
Netherlands

Ask European space defense initiative

by Dean Andromidas

Speaking before a select group of security experts in the Dutch capital of The Hague on April 26, Brigadier-General G. Berkhof, of the Royal Netherlands Army, called for the formation of a European Aerospace Defense Initiative (EADI) which would serve as a European counterpart to the Strategic Defense Initiative. The general also called for the formation of a NATO Aerospace Command to be under the command of a West German officer.

The general's proposals came amid heated debate throughout NATO on not just "if" Europe should participate in the Strategic Defense Initiative, but "how." Though representing his own personal view and not that of the Royal Netherlands Army—or the Netherlands Institute for International Affairs, for which the general is a research fellow—the proposals represent a viable option to be taken up by political and military circles throughout the NATO alliance on both sides of the Atlantic.

Writing in a policy paper entitled, "The American Strategic Defense Initiative and West European Security: a Dutch view," presented before a Symposium at the Clingendael Institute, the general motivates the need for such options, by detailing the erosion of the United States strategic deterrent and the Soviets' own advances in anti-ballistic missile defense. He goes on to say that while a successful SDI would redress this imbalance, it would not redress the current erosion of NATO's theater nuclear and conventional forces or the "balance of imbalances between NATO's former technological superiority and Soviet superiority in 'classical' weapon systems such as tanks and artillery." Furthermore, the general points to the alarming threat posed by Soviet short-range SS-21, SS-22, and SS-23 missiles which have both a nuclear and non-nuclear capability.

The document points out that an EADI, in that it addresses this problem of the European theater, poses an attractive option since increasing theater nuclear forces or attempting to achieve "total" conventional defense would entail obvious political and economic problems. "An added advantage could be this: If a multilateral West European study group were set up to work out a conceptual framework for a ballistic missile defense against shorter-range ballistic missiles in Western Europe, it could form the basis for a joint coordinated U.S./

West European concept. West European security aspects could then be fully incorporated in the overall SDI project. Coordination with other NATO plans would of course be essential. But it would be important that the study was first conducted by West Europeans as this would give it a West European identity that NATO plans sometimes lack. . . ."

In answer to the fear among Europeans that cooperation on SDI would be a "one-way street" in favor of the U.S., the document declares: "The opportunities for West European firms would be more promising if West European governments were to decide not only to cooperate with the Americans but to set up a special research program of their own. This could be directly tailored to specific West European security needs. Its aim would not be to duplicate American efforts but to arrive at a division of labor with mutually supportive programs." Pointing to the tremendous implications of SDI research for industrial applications as well as contributing to basic science, the general writes: "A European Aerospace Defense Initiative in close cooperation with the American SDI would be a form of insurance against Western Europe lagging behind in modern technology."

Addressing current fears of "decoupling," the paper says, "Weighing the pros and cons, a parallel European Aerospace Defense Initiative as referred to above would appear to be the best means of preventing a 'decoupling' of the United States and Western Europe; a decoupling extending beyond the security level to the technological and economical levels as well. Obviously funds will have to be made available and a joint organization set up, but the rewards will be far greater than by adopting a 'wait and see' attitude. While retaining strong ties with the United States Western Europe would invest in its own future. . . ."

Concomitant with an EADI would be an operational NATO Aerospace Defense Command (NADC) which could immediately serve as the operational organization required to deal with the Soviet aerospace threat posed by their shorter-range ballistic missiles and aircraft. While noting that such a program would conform with the limitations imposed by the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the general suggests: "In view of the role the Federal Republic of Germany would have to play in a West European aerospace defense, NADC should preferably be headed by a West German officer. This would probably facilitate allied cooperation. Another measure to ensure cooperation would be a division of labor in which a multi-layered space-based defense system would be focused not only on intercontinental ballistic missiles but on intermediate-range weapons such as the MIRVed SS-20s, older Sea-Launched Ballistic Missiles and variable-range ICBMs."

In conclusion, General Berkhof points out the challenge to Europe posed by the SDI. "For the industrialized West European nations, a project such as the EADI could be the answer to another challenge, that of getting Western Europe back on its feet!"