

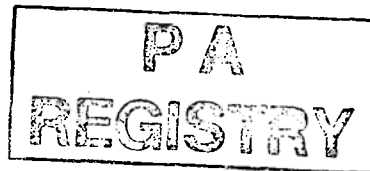
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



"NATO: STRATEGY IN DEBATE"

MEETING OF THE

FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG, BONN

THURSDAY 14TH NOVEMBER, 1985

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF NATO

THE RT. HON. THE LORD CARRINGTON

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 6.00 p.m. local time 14th November

It was - I think - kind of you to invite me. Kind, because over the years I have spent a good deal of time working with members of the SPD to strengthen the Alliance and to improve East-West relations; and I look forward to the opportunity of discussing these matters with you this evening. Kind, I think, because there is a slight flavour of Daniel and the Lions' Den about it all; and I am very much aware that debate within your party has focussed critical attention on aspects of NATO strategy.

I would be worried if there were not debate about NATO strategy, because it would mean either that NATO had ceased to be worth bothering about or that its member states had ceased to be vigorous democracies. But I would be worried also if the Western democracies were not able to maintain a sufficient degree of bipartisanship on the major issues of defence and East-West relations.

How much is sufficient is a question on which opinions may vary; but I do not see how we can reasonably expect to develop a more stable and more constructive relationship between East and West - which is what the Alliance is determined to do - if we on the Western side are not able to show a certain consistency of approach.

There is certainly no lack of consistency on the Eastern side; and, as we know, it has been bought at a high price in individual liberty and national independence. That is not a price which we would want to pay, or which we need to pay. But we as parliamentary democracies do want - and need - to have some influence on the politics of the world in which we live. And that can only be done by sustained effort; by recognising that the national interest does not change every four or five years; and by doing what we can to prove de Tocqueville wrong, when he wrote in "Democracy in America": "A democracy is unable to regulate the details of an important undertaking, to persevere in a design and to work out its execution in the face of serious obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy and it will not await their consequences with patience".

You may feel, as I do, that there is something in that comment which is not wholly irrelevant to the present day. And yet the Western democracies have been remarkably successful in the decades since the last war in keeping the peace and in maintaining their freedom; and they have been able at the same time to increase their prosperity and the standard of living of their people. In the light of history, that is a remarkable achievement; and it is all the more so when one considers how difficult it has been - and continues to be - for Europe to come to terms with the disproportionate military weight of the Soviet Union.

How all this was achieved will be a matter for the historians. Indeed, it is already a matter on which different schools of historian disagree. I don't propose to join in the argument in any detail, but it won't surprise you to hear from a Secretary General of NATO a fairly orthodox conclusion: that the basis of what we have achieved by way of peace, freedom and prosperity has been the post-war American commitment to the defence of Western Europe - a commitment which remains in the American as well as in the European interest; the Western European commitment to reconciliation and collective defence; the Alliance which has given all this concrete expression; and the way in which governments of different political persuasions have worked together over the years in pursuit of common objectives.

So perhaps the first thing we should be asking ourselves this evening is what are these objectives, and do we still have them in common? If I were to ask myself what, in a word, was the objective of NATO, the two obvious candidates would be the prevention of war and defence. I should like to touch briefly on each in turn.

War-prevention, within the context of NATO, provides a very good explanation of some of the most important aspects of Alliance policy. It explains the emphasis we place on deterrence; it explains why we have undertaken never to use any of our weapons except in response to attack; and it explains why the Alliance sees East-West relations in political as well as in military terms, and seeks to work for a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe.

What the objective of war-prevention doesn't explain - or certainly doesn't explain so well - is what we would do if deterrence failed, and allied territory were invaded. NATO policy then would be to fight: "*cet animal est mechant; quand on l'attaque, il se defend*". While pacifists would no doubt argue that war could, in those circumstances, be prevented at a price to be negotiated with the invader, without resort to armed force on our part.

In the short term, that might be true; but I have never found convincing the pacifist recipe for war-prevention in the longer term. Because force breeds counter-force; and even under a worldwide empire, ordinary men and women could never be sure that some general would not cross the Rubicon; and bring with him - or be met by - nuclear arms. In short, the policy of peace at any price may be rather better at ensuring that we pay the price than at ensuring the peace.

