

CHAPTER 7

CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS, ARMS CONTROL, AND STRATEGIC STABILITY IN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

There is no question that Europe was the focal point for American strategy during the Cold War. From the end of World War II to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the European continent witnessed the largest buildup of military forces in human history. As a result, arms control became an invaluable diplomatic tool for ensuring stability between the superpower blocs and preserving Alliance solidarity. In this regard, “stability” is defined as the absence of war, and any nation wielding predominant power is considered stable. John Lewis Gaddis describes a “stable system” as generally being characterized by minimal direct violence, particularly between the superpowers. A stable system has methods to peacefully resolve disputes and ensure that low level disputes do not escalate to larger crises. In a larger sense, a system might be stable if it is self-regulating in the sense that the principal members establish the means, including agreed procedures, to counteract pressures that might jeopardize peace and further agreed procedures to resolve disputes.¹

From the start, certain concepts were deemed key to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) agreed strategic approach as well as military and policy planning. Military sufficiency described the need to preserve sufficient forces and freedom of action to deter Warsaw Pact aggression and, should deterrence

fail, defend Alliance territory. The physical presence of U.S. conventional forces in Europe was important not only from the standpoint of conventional deterrence, but also because of the linkage to the Alliance's nuclear capabilities and ultimately the American strategic arsenal. Any Soviet calculation about a conventional attack on Western Europe had to consider the possibility of escalation and nuclear war, especially since NATO policy retained the option to initiate the use of nuclear weapons due to its conventional inferiority vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact.

With these concepts in mind, conventional arms control—in particular the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (often referred to as the CFE Treaty)—played an important role in the maintenance of stability. It supported conflict prevention and crisis management by providing transparency about the size and disposition of military forces. This reduced uncertainty and miscalculation between the two blocs. In many ways, the CFE Treaty and arms control in the European context in general sought to deal with the difficulties of extended deterrence and prevent war through the stabilization of deterrence.² Extended deterrence was seen to depend upon forward deployed American conventional forces as an explicit link between the direct defense of Europe and the U.S. central strategic deterrent. The CFE provided not only clear limits on these forces for both blocs, but also a system of verification/inspections that could be (and were) exercised during times of crisis to further maintain the stability of the system.

Periodic crises that could have resulted in war in Europe emphasized this requirement, which was especially important in the waning days of the Soviet Union. The transparency and predictability provided

by the treaty gave reassurances to both sides which allowed Moscow to withdraw its forces from Eastern Europe without a dramatic increase in East-West tensions. During this time, the CFE Treaty assisted in the transition of the security environment and the development of a new relationship with the Russian Federation. It was also valuable following the wars in former Yugoslavia as arms control contributed to conflict resolution and the prevention of a recurrence of hostilities.

At the NATO Summit in Lisbon in November 2010, the Alliance agreed to three essential core tasks – collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.³ All of these are essential to maintaining security on the European continent and ensuring continued stability. Clearly the CFE Treaty would seem to contribute positively to each of these tasks. In terms of “collective defense,” the treaty provided not only predictability for NATO force planners but also the transparency over other forces on the continent. It also remained key to crisis management as it discouraged escalation. Finally, it continued an ongoing process of cooperation between NATO and the Russian Federation. Consequently, it is important to review the background of the agreement, examine its current status, and consider its role as part of contemporary European security architecture and stability.

CONVENTIONAL ARMS CONTROL AND THE CFE TREATY

In Paris, France, on November 19, 1990, the CFE Treaty was signed between members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. At its signing, many analysts hailed it as “the cornerstone of European security,” and it is

clearly the most ambitious and far-ranging conventional arms control treaty in history. It underscored a transformation of European security that is still ongoing and whose end state many argue is unclear.⁴

The events that framed this transformation were both largely peaceful and remarkable. Only a year before, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall, which had served as perhaps the primary symbol of the Cold War for nearly 40 years, came down. Six weeks prior to the Paris signing, Germany formally reunified into a single nation. The number of signatories has increased from 22 to 34. One of the Alliances, the Warsaw Pact, dissolved and the other, NATO, enlarged. A key signatory to the Treaty, the Soviet Union, disappeared and was replaced by a host of successor states. Finally, the nations that convened in Paris did so under the overall auspices of the Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This organization has now grown to 56 members and become the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which reflects that it has now matured into an international organization. An adapted treaty that reflects many of these political changes was signed on November 19, 1999, at the OSCE Summit held in Istanbul, but it has not been ratified by the majority of the states involved.

