gorbachevian policies for Eastern Europe and would have ramifications for the future direction of NATO's military posture. The de-escalation strategy might be to keep both blocs out of the affair and to back that position up with force postures on both sides that deter intervention.[11]

2. The Case of Soviet Intervention Elsewhere in Eastern Europe

A more difficult case would occur if Soviet forces intervened in the internal political affairs of other East European states. There were elements of this in the perceived threat of intervention in Poland in 1980-81. It is not clear that NATO would do more than it did in that case. The Alliance's current leverage in crisis management for this class of contingency is not great. But a Soviet reintervention *subsequent* to a withdrawal would have greater import than any intervention, real or threatened, during the Brezhnev era. Presumably, the

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[11]Although not a NATO example, the U.S. and Soviet reinforcement of their Mediterranean forces during the 1973 Middle East War illustrated how a mutual military posture can deter intervention by both sides.

West would have stronger economic and political ties with the East European states after Soviet withdrawal. It is one thing for the Soviets to put down an uprising against Soviet or puppet rule; it would be another for them to interfere militarily after a state has returned to democratic rule and has established growing economic ties with the West—even if that state were suffering from civil conflict.

De-escalation efforts would probably be focused on keeping Soviet and NATO troops away from border areas.[12] This task would take on even greater urgency in a Europe with open borders. Relatively free population flows across borders facilitate the movement of conflict across borders. One of the few useful functions of the Iron Curtain was that it served to seal off internal conflicts and provide a major firebreak to escalation.[13]

3. Needed De-escalation Capabilities

What de-escalation capabilities are needed by NATO to respond to civil conflict in Eastern Europe? The most important one is to know the extent of the Alliance's vital interests in the circumstances of civil conflict. A civil conflict in Eastern Europe, particularly one in which there was Soviet intervention, would be sure to raise the international political temperature. Side-taking would be the major temptation, particularly (as is likely) if one side were to engage in major and flagrant human rights abuses and attacks on the general population.

The need for peacekeeping observers and forces would soon arise. An important NATO capability would be to know its own mind on the makeup of such forces and the more important details of their operation. Additionally, there would be a need for incentives to engage the Soviets in efforts to restore peace in the affected area and to refrain from intervention. Finally, there is a need for a forum in which European security matters (that transcend the two military blocs) can be discussed in crisis. This might argue for either a NATO-Warsaw Pact Consultative Committee, or a more overarching organization along CSCE lines.

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[12]Indeed, there might be some benefit in a tacit agreement between NATO and the Soviets to agree on mutual nonintervention in some areas. Richard Betts describes this as a commitment to non-escalation, or preemptive de-escalation.

[13]Richard Betts has called this the stability versus justice dilemma.

SCENARIO 3: A LOCAL CROSS-BORDER WAR IN EUROPE

While such a contingency appears more remote than civil conflict, there are several sensitive areas in each bloc that might cause such conflict. On the NATO side, continuing Greek-Turkish disagreements over Cyprus and sovereignty in the Aegean is an example. In Warsaw Pact Europe, Hungarian-Romanian border conflict is not out of the question. Looking across the blocs, a Turkish-Bulgarian conflict is not inconceivable. De-escalating these and other similar conflicts would likely require observers or peacekeeping forces.

Up to this point NATO has been unwilling to undertake contingency planning for a future peacekeeping mission. On those occasions where such a peacekeeping force might have been useful—for example, the various disorders in Cyprus and the Turkish invasion of 1974—the United Nations has been the adversaries' peacekeeper of choice. Somewhat surprisingly, there has been little attention paid to this possible NATO role in the analysis literature.

