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Research Note

CONSENSUS LOST?

Domestic Politics and the "Crisis" in NATO

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THE year 1979 saw both the 30th anniversary of the NATO Alliance and the beginning of a widely perceived crisis in Western security relations. Buffeted by external events and challenged by domestic pressures, NATO was subjected to heated debate and proposals for reform in virtually all aspects of its operation. The decision to deploy modern intermediate nuclear forces (INF) was the cause of the most visible controversy, but it was hardly the only one. The revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the suppression of the Solidarity movement in Poland, the pipeline controversy—all of these issues produced a level of acrimony that at times surpassed even that of nuclear strategy. Finally, just as the INF debate seemed becalmed by the initiation of arms control negotiations, the announcement of the American strategic defense initiative (SDI) produced yet another problem on which Americans and Europeans were challenged to harmonize their views.

To some observers, this succession of arguments and controversies was both familiar and understandable. Anton DePorte, who in 1979 had described the enduring constraints that had anchored NATO for 30 years, restated his thesis in 1983. The Alliance, he argued, had never seen a perfect community of views. Rather, its members were joined by a common interest in deterring Soviet power in Europe—an interest that did not preclude disagreement on the means to the end or differences on issues that went beyond the core of Alliance concerns in Europe. So long as Alliance members recognized the Soviet threat in Europe and the dearth of feasible alternatives to meet that threat, NATO was likely to endure.¹

Yet DePorte had also cautioned that this structure of stability might be threatened by domestic change: "A new challenge, not yet in focus, is the

* The research reported in this essay was supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.
¹ Anton DePorte, "NATO of the Future: Less is More," *The Fletcher Forum* 7 (Winter 1983), 1-26, and DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers: The Enduring Balance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

prospect that economic difficulties and political realignments within the advanced countries may call into question their internal stability and the relations between them."² As the 1980s progressed, it was precisely these economic and political difficulties that became the objects of intense concern. The recession of the early 1980s placed a heavy burden on defense debates because reform of security policy raised the prospect of tradeoffs among "guns, butter, and growth." In the political sphere, the explosion of peace movements and the nervousness of public opinion challenged the consensus on which the Alliance had rested for 30 years. Writing at the height of the INF controversy, Lawrence Freedman argued that "whether a strategic doctrine is acceptable to the people for whom it has been developed is as important in an alliance of democratic societies as that doctrine's ability to impress the enemy."³

But if the problem of domestic consensus was generally seen as NATO's major ail, specific diagnoses were more difficult to find. To be sure, domestic constraints—especially public opinion—were much studied, but both the degree of dissensus and its origins remained unclear. Summing up a comprehensive historical review of public opinion in all NATO countries, Flynn and Rattinger concluded in 1985: "In a study like this, one is dealing with hundreds and thousands of tiny pieces of information. . . . The problem for the researcher as well as the political decision maker is to make sense out of such a multitude of individual observations."⁴

The purpose of this essay is to present further data on the degree of domestic cleavage on security issues within NATO countries, and to attempt an explanation of these cleavages. The essay includes a summary of research on public and elite opinion in the United States, Britain, France, West Germany, and the Netherlands. In the first section, we summarize public opinion concerning the NATO Alliance, the military balance, defense spending, nuclear weapons, and—in the case of Europeans—the recent drift of American foreign policy. All of these surveys used large samples designed to ensure the representativeness of the results. In the second section, we report major themes and questions that arose in interviews with approximately 180 European and American "influentials." These conversations were held during 1981 and 1982, the period of most intense controversy within the Alliance. Each followed a standard format. Although we do not claim to have studied a represent-

¹ *Ibid.*, 243.
² Freedman, "NATO Myths," *Foreign Policy*, No. 45 (Winter 1982), 48.
³ Gregory Flynn and Hans Rattinger, eds., *The Public and Atlantic Defense* (Tucson, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 381.

active sample of elites, we believe we can describe the attitudes, concerns, and predictions of officials and other influentials who were closest to policy debates during a critical period in the Alliance's history. In the third section, we compare elite and public opinions; we conclude that, with the exception of the nuclear issue, the public and its officials are largely in agreement.

I. CONSENSUS LOST? PUBLIC OPINION AND NATIONAL SECURITY

As controversy in NATO deepened during the early 1980s, the most frequent concern expressed by scholars and government officials was the apparent rise in European neutralism and American unilateralism.¹ These fears seem to have been unfounded. Table 1 summarizes available surveys on the perceived need for the NATO Alliance or support for continued membership. Public support for the Alliance has been quite high in four of the five countries examined here, and largely stable over time in all countries. Not surprisingly, it is only in France that support for NATO is low. In Britain, West Germany, and the Netherlands, support for NATO has been high and largely unwavering from the mid-1960s through the most recent poll in 1984. In the United States, support for maintaining or increasing the NATO commitment rose from 54 percent in 1974 to 67 percent in 1978 and 1982. Support for the use of American troops to defend Europe also increased from about 50 percent in the early and mid-1970s to 64 percent in 1982.²

A surprising feature of the more recent responses to these surveys is that the importance of NATO held constant or increased in precisely the two countries where the Alliance has been most controversial: in West Germany, where the INF issue produced profound domestic divisions, and in the United States, where a perceived lack of support from the European allies once again led to discussions of burden-sharing and "go it alone" strategies. This apparent anomaly is probably explained by several factors. The first is the familiar "threat-cohesion" response. In the United States, there may be frustration with the apparent uncooperativeness of allies, but there is also a very strong sensitivity to Soviet power, and thus to the utility of the Alliance. In West Germany, attitudes are no doubt also affected by threat perceptions, but there is the additional factor of the lack of alternatives. Most analyses of West German politics emphasize

¹ Walter Laqueur, "Hollandsiteit: A New Stage of European Neutralism," *Commentary* 72 (August 19, 1981), 19-26.