The “Original” CFE Treaty and Adaptation.

The original treaty, signed in 1990, established limits on the aggregate total of conventional military hardware for the two blocs, required substantial reductions in each nation’s conventional arsenal, and created an intrusive regime of inspections and verification. The talks had commenced in January 1988 and the following mandate was agreed upon to guide the negotiations:

The objectives of the negotiation shall be to strengthen stability and security in Europe through the establishment of a stable and secure balance of conventional armed forces, which include conventional armaments and equipment, at lower levels; the elimination of disparities prejudicial to stability and security; and the elimination, as a matter of priority, of the capability for launching surprise attack and for initiating large scale offensive action.⁵

This mandate is clearly consistent with our established definition of “stability.” It further acknowledges that conventional arms control in many ways is technically a more complex undertaking than nuclear arms control. Conventional weaponry depends not only on a diversity of armaments and geography, but also other variables such as technology, doctrine, and organization. Consequently, arguments persisted throughout the Cold War over the relative strengths and weaknesses of NATO and Warsaw Pact conventional forces. This was in part due to the inherent imprecision of any supporting analysis. Still the principal sources of instability remained each side’s ability to generate forces over time, a factor that the mandate clearly addresses. This includes time to prepare for attack, time for operational warning and political response, and time to mobilize defenses which are more important to ensure stability than static comparison of forces deployed in peacetime.⁶

The final agreement required Alliance or “group” limitations on tanks, artillery, armored combat vehicles, combat aircraft, and attack helicopters—known collectively as treaty-limited equipment (TLE)—in an area stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains. Subsequent national limits for each

treaty signatory were determined during negotiations among the members of the two respective Alliances. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the successor states (within the area of treaty application) determined their respective limits from the total allocated to the Soviet Union in May 1992. However, the three Balkan states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) did not participate in these discussions about “national limits” for the “successor” states of the Soviet Union. Rather, they argued that they had been “occupied territory” and therefore that their territory was no longer part of the Treaty’s area of application. Following their entry into NATO, the Balkan states have indicated a willingness to accede to the adapted CFE Treaty if it enters into force.

Bloc limitations for NATO and the former Warsaw Pact were further restrained by a series of five geographic nested zones for land-based TLE with respective limits for each zone. This was done to achieve the goals established in the mandate to prevent the destabilizing concentration of conventional military armament. This construct had the effect of permitting free movement of equipment and units away from, but not towards, the central European region, which thus inhibited surprise attack in the area deemed – during the Cold War at least – to be the most vulnerable. This consequently contributed to stability on the continent.

The Soviet Union (and subsequently the Russian Federation) further accepted the so-called “flank zone.” This portion of the agreement placed limits on ground-based systems in the Leningrad and North Caucasus Military Districts in the Russian Federation. Norway is part of the northern portion of the flank and the north Caucasus states, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova are in the southern portion.

Limitations on helicopters and attack aircraft only apply to the entire area of application due to their ability to reposition rapidly.

Only 1 year after the signing of the initial agreement and as Treaty implementation was commencing, Russian leaders began arguing for adjustments to their equipment limits. They began raising concerns about Russia's equipment limitations, particularly in the flank region, and Moscow subsequently undertook a campaign to alter those limits. The CFE signatories reach a compromise at the first Review Conference in May 1996. The compromise permitted Russia to maintain higher force levels in the flank zone, established a May 1999 deadline for Moscow to meet these adjusted levels, and reduced the overall size of the flank zone. Still, the problem of Russian force levels in this area would continue to bedevil negotiators. It was exacerbated by Russian military operations in Chechnya (which is in the flank region) and the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008. Russian military experts expressed a concern that Moscow required higher force levels in the flank to deal with the insurgency in Chechnya. Some Western military experts believed that Russia had violated its force limits during the 2008 conflict.

At the same time, treaty signatories had already begun (as agreed at the 1996 CFE Review Conference) to embark on a "modernization" of the treaty, in order to adapt it more broadly to the changed European security architecture, one without a Soviet Union or a Warsaw Pact. These CFE Treaty adaptation negotiations continued from 1996-99, through a period in which the European landscape continued to evolve. Of direct relevance to the Treaty and conventional forces, NATO began its process of enlargement. The

enlargement process, together with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, brought to the surface a number of Russian concerns. Moscow argued that changes needed to be made to the Treaty to ensure continued stability and that it remained consistent with its original objectives.

