

Interview

General Nino Pasti:

Euromissiles mean war

The following interview with General Nino Pasti, who retired from military duties with the NATO command to become a member of the Italian parliament on the Communist Party (PCI) ticket, was conducted by EIR correspondents Philip Golub and Leonard Servadio in Rome.

Q: General Pasti, most leading European circles see the December NATO decisions to deploy Pershing and Cruise missiles as the probable leading cause of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. U.S.-Chinese negotiations over missile technology are similarly seen as a major factor. Could you comment on these two aspects of the present military situation?

A: Let's take China first. When U.S. defense minister Brown visited China, the aim was to establish common points for harmonization of U.S. and Chinese military policy, with a view toward an eventual war against the Soviet Union. The visit was organized before Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. Contrary to what some say, the invasion was not the cause of the intensified U.S. Chinese negotiations; the contrary is the case.

The second cause of the invasion of Afghanistan was the decision to install the Euromissiles. There is no question about this. It must be understood that the Euromissiles are not theater nuclear weapons, but are strategic weapons, deployed to destroy targets well within the U.S.S.R. As a result they cannot be termed tactical but are strategic, and thus, cause an imbalance in the world strategic balance of forces. This destabilizes the international situation.

The fact that the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the SALT II agreements is significant in this regard. SALT II implied reaching a level of equilibrium in strategic forces: parity. It is this parity which prevents war given that each side can inflict annihilation on the other. The refusal to ratify means refusal to accept parity. The real

meaning of the deployment of Euromissiles is therefore that the U.S. is attempting to achieve superiority. The Pershings and Cruises can hit targets within Russian territory. This is not a quantitative problem. NATO has over 7,000 nuclear warheads in Europe. The Pershing and Cruise is a qualitative change in the equilibrium. Given that the Soviet Union cannot and will not accept this, the deployment will lead to a major arms race, which carries with it the danger of a world war which would endanger the whole human race.

The NATO argument and propaganda to the effect that the Euromissiles were required to achieve parity following the deployment of the SS20 is simply false, for the following reasons. The SS20s are theater nuclear weapons which cannot reach U.S. territory. They are a modernization of the SS4 and SS5 whose precision and functions were outdated. The SS20 warheads carry three times less throw-weight per warhead than the SS4 and the SS5. Each SS20 missile carries three warheads. The ratio of replacement is one new warhead for every three old missiles, a fact recognized officially by the U.S. and Europe. What astonishes me is the replacement of SS4 and SS5s by SS20s. The United States has replaced their missile systems no less than several times.

It is important to note what Kissinger said when he was in Vladivostok in November 1974. During the signing of the interim accord he declared in a press conference that it was the U.S.A. which convinced the Soviets not to include theater nuclear weapons in overall negotiations, although the Soviet side wished to do so. Using the argument that theater nuclear weapons could not reach Soviet territory and were not strategic weapons, Kissinger asked that they not be included, whereas Gromyko wanted to negotiate on theater weapons.

From the standpoint of Western Europe the deployment of Pershing and Cruise means only a much heavier targeting of Europe by Soviet missile weapons.

Q: The new missiles can reach Soviet territory within four minutes of launch, giving the Soviet Union precious little time to decide on world war. Some have described this situation as a Cuba crisis in reverse.

A: Yes, it is a Cuba missile crisis in reverse. There is no point in arguing that the Soviets can destroy Europe and Europeans cannot destroy the U.S.S.R., because it was discussed that if you have in Europe weapons which can reach the U.S.S.R., the U.S.S.R. can have weapons which can reach Europe. If East Germany had missiles capable of reaching the U.S.A., the U.S.A. should have the same towards East Germany. The problem is when there is not reciprocity, as in the case of Cuba, which can be destroyed by the U.S.A., but cannot destroy the U.S.A.

Q: But if we look at the other part of the equation, at China, every bit of new technology given is a threat equivalent to the Euromissiles and can be a cause for war.

A: The SALT II agreement does not include any provision for the U.S.S.R.'s weapons aimed against China. That is the reason why the SS20 was made mobile. According to U.S. intelligence sources, more than half the total amount of SS20s are aimed at China.