The ACE Mobile Force and the NATO Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVLANT) are suitable nuclei for peacekeeping forces. They are mobile and they are (or can be readily placed) under NATO command. The only elements lacking are the planning for contingent future employment in the peacekeeping role, the specialized additional capabilities in communications, linguists, small detached unit support, *and the collective agreement of 16 nations to use the forces in that role.*

SCENARIO 4: AN OUT-OF-AREA CONFLICT WITH MAJOR NATO IMPLICATIONS

Out-of-area conflicts that might involve NATO are already visible on the international horizon. They are a repetition of conflict in the Persian Gulf that threatened free-world oil supplies and a resumption of fighting between Israel and one or more Arab states. Although such contingencies have enormous implications for NATO, the Alliance has in the past given a wide berth to suggestions of greater Alliance involvement in them.[14] The United States, though acting in its own self-interest in such conflicts, has in some respects acted as an executive agent for the Alliance: attempting to maintain freedom of navigation and working to effect a truce between the adversaries.

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[14]Individual NATO states did participate in keeping Persian Gulf sea lanes open, but they did so unilaterally and reluctantly as events unfolded. Naval forces of six NATO states were in the Gulf in 1987. See "Chain of Events in Persian Gulf Led Reluctant Allies to Join U.S.," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1987.

Even if they eschewed Alliance responsibility for containing and de-escalating such conflicts, it seems certain that individual NATO allies would want a voice in whatever was decided by the superpowers in responding to events. Typically, in past crises of this sort the Defense Planning Committee has been a forum for consultation if not action. It is likely that this consultation facilitated responses that, if not concerted, were at least not at significant cross purposes.

The downside of this historical NATO unwillingness to participate as an alliance in resolving out-of-(NATO)-area crises has been a de facto delegation of that critical role to the superpowers or the United Nations. Since it has not been able to speak with one voice on matters of importance to it, NATO as an alliance has settled for no voice or *sotto voce* in such matters. In the "new Europe" characterized by transition, instability, and superpower retrenchment, this careful detachment, if continued in the future, points to an even smaller NATO influence on de-escalating crises of interest to it.[15]

If NATO were to decide that its interests would be served by a larger Alliance role in resolving out-of-area crises, what capabilities might be of most use? While, as in the other scenarios, peacekeeping forces or observers come to mind, there is probably also a need for more substantial "presence" forces to convince crisis adversaries of the Alliance's interests and its willingness to intervene if those interests were threatened.[16] This possibility and other changes in the European security environment argue for a critical review of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Charter has served admirably its original purposes of deterring, and if necessary, countering external attack. As that mission recedes as NATO's preeminent contribution to European security, Article 12 of the treaty becomes more important:

> After the Treaty has been in force for ten years, or at any time thereafter, the Parties shall, if any of them so requests, consult together for purposes of reviewing the Treaty, *having regard for the factors then affecting peace and security in the North Atlantic area* . . . (emphasis added).

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[15]Although he doesn't directly address the question of a future NATO role in out-of-area crises, Ranier Rupp has pointed out some of the largely unexamined implications of post-1992 Europe for NATO's historical role as the principal agent of the West's security functions. See his "Europe 1992: Potential Implications for the North Atlantic Alliance," in *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, January 1990.

[16]Dean Millot points out that one interesting outcome of major reductions in European national forces may be that they will be structured only for defensive operations on their own and adjacent territory and less able to support out-of-area operations. The utility of such limited capabilities depends on one's views of the scope of the new Europe's interests and the threats to those interests its member nations perceive.

The current circumstances and the relevant treaty language argue for *reviewing* and *reinterpreting* the treaty, not necessarily *revising* it.

III. THE CONTINUING IMPORTANCE OF CRISIS DE-ESCALATION CAPABILITIES

NATO's crisis de-escalation capabilities in the past have been little understood and fortunately only infrequently needed. This combination of neglect and good fortune conveys the wrong message to statesmen and planners as they look to the future. In past crises between the two blocs (e.g., Berlin 1961, Cuba 1962, and Middle East 1956 and 1973) the issues have been such that they were largely decided by the superpowers with a judicious mixture of force and diplomacy. But behind each of those crises was the fundamental fact of strategic stability underwritten by the overall nuclear balance. As we look to the future, a time of rapid change and new tensions for Europe, the old force balance calculations are becoming less relevant. Change and tensions—particularly unfamiliar tensions—point to future crises as new relationships are worked out and changing aspirations are accommodated. The necessary political and military structures to manage and de-escalate such crises are not in place. De-escalation capabilities, seldom used in earlier crises, are now likely to be more in demand.

