The technologies presently emerging in the West can be used in different ways. They can be developed with the aim of constructing a strategic defence shield. They can be applied to give NATO a conventional deep strike potential. Or they can be used to build up a posture emphasising defence. In Part III of this book several proposals were discussed based on these three different approaches to solving problems presently facing NATO. It was shown in Part IV that these approaches have a role to play in the evaluation of new weapon systems and weapon programmes.

But how must these approaches and the proposals based upon them be evaluated? In the opening chapter several generally acceptable criteria were presented. Any proposal for easing the problems stemming from the present doctrine and associated armaments must be effective in a military sense if it is to deter a deliberately WTO initiated war. It must also increase crisis stability, if an 'accidental' war growing out of an incident is to be precluded. It must give scope to de-escalation and conflict management if it is to enable the termination of any hostilities that might nevertheless break out. Any NATO posture must also be affordable given present military budgets. It must make an intelligent use of technology, without falling prey to unwarranted technological optimism. It must further be politically acceptable to the Alliance, and fit into West European détente policies. It must not unduly stimulate the arms race, but give scope to arms control. And – last but not least – it must to be publicly acceptable and contribute to the raising of the nuclear threshold.

In the course of the book, many elements of this evaluation have been brought forward. Comments were given in the chapters on the proposals (Part III). In the evaluation they were compared in terms of military effectiveness and crisis stability (Part V).

In this chapter we do no more than sum up the comments made by other authors, adding a thing or two here and there. Admittedly, we do this from our own perspective, arriving at conclusions which
are supported by some though not all of the authors. But that after all, is an editor's privilege.

Let us have a final look at the three different approaches.

SDI

The most spectacular proposal is the Strategic Defense Initiative. SDI is not what Reagan would like it to be, a way of freeing people from the fear of nuclear war by protecting them against nuclear attack. On the contrary, as pointed out in Chapter 5, the idea is to protect the US intercontinental ballistic missiles from a Soviet (second strike) attack. This makes their first use for limited counter-force options less risky, because an answering Soviet counter-force attack would be less effective. SDI is not intended to abolish flexible response deterrence policy, but to give it a new lease on life, by making a first limited use by the US more credible. It is within the context of this counterforce doctrine that SDI must be evaluated.

So if one is wondering whether this proposal will raise the nuclear threshold the answer is no. For by making the first use of nuclear weapons by the US less risky, a strategic defence shield will actually be lowering the nuclear threshold. As this basic idea behind SDI dawns on the general public, the initiative itself will become increasingly unacceptable. To West Europeans, who dislike thinking in terms of nuclear war-fighting anyway, this ‘solution’ must seem especially threatening. They might fear that even a nuclear war which starts in a limited way will lead to their ultimate destruction.

The question to which SDI offers no answer, is how to give NATO the ability to counter a conventional Soviet attack in the early phases of a conflict, before a first use by the US is decided upon. Obviously, SDI is not enough. As pointed out by advocates like Berkhof, it must be complemented by modernisation, both of nuclear and conventional forces.

But taken together, all these programmes will make the total posture unaffordable even if the separate elements can be paid for. Pressure will grow to save on less spectacular items, such as training, and conventional ammunition stocks, resulting in a further decrease of the conventional holding capacity. So it is not only by lessening the US perceived risk of a first use of counter-force weapons, that a strategic defence lowers the nuclear threshold. It also does this