Now, the increase of technology to China increases the danger of war. Look at the change in strategic posture of the U.S.A. during the period 1973-79. Before, it was based on massive retaliation. A strategy of "counter-city": If you attack me and destroy my cities I will do the same with your cities; so, war was impossible.

In 1973 Schlesinger invented the "counterforce" doctrine. This presupposed a destruction of the enemy through a surprise attack. Today, the U.S.A. has 10,000 warheads and the U.S.S.R. has 5,000. The Soviets have more throw-weight, which is important to attack the cities, but not for a countervalue strategy which aims at wiping out the military forces of the enemy. This requires that they be able to hit small targets and many of them. It is more effective to have the same throw-weight but with many missiles than to have that throw-weight with fewer.

Q: From the standpoint of military strategy, from the standpoint of Scharnhorst, Machiavelli and the military tradition of the American Founding Fathers, the U.S. strategy appears bankrupt, because as soon as the U.S.S.R. monitors on their radar system a U.S. launch, they will launch all their missiles—so the U.S. missiles will be striking empty silos. It seems that the reason for the U.S.A. strategic posture is that they are preparing for a limited tactical nuclear war.

A: We must consider the possibility that the U.S. could blind the Soviet early warning system. The U.S. is making progress in this direction. So, at the last minute, they could breach the Soviet early warning system.

Q: But the Soviets will realize that.

A: Yes, but when they realize it, 15 minutes is little time to act on what is going on. It might have been a moon storm or other phenomenon which is mistaken for a disruption of the early warning system signifying attack. How can one take the decision to launch a full nuclear strike under those conditions?

That is one possibility. Furthermore, 50 percent of the U.S. missiles are submarine-launched, whereas only 20 percent of the U.S.S.R. missiles are submarine. So, the surviving weapons after the first strike will be 50 percent on one side and only 20 percent on the other.

That is only part of the story. If on the Soviet side, 11

percent of the submarines are on permanent patrol, the U.S. has 50 percent of its submarines on patrol and is making a big effort to increase their number of submarines.

In short the United States is doing everything to reach superiority. Then there are the MX mobile missiles. There is opposition from the side of the General Accounting Office to these missiles, but Carter will go ahead with them. Then there is the second Trident that can be used very close to the Soviet seacoast.

Another factor is that the U.S.S.R. does not have air bases on the Atlantic and on the Pacific to track and attack submarines, while the U.S. has some bases and has several carriers, more than the U.S.S.R. This is the picture, and for this reason, it is even more dangerous to deploy the Euromissiles. The Soviets must react very toughly.

Q: The Soviets have made progress in plasma physics, electron beams and particle acceleration. The Carter administration can be characterized as Malthusian. It is cutting scientific budgets, cutting research. Some think that Soviet development of beam weapons can provide them with a margin of superiority.

A: I generally agree that in plasma physics, the U.S.S.R. is superior, but that is important for producing energy, not for weapons, although it is true that there is an interrelation between the two. But the U.S. is making progress in direct energy conversion, like lasers and particle beams. I don't know, but I think that particle beams is a very difficult approach. Still, I think the U.S. and U.S.S.R. are approximately even in progress toward an effective weapon. Any such weapon, in any case, would be effective only against a limited number of missiles.

Q: It is said that the Soviets are at least five years ahead in beam technology. The U.S. administration is crazier than one usually imagines. It doesn't seek to develop any new technology, but only expand the number of existing weapons—not their quality. So this could lead one to think that the U.S. would be willing to provoke a conflict now, before the Soviets are too much ahead in technological development.

A: I partly agree. There is stress on research and development in the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. is following this course, too. But to have a crisis before the R and D develops new weapons means war. How can you stop the U.S.S.R.? It is easy to count the number of missiles, but what do you know of what is happening in the laboratory. It is a difficult choice, one of attacking in order to prevent the other from achieving technological superiority.

The change in U.S. strategy has many aspects. There is the question of the military industrial complex, but that is not the primary aspect. There are the big banks, too.