² William Schneider, "Peace and Strength: American Public Opinion on National Security," in Flynn and Rattinger (in. 4), 359-366; William Watts and Lloyd Free, "Internationalism Comes of Age . . . Again," *Public Opinion* 3 (March/April 1980), 47.

that there has been no shortage of debate in the Federal Republic on issues concerning Atlantic security. Nonetheless, as has been true since 1949, West German policy is strongly constrained by suspicions in both East and West that would be strengthened by an overly independent stance in Bonn. Indeed, concern for the future orientation of Germany probably conditions the high level of attachment to NATO in other countries as well. As fears of German neutralism and nationalism sharpened during the INF debate, West Germans moved forcefully to restate the importance of the Atlantic connection and membership in NATO as a stabilizing force in *Western* perceptions.³

Just as the total level of support for NATO has been steady over the past few decades, so has the distribution of support among major political parties in all member countries. In the United Kingdom, a 1983 poll showed that Conservative Party voters and supporters of the Liberal/SDP alliance favored NATO membership at the level of 91 percent, while Labour Party members also supported NATO at a high level of 72 percent. The sentiments of the three main Dutch political parties closely resemble those of the British. In 1981, 95 percent of the VVD (Liberal) party voters believed that the Netherlands should remain in NATO, as did 90 percent of CDA (Christian Democratic) voters and 70 percent of PvdA (Labor) supporters. In the Federal Republic, a 1983 poll showed that only Green Party voters were less than enthusiastic about NATO, but even the Greens found the Alliance necessary by an astounding 56 percent. Members of the SPD, CDU/CSU, and FDP supported NATO with 86 percent, 96 percent, and 95 percent, respectively, responding that NATO membership is necessary to German security. Although France has a qualified relationship with the Alliance, only Communist Party voters favored a position of absolute neutrality; members of the other French parties were fragmented among a variety of alternatives to NATO.⁴

Despite frequent mention of European "neutralism," these high levels of support for NATO should not come as a surprise. After all, even the parties that have been most critical of NATO policies, such as INF, continue to assert their strong endorsement of the Alliance itself. Nonetheless, there is a further question to which most scholars and statesmen have turned their attention: a different aspect of the problem lies in the changing values and priorities of the "successor" generation that matured during the era of detente and arms control. Most analyses of generational

³ The most explicit analysis along these lines is Joseph Joffe, "Europe's American Pacific," *Foreign Policy*, No. 54 (Spring 1984), 64-82.

⁴ The figures in the preceding paragraph are taken from Flynn and Rattinger (in. 4), 61, 167, 94, and from Netherlands Institute for Public Opinion (NIPX), *Bericht* No. 2112 (Amsterdam, April 1981).

TABLE I
PUBLIC OPINION AND THE COMMITMENT TO NATO*

	NATO is Essential		NATO is not Essential		Don't Know
	NATO is Essential		NATO is not Essential		
FRANCE					
1967	34%		30%		36%
1969	47		37		16
1971	54		35		11
1973	42		34		25
1976	42		35		23
1977	44		29		27
1978	39		35		26
1980	44		34		23
GREAT BRITAIN					
1967	59		15		26
1969	68		15		17
1971	81		12		7
1976	69		15		16
1977	73		8		19
1978	70		10		20
1980	79		13		8
1981	70		15		15
1984	76		12		12
1985	76		13		11
WEST GERMANY					
1967	67		17		16
1969	76		13		11
1971	84		11		5
1973	73		13		14
1976	85		10		5
1977	79		7		14
1978	84		5		11
1980	88		8		4
1981	62		20		19
1984	87		10		3
NETHERLANDS					
1981	62		27		11
1984	58		20		22

TABLE I (continued)

	Remain in NATO		Withdraw		Don't Know	
	Remain in NATO		Withdraw		Don't Know	
NETHERLANDS						
1969	65%		13%		22%	
1971	71		12		17	
1972	65		16		19	
1974	76		9		15	
1979	76		12		12	
1980	76		14		10	
1981	78		14		8	
UNITED STATES						
1974	54		20		26	
1978	67		13		20	
1982	67		15		18	

* In Europe, the question asked is whether "NATO is still essential for our country's security." In the United States, the question is whether the commitment of U.S. troops to NATO should be increased, maintained, decreased or ended.

Sources: For "NATO Essential," Kenneth Adler and Douglas Wertman, "West European Security Concerns for the 1980s: Is NATO in Trouble?," Paper prepared for delivery to the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Public Opinion Research, Buck Hill Falls, PA, May, 1981; United States Information Agency (USIA), "NATO and Burden Sharing," (Washington, DC: Research Memorandum, R-11-1984), Table 1. For the United States, Schneider (fn. 6). For the Netherlands, Netherlands Institute of Public Opinion (NIPO), Reports 1648, A-497/42, 2023, and 2112.

change have focused on the young age cohorts with a university education, for it is this generation that experienced the affluence and the secure international environment that are considered the sources of change in values and policy views.⁹ Table 2 compares opinions of NATO held by this group to the views of the older generation. Allowing for sampling variation in these small subsamples, differences between the views of these two groups must be considered minor.¹⁰ In West Germany, differences on alliance alternatives are very small between the age groups; in

⁹ See Ronald Ingehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Postwar Europeans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), and Stephen Szabo, ed., *The Successor Generation* (London: Butterworth's, 1983).

