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OTAN/NATO, 1110 Bruxelles ■ Telephones: 241 00 40 - 241 44 00 - 241 44 90 TELEX: 23-867

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

"THE DEFENCE OF EUROPE"

INSTITUT FRANCAIS DES RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES

PARIS, WEDNESDAY, 10TH APRIL, 1985

SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANISATION,
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD CARRINGTON

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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My countrymen are brought up to believe that the French are a particularly logical race. It is not a belief which your countrymen do much to discourage. And it leads me to assume that it would be unwise to speak to you about the defence of Europe without making at least some attempt to explain what I mean by Europe and what I think it needs defending against.

There are those who say that what it needs defending against most of all is an approach to the economic future in which complacency and chauvinism have gained the upper hand. It is an approach which has produced expensive surpluses of agricultural production; and which threatens to produce very much more expensive deficits in high technology goods and services. No-one in their right senses believes that we can survive in prosperity and freedom by exporting potato chips and importing silicon chips; and, although this is a caricature, we should be alert to the element of truth it contains.

I shall want to come back to this later, because the general point is relevant to a question of specific interest to me as Secretary General of NATO: that of co-operation in the field of arms production and procurement. But let me turn first to a more orthodox evaluation of what it is that Europe needs defending against: in shorthand, the Soviet threat.

The assessment of that threat is an important part of the job which we do collectively in the Atlantic Alliance; and no-one would dispute that it requires us to weigh evidence of intentions as well as evidence of capability. There is in fact a progression of increasing difficulty. You start with the relatively simple job of counting tanks; move on to assess their quality, and then the quality of their crews and their commanders; and then do what you can to judge the intentions of the Soviet leadership today and - more important - tomorrow.

It is the judgement of intentions which is the more controversial, for obvious reasons; but we should obviously do all we can to increase our understanding of what influences the Soviet leadership. If there is an elephant in your neighbour's garden, there is much to be said for trying to discover as accurately as possible where it should be placed on the psychological scale from friendly to fierce. But, however friendly it may be, there is equally much to be said for having a stout fence to protect your flower beds. And I would suggest that common sense points to our drawing similar conclusions where the defence of our wider interests is concerned.

The question of who we are defending is in a way more difficult, because the common sense answer here runs counter to much history and sentiment. But the fact remains that we do not and cannot defend the Eastern European members of the Warsaw Pact. What we can do, and what we should do, is to defend politically a concept of Europe in which their place is recognised and valued. Easier said than done: especially when one looks back to East Germany and Hungary in the 1950s; Czechoslovakia in 1968; and Poland more recently. But not too badly done nevertheless, when one compares the reality of East-West relations in Europe today with those traumatic black and white newsreels of the decade or so after the war.

And then there is the position - or more accurately the positions, for each country must be looked at individually - of the European neutrals and non-aligned. What they have in common is that each has its own fence, with "keep off the grass" signs in elephant language all around. It is not for me to say how far their confidence in these arrangements may be increased by the knowledge that the large elephant on one side must take into account the possible reactions of the large elephant on the other.

That leaves the fourteen European countries who are members the Atlantic Alliance; and whose defence is, therefore, of particular interest to me as Secretary General. Seven of them are signatories of the Brussels Treaty, which provides that:

"If any of the ... Parties should be the object of an armed attack in Europe, the other ... Parties will ... afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power."

And all fourteen are signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty, in which the Parties agree that:

"... an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all ... and each of them ... will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually, and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

The man from Mars, whose proverbial role it is to examine without preconceptions the affairs of mankind, might first be struck by the differences between the two texts. And, were he a lawyer, he would no doubt advise his headquarters that the commitment in the Brussels Treaty was the stronger.

If he were a more practical man, he would look beyond the texts. He would then discover that the WEU commitment was supported neither by regular military exercises nor by an integrated military structure. And he would discover also that NATO had the advantage in both these respects, and in others besides. Including, of course, the membership of the United States and Canada; and of seven other European countries, of whom two share strategically important borders with the Soviet Union.