Be that as it may, it is a fact that we do not usually conduct the argument on those terms. The orthodox approach is rather to bring forward a different objective, that of defence. And that, too, can be used to explain much of NATO policy. Though not, I think, the very important fact that we have renounced - not for military reasons, but for political reasons which I consider to be rather good ones - the idea of defence by pre-emption. And that we have done so - Moscow please note - as a matter of firm policy and military doctrine, and not only as a matter of declaratory diplomacy.

So perhaps the best answer is that you need the two objectives - the prevention of war and, should that fail, defence - fully to explain Alliance policy. You may also need to define defence in a sense wider than the defence of territory, to take account of the fact that the political and military effort which we make as an Alliance is intended by the member nations to preserve their political as well as their territorial integrity.

All this could be differently, and no doubt better, expressed. But this does not in any case seem to me to be the part of the argument which people are principally concerned about when they criticise NATO policy, or NATO strategy, from some point within the broad mainstream of Western politics. There, the debate is much more about means than ends. But that still leaves plenty of scope for disagreement; and much more than I could possibly deal with in a speech of tolerable length. So let me state a few simplifying assumptions - which we can come back to in the discussion period if you wish.

I shall assume - and I happen also firmly to believe - that we shall not get the sort of East-West relationship we would like unless we are both able and willing to maintain a sufficient counterweight to Soviet military power; and that this counterweight, given the capabilities of the Soviet Union, must include a nuclear as well as a conventional element.

There are, of course, people in the West who would dispute that, and particularly the nuclear bit; but I would guess that you spend at least as much of your time arguing against them as I do. We might perhaps better use our time together this evening in exploring questions which are nearer the middle ground, though not necessarily any the easier: questions like how much is enough; and how should we go about trying to reduce the clearly excessive nuclear inventories which confront each other across Europe; and what should be the role of the nuclear weapons which remain; and which countries should be involved in helping to implement that role.

We may differ in our answers to these questions. But I hope that there are two things on which we can all agree. First, that the Alliance should remain ready to consider proposals for change carefully and on their merits. And secondly - and this is really the other side of the same coin -

that proposed changes of policy on matters which affect the Alliance as a whole should be discussed in the Alliance, and have their implications assessed in the Alliance, before decisions are reached.

The Americans, for example, are negotiating with the Soviet Union on matters of greatest concern not only to the United States, but to the Alliance as a whole. The point hardly needs making within days of the meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev. But it is worth emphasising that the US Government has done a great deal, both in the North Atlantic Council and bilaterally, to consult with its allies; and that it has made it quite clear that it will continue to do so. President Reagan's participation in a special session of the Council immediately after Geneva is welcome not only as an occasion to debrief at the end of one chapter, but as a stage in a continuing process of consultation, in which the Alliance as a whole is involved.

The Government of the Federal Republic - like the governments of other allied countries - clearly attaches great importance to this. I would be surprised if any successor government were to think differently. But to consult, and to involve the Alliance as a whole in matters which affect the Alliance as a whole, are not just things which the Americans owe to their European allies. They are surely also things which their European allies owe to the Americans - and, indeed, to each other. And if I interpret the views of member governments correctly, then such subjects as chemical and nuclear weapon free zones are very much regarded as matters which affect the Alliance as a whole. And so, more fundamentally is the assessment of Soviet capabilities and intentions; and of the implications for our own defence.

That view does not strike me as surprising, or unreasonable. The Alliance, after all, is committed to collective defence; it takes its decisions by consensus; it draws its strength from a feeling of partnership - from a sense of shared endeavour, to which each contributes his share; and it regards agreements on arms control and disarmament as a very desirable part of a soundly-based security policy, but not as an alternative to one.

It follows that the agreements we are trying to reach, at Geneva, and in Stockholm and Vienna, are agreements of a kind which will maintain and if possible enhance our collective security; and which can be relied upon to go on doing so. These are judgements which can be difficult to make at the best of times; and which can be made more difficult if a military commander here or a politician there seeks to exaggerate the risks of a particular course of action. But that is not an argument for ignoring the risks, or for short-cutting the processes by which we try to reach a common assessment of them.