On November 19, 1999 (the ninth anniversary of the CFE Treaty), 30 leaders signed the Adapted Treaty. All 19 NATO members accepted lower cumulative national limits, and all signatories accepted the new structure of limitations based on national and territorial ceilings consistent with the principle of host nation consent for the presence of foreign forces on any country's territory. The agreement also provided enhanced transparency through increased quotas for mandatory on-site inspections, operational flexibilities to exceed ceilings temporarily, and an accession clause.

The states parties also adopted the "CFE Final Act." This document contains a number of political commitments related to the Adapted Treaty. They include: (1) reaffirmation of Russia's commitment to fulfill existing obligations under the treaty to include equipment levels in the flank region; (2) a Russian commitment to exercise restraint in deployments in its territory adjacent to the Baltic; (3) the commitment by a number of Central European countries not to increase (and in some cases to reduce) their CFE territorial ceilings; and (4) Moscow's agreement with Georgia and Moldova on the withdrawals of Russian forces from their territories. President Bill Clinton noted in his statement at the conclusion of the summit that he would not submit the agreement for review by the Senate until Russia had reduced to the flank levels set forth in the Adapted Treaty to include removing its forces from Georgia and Moldova.

The Adapted CFE Treaty included provisions to reflect the new security environment. Russia's concerns about the three Baltic republics achieving NATO membership were addressed by adding an accession clause to the Adapted Treaty. The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act also contained a key sentence to address Russia's concerns about stationed forces on the territory of new member states:

NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defense and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.⁷

The Russian "Suspension."

On December 12, 2007, the Russian Federation officially announced that it would no longer be bound by the restrictions of the 1990 CFE Treaty and suspended participation.⁸ Moscow claimed that it took this action because the 22 NATO members bound by the 1990 agreement had not ratified the 1999 Adapted Treaty, and during a June 2007 extraordinary conference, it provided a further detailed list of "negative effects" of the conduct of NATO states.⁹ These included overall NATO force levels, the flank limits, and other unspecified demands for additional transparency. In addition to these concerns, it was clear that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and other Russian leaders were angry over a series of issues, including NATO enlargement, the independence of Kosovo, and plans to install essential components of a ballistic missile defense system on Polish territory. Nonetheless, Moscow reassured the other treaty signatories that it did not intend

to dramatically increase its force levels in the territory adjacent to their borders.

In terms of ratification, NATO members have argued since the Istanbul Summit in 1999 that ratification remained contingent upon Russia complying with obligations it freely accepted when the Adapted CFE Treaty was signed. The most contentious issue was the NATO demand for the full removal of all Russian military forces from the territory of the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Moldova. Russia adamantly contested this linkage, and Russian Prime Minister Putin has publicly argued that “there is no legal link” between the Adapted CFE Treaty and these commitments.¹⁰

In response, NATO initially endorsed a “parallel actions package” in March 2008 in an attempt to avoid the Treaty’s demise. The package represented a serious shift in the NATO position, as it called for NATO countries to begin the ratification process (which in some countries such as the United States might take several months) while Russia commenced its withdrawals. Once the forces left Georgia and Moldova, NATO countries would strive to complete ratification of the Adapted Treaty quickly. NATO members also pledged to address many Russian security concerns once the Adapted Treaty was in place.¹¹

Unfortunately, the negotiations made little to no progress. This effort was largely undermined by the deteriorating relations between NATO countries and the Russian Federation in the aftermath of the conflict in Georgia in the late summer of 2008. The situation was further complicated by Moscow’s subsequent decision to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent nations.

Following the meeting of OSCE foreign ministers in June 2009, the so-called “Corfu Process” began to examine European security challenges. By early 2010, an effort was undertaken in the Joint Consultative Group (the body based in Vienna, Austria, designed to oversee treaty implementation and adjustments) to develop a framework document that would simply contain principles of conventional arms control that all nations could agree upon. It was hoped that this would serve as a basis for new negotiations, and in the interim offer each state the option of either complying with the existing CFE Treaty or the list of specific requirements described in the framework document.