This more practical Martian would no doubt also report back in due course. And, although we don't need to waste time in speculation about what he might say, we as Europeans do need to have a very clear idea of what is necessary for our defence; and of how best to secure it.

The French have produced an answer which is in many respects a very good one. It ensures in particular that the French defence budget is seen by the French taxpayers as money to be spent for the defence of France. And that, I suspect, makes it rather easier to establish a consensus on defence spending than the somewhat vague slogan of "Contribution to NATO" which appears on the metaphorical collecting boxes elsewhere in Europe.

So, as I say, the French position has its advantages. But I do not think that you would expect the Secretary General of NATO to commend it as an example to others. The integrated military structure is, as you know, integrated by consensus, not by command; and there are areas where I would very much like to see that consensus further developed by the Defence Planning Committee. Both for the political signal that this would give; and because we cannot afford not to get the best value for the money which we spend on defence. And, above all, because the contribution of the United States to the defence of Europe remains of fundamental importance.

There are some on both sides of the Atlantic who would question that last point. In the United States, the questioning tends to assume that Western Europe is rich enough, and potentially strong enough, to contain the Soviet Union on its own; or with very much less help from the United States than is now the case. In Europe, the questioning is more likely to assume either that the Soviet Union presents no problem, or that there is something to be said for the man who proposed leaving tape recorders on the border with a message of surrender in Russian.

My answer to the doubters in Europe is that I see no reason at all for messages of surrender, in Russian or any other language. But to keep the peace in Europe - which means deterring conventional as well as nuclear war - cannot be done by wishful thinking. And we are rightly concerned also with the quality of that peace, and with the protection of our values and our way of life; which means that we cannot leave without a sufficient counterweight the very significant military power which the Soviet Union has accumulated in the Eastern half of our continent.

To the doubters in the United States, I argue first that the maintenance of a counterweight to Soviet power in Europe remains in the American as well as in the European interest. I do not deny that it would theoretically be possible for Western Europe to provide this counterweight on its own; but there seem to me to be a number of good practical reasons why it should not be left to do so. There is no doubt that any such attempt would require a massive transfer of resources from the civilian to the military sector; a very significant increase in mobilised conventional defences; and some means of compensating in the nuclear field for what had been lost by way of deterrent effect by the reduction in the American commitment.

These are all decisions which it would be difficult for democracies to take in peace time; and still more difficult for them to sustain without significantly changing the nature of our societies. And such changes, and the increases in military strength with which they would be associated, would inevitably have their impact on Moscow. I don't know how the Soviet leaders would react; but a still greater military effort on their part, and heightened tension all around, might prove the least of it. Western Europe would be unlikely to feel any the safer as a result; and I don't think that the United States would either.

That is the background against which I look at the efforts which are being made - and which I have consistently supported - to establish a stronger European defence identity.

In my view, a European defence identity without France would be a contradiction in terms; a European defence identity without Britain would have equally little to commend it; and anything which served to undermine the American commitment would be a very poor bargain as far as the defence of Europe is concerned. But I passionately believe that Europe needs to be, and needs to be seen to be, more energetic in its own defence. So what is to be done?

The immediate temptation is to try to answer that question by means of institutional reform, or by assuming that a stronger European voice must mean a distinct and different European position.

If you look around at the institutions, the temptation is clear. In descending order of size of membership, we have NATO, the Independent European Programme Group, the EUROGROUP, the Community and the WEU. Each with different membership; and three of them with their own parliamentary assemblies. It seems at first sight to be a case of mismanagement on an epic scale. Proudly presented, as Hollywood might put it, by the team that brought you "Tower of Babel".

I was taught in the army that time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted. And I have learned since in public life that time spent in seeking institutional answers to problems of substance almost invariably is. So my own inclination would be to look at the substance; and to rely on the governments who are members of some or all of these institutions - and who have very close bilateral links besides - to ensure that they work together to the extent necessary. If the WEU can indeed act as a ginger group in all this, so much the better; provided that it observes the first law of productive motion, which is to point in the right direction first and apply the ginger thereafter.