Consultation, in short, is an important element in the metaphorical glue which holds the Alliance together. Burden-sharing is another; and it has been very much at the centre of attention because of criticisms made in the US Congress of the performance of the European allies in the field of conventional defence.

The problem certainly hasn't gone away, but I don't propose to deal with it in any detail in these opening remarks. I will, however, say two things about it. First, that I shall continue to do all I can when addressing American audiences to put across how much is being done by the Europeans in general, and by your own country in particular. And second, that the best answer to this problem will be to build on the good work we have done at the last two Ministerial meetings of the DPC; and to produce a pattern of continuing and steady improvement where it counts most - which is in well-planned and good-quality output on the ground.

But burden-sharing is important also in the nuclear field. By which I mean that, when we decide as an Alliance what nuclear weapons are necessary and for what purpose, it strengthens the metaphorical glue if as many member countries as possible are seen to play their part. And it weakens it - and with it the credibility of the deterrent - if countries say instead: "oh, did we decide that?; and, well, maybe there is some point to it; but it's dangerous, and it may even be immoral; so get on with it yourself by all means, but please leave me out of it."

There is nothing very noble about that sort of approach; and I don't think that there's anything very practical about it either: because a security partnership in which the Americans did all the giving and the Europeans did all the taking would not be very convincing in Moscow - or, for that matter, in Moscow, Idaho.

As you know, the Alliance at present relies on nuclear weapons - and very largely on American nuclear weapons - to do three things: to deter the use of force, whether nuclear or conventional; to provide credible retaliatory capabilities were force to be used against us; and to give us an effective counter to nuclear blackmail. Deciding how much is enough - and how much of what is enough - can never be easy. And it is particularly difficult in Europe, where nuclear weapons play a critical role in deterring conventional aggression and where there is a close relationship between our nuclear and conventional forces.

If, against that background, the Alliance were to move to a policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, the change would not be only declaratory. It would be inevitable in our open and democratic system that there would be changes also in military doctrine and in the weapons deployed; and these changes, more especially if they were to a certain extent reciprocated by the other side, would no doubt be welcome at least to some of the critics of our present strategy.

But there is also a negative side to this balance sheet, and one which I believe to be the more significant. Our present policy does not commit us to the use of nuclear weapons in any particular circumstances: it merely leaves the options open in order to reinforce our policy of deterrence. The distinction - and the real difference which it reflects - is important. The policy is designed to work, not by making a potential aggressor certain that invasion would lead to escalation, but by making him uncertain that it wouldn't. It is the uncertainty which is the key. And to remove that uncertainty would surely be to convey a very simple message to a potential aggressor: that the cost of aggression had become more predictable, and predictably less.

That is surely not the message which we want to be sending, either about the territory of the Alliance as a whole, or about special zones within it.

As you may by now have noticed, I am suspicious of special zones. Not, I hope, because I am suffering from creeping dogmatism. But because it is part of the job of the Secretary General to be suspicious of things which may prove divisive and undermine the commitment to collective defence which lies at the heart of the Alliance.

I am not saying that this is bound to be true of every conceivable form of special zone. It is, for example, perfectly reasonable to argue that a special zone is what we are aiming at in the MBFR negotiations. But it is equally reasonable to point out that these negotiations are being conducted on the Western side in a way which fully takes into account the collective interest; and that all members of the North Atlantic Council contribute to the instructions received by the negotiators of the participating countries in Vienna.

One answer to that is of course wholly predictable: "Doesn't he realise that the negotiators in Vienna have been at it for thirteen years, and have achieved nothing?" But there is an answer to that too, and one worth reflecting on. Western negotiators in Vienna have been trying to reach an agreement which makes military as well as political sense; which does so from the point of view of the Alliance as a whole; and which will result in arrangements which are not only equitably balanced, but which can be relied upon to remain so - which is another way of saying that they must be properly verifiable.