¹⁰ In subsamples of this size, differences of about 15 percentage points are statistically significant.

TABLE 2
NATO AND ALLIANCE ALTERNATIVES:
VIEWS OF HIGHER-EDUCATED EUROPEANS*

	Higher-Educated Only		Total Population
	Under 35	Over 35	
FRANCE			
No Alliance	6%	6%	12%
European Alliance	14	20	14
European/U.S.A.	22	24	24
NATO as is	20	17	15
	N = 131	56	995
GREAT BRITAIN			
No Alliance	5%	5%	10%
European Alliance	6	0	5
European/U.S.A.	25	33	27
NATO as is	50	52	48
	N = 81	42	1058
WEST GERMANY			
No Alliance	1%	2%	3%
European Alliance	1	3	4
European/U.S.A.	21	15	20
NATO as is	58	67	64
	N = 71	126	1008
NETHERLANDS			
No Alliance	4%	2%	4%
European Alliance	9	6	7
European/U.S.A.	17	18	18
NATO as is	44	63	53
	N = 250	148	1085

* Full wording of alternatives is as follows: No alliance: "without belonging to any military alliance"; European Alliance: "an independent West European defense force ... but not allied to the U.S."; European/U.S.A.: "establish a unified West European defense force ... allied to the U.S."; NATO as is: "continue in NATO ..."; Other alternatives (not shown): "accommodate Soviets"; Gaullist NATO model: Higher education is defined as 19 years or older on completion of education. Unless otherwise shown, percentages in this and following tables are based on those expressing an opinion (i.e., excluding don't-knows and non-responses).

Source: Commission of the European Communities, *Euro-Barometer 14, October 1980*, (Ann Arbor: ICPSR Study Number 7958).

any case, well over 70 percent choose one of two options that involve alliance with the United States (majorities of both groups support NATO as is). In Britain, the figures are similar, but the "European option" is more popular than in West Germany. The Dutch figures do show some of the successor-generation effect (the young are less enthusiastic about NATO); but, once again, majorities of both age groups support either NATO as it now stands or a European command allied to the United States. In France, there is neither support for NATO nor consensus on any alternative—a result that seems unsurprising and uncontroversial in light of official French policy. Generational differences are also minor in France.

With regard to membership in the Atlantic Alliance, then, support is high, stable over time, and widespread among party, age, and educational groups. Thus, these polls strongly contradict other surveys that find an apparent affinity for neutralism in many European countries. "We believe the polls reviewed here to be more reflective of the options facing citizens in NATO countries because they offer a choice between NATO as currently constituted and a number of real alternatives. Public opinion chooses NATO. Surveys revealing the hypothetical attractiveness of neutralism may reflect the wish, but they do not consider the constraints. Although the figures for the other countries do not match the near-unanimous West German attachment to the Alliance, they do suggest the continuing relevance of interpretations that find the endurance of the Alliance to be rooted in the unpopularity of the alternatives."

Nonetheless, there is the further question of whether this commitment is merely symbolic, or perhaps even reflective of the "free-riding" logic so often discussed in relation to NATO. After all, a continuing commitment to NATO does not preclude disagreement or nonperformance in any number of policy areas. Indeed, commitment to membership might be seen as the minimum condition of free-riding.

To some extent, the answer to this question depends on one's expectations. For alliance minimalists (such as DePorte), it is sufficient to continue membership, with all its implications for commitment of troops and equipment, since those are the components of the Alliance's central purpose of deterring Soviet influence in Europe. The polls are telling on this point, both because the question on commitment to membership is continually posed (frequently under the sponsorship of the U.S. government) and because support for membership reaches levels rarely seen in public opinion surveys on any political issue. Nor can the issue be viewed as en-

¹¹ See, for example, the two polls reported in *Public Opinion 6* (February/March 1983), 6.

¹² The most emphatic statement of this interpretation is DePorte (in. 1, 1979).

tirely symbolic, because European governments often justify their policies domestically with the need to maintain NATO commitments. The need for NATO is neither self-evident nor cost-free in European eyes, a fact that further underscores the depth of the commitment revealed in the surveys.

Moreover, this commitment underwent a severe test during the early 1980s. Faith in the senior Alliance partner very nearly collapsed during the tense years of 1981 and 1982. The INF issue defined the cost of Alliance membership quite clearly and explicitly. Throughout the debate, the issue of "independence versus alliance" lurked in the background—as in British debates on ultimate control of INF and in German ones on national unity and *Ostpolitik*. Commitment to membership in the Alliance may well be a minimum condition, but that commitment underwent a severe test during the 1980s, and support for NATO emerged higher than ever.

Other areas of public opinion are not marked by similar uniformity. Table 3 sets out assessments of the East-West military balance among younger and older respondents with higher education. The survey shows a different profile in each country. In France, there is stark evidence of a successor generation that sees things quite differently from its elders: 60 percent of young, educated respondents see the West as more powerful—exactly the reverse of the older generation. In Britain, both age groups have a lower opinion of Western military power, but it is the *older* generation rather than the successor generation that is relatively more optimistic. West Germany provides a final variant: there is no difference to speak of between age groups in the Federal Republic. In summary, public opinions on the East-West military balance are much more complex than those on the Alliance itself. There is considerable variation among countries, and each shows a somewhat different pattern of generational cleavage.

Public opinion on military spending produces yet further complications. Table 4 shows opinions on "defense spending in support of NATO." In France and West Germany, both the younger and older generations of the more highly educated show disproportionate hostility to defense spending (i.e., greater desire to cut spending than their less educated cohorts); in Britain, only the *older* generation does so.¹³ In the Netherlands, the successor generation displays the expected pattern.

