# Two Zeros Too Many in Gorbachev's Offer

By Joseph Joffe

MUNICH — Why worry when Mikhail Gorbachev is so generous? Why not take up the "double zero" offer, if he is willing to trade some 1,200 warheads on his longer-range Euromissiles for 316 Western ones, and if he is ready to sweeten the deal by throwing in 130 shorter-range missiles for nothing?

After almost eight years of Soviet "nyets" to Western arms control proposals, this looks like manna from heaven to the diplomatist. Still, remember the cardinal rule of international politics: There are no free gifts between states. If the general secretary wants to give away so much for so little, his ideas of what is a loss and what is a gain must be different from the West's. In fact, Mr. Gorbachev has thrown a triple curve ball.

First, on the hardware level. In proffering "double zero," Moscow has invited NATO to scrap its most modern and least vulnerable weapons, missiles like the Pershing-2 that have a high deterrent value because they threaten not Dresden or Warsaw but the Soviet homeland itself.

"Double zero" would permit the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to keep weapons that are largely obsolete, vulnerable and self-deterring. The alliance would hold on to aging bombers, based on fixed airfields that make inviting targets for a first strike. If these planes do get off the ground, they run the high risk of being shot down a bit later; Warsaw Pact territory happens to be the most lethal air-defense environment in the world.

NATO would also keep lots of tactical weapons, with a range of up to 80 miles (130 kilometers). Delivered by artillery and short-range rockets, these warheads terrorize their users more than the enemy. Destined not to explode in the faraway reaches of the Warsaw Pact but on densely populated home ground, these are the perfect weapons of *self*-deterrence.

On the conceptual level, Mr. Gorbachev has similarly succeeded in turning things upside down. By offering to strip away two layers of nuclear weapons — with ranges of from 300 to 600 and from 600 to 3,000 miles — he in effect is driving at the heart of Western Europe's postwar security system. These weapons are not some frilly add-ons. They were installed to counter a natural Soviet advantage and a congenital Western weakness: the Soviet Union's preponderance in Europe, based on sheer conventional mass and geographic proximity, and the half-continent's inability (or unwillingness) to field the troops required for a purely conventional posture.

Mr. Gorbachev has not offered to start with basic imbalance, the geographic-conventional one, but precisely with those weapons that were deployed to neutralize that inequality. He has invited the West to return to a "balance" of military power that intrinsically favors the Soviet Union as the strongest player on the European chessboard. In effect, the Kremlin's foremost "new thinker" has said: Let's do away with what has blunted my natural edge.

Finally, on the psychological and philosophical levels, Mr. Gorbachev has stood the key issue on its head. He has asked the West to invert the classic relationship between weapons and security; to accept that nuclear weapons are the supreme threat, not the source of security and stability. Hence his startling prescription that we must rid the world of nuclear weapons by the year 2000.

This is a momentous piece of legerdemain. For more than 40 years, nuclear weapons have guaranteed the peace — the longest in European history — by severing the Clausewitzian continuum between politics and war.

By threatening incalculable damage, nuclear weapons have put that link precisely at the point where for centuries diplomacy had given way to war — which Clausewitz, in his most famous phrase, defined as the "continuation of political relations ... by other means." Wherever they are in place, nuclear weapons have simply eliminated the military option. Where the balance of terror did not rule, as in the Third World, scores of wars have erupted since 1945.

In this light, Mr. Gorbachev's largess is not so wondrous. He offers a "revolution" that is squarely planted in the continuity of Soviet Westpolitik. "Denuclearization" has been a Soviet watchword since the early 1950s, when the United States began to place nuclear weapons in Europe.

The advantages of even partial denuclearization along the lines of "double zero" hardly need belaboring. While the Soviet Union will always be a nuclear power, with a vast array of nuclear options that do not depend on this or that Euromissile, it will reap a historical profit on the conventional front. The drawdown of American nuclear weapons would at last unshackle Russia's ancient advantage in troops and tanks, aircraft and artillery. To remove the other superpower's intermediate- and shorter-range missiles from the path of invasion would obviously simplify any calculation of risks and costs.

What about the remaining nuclear weapons — the artillery shells and shortest-range missiles? They might give pause to the Soviets, but they strike terror into the hearts of the West Germans, whose territory would serve as the venue, and victim, of "limited" nuclear war, a war that would devastate Germany alone.

And yet the Atlantic alliance is based on the premise that the nuclear risk must be shared.

If "double zero" came to pass, it would return to haunt the United States once the heady treaty-signing ceremony was over. If this left only a nuclear threat against the Germans, there would be irresistible pressure for a separate deal with the Russians. And this time, both left and right might join hands on a common platform of nationalist neutralism. Is arms control *über alles* worth the risk to an alliance that has kept the European peace for more than 40 years?

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