At the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010, the Alliance reaffirmed its continued commitment to the CFE Treaty regime and all associated elements. While the ultimate goal remained to ensure the continued viability of conventional arms control in Europe by strengthening common security and stability, member states further recognized (as noted at the previous Summit) that “the current situation, where NATO CFE Allies implement the Treaty while Russia does not, cannot continue indefinitely.”¹²

Despite these lofty goals, progress on achieving agreement on a framework document proved illusory. This was largely due to Russian insistence on disallowing any language in the framework document recognizing “host nation consent” for stationing foreign forces that included the phrase “within internationally recognized borders.” Such insistence was obviously because of Russian recognition of the former Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the continued presence of Russian forces on their territory. By the summer of 2011, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Grushko declared that the negotiations

had “ended up in an impasse” and blamed the West for this development.¹³

The failure to achieve agreement on the framework document prior to the September 2011 Review Conference, with the fourth anniversary of the Russian suspension of participation in the agreement now rapidly receding, left Washington and its NATO allies with few choices. On November 22, 2011, the United States announced that “it would cease carrying out certain obligations” under the treaty with regard to the Russian Federation.¹⁴ NATO allies quickly followed suit with similar announcements.¹⁵ In addition, the United States and its allies argued that the sharing of sensitive data by treaty signatories with the Russian Federation should be considered a compliance violation, as the data should have been provided only to “active” participants in the agreement.

Despite these actions, it does seem clear that American and NATO policymakers do not wish to terminate the Treaty or argue that the Russian Federation is in “material breach.” This is clear in a number of ways. First, November 2011 the announcement reaffirmed the U.S. willingness to implement the Treaty and carry out all obligations with the other signatories. Second, the announcement offered to resume full implementation with Moscow should it decide to return to compliance. Finally, the United States declared that, in the spirit of transparency, it will “voluntarily inform Russia of any significant change” in American forces in Europe.¹⁶ Thus, the November 2011 announcement appears intended simply to acknowledge that, after 4 years, the United States and its NATO partners could not continue to fulfill Treaty obligations absent some reciprocity from Moscow.

What Have Been the Contributions of the CFE Treaty?

Some might argue that in terms of European stability, the demise of a Treaty negotiated during the Cold War has little significance on today's most pressing strategic challenges. Many policy experts, especially in Europe, however, still refer to the treaty as the "cornerstone of European security" and argue that it must either be revitalized or a new agreement negotiated. Still the agreement can only be truly evaluated against the backdrop of European security and stability since its creation.

Oddly, the treaty was signed to prevent, or at least reduce, the likelihood of conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Shortly after it was signed the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union both disappeared, so the true value of the Treaty must be considered in the context of the dramatic transition. In fact, some have argued that the "cornerstone" metaphor is misplaced. The CFE Treaty has not been a static agreement; Europe has weathered many changes, and the Treaty has been adapted to accommodate these new realities.

The Treaty also provided critical political reassurance, which has been a central key to maintaining stability in the system. For example, it proved important in assuaging concerns about German reunification and provided transparency during the withdrawal of massive numbers of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe. These withdrawals occurred following the signing of the Treaty on the German Reunification (September 12, 1990) by the Federal Republic, German Democratic Republic (East Germany), France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States.¹⁷ This agreement also contained significant additional

restraints on military operations. Germany agreed to only deploy territorial units that were not integrated in the NATO command structure on the territory of the former East Germany. Bonn further agreed that no foreign troops would be stationed in its eastern states or “carry out any other military activity there” while the withdrawal of Soviet forces was ongoing. Finally, the reunification treaty also specified that “foreign armed forces and nuclear weapons or their carriers will not be stationed in that part of Germany or deployed there.”¹⁸

In terms of the actual reductions of military equipment, the numbers are truly impressive. Treaty compliance resulted in the destruction of over 69,000 Cold War era battle tanks, combat aircraft, and other pieces of military equipment in the now 30 countries stretching from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains (the area of application). In many ways, the treaty changed the face of European security by “establishing new, cooperative political-military relationships.”¹⁹ More than 5,500 on-site inspections have been conducted, which has created a new sense of political-military cooperation and openness. Obviously, the Russian suspension has placed this cooperation in jeopardy.