A more detailed presentation of these data would involve long and

¹³ As noted in fn. 10, caution is warranted when comparing very small subsamples. These differences, averaging about 10%, are not statistically significant. Nonetheless, the pattern shows up in other surveys as well, and the left-right distribution noted below is consistent.

TABLE 3
THE EAST-WEST MILITARY BALANCE:
VIEWS OF HIGHER-EDUCATED EUROPEANS*

	Higher-Educated Only		Total Population
	Under 35	Over 35	
FRANCE			
West More Powerful	60%	39%	50%
East More Powerful	40	61	50
Equal	N/A	N/A	N/A
	N = 92	62	617
GREAT BRITAIN			
West More Powerful	19%	35%	31%
East More Powerful	72	53	57
Equal	10	12	12
	N = 74	49	850
WEST GERMANY			
West More Powerful	43%	41%	45%
East More Powerful	57	59	55
Equal	N/A	N/A	N/A
	N = 35	32	802

* Which do you think is more powerful at the present time—the West, that is the NATO countries, or the East—that is the Warsaw Pact countries? "Both equal" is volunteered by respondents (followed in Britain only). The survey was not conducted in the Netherlands.

Source: USJA, 1986 *Multinational Security Survey* (U.S. National Archives and Record Service, Machine-Readable Study Number 11007/RG-1106).

complicated tables of survey figures, but we can summarize additional findings here. Examination of several surveys over the period 1979-1983 produces further evidence that, in Britain and West Germany, the educated of both generations are on occasion more skeptical of NATO policies than is the population at large.¹⁴ On closer analysis, it turns out that most of these skeptics are members of parties of the center-left (Socialist, Labour, Social Democrat). The educated of the center-right do not show the same pattern. In the young, this is uncontroversial, for most theories of generational change would predict a concentration of young, educated

¹⁴ This pattern is less true of France and the Netherlands, where there is good evidence of largely partisan cleavages complicated by a very skeptical successor generation.

TABLE 4
OPINIONS ON DEFENSE SPENDING IN SUPPORT OF NATO
BY AGE AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION*

	Under 35			Over 35		
	Lower Education	Higher Education	N	Lower Education	Higher Education	N
FRANCE						
Decrease	46%	58%		34%	53%	
Keep Same	49	35		63	38	
Increase	4	7		3	10	
	N = 109		116	247		41
GREAT BRITAIN						
Decrease	17%	20%		16%	26%	
Keep Same	53	48		51	44	
Increase	30	32		34	29	
	N = 275		79	474		41
WEST GERMANY						
Decrease	18%	29%		19%	27%	
Keep Same	56	46		60	51	
Increase	27	25		21	23	
	N = 246		68	417		131
NETHERLANDS						
Decrease	38%	43%		30%	20%	
Keep Same	55	49		56	62	
Increase	7	8		14	18	
	N = 211		231	381		142

* Higher education is defined as 19 years or older on completion of full-time education.
Source: See Table 2.

people in parties of the left. But the data also suggest that at some times and in response to some survey questions, older members of center-left parties have opinions that resemble those of younger party members. In summary, on some issues of perception and policy, there is evidence that an important line of division in public opinion is the traditional one of left and right rather than the much-discussed polarization of young and old. We do not find this surprising. Domestic politics over 30 years of

NATO's existence experienced a periodic recurrence of party conflict on such issues as relations with the Soviets, defense spending, and nuclear weapons. To be sure, those debates have at times been muted. But the basic orientations apparently remained, to be sensitized once again when difficult choices reached NATO's agenda. After all, the younger generation was socialized during the time of détente, but their elders grew to maturity during a period of intense controversy on security issues—controversies in which political parties played a prominent role.

This interpretation seems particularly applicable to opinions on defense spending, the issue that produces the deepest and, crossnationally, the most uniform pattern of polarization of any we encountered in our research (see Table 5). When defense spending is considered in the context of recent budgetary politics, the salience of party attachments is revealing. The most recent recession saw a reorientation, if not a drastic overhaul, in the budgetary policy of each country under study here. In the recession of 1981-1982, all Western governments reversed the countercyclical spending pattern that had characterized their responses to the recession of 1974-1975. For example, in the United States, social security spending grew by 12.4 percent during the recession of 1974-1975, but by only 7.3 percent during 1979-1981. The slowdown was noticeable in other countries as well (France: 10.3 percent and 5.6 percent; Britain: 5.6 percent and 4.1 percent; Germany: 10.9 percent and 3.1 percent; Netherlands: 8.7 percent and 2.7 percent). Moreover, the growth rate of spending in the most recent recession was generally lower than it had been even in non-recessionary years of the 1970s.¹⁵ Whereas in the past there was generally growth in both defense and civilian spending as well as an acceleration of spending at times of recession, in the early 1980s civil spending was curtailed just when demands for increases in defense spending were heard.

Perhaps this situation explains a somewhat unexpected feature of trends in public opinions on defense spending: despite détente and the economic shocks of the 1970s, public opposition to defense spending was actually lower in 1979 in every country examined here than it had been a decade (or more) earlier.¹⁶ It was only in 1981 that sentiment to cut defense spending began to rise. In some countries, such as the United States and Great Britain, public support for defense spending had by 1985 col-

¹⁵ Figures are calculated using data and GNP deflator from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *National Account Statistics of OECD Member Countries*, Vol. II, *Detailed Tables* (Paris: OECD, 1983), Table 9.