In the period between 1963 and 1973 there was free competition and many agreements. People like Kennedy and others thought that through free competition, they could produce more than the U.S.S.R. But then they realized that was not true. The Soviets developed new technology for energy in Siberia. In this field the technological development in the Soviet Union advanced more rapidly than in the U.S.A. The U.S. found itself on the losing side—the arms race started in 1974 when Schlesinger said that “detente and deterrent are dangerous illusions.” He said that because he wanted to increase the arms race to reach two goals: First, make the Soviets spend more money to build weapons; second, to gain superiority, military superiority. Schlesinger said he wouldn’t hesitate to tell a president to push the button.

Q: What about the recent Iranian adventure? According to our information, there were 6 Israelis in the American helicopters, and several countries in the area were involved in the operation, including Israel and Oman. The Midway carrier was ready to send a force into Iran.

A: I have written some articles on this subject. It is impossible for the mission to have succeeded and everyone agrees on that. To free hostages in the middle of a town, and guarded by a couple of hundred students who are, furthermore, Muslim fanatics, ready to kill all the hostages and die together—under these circumstances, rescue is impossible. In the U.S. operation, there was a first phase, and other phases to follow. I do not think that the technology employed was wrong. It is very unusual for three helicopters to break down at the same time. I do not think that the mission as planned could not have been carried out without those helicopters. More helicopters could have been sent from the Midway to support the operation. But even if it had become impossible, why abandon the mission and leave the desert so hurriedly? If they abandon eight bodies and three helicopters still in running order in the middle of the desert, this indicates they were under extreme pressure to leave. How can you explain that?

I think that the Soviets knew of the American operation, and I think they also knew what phase two of the operation was supposed to be: to attack and create a fight inside the country, a fight in which many hostages would have been killed. But that is not the whole story, because they had to intervene in the middle of Teheran and it is inevitable that the Iranian army would have responded. The question is: on whose side? If the army were to intervene on the students’ side, there would be an official war between the two countries. But there is

another possibility, that they would intervene on the U.S. side—this would mean a coup d’etat. This is what provoked the Soviets to intervene, to stop the operation.

Furthermore, Cyrus Vance resigned before the operation went into effect, just because he judged that phase two of the operation was too dangerous.

Q: So there was a U.S.-Soviet clash in the desert, you believe?

A: Yes, and you know the danger involved.

Q: Let us turn to Italy. Were there, in your view, secret agreements reached between U.S. defense secretary Brown and premier Cossiga?

A: Perhaps. Not on the use of weapons, but on the use of Italian bases. Cossiga has a great knowledge of military affairs.

Q: In Europe, there is French President Giscard, who met with Brezhnev in order to reestablish a detente process. Schmidt also wants peace, but it seems that the attitude of Italian premier Cossiga is very near if not even more extreme than the position of Thatcher, for a renewed Cold War.

A: The Italian government is obedient to every U.S. pressure. They accept with joy what the U.S. says. It is different with France. They are more independent. I am surprised by the way the press covered the Giscard meeting in Warsaw. Giscard’s policy had been stated when he said: “I am part of the alliance, but what happens beyond the sphere of the alliance has nothing to do with the alliance. It is a question of the foreign policy of different states.” Giscard is independent and is not going to accept U.S. pressures.

Giscard said on Afghanistan that, first, the U.S.S.R. must withdraw from Afghanistan; second, no external intervention in Afghanistan’s internal affairs; third, it is necessary to establish in Afghanistan a government which is not hostile to its neighbors, including the U.S.S.R. Giscard said he agrees to keep the channels of communication with Moscow open. There is no other solution. Retaliation means war.

Now, if you examine the recent proposals by the Afghanistan government, they follow the same lines as the proposals made by Giscard. The idea is withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan and common guarantees of noninterference, and then support for this government or for another government which is favorable to the Soviet Union.

Kharmal can be replaced, but not by a government favorable to the United States or hostile to the U.S.S.R. It is not a surprise that Afghanistan made this proposal, and that the Warsaw Pact supports it. Thus, it also is not surprising that Giscard met with Brezhnev.