

Wanted: A U.S. Insurance Plan

By JOSEF JOFFE

DO you remember when West Germans marched against Pershing II and cruise missiles, proclaiming that theirs was an occupied country condemned to serve as a shooting gallery of the superpowers? That was in the early 1980's. Or when President Reagan was greeted in West Berlin with chants of "amis raus" — "kick out the Americans" — in 1982?

These days nobody is screaming "out with the Americans," and people are suddenly quite appreciative of Uncle Sam, certainly of his 210,000 emissaries in green fatigues. Indeed, something funny happened on the way down from the high of the past few weeks, which have seen an impossible dream turn real again: the end of Germany's and Europe's partition. Things are moving fast — too fast for a nation, and indeed for most West Europeans, who have taken for granted the miraculous stability the continent has enjoyed for 40-odd years.

After the great national garden party, when Germans (East) and Germans (West) danced on top of the Berlin wall, a measure of sobriety has set in among those who think about security and stability. The traditional Soviet threat is not what worries West Europeans. The nagging question is about whether Europe, suddenly on the verge of becoming whole again, can have the transition without the trauma.

It would be nice, as United States Defense Secretary Dick Cheney put it, to "persuade the Soviets ultimately to withdraw all their forces from Eastern Europe." But if the Soviets pull out, will the Americans stay? Mr. Cheney has assured NATO that "we will not act unilaterally." But West Europeans can read George Bush's lips too, and they know Mikhail S. Gorbachev is offering a vision that Gramm-Rudman could never help materialize: help for America's deficits, not by raising taxes but by slashing the defense budget.

The nagging fear is that the old order is going fast without anything in sight to replace it. What if Mr. Gorbachev falls or if the Soviet empire explodes? Will his successor resist the advice Shakespeare's Henry IV gave to his son — "to busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels"? Europe's stability has made it safe for democratization. But if the peace-reform link helps explain the unfreezing of Eastern Europe, won't the

opposite be true, too? Imagine a post-cold war continent in the throes of revolutionary violence and nationalist strife. Instead of a Walesa, you might get a Pilsudski, Poland's authoritarian leader after World War I. Instead of a Gorbachev, you might get a chauvinist using the only power Russia still has: military might.

None of this need happen, but West Europeans would certainly like a paid-up re-insurance policy only Washington can underwrite. Nor is that a narrow European interest. The American global position is tied inextricably to its military presence in Europe. It is nowhere written that the United States must maintain 300,000 troops there; 100,000 might be enough. But the conditions have to be right: orderly, multilateral disarmament; lots of contractual and physical barriers in the path of a Soviet return, and a manner of leaving that allows for a quick return if things go sour again.

These are ideal conditions, and we know democracies are not very good at keeping their powder dry when peace breaks out. Which is all the more reason not to forget the obvious: that it was Europe's miraculous peace, based on reliable deterrent power and the United States presence, that made possible the democratic revolution of 1989.

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