¹⁶ This summary is based on the following surveys and sources: U.S.A.: Gallup, 1971-1988; Great Britain: Gallup, 1961-1988; France: United States Information Agency (USIA), 1968-1982; West Germany: Federal Ministry of Defense, 1968-1984; Netherlands: NIPO and USIA, 1970-1984.

TABLE 5
PUBLIC VIEWS OF DEFENSE SPENDING AMONG MEMBERS OF MAJOR PARTIES*

	Keep Same		Increase	N ^b
	Decrease	Same		
FRANCE				
Communists	71%	24%	4%	51
Ecologists	63	32	6	50
Socialists	48	49	2	135
UDF (Giscard)	20	75	4	51
RPR (Gaullist)	16	76	8	39
Total Population	43%	52%	5%	416
GREAT BRITAIN				
Labour	25%	53%	22%	292
Liberal	18	59	22	109
Conservative	8	50	43	313
Total Population	18%	51%	31%	775
WEST GERMANY				
Greens	69%	28%	3%	32
Social Democrats	19	62	19	362
Free Democrats	25	60	16	94
CDU/CSU (Union)	15	49	36	278
Total Population	21%	56%	24%	792
NETHERLANDS				
Labour (PvdA)	47%	49%	5%	228
D '66	36	56	8	151
CDA (Alliance)	13	75	12	235
VVD (Liberals)	11	61	29	115
Total Population	33%	56%	11%	862
UNITED STATES				
Democrats	17%	26%	45%	Don't Know
Republicans	7	23	60	12%
Independents	12	23	52	13
Total Population	14%	24%	49%	13%

* In Europe, question inquired about "defense spending in support of NATO." In the United States, question asked if "defense spending is too much, too little, or just about the right amount." U.S. percentages include "don't know" and nonresponses, as shown.

^b For Europeans, percentages for total population include partisans of other parties not shown here.

Sources: For European countries, *Eurobarometer 14* (Table 2); for the United States, *Gallup Opinion Index*, No. 175 (February, 1980), 10.

lapsed to levels approaching postwar lows; in other countries, there was either a modest increase in sentiment to cut spending or a modest increase in the percentage of the public who wanted defense spending kept at stable levels. Because the 1970s were a time of growth in both guns and butter, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the recent deterioration in support for defense spending is the result of the shift to budget austerity rather than the result of a more general "antidéfense" rebellion. Nor is it surprising that citizens would rally to the familiar partisan positions that have long structured distributive debates.

Polarization in budgetary politics occurred simultaneously with one of the most intense controversies in NATO's history: the decision in December 1979 to deploy modern intermediate range nuclear weapons. Public opinion on nuclear weapons and INF has become something of a controversy itself, as the variety of questions put to the public have produced a (predictable) variety of opinion profiles in response. Nonetheless, a comprehensive review of public opinion on nuclear weapons issues across a number of different wordings yields important insights into the public's concerns.

There are several noticeable patterns. The first is somewhat surprising in view of the visibility of protest in Europe: people in general accept the concept of nuclear deterrence. This may not be new as far as the French and the British are concerned, but even the Dutch believed (by a majority in 1982) that nuclear weapons had helped to preserve peace and that NATO would have to depend on them in the future for deterrence purposes. A second pattern is also clear, however: in all European countries, the percentage who support first-use of nuclear weapons is very small; substantial minorities (in some cases majorities) favor using nuclear weapons only if the Soviets use them first. There is also strong support for the argument that nuclear weapons should never be used. Thus, although European publics support deterrence, they are decidedly hostile to the use of nuclear weapons—a sentiment they share with the Americans public.¹⁷

Opinions on the INF deployment are somewhat more complex. Across a wide range of surveys on the issue, it is clear that the best characterization is also the most ambivalent: it is about evenly divided in all countries, with somewhat stronger (British) or weaker (Dutch, West German) levels on some questions. But it is also clear that opinions on INF were heavily colored by the way the questions are worded. For example, when

¹⁷ Lisa Belisky and John Doble, *Voter Opinions and Nuclear Weapons: A Briefing Book for the 1984 Elections* (New York: Public Agenda Foundation, 1984). European figures are from Richard C. Eschenberg, "The Myth of Hollandite," *International Security* 8 (Fall 1983), 151, 155.

NATO commitments are mentioned, support increases. Two additional factors are summarized in Table 6. The figures set out in the Table show responses to two separate questions, one mentioning "Soviet warheads" and the other mentioning arms control negotiations. Both wordings reduce opposition to INF; it is 30 percent to 50 percent in these polls, as compared to the 50 percent to 70 percent found in other published polls. Moreover, mention of arms control seems to elicit an even stronger response than does mention of Soviet arms. Generally, fewer respondents opposed INF when arms control was mentioned than opposed it in the "Soviet warhead" version of the question; this pattern became more obvious during 1982 as the INF negotiations got underway.

According to the extensive survey done by Yankelovich and his associates, the same set of considerations is present in American opinion surveys.¹⁸ Moreover, there is evidence from Europe that attitudes toward INF (and perhaps toward nuclear weapons more broadly) were influenced far more by the general deterioration of the East-West climate than by any evaluation of particular weapon systems. European fears of war rose dramatically after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the reversal in U.S. approaches to the Soviet Union. Moreover, at least some of the blame for the crisis in East-West relations was laid at the American doorstep. In U.S. government polls conducted in Europe, the decline in the image of the United States during this period is one of the most striking findings of the postwar period. In Britain, it dropped from 63 percent favorable in 1978 to 2 percent favorable in 1982. The figures for other European countries are similar, if less dramatic (in France, from 49% to 23%; in Germany, from 81% to 49%).¹⁹

Writing in 1984, Joseph Joffe indicated the connection between views of INF and nervousness about American policy:

The peace movement of the early 1980s could not have flourished without the denigration of arms control and detente which accompanied the frightening surge in the quantity and the quality of nuclear weapons. Conversely, would the movement have receded as quickly without the calming moderation in the West's tone and language?²⁰

Nor is this generalization confined to the period of the Reagan administration. Although President Reagan certainly intensified European fears about the lapsing of detente and the lack of progress in arms control,

¹⁸ Belsky and Doble (fn. 17).