All this is to say that the threat to NATO security is changing. A NATO structured exclusively to respond to threatened or actual Warsaw Pact invasion from a position of strength in East Germany is poorly positioned to respond to threats (or the fact) of: Soviet *reentry* to non-NATO Europe, civil and cross-border wars in the new Europe, and "out-of-area" contingencies in which its interests will increase as economic integration grows. The issue will be: Can NATO's members agree on the new threats with sufficient clarity of purpose to support meaningful contingency planning?

THE NEEDED DE-ESCALATION CAPABILITIES

For the most part, these capabilities do not exist now because of the Alliance's historical myopic focus on a Warsaw Pact invasion of NATO Europe, a political unwillingness within the Alliance to address other scenarios in its planning, and tacit, if often unwilling, reliance on the United States to handle important contingencies elsewhere. The listing of required capabilities below is intended to meet the needs of the changing environment on the assumption that the Alliance will continue to be the centerpiece of the security efforts of its members.

Three categories of improvements are examined: planning, forces and hardware, and political frameworks. The categories are examined in that order because of the ascending degree of difficulty, not because of logical progression.

PLANNING

In this category we examine current plans, planning capabilities, and the exercises that test both. De-escalation is not directly addressed in current plans. Periodically, the Alerts Committee has addressed the question and come to the conclusion that the current Alert System (documented in MC 67/3) is adequate to handle de-escalation. NATO's reinforcement plans are alleged to be flexible. Although the Alliance apparently believes that its reinforcement plans can be readily implemented in their entirety or in part, the ability to adjust the plans *during their implementation* is open to question.

Planning flexibility is important to de-escalation because the process will likely require that forces go to different, probably unplanned, locations for disengagement, locations different from those associated with increasing readiness. Important military capabilities (needed for leverage and safety in continuing crisis management) can be frittered away during crisis if the plans are not up to the political needs.

If for whatever reason flexible plans are not in place, greater loads are placed on the various military planning staffs at a time when they are fully engaged in overseeing the execution of existing plans. NATO staff guides and general planning documents are of little solace to the planner as he contemplates the requirements of de-escalation and disengagement while preserving essential military capabilities.

One might hope that any deficiencies in plans and in staff planning mechanisms for de-escalation would be identified during NATO exercises. But, since de-escalation has not been exercised in the NATO arena, these deficiencies (if any) must await exposure during crisis. In the absence of plans, planning mechanisms, and exercises that deal with de-escalation, one can fall back on precrisis analysis that might inform important judgments to be made during crisis.

Probably the most fruitful area for research lies within the purview of the Major NATO Commanders (MNCs). They could develop scenario-based analyses with the objective of identifying candidate guidelines for use by political authorities as the latter negotiate de-escalation issues both within the NATO Alliance and with adversaries.[1] These analyses would address such issues as:

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[1]But the *political* difficulties of this type of *military* planning are immense. The

- The ordering of disengagement actions (e.g., stopping or slowing reinforcement versus lowering readiness versus pullbacks).
- Checklists for selecting pullback lines (e.g., defensible terrain, proximity to bases, transportation axes).
- Verification requirements and needed surveillance and observer capabilities.
- The role of military-to-military communications and liaison actions in de-escalation.
- Modifications to rules of engagement (ROE) during de-escalation.
- An assessment of possible military "signals" for their observability, credibility, and penalties to combat posture.
- The feasibility of interrelated "logic trees" to guide disengagement decisionmaking at NATO political and military command levels.

Recommendations for Improved De-Escalation Planning

1. MNCs: Conduct analyses with the objective of identifying guidelines for de-escalation for use by Alliance and national political authorities in crisis.
2. MNCs: Game current war plans and readiness systems to assess adequacy for transition to de-escalation situation.
3. DPC: Ensure de-escalation issues are addressed in recurring major NATO exercises (e.g., HILEX).
4. MNCs: Develop annexes to current plans that cover de-escalation options and execution criteria.
5. DPC: Direct MNCs to develop "illustrative" concept plans that cover selected nonstandard contingencies (e.g., with NATO forces acting as peacekeepers, responding to a Soviet reentry in Eastern Europe).