The question of the different voice can best be considered by looking again at our objectives. The purpose of a stronger European defence identity is not to make Europeans feel more comfortable, or self-righteous; but to give them good reason to feel more secure. The aim, in other words, is to strengthen the defence of Europe; which means strengthening the Atlantic Alliance as well as the European contribution to it.

What that requires in a particular case - for example that of the Strategic Defence Initiative - is not that there should be a European position opposed to an American position; but that there should be an Alliance position, which reflects the concerns of the Europeans as well as those of the Americans. We shall obviously not succeed in that if the Europeans are not able to identify their concerns and to formulate them persuasively; and it is entirely sensible that they should work together to this end. But decisions need to be taken by the Allies collectively if the position of the Alliance as a whole is to be a sound one.

To return to the substance, I am more than ever convinced that progress in the field of arms production and procurement is the key to a stronger European defence identity. A voice, though it can be intermittently shrill and penetrating, cannot in the longer term be stronger than the body which sustains it; and a sound military posture can only be sustained by the right quantity of the right equipment.

And by right equipment, I mean equipment which makes sense in defence terms. I have been a politician and an industrialist for long enough to know how important a national armaments industry can be in terms of industrial policy; and how important its export performance can be in terms of trade policy. And, of course, a large export market can bring down unit costs to the benefit of a hard-pressed military budget. But I am talking about defence. And in the defence field we are competing against the Soviet Union, not in the market places of the Third World, where they sell yesterday's equipment; but on the potential battlefields of Europe, where they are deploying the equipment of today and tomorrow. In very large numbers. And to an increasingly sophisticated standard.

This is a competition which the West cannot afford to lose. And there is no earthly reason why we should lose it, when you consider the human and financial resources at our disposal. But what is happening in practice is less encouraging. The Americans are producing - and selling to Europe as well as buying for themselves - equipment which is often too expensive, at least in part because production runs are less than optimal. And the Europeans are either producing in still smaller quantities, and still more expensively; or allowing export prospects to weigh more heavily than perhaps they should in the setting of specifications. Or both.

The result is a tendency towards what has been called structural disarmament. You replace the previous generation of aeroplanes or tanks with better ones; but you cannot afford to replace them one for one; and the effective military balance with the Warsaw Pact - which is a function of both quality and quantity - gives increasing cause for concern.

If we do nothing about it - and I come back to the complacency and the chauvinism which I mentioned earlier - we shall succeed only in weakening the defence of Europe. If we do decide to do something about it, I can see two alternatives.

The first is that we should forget about the two-way street in transatlantic arms sales and allow the most efficient producer - which will often mean an American producer - to supply the Alliance with what it needs. And to produce it in sufficient quantity to be able to deliver it at a price we can afford to pay. The second alternative is to create a European armaments industry worthy of the name, so that the advantages of the first alternative can be secured from a more equal partnership between the two sides of the Atlantic.

I have no doubt which of these alternatives I would prefer; and I think that all European governments would agree with me. But too many of them - and not least yours and mine - are reluctant to believe that this is a choice which we shall have to make if we are to be serious about the defence of Europe. And still more if we are to be serious about a European defence identity.

What is being done at the moment, under the auspices of the Independent European Programme Group and in smaller groups, seeks to make progress on a project-by-project basis. And that, because it is pragmatic enough to appeal to the British and logical enough to appeal to the French, is obviously very sensible as far as it goes. But how far does it go?

There have, of course, been successes in the past; and I am optimistic that there will be successes also in the future. But I suspect that the project-by-project approach, useful as it is, tends to fall foul of Marc Anthony's law: the evil that firms or nations do in a particular case lives after them; and the good, if not interred with their bones, is at least not bankable, in the sense of making it more easy to negotiate the next project - which may, after all, involve different actors as well as different products.