¹⁹ Leo P. Cress, *Long-Arm Trends in Some General Orientations Toward the US and the USSR in West European Public Opinion* (Washington, DC: Office of Research, United States Information Agency, Report R-13-1983), Table 1.

²⁰ "The Eclipse of the Peace Movement," *The New Republic*, June 11, 1984, pp. 21-23.

TABLE 6
OPPOSITION TO INF DEPLOYMENT:
TWO SURVEY QUESTIONS*

	Oppose INF When Soviet Warheads Mentioned	Oppose INF When Arms Negotiations Mentioned
GREAT BRITAIN		
July 1981	29%	22%
October 1981	35	32
April 1982	37	28
FRANCE		
July 1981	32	29
October 1981	36	33
April 1982	40	33
WEST GERMANY		
July 1981	29	26
October 1981	33	32
April 1982	39	29
NETHERLANDS		
July 1981	51	38
October 1981	56	47
April 1982	n.a.	n.a.

* The figures represent responses to two separate questions. The first contains a preface referring to "50 Russian nuclear warheads"; the second does not contain this warhead reference, but it does offer the choice between opposition to INF and a number of "deploy/ negotiate" options.

Source: USA, *West European Opinion on Key Security Issues* (Washington, DC: Office of Research, Report R-10-1983), Tables 42 and 43.

those fears were already apparent in early 1980 when the Carter administration hardened its approach to the Soviets. Even before Reagan's election, leaders on the continent were expressing concerns about the ratification of SALT II and the prospects for negotiation on INF. Those concerns later became very intense and were not confined to the INF issue.

THE VIEW FROM THE CENTER

The lack of public consensus became a preoccupation of policy makers as polls and protests revealed the depth of domestic division during 1981

and 1982. Yet, after conducting several comparative surveys and commissioning studies of opinion in all NATO countries, Flynn and Rattinger reached a different conclusion in 1985:

Restrictions on the range of national security options open to decision makers are far more strongly imposed by the positions taken and articulated by political and social elites and counterelites than by public opinion at large. In terms of popular acceptance, the decision latitude of policy makers still appears to be rather wide.¹¹

If this conclusion is correct, the views of political elites are far more important to the Alliance than an undivided focus on the public would suggest.

As noted above, we interviewed approximately 180 members of American and European elites during the fall of 1981 and the early winter of 1982. The clearest theme that emerged in all five countries was the belief that the West in general, and certain nations in particular, faced a period of profound crisis in national security. The causes were spread over a wide range, and prognoses for the immediate future revealed some divergent expectations. But a belief in the existence and the severity of the present crisis was stated clearly in all but a handful of interviews.

In Europe, one reason for this pervasive mood of pessimism was the concern and uncertainty about the direction and consistency of U.S. foreign policy. A uniform source of this concern was the change in direction that had begun with Jimmy Carter and was intensified with the accession of Ronald Reagan and his administration. For Europeans, the new men in Washington represented the end of détente and the shift to a more aggressive approach toward the Soviets, coupled with a cautious, calculating approach to arms control. The new administration endeavored to place emphasis on autonomous American efforts and to restore both the military capability and economic health that would be needed for a variety of (expanding) commitments.

While Europeans hardly endorsed the more militant thrust, an even more troubling feature of the change in American foreign policy was the fact that it represented yet another in a series of shifts and rhetorical campaigns designed to please domestic constituencies. A number of British, German, and Dutch respondents commented on the inconsistency and unpredictability introduced into the Alliance by American *domestic* politics. The possibility of neo-Mansfeldism, of a precipitous withdrawal of American forces to placate an isolationist Congress, was widely acknowledged and even accepted by some as quite probable before the end of the

¹¹ Flynn and Rattinger (fn. 4), 384.

1980s. Most often cited were the frequent shifts in nuclear weapons policy. Further shifts were not unexpected: was it not possible that the experience of the neutron bomb would be repeated in the case of INF?

The prevailing image (among some American critics of the Reagan administration as well) was one of a U.S. policy process that was overly flexible and crowded by insistent demands that might be superseded by yet more insistent demands at any point. It was impossible to know when the pendulum would swing again, in disregard of promises made to allies or concessions extracted from them. There were doubts that any American administration could rise above the easy political game of demigrating European contributions to NATO, especially as budgetary difficulties and the costs of competing missions continued to mount.

A second theme that emerged from the interviews is therefore all the more surprising: there was little doubt in our respondents' minds that the Atlantic Alliance *should* and *would* remain the institutional framework of Western security. The present crisis in the Alliance was solvable; specific disagreements—especially across the Atlantic—would have to be overcome. For both the United States and its European allies, the costs of not doing so were too heavy to bear, at present or in the foreseeable future. Without NATO, neither deterrence nor political balance could be maintained. Simply put, there was no alternative to NATO.