FORCES AND HARDWARE

Long-range strategic planning should drive forces and hardware, but circumstances dictate that available hardware help shape near-term strategic planning. Exercises should test the commanders as well as existing plans, forces, and hardware. In the absence of related planning it is not surprising that the forces are not in hand to undertake de-escalation

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difficulties inherent in selecting the scenario and events list for the biennial WINTEX is a case in point.

functions such as peacekeeping, or that they are not well used. However, there are some existing capabilities to undertake surveillance and observer duties. Each side maintains intelligence-gathering units that would be vital to monitoring de-escalation activities along the current borders. Moreover, the four occupying powers (USSR, United States, United Kingdom, and France) maintain observers on opposite sides of the inter-German border. While these latter arrangements in their present form are unlikely to survive German reunification, they do provide a precedent and pattern for future efforts along the same lines. In a Europe enjoying a Soviet pullback, some surveillance capabilities would have to be relocated farther eastward.

As for peacekeeping forces, NATO has potential tools in the Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force and in the Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVLANT). These forces exist, are (or can be) under NATO command, and are inherently mobile. Detailed scenario-specific planning in the precrisis period would be valuable, but its absence does not rule out useful training in peacekeeping duties.

Communication between opponents is a critical element in de-escalation. Such communications might be particularly important between the forces of the two sides as they de-escalate. In the context of NATO-Soviet conflict, this argues for communications links between the respective regional military headquarters (e.g., between CINCENT and the Soviet Western Group of Forces in the GDR or, at some future time, Soviet forces in the Western Military District of the USSR). There is a precedent for this in current U.S. and Soviet efforts under the Crowe-Moiseyev Agreement, wherein one provision provides for air control facilities in adjacent sectors to conduct interoperability exercises. Such exercises have in fact been conducted.

In other conflict contexts, the communications requirement might argue for rapidly deployable compatible communications modules that could be located at the headquarters of the non-NATO and non-Soviet adversaries, modules manned by peacekeeping communications (and perhaps observer) staff.

Recommendations on Forces and Hardware

1. DPC: Assess feasibility of giving NATO standing and mobile forces a contingent peacekeeping mission.

2. MNCs: Assess NATO's capabilities for observing military disengagement (from observer organization and electronic surveillance standpoints).
3. DPC: Authorize the establishment of military-to-military hotlines between major headquarters, starting with hotlines between NATO and Soviet commanders adjacent to the NATO center.
4. DPC: Authorize development of deployable crisis communications modules for netting opposing non-NATO and non-Soviet military headquarters to facilitate peacekeeping.

POLITICAL FRAMEWORKS

I have saved the hardest for last: adjusting the political frameworks under which crisis management (including de-escalation) is conducted to better reflect both *enduring realities* in international affairs and the *new security environment* facing the North Atlantic Alliance. The need for this adjustment goes beyond managing de-escalation and applies to the security objective comprising the bedrock of the Alliance and to crisis management as the servant of that objective.

What is meant by new political frameworks? Two possibilities come to mind. The first is a framework *within the Alliance* that accommodates the new realities of a reduced Soviet threat, increasing economic integration, the concomitant expansion of common security interests outside the North Atlantic treaty area, and the likelihood of continuing instability in Eastern Europe. This framework would serve to advance the Alliance's interests in nontraditional roles such as peacekeeping and provide a basis for Alliance action in out-of-area contingencies where the Alliance's vital interests were involved.[2]

The second is a framework *outside the Alliance* that provides a larger forum of European security cooperation. Some means must be found to engage the larger European community, including the United States, in the resolution of security issues—including crises. While there are numerous proposals that the CSCE provide the institutional basis for a future European security regime, if it were to assume that role it would need to address many of the issues raised in a NATO context in this paper.

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[2]As indicated earlier, there has been and will likely continue to be resistance from the NATO nations to this larger role. My point here is that a "new NATO" with larger economic interests and a lesser U.S. global security role may be unable in the future to remain as aloof to out-of-area threats to its security.

