

Gorbachev has NATO in a corner

Western Europe's leaders are in a serious fluster thanks to the latest rabbit that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has pulled out of his hat. What he did was to commit a nefarious and unthinkable breach of big power diplomacy. Gorbachev accepted all of NATO's major nuclear arms reduction proposals.

NATO never for a moment suspected the Soviets would do anything so dastardly. The West's proposals to scrap all intermediate and short-range nuclear missiles in Europe were merely aimed at placating European public opinion. By cheerfully acceding to NATO's offer, Gorbachev has forced Europe's political leaders into a corner and unmasked their hypocritical attitude toward nuclear arms.

Put simply, NATO loves its nukes. The reason has to do with cost and votes. The western alliance is outnumbered and outgunned by the Warsaw Pact in conventional forces by 2.5:1 or 3:1 (depending on how one measures Soviet force potential). If Europe cannot match the pact's military muscle, it will end up being pushed around by the big bully from east of the Elbe River. So the choice is to either massively increase spending for non-nuclear forces or rely on the threat of tactical nuclear weapons to counterbalance the Soviet threat.

Europe's leaders have always chosen the latter course. Big Brother America supplies most of the nuclear weaponry for free. Raising one new mechanized division in Western Europe would cost at least \$2.5 billion U.S. To provide a minimal effective conventional counterforce to the Warsaw Pact's armored armies, NATO would have to build some 15 new heavy mechanized divisions — at a



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cost of \$37.5 billion U.S., plus billions more to sustain them.

Funds to do this would have to come from either massive cuts in vote-getting welfare spending or higher taxes.

Canada faces precisely the same problem. Imagine Brian Mulroney going to the public and announcing another tax surcharge of 5% in order to create a new Canadian division for Europe. No way, say Europe's politicians, let's keep our lovely, low-cost nuclear weapons.

The Soviets, by contrast, don't need any nuclear arms. They have seas of men, tanks, guns and aircraft. Soviet tank generals hate the thought of their massed armored corps becoming targets for nasty NATO nuclear weapons. The Soviets, if truth be told, would be equally happy to ditch their nuclear ICBMs. It's the West that won't let go. After all, nuclear weapons are the cheapest way ever invented to kill people.

No wonder the Europeans are squirming. Their politicians are desperately trying to find objections to the Soviet offers. What an irony that Mikhail Gorbachev may finally force Western Europe to do what Washington has been nagging it to do for years — spend more on conventional forces.

Is this good for the West? I think so. It's about time that Western Europe assumed its own defence and its fair share of NATO costs — and add in that champion alliance shirker, Canada.

The nations of Western Europe could easily field larger and better-armed forces than the Warsaw Pact, allowing the U.S. to withdraw a good portion of its 325,000 European-based troops. These U.S. soldiers and airmen could be readied for deployment to other threatened areas — particularly the Mideast or Latin America.

European taxpayers and welfare train riders will, of course, squeal — probably even louder than its anti-nuclear agitators now do. Too bad. Europeans live very well and can afford a few fiscal bumps. Life might even go on in Canada without, say, baby bonus cheques or — gasp — the Canada Council. It would not be bad for Western Europe or Canada to break their military dependence on Big Daddy Warbucks in Washington.

To do so requires political courage and caution. Any agreement to scrap all nuclear missiles in Europe must be phased over years so that Western Europe can build up its conventional forces — or, and this will be far harder, to convince the USSR to cut its huge armies.

Caution must be taken to ensure that once Europe strips away its nuclear shield it will not find another Stalin sitting in the Kremlin while a hapless Gorbachev ends up running a dam in Siberia.

Still, the West must allow the winds of change to fill its sails. Getting rid of nuclear-armed missiles in Europe is clearly a prelude to scrapping the ICBMs that threaten life on our planet. Such an opportunity must take precedence over votes and taxes.