

Arms Race's Last Lap?

Will the Gorbachev-Reagan agreement scrapping INF weapons mark the first stage in a process of disarmament? On the one hand, both the USA and USSR seem optimistic that a further agreement cutting strategic nuclear weapons by 50% can be signed by the summer. On the other hand, Nato's new supreme commander in Europe has urged modernisation of Nato's tactical nuclear armoury in Europe, while British and French ministers have announced plans for closer nuclear collaboration.

Yet the Gorbachev revolution is producing positive responses from unexpected quarters. Nowhere is this more true than in West Germany, where both Foreign Minister Genscher and Chancellor Kohl are stressing the need to retain the momentum for disarmament and to move ahead now on negotiations for the reduction of battlefield nuclear weapons. By contrast, in statements after

the INF agreement Thatcher, Younger and Howe all pointedly omitted tactical nuclear weapons from their disarmament agenda. They fear, not without reason, that the removal of these weapons would leave Nato's 'first-use' nuclear strategy in tatters the British and French nuclear armoury very exposed. They remain locked into the old thinking that has dominated Western governments since 1945.

Not so in the Federal Republic. When Franz Josef Strauss, West Germany's arch hawk, declares that 'the 40-year long postwar history has ended. A new chapter has been opened' and that 'it is impossible to ascribe to the Soviet side an intention to fight with the West', there can be no doubt that the political terrain has begun to shift. An increasing number of West German politicians see that their interests lie in a complementary process of disarmament and growing trade. To date there are few signs of British politicians following suit. Is Labour listening? •

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