One need only imagine a further degeneration of the continuing crisis in Yugoslavia to see a role for these two frameworks in crisis resolution and de-escalation. The current modalities for security cooperation in Europe are not up to the task. NATO as an Alliance has long looked the other way (or taken half measures) when potential conflict threatened near its borders. NATO is not prepared with plans or mechanisms to assist in peacemaking or peacekeeping. Similarly, there is no forum for crisis management discussions between the two blocs, or within the larger European community, to act in resolving crises of interest to all. In short, Article 52 (regional collective security) of the UN Charter has not been applicable to European security interests to this point.

In the absence of capabilities *within* Europe to resolve crises involving the security of one or more states, it is left to the superpowers, in consultation with their allies, or to the United Nations to broker outcomes. Neither is a satisfactory solution: the former because U.S. and Soviet influence within Europe is declining, and the latter because it fosters the intrusion of nonregional issues in a European regional context. One need only look at the makeup of the Security Council of the United Nations to understand the mischief it could work in undertaking to resolve European security issues.

While it may be premature to formally and publicly take actions that would lead to improved frameworks, it is not too early to begin the planning. What might a planning agenda look like? As a start, a major review of NATO's role in the new Europe is needed. The product of this review might be one that would have the impact of the 1967 Harmel Report (on the Future Tasks of the Alliance).[3] It would sketch out the revisions needed in the Alliance's security objectives and lay out a strategy for changing the Alliance's direction to match the new circumstances. This review would be chartered to examine the role of the Alliance in safeguarding the security of Europe and to define what crisis management capabilities the Alliance requires. While de-escalation capabilities might not be specifically addressed in such a review, the need for an end-to-end examination of crisis management would be part of its focus.

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[3]The North Atlantic Council Ministerial Communique of 15 December 1989 refers to the Harmel Report by stating "Building upon our dual approach to East-West relations contained in the Harmel Report, the NATO Summit Declaration of this past May reaffirmed our continuing support for the development of these [East European] freedoms." The same communique goes on to state that: "Recalling the origins of the North Atlantic Treaty as a political alliance...the Alliance must reintensify its efforts to overcome the division of Europe. *In doing so it must take up new challenges*" (emphasis added). As the communique implies, the Harmel Report is still a useful guide, but more is needed to fit today's circumstances.

A follow-on initiative, though circumstances might dictate that it proceed in parallel, would be to open discussions within the larger CSCE context on ways to provide for crisis management capabilities that transcend narrower Alliance concerns. While the Helsinki agenda is filling up rapidly, there is likely to be room for consideration of new mechanisms of crisis consultation. The planning should already be under way on this topic within NATO capitals and on the NATO International Staff.

Recommendations on Political Frameworks

1. North Atlantic Council/DPC: Direct a review of the Alliance's current security strategy with a view to recommending needed changes to reflect the new European environment and impending changes (e.g., economic integration, reduced U.S. and USSR presence). This review should include a reexamination of MC 14/3, the various plans of the Nuclear Planning Committee, the NATO exercise program, and the types of Alliance crisis management capabilities needed.
2. North Atlantic Council: Consider alternatives for improving security cooperation throughout Europe on regional crisis matters. Alternatives might include: a bloc-to-bloc standing consultative arrangement, a larger CSCE initiative that utilizes the opening provided by Article 52 of the UN Charter, and a web of important bilateral arrangements (e.g., between Germany and Poland).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This review of the NATO Alliance's capabilities for crisis management has proceeded from the assumption that the current era of long-term relaxation of tensions points up two problems: failure to prepare for the de-escalation phenomenon, and the possibility that reescalation can happen under a wide variety of conditions. If one believes that the reduction of tensions is irreversible and that new and different crises are unlikely—that indeed history is at an end—it follows that the need for capabilities to manage the de-escalation phenomenon is largely overtaken by events.

But history itself tells us that it is not at an end, that new crises will emerge. The ability to de-escalate such crises while protecting vital Alliance interests will be a key test of statesmanship. Those who pass the test are likely to be those who saw the need and planned to meet it.

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