A third major theme was the emphasis on the economic components of security, a subject that was repeatedly accorded as much importance as any specific set of security problems. British and German respondents, especially, saw economic vitality as a requirement both for national political unity and for the political capacity to resist external influence. Without a healthy economy, there would be no real security and no citizenry able or willing to defend the society. The postwar democratic restoration of Europe had been built on the state's assumption of social and economic responsibility. To fail to meet these obligations or to sacrifice them to meet short-term military needs was to put at risk one of the cornerstones of postwar Western political systems. Finally, a healthy domestic economy assured external security through a variety of instruments other than the use of force. Trade and the securing of resources through economic links and technology transfer were of increasing significance. Especially Dutch and West German respondents considered these more helpful in some circumstances than the actual use of military force or the maintenance of military equilibrium in all categories of weapons. They, as well as many of the British, expected the predictable challenges to the West to come in the Third World rather than in Europe, and here the ability to persuade and to offer economic incentives would be indispensable.

Lacking interest in or detailed knowledge of security issues, citizens look either to traditional party approaches or to contemporary debates as they form their opinions. More directly, our interviews with government officials yielded the observation that the "consensus of silence" that had earlier characterized the politics of European security had broken down as the parties once again began to diverge in their approach to choices on NATO's agenda. Finally, even a cursory review of the recent past shows that governments and other elites provided ample "cues" in the debates that have bedeviled the Alliance. As early as 1980, for example, Giscard D'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt hastened to brake the deterioration of East-West relations and to preserve arms control negotiations that were then threatened by Soviet actions and the American response. Their attitude could hardly be lost on the public.

Our research shows that on most security issues there is a close correspondence between public and official views. Despite almost constant irritations over the last several years, both the public and elites see the NATO Alliance as the preferred framework of their security efforts. On the issue of defense spending, both the public and elites emphasize economic factors and the welfare consensus rather than "defense" narrowly defined. And even before the security debates of the early 1980s, Helmut Schmidt provided an arresting example of this priority. In 1977, in the same speech in which he called attention to growing imbalances in intermediate nuclear forces, Schmidt also articulated a view of economic problems that nicely summarizes the public and elite opinions discussed above:

The answer to our problems cannot lie in dismantling our social achievements, in rolling back social progress. The stability of liberal democracy depends on the extent to which we can secure greater social justice. If the Federal Republic is today enjoying considerable stability, it is because she has made social justice a broad reality.⁴

The convergence of public and official views is dramatic in the case of opinions about the United States. In opinion surveys, the declining image of the United States is one of the more striking features of recent polls. At the elite level, doubts and dissatisfactions with American policy and with the policy process are profound. While it is difficult to tell who is leading whom in these evaluations of American politics and policies, one would not have to search long to find official expressions of doubt—and

⁴ Schmidt, "The Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture," reprinted in *Survival* 20 (January-February 1978), 2-10.

pique—about the consistency and direction of U.S. foreign and security policy.

Although European elites and publics converge on many issues, there is one subject on which they differ somewhat. Our interviews show that European elites, in spite of their doubts about American security policy in general and nuclear policy in particular, still think that nuclear weapons have a role in European security. For all of the familiar reasons (the unattractiveness of conventional options, the decoupling of the United States) these officials felt—despite intense pressure to change their views—that nuclear deterrence must remain a cornerstone of European security.

Our research does not necessarily indicate that public opinion disagrees with these views. Indeed, on such general questions as the need for deterrence and the need to counter Soviet power, European public opinion is actually in tune with official views. Further, it is clear that the public's desire to preserve the arms-control process is hardly out of step with governmental preferences. Rather, the distance between the public and its officials lies in the public's greater ambivalence about the ultimate role of nuclear weapons. We have seen that, when surveys turn to the issue of using nuclear weapons, the public (of all ages) becomes decidedly hostile. Elites, too, object to talk about the use of nuclear weapons, but they accept the ultimate threat to use nuclear weapons that underlies NATO's deterrence strategy. It is the attempt to explain this paradox that leads inevitably to the possibility rejected by the public. For elites, the uncertainty of nuclear deterrence is precisely what makes it effective. For the public, it is precisely what makes it unpalatable.

Thus, although the difference may be one of emphasis, the issue of nuclear weapons in Europe is the single example of a divergence between official views and the consensus of public opinion. It is therefore understandable that European governments lobbied so strenuously for the resumption of arms-control talks and for the cessation of talk about the possible use of nuclear weapons. The relative calm of the recent past suggests that these actions were sufficient to quiet, if not to remove, the doubts of the public.

Ironically, that quiet may be shortlived. One recurring theme in our European interviews was the near-fatalistic acceptance of shifts and changes in American policy. Indeed, many of our respondents predicted yet further shifts to come from Washington. That prophecy was of course fulfilled in March 1983, when President Reagan announced his plans for the SDI. From what has been said here, the European reaction was pre-

dictable. Speaking in confidence to a team of congressional staffers studying reactions to SDI, European officials complained of the suddenness of the announcement and the lack of consultation:

Virtually every official of an allied government . . . complained that the Reagan administration had failed to consult his government. . . . [A French official said] "when it's a question of our strategic defense and our future survival, we have to hear it on television like everyone else."²⁴

Aside from the fact that SDI came as a surprise, European officials were uncomfortable with its implications for deterrence and for the problem it created with the public: "West European leaders have spent three decades persuading their people that deterrence is the cornerstone of NATO defense policy. Suddenly, . . . officials of the Reagan administration announced that nuclear weapons are 'immoral.'"²⁵

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

We began by inquiring into the *level* and *origins* of domestic consensus and cleavage in NATO. Our research suggests several answers to these questions, each of which has implications for the future of the Alliance and for the relative ease or difficulty of harmonizing policy within it.