The true value of the Treaty and the associated transparency measures to European stability were demonstrated during the various conflicts in the Balkans. As the American troops prepared to depart for Bosnia in 1995, Russian inspectors conducted short notice inspections in accordance with the CFE Treaty. As a result, these military operations were conducted without a significant increase in tensions. The Dayton Accords that ended the initial conflict in the former Yugoslavia in 1996 also contain an annex that established a “CFE-like” agreement between the contend-

ing states. This treaty was nearly identical to the CFE Treaty in terms of limits, definitions, transparency measures, etc. Furthermore, all of the Balkan states participating in this agreement expressed a desire to accede to the full CFE Treaty at some point in the future. Finally, in 1999 Russia conducted an inspection at Aviano Airbase in Italy during the U.S.-led air campaign against Serbian forces in Kosovo. This helped allay to some degree Russian concerns about U.S. force deployments during this crisis.²⁰

In fact, these transparency measures were critical to the maintenance of stability when the system was stressed by periodic crises. In fact, many experts believe the inspection regime may have contributed more to the reduction of tensions and crisis prevention during this dramatic transition in European security than the actual force reductions. Some argue that the Treaty's greatest value may be the entire CFE system, which encourages confidence through transparency. In the final analysis, the existing Treaty, as well as the Adapted Treaty, provides a forum for the major European states to debate, agree, and maintain a set of rules about conventional military power on the continent that is critical to overall stability.²¹

What Would Failure Mean?

So, what would the impact be if the CFE Treaty completely unravels and the flow of routinely provided information on conventional equipment, inspections to verify that information, and constraints on the levels of that equipment were to disappear? Sadly, it is not too far-fetched to imagine that this could cause a dramatic realignment of European security and have an adverse impact on stability. The loss of information

and undermining of predictability could set the stage for historic animosities to resurface and lingering crises to potentially worsen.

For example, there have been suggestions that Azerbaijan is counting on the failure of the Treaty to provide it with an opportunity to increase its military forces. Such a development would clearly exacerbate tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which remain embroiled in a long simmering conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.²² This struggle has resulted in over 15,000 casualties and over 800,000 Armenian and Azeri refugees since 1988. Second, Russia would also lose any transparency into the military forces of existing or future NATO members, as well as transparency into the deployment of NATO forces on the territory of new members. Finally, the Baltic republics would not be allowed to accede to the existing agreement and, consequently, there would be no mechanism to limit NATO forces or provide transparency about such forces on their territory.²³

Many experts fear such developments might encourage an expansion in military forces or cause damage to other agreements to the detriment of stability on the continent. For example, some experts believe Russia might continue to place greater and greater reliance on nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) and reconsider its participation in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in an effort to improve its security posture. Senior Russian officials as well as President Putin have criticized this agreement as contrary to Russian national interests and threatened to abrogate Moscow's participation.²⁴

Loss of CFE would also remove a valuable crisis management tool from European security architecture and damage arms control as an instrument to enhance

overall stability on the continent. In this regard, some Balkan observers believe the demise of the CFE Treaty might mean an end to the arms control arrangements contained in the Dayton Accords. Obviously, such a development could contribute to renewed violence in that troubled region.

The collapse of the CFE Treaty could spill over into other aspects of the Russia-NATO relationship and undermine some of the cooperative European security structures that have been built over the last 15-plus years. Its demise could adversely affect the NATO-Russia Council, the OSCE, and prospects for building or enhancing future cooperation in other areas. Finally, if CFE is abandoned absent a new agreement, the benefits provided by conventional arms control would be difficult, if not impossible, to replace. Beyond that, if CFE is no longer a viable agreement, and the confidence-building aspects of the regime are destroyed completely, over time it is entirely possible that some states parties will likely seek alternative arrangements that will replace the security benefits they now derive from the treaty.

Finally, the dissolution of the CFE Treaty could also have a serious impact on relations between the United States and the Russian Federation. Moscow and Washington have had serious disagreements over the past decade and, at the onset of the Barack Obama administration, their bilateral relations were perhaps worse than any time since the end of the Cold War.²⁵ Early in the new administration, President Obama called for hitting the “reset button” in the relations between the two countries. Despite serious differences, the two sides successfully negotiated the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) by the spring of 2010, and it was subsequently ratified by both the United

States Senate as well as the Russian Duma. However, serious difficulties remain between the two countries. Washington has clearly stated its desire to negotiate limits on nonstrategic nuclear weapons in the near future, but the prospects for success in this effort would appear dim absent progress in conventional arms control.

The Way Ahead.

