

Christoph Bluth. *The Two Germanies and Military Security in Europe.* Cold War History Series. Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. viii + 276 pp. Acknowledgments, text, notes, bibliography, index. \$72.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-333-96893-x.

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Published by H-German (June, 2003)

Germany and Cold War Security

A hellish scenario haunted western policy-makers throughout the Cold War. In this nightmare, the Warsaw Pact nations, bolstered by the Soviet Union's enormous superiority in conventional weapons and doubting western resolve to use its nuclear arsenal, would launch a pre-emptive conventional strike through West Germany. To most western observers, such a strike seemed certain either to reach the English Channel within a number of days or to escalate into a full scale nuclear war. The United States and its NATO allies from the 1950s onward grappled with the question of how best to counter the asymmetry in conventional forces in Europe between the Soviet bloc and the West. Quarrels ensued, in which the strategic visions of western European nations diverged from the United States and from each other. On the one hand, a succession of American Presidents, from Dwight D. Eisenhower to George H.W. Bush, set forth often contradictory strategic doctrines to deal with the American desire to see western Europe arm itself to deter Soviet aggression, while increasing American overtures to de-escalate (or escalate) the nuclear arms race. At the same time, western Europeans jockeyed for position either to follow or to flout the American lead. They also pushed for a way to avoid a conventional arms race that would be financially ruinous and strategically perilous. Moreover, western Europeans suspected that the United States would cut a deal with the Soviets over their heads, leaving western Europe vulnerable to Soviet blackmail. At the center of this lay West German initiatives of *Ostpolitik* and the decades-long series of negotiations that culminated in the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) Treaty signed provisionally on July 10, 1992. Christoph Bluth, in his new book *The Two Germanies and Military Security in Europe*, examines the MBFR and the

role played by East and West Germany in its initiation, evolution, and resolution.

Bluth spends considerable time setting the stage before arriving at the MBFR negotiations that began in the 1970s. His first three chapters deal with the evolution of East and West German policies, from division to *détente*, within a context of shifting Superpower. For West Germany, this meant the change from Adenauer's policy of *Politik der Stärke* in the 1950s to Brandt's *Ostpolitik* at the end of the 1960s. These two policies sought to achieve the same goal, German reunification, but looked in opposite directions for the solution to Germany's division. Adenauer looked to a position of strength, found in westward integration, to achieve reunification, while Brandt believed reunification to be impossible without an accommodation with the Soviet Union and East Germany. Bluth demonstrates how these policies intersected with the shifting American containment doctrines of the New Look, Flexible Response, and, later, Nixon and Kissinger's Grand Design. Of special note was the gap that emerged between American strategic thinking over flexible response and Robert McNamara's insistence that conventional forces be sufficient to hold up a Soviet conventional thrust into western Europe long enough to broker a cease fire before resorting to nuclear weapons. For the West Germans, as Bluth argues, "the defense of Germany against a massive attack from the East was impossible without recourse to nuclear weapons, while the use of nuclear weapons would be totally catastrophic" (p. 68). By the early 1970s, public opinion called for a reduced reliance on nuclear weapons. Strategically, this would necessitate an increase in both quality and quantity of conventional forces. Just as forcefully, however, West German public opinion also called for keeping defense spending down. One solution to this conundrum would be a

mutual reduction in conventional forces.