There is another, and possibly more serious problem with the project-by-project approach. It doesn't give any individual firm, or perhaps even any individual country, enough confidence in the likely volume of business ahead to justify a major research effort. I do not have precise figures; and neither can I tell you precisely what lies behind the figures I do have. But I understand that the United States plans to spend over 30 billion dollars on military research and development in 1985 - a figure which excludes R and D for the Nuclear Energy Agency and NASA. The nearest I can find to an equivalent figure for Europe dates back to 1982, and applies only to the member countries of the WEU. In that year, they spent in aggregate just over three billion European currency units, or 6.5 billion dollars at the then rate of exchange. Whereas the corresponding US figure in 1982 was 20 billion dollars.

And that ratio of roughly three to one does not take into consideration the duplication which is inevitable in the present situation, and which probably means that the imbalance in effective R and D effort is even greater. Hence, perhaps, the huge imbalance in favour of the United States in the transatlantic arms trade.

I refuse to believe that there is nothing we could do about this if we as Europeans were determined to take the challenge seriously. There are other fields where European countries could never have hoped to compete as individuals in the big league, but where they have shown what can be done collectively. In particle physics, for example, CERN can boast the largest single particle accelerator in the world; and in fusion and plasma physics, the Joint European Torus is probably the most advanced machine of its type. And Europe is in space, both as far as research is concerned and in terms of orbiting hardware, through the European Space Agency, which is financed by member states, who contribute on the basis of a percentage of their GNP to its general and scientific budgets, and on an a la carte basis to individual programmes.

I do not mean to suggest that all or any of these models can be applied as they stand to the armaments field. But I do think that there is something there to which we should be giving further thought. And I would draw out two points in particular. First, that institutionalised co-operation on basic research can be an immensely productive first step - as the experience of CERN and JET would seem to imply. And, second, that the variable geometry which is probably best suited to the production stage may work most effectively where, as in the European Space Agency, it is subsumed in a stable and more general framework. I do, for example, find it interesting to note that the member states of the ESA have undertaken not to embark on space programmes at national level without first inviting the other member states to take part; that nearly all member states participate in the optional programmes; and that many decisions are taken by a majority vote.

There is, of course, what many people would regard as a practical, common-sense answer to all that. Roughly speaking, that space and particle physics is all very well. But defence - well, defence is defence, and that means national defence.

Of course it means national defence, which is why we want it to be the best defence we can get. And surely nobody, with the Strategic Defence Initiative - more popularly Star Wars - making the headlines, can doubt that there is and will remain an intimate connection between the protection of national frontiers and the exploration of the frontiers of science.

Research into strategic defence is going to go on in the Soviet Union whether we in the West want it or not. And it is going to go on in the United States. Partly as a prudent hedge. And partly because a new generation, exposed to the threat of nuclear weapons, is not going to accept as a matter of dogma that the strategic calculations which lead to the signature of the ABM treaty in 1972 will automatically hold good in 1992 and into the next century. They may. And they may not. And it will take a lot of research, as well as a very careful examination of its political and strategic implications as well as of its technical and financial results, to produce the answers.

We, as Europeans, have now to decide whether to participate in this research. There may be good reasons not to do so, on the grounds that whatever extra resources we may be able to spend on defence are more urgently needed elsewhere. But what would not be a good reason would be to suppose that we could stop the world by getting off. Or even slow it down by failing to get on.

The Strategic Defence Initiative, for better or worse, is of vital importance to the defence of Europe; and we should take it seriously, if we are serious about our defence. And if we are serious about a European defence identity, we should surely make every effort to make a collective European response to the invitation which has been put to us.

Having said that, and having already spoken too long, let me say a final word to avoid misunderstanding. I do not mean to suggest that participation in SDI research is the make or break issue for European defence co-operation. But if there is to be European participation, then surely everything points to its being done on a collective basis - so that wasteful duplication can be avoided, and benefit and burden can be equitably shared.

Meanwhile, we should not spend all our time looking at the stars. I should be very happy to see progress nearer to earth, like, for example, the creation of jointly-funded European research establishments on armoured fighting vehicles and what-have-you. What matters is not so much where the start is made, but that it should be made. And that we should move together, and with determination, away from the sort of business as usual which does nothing to provide a stronger European defence identity; and which risks doing not enough in the longer term for the defence of Europe.