In seeking a way ahead, several cautions are in order. First, the historical record is clear that arms control can never be an “end” or objective of policy in itself. An arms control accord is neither good nor bad when examined in isolation. Each treaty or agreement has value only insofar as it provides a “way” to mitigate concerns over or threats to national security, enhance stability, and reduce the possibility of conflict or limit its consequences. Thus, a resurrection of the CFE Treaty or creation of a new agreement *de novo* must be consistent with both American and NATO security interests.

Second, at its very core any arms control agreement depends upon a harmony of interests among the signatories. This “harmony” is based on careful analysis by all potential parties that the benefits gained from entering the arms control regime outweigh the risks associated with the measures such a regime might require. These might include reducing military forces or accepting high levels of transparency that allow exchanges of sensitive data, verification, and inspections. One does not get something for nothing, particularly over the long term.

Third, it is often easy to dismiss the success of arms control since we lose sight of its focus. A successful

agreement is one that contributes to the prevention of conflict and enhances stability. But measuring the efficacy of an arms control agreement is seeking to learn why things have not happened, an inherently more difficult endeavor. Arms control regimes, like deterrence, are difficult to correlate completely with causes and effects of policies, because their ultimate metrics are for events that we do not want to happen (wars, arms races, increased tensions, and so on).

If the Alliance is to use conventional arms control to achieve its stated goals, what are some of the elements that might be contained in a future arms control strategy? First, every effort should be made to maintain firm ceilings on conventional forces, particularly in volatile areas such as the North Caucasus and Balkans. This must occur even if the CFE Treaty is discarded, and new negotiations to limit conventional weapons commence. Second, any negotiation must include the Baltic and Balkan states as potential signatories to a future agreement. Third, the inspection regime associated with any future agreement must be simplified. This would seem logical based on today's reduced possibility of a major conflict. Still there will be particular concerns over Russian concentrations of forces on the part of those states that share borders with the Russian Federation.

Fourth and finally, every effort must be made to integrate efforts in conventional arms control with other arms control treaties and agreements in order to achieve the synergy of a comprehensive approach. This must include the Vienna Document (a politically binding agreement focused on confidence- and security-building measures) and the Open Skies Treaty. These agreements provide an existing level of reassurance concerning conventional forces that should not

be discounted. This is particularly true in the current security environment where the prospects of a major conflict in Europe seem remote. Still both can be strengthened and improved. The Vienna Document has not been changed or even tweaked since 1999, despite Russia's indication of interest in new proposals.²⁶ But it is still critical to remember that ultimately these agreements, while important, may not be a full substitute for an agreement that includes legally binding limits, information exchanges, and a verification regime.²⁷

CONCLUSIONS

A Western arms control expert once remarked that he felt like he was watching 300 years of European hostilities unfold during the course of CFE negotiations. Critics of this process are frequently captivated by the technical details of definitions, counting rules, stabilizing measures, inspection regimes, etc., and often overlook the connection between these points and larger security issues. While the "devil may be in the details," this accord is rooted in the collective attempt of over 30 sovereign states to improve their respective security and enhance stability on the continent. Historical antagonism has an impact, as well as contributing to the agreement's enduring value as Europe seeks a new architecture based on cooperative security.

With the rising threat of transnational issues such as nuclear proliferation and terrorism, the fate of conventional arms control in Europe may not top the priority agenda for NATO's leadership. But this may be precisely why a renewed effort in conventional arms control as a means of stability is appropriate for American and European leaders. European defense

spending has been in steady decline for the past decade and may well continue on a downward trajectory in light of ongoing economic challenges.²⁸ At the NATO Summit in Prague in 2002, all NATO members endorsed a target for each country to spend at least 2 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. By 2011, only three European members of the Alliance met this goal—Greece, the United Kingdom, and France—and the average expenditure was below 1.5 percent of GDP.²⁹ These developments, coupled with serious American economic challenges, caused Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to comment in his final speech at NATO headquarters:

. . . if current trends in the decline of European defense capabilities are not halted and reversed, future U.S. political leaders—those for whom the Cold War was not the formative experience that it was for me—may not consider the return on America’s investment in NATO worth the cost.³⁰

While the original purpose of the treaty—to reduce the risk of conflict and short-warning attacks between two blocs—may be a thing of the past, the CFE Treaty continues to contribute to current and future European security and stability in crucial ways. Perhaps most importantly, the transparency and predictability that it provides serve as important stabilizing elements as European relationships continue to evolve, military forces modernize, and both sides of the Atlantic wrestle with the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression. Policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic will ignore its contributions to European stability at their peril.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 7

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