In the East, Bluth makes it clear that the Soviet Union ruled the roost. He therefore concentrates on Soviet military policy. The Soviet Union enjoyed several advantages over the United States and NATO. In addition to fielding a much larger conventional force than NATO could, the Soviet Union could easily reinforce its troops in the event of a war in western Europe. The United States, on the other hand, was reliant on a tenuous ocean supply line. In other words, the NATO forces that were in Europe when the shooting started would have to hold up the Soviet forces. On the other hand, the quality and loyalty of American allies far outshined the reliability of Russia's Warsaw Pact colleagues. Soviet troops in Eastern Europe served double duty: first, they were to be the possible invasion or defense force against NATO, and second, they were there to keep unpopular communist regimes in place. NATO superiority in air power and the introduction of Theatre Nuclear Forces (TNF) negated much of the Soviet superiority in conventional forces. Nevertheless, as the author explains, Soviet military doctrine by the 1970s envisioned a quick theater nuclear strike followed immediately by a massive invasion of western Europe, "thus presenting the United States with the *fait accompli* of having been excluded from Europe" (p. 100). What is striking about this chapter is the author's use of East German archival material to reveal just how much the Warsaw Pact understood of NATO strategy. For instance, on the use of TNF, Bluth persuasively shows that the Warsaw Pact clearly was attuned to when and in what circumstances NATO would use these nuclear weapons (p. 102). Bluth summarizes the inherently contradictory motivations that lay behind the approach to MBFR negotiations as follows: "Both sides dedicated their military efforts to negate the military objectives of the other [...]. Thus the priority for the Western side was to reduce the preponderance in ground forces on the Eastern side. For the Eastern side, the priority was to inhibit Western implementation of flexible response by reducing air strike forces and nuclear weapons while maintaining the existing balance of ground forces at lower levels" (pp. 118-19).

The next four chapters examine in minute detail the inception, development and settlement of the MBFR talks. The immediate catalyst to these talks derived from domestic pressure in the United

States to devolve its expensive military commitment in Europe. Brezhnev accepted a NATO offer to commence MBFR negotiations, as Bluth points out, "just as the critical vote on the Mansfield Resolution in the US Senate was approaching" (p. 167). This development added to the western European impetus for MBFR talks. It also convinced the Soviets that they too could negotiate with the West successfully. Despite negotiations from 1973 onward, the talks became mired on the question of which forces were to be withdrawn. The Soviets wanted limitations on American TNF and air forces. The West wanted an uneven withdrawal from Europe favoring the West, given the preponderance of Soviet forces. Eventually, the MBFR only gained momentum when the Reagan Administration's "zero option" for Europe (a dismantling of all TNF, excluding British, French and American submarine launched missiles) intersected with Gorbachev's New Thinking. The Soviet leader unilaterally withdrew large numbers of Russian troops from Eastern Europe and allowed the dissolution of the Soviet East European empire. The Reagan era momentum towards MBFR stalled under his successor, George H.W. Bush. The MBFR negotiations became bogged down over Soviet unwillingness to destroy weaponry agreed upon during previous talks. It was only after the end of the Soviet Union that a final treaty was signed.

In many ways, Bluth's study underscores a point that, at one time, seemed obvious: namely, that the Cold War was a conflict largely shaped by military and strategic considerations. By centering his discussion on military security and the disparity between Soviet forces and those assembled in the West, Bluth returns to ground well tilled by Raymond Garthoff, among others.[1] What makes this study different is his methodology, especially his use of East German sources, and his focus, the MBFR talks. The East German sources give Bluth a new vista from which to view the intentions of the Eastern Bloc. The MBFR talks emerge as a vehicle to re-examine larger strategic issues between East and West as well as within the blocs. In this endeavor he is largely successful.

This is not a book for the faint of heart, however. While the first three chapters provide a very useful synthetic overview of the evolution of European strategic doctrine during the Cold War, the last four chapters contain so much detail that often the reader loses the forest for the trees.

Another stylistic shortcoming is the lack of a table of abbreviations. On one occasion I was forced to consult an endnote to find the meaning of an acronym. One should be forewarned that it may be too detailed for the undergraduate classroom, though it would be a welcome addition in a graduate reading seminar. That being said, this book should be examined by anyone interested in Cold War Europe. It reminds us, especially in the author's bone-chilling description of Soviet military plans that included a first strike with tactical nuclear weapons against such cities as Munich, that the Cold War was much more than just a cultural phenomenon. It was a deadly competition between two adversaries armed to the teeth with weapons whose use would have ended European civilization.

Note:

[1]. For instance, see Raymond Gartoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985. pp. 479-83.

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Library of Congress call number: UA710.B82 2002

Subjects:

- National security -- Germany (West)
- National security -- Germany (East)
- National security -- Europe -- History -- 20th century
- Cold War

Citation: Henry Burke Wend. "Review of Christoph Bluth, *The Two Germanies and Military Security in Europe*, H-German, H-Net Reviews, June, 2003.

URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=297621058124045>.

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