Concerning the *dégré* of domestic consensus, we must distinguish the level of agreement between governmental elites and public opinion and the level of agreement *within* the public. Concerning the elite-public consensus, there is much evidence to suggest that it is strong. Despite the many controversies that have plagued the Alliance and its governments, and despite suggestions that domestic audiences were turning to neutralist or pacifist solutions, we found that on almost every issue public opinion is largely in tune with the views of governmental elites. A division between public and elite perceptions occurs only on the nuclear issue. Thus, it seems fair to say that popular depictions of governments held hostage to a recalcitrant public opinion are exaggerated.

That is not to say that there are no domestic divisions. European polities are divided primarily by partisan cleavages, and in some cases complicated by generational cleavages. We have argued that the prominence of partisan divisions is neither new nor particularly surprising in view of the European historical tradition of ideological differences on security policy. Although we do not assert that these conflicts are historically

²⁴ Paul E. Gallis and others, *The Strategic Defense Initiative and United States Alliance Strategy* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 1, 1985), 27.
²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

novel, it seems clear that simplistic conceptions (neutrality, pacifism) as well as single-factor theories (generational change) are inadequate to explain the pattern of domestic cleavage on security issues.

It is the very complexity and diversity of these divisions that complicates policy harmonization within the Alliance, for opinion profiles vary in several ways. First, opinions are not uniform across countries. In some there are deep divisions on security issues while in others these are less severe. Second, the *nature* of opinion cleavages varies; in all the countries, there is evidence of partisan cleavage, but in some it is complicated by generational differences.

The implication of this diversity seems clear. To the extent that NATO governments must depend on domestic consensus to implement policies, the pace of harmonization and even the ability to harmonize will be complicated by the diversity of opinions within member states. Further complications will arise because of differences in the political institutions and domestic conditions that mediate domestic opinion. For example, although it is clear that there is a general consensus against increasing defense budgets at the cost of social programs, the impact of this constraint in different countries will depend on rates of economic growth. Further, the ability to manage budgetary tradeoffs depends to some extent on the particular structure of the welfare state in each member country: in West Germany, for example, close to 40 percent of governmental revenues are tied to social security through payroll taxes, while in Britain the figure is only 15 percent.²⁷

Although our research suggests that the simple model of governments held hostage is inaccurate, on the nuclear issue there is some evidence that public opinion is estranged from official views. Officials are willing to live with the ultimate threat of using nuclear weapons as the cornerstone of deterrence policy, but public opinion is negative about precisely this aspect of the Alliance's doctrine. To be sure, this might be seen as a rather narrow disagreement. Governments as well as the public reject gratuitous talk of using nuclear weapons, and European governments are just as committed to arms control as are their domestic constituencies. Nonetheless, it is difficult to discuss NATO strategy without discussing the ultimate role of nuclear weapons, and on this point, the potential clearly exists for a negative public reaction, and thus for renewed unrest in Alliance planning.

This set of circumstances explains the widespread interest in alternatives to nuclear deterrence, now summarized under such phrases—and

²⁷ Percentages calculated from OECD figures (fn. 15), Table 9.

even acronyms—as the conventional defense initiative (CDI). Although cost estimates vary, a major effort at lowering the nuclear threshold clearly raises the prospect of budgetary tradeoffs; and, as we have seen, under present circumstances there is neither public nor official sentiment for major increases in defense spending if these increases come at the expense of social programs. For European governments, the most hopeful prospect would be the avoidance of tradeoffs through economic growth sufficient to allow modest increases in conventional defense spending without threatening other budgetary priorities. Although such an outcome would be modest, on past patterns it clearly falls within the realm of the possible. During the 1970s, most European governments increased defense spending in real terms without incurring the wrath—or even the notice—of the public.

Nonetheless, modest improvements in conventional armaments seem unlikely to remove dependence on nuclear weapons completely. Moreover, although European officials now talk routinely of the need to lower the nuclear threshold, the depth of their attachment to some nuclear deterrence should not be underestimated. Thus, both budgetary conditions and doctrinal tradition suggest a continuing role for nuclear weapons in Alliance strategy.

The final question is therefore whether nuclear deterrence, so long a thorn in NATO's existence, has finally been caught in the contradictory web of domestic constraint and strategic rationale. Our research shows that the answer depends on two critical issues. The first is the future of arms control. Clearly, arms control has served the important function of reassuring the public that the dangers of nuclear weapons were at least being addressed politically. Once the INF negotiations were underway, opinion polls registered a decline in concern, and deployment has proceeded calmly under (re-elected) governments in every host state. Since 1983, domestic audiences have remained very quiet despite the fact that little progress has been seen in the negotiations.

If this pattern is any guide, the single most important development of the recent past may be the decision of the Reagan administration to forgo compliance with SALT II and to call into question the permanence of the ABM Treaty. Should this deterioration in arms control be accompanied by an increase in international tensions, European publics and their governments are likely to be joined in another round of bickering with their American ally.

The second critical issue is the future of SDI and the commitment of the U.S. government to nuclear deterrence in Europe. As we have noted, the traditional European attachment to nuclear deterrence is unlikely to

be removed by foreseeable conventional improvements. The British and French have their own reasons for opposing SDI. Should progress on SDI relations could reach a new low.

Of course, the worst-case scenario is for both of these developments to occur. Whether the abandonment of both deterrence and arms control would be sufficient to reverse the abiding attachment of Europeans to the NATO Alliance is difficult to predict. What can be said at present is that European governments and public opinion have both made it clear that deterrence *with* negotiation is the mixture of policies that allows a fragile balance between fear of nuclear weapons and support for the policy of deterrence. On this issue there is a European consensus to the point of unanimity.