These surely are the right objectives; but it is precisely these requirements which have proved so difficult to negotiate. There is a dilemma here, no doubt. But I cannot believe that the right way to resolve it is to abandon sensible objectives in order to speed up the negotiating process. We might indeed succeed in speeding it up - one always tends to go rather faster when one is going downhill; but it is not only hasty marriages which may have to be repented at leisure.

All that, I fear, is something of a digression; because I had intended to move smoothly from no-first-use of nuclear weapons, which I consider to be a seductive but dangerous idea, to no-early-use, by which I mean reducing reliance on early use. And that I consider to be an entirely sensible objective. The point being, in short, that the strategy of flexible response is intended to be exactly that; and that there is nothing flexible about allowing yourself to be driven into a position where you would have to decide within a short time of being invaded whether to escalate or to surrender.

The answer is surely to maintain a conventional capability sufficient to give us time and a degree of control over events; and to do what we can to improve that capability, in areas where the Warsaw Pact seems to be building up a potentially dangerous superiority.

A policy on those lines is probably as near to motherhood and apple pie as you can presently get in the field of NATO strategy. But implementation is another thing. Some admit that such policy costs money, say most of the right things about that, but then forget to explain where the money is going to come from. Others look encouraging, while tip-toeing quietly out of the door. And others still argue that the money point has been greatly exaggerated, because we have made substantial mistakes of quantity or quality - or both - in our basic force comparisons between NATO and the Warsaw Pact; or because there are risks - scenarios, if you prefer - which we can safely ignore.

To take the last points first, I do not find it at all convincing to build a defensive strategy only on the assumptions about possible Soviet behaviour which may suit us best. And, more generally, I would say that we have got the comparisons more or less right; that we're equally right to assume that we do not need, as a defensive alliance, to match the Warsaw Pact man for man, tank for tank, or gun for gun; and that we would be wise also to listen carefully to our military advisers when they tell us that there are key deficiencies on our side which need to be put right quickly.

You may not agree; but, if you don't, I hope you will agree at least on a point of procedure: that this is too complex and too important a subject to be dealt with in a few minutes by trading debating points and statistics. If there are some who seriously doubt either the figures which allied governments use, or the interpretations they put upon them, then I should be very glad to put together at NATO a half-day or one-day session at which we could try to get to the bottom of the matter.

Meanwhile, if I am right that the sort of policy I have outlined will require substantial sums of money, and if the financial climate does not get any easier, then all of this will place a very high premium on making the best use of what we have, and of what more we may hope to get. And that is what the



Alliance is at present doing: by paying far more attention to the field of conventional defence; by identifying a number of areas where improvements will benefit us most; and by making a concerted effort to make real progress in those areas.

If the process continues as it has started over the last year, there will be a number of things to be said about it. First, that we are not going to see many headlines: there is nothing very exciting about hardening aircraft shelters and making good shortfalls in ammunition. Second, that a pattern will emerge of practical but gradual improvement. And third, that the panacea merchants will be disappointed.

I may be old-fashioned, but I confess that I won't be too upset if that is the way things turn out. Because practical improvements are what we do need. And, while strategic short cuts and radical new ideas can be a stimulus to thought as well as to headlines, the panacea route is not a very productive one.

Emerging technology, for example, is not a quick fix to our problems in the conventional field; and still less a cheap one. But, just as it is true that technology is always emerging, so it is true that we should make the best use of it in our defence planning. We cannot afford not to. And the Europeans in particular will have to find more effective ways of working together if they are to keep in the game.

As they must, if Western Europe is to play a proper part in its own defence. Because new technology is not something which we can discuss as being relevant only to proposed changes in strategy of which we may be suspicious. It is, on the contrary, very relevant indeed to what we will need both to implement the strategy we have and to strengthen the conventional element within it.

And that is the way I tend to look at the debate we have been having about FOFA, and about what priority should be given to dealing with the first echelon. The answer surely is that we must be able to deal with the first echelon; that we won't be able to do that successfully if we allow it to be resupplied and reinforced without hindrance; and that the job of hindering resupply and reinforcement may have been given a new acronym, but is in reality as old as warfare and very much older than NATO? It has certainly never been Alliance policy that the territory of the invader should be treated as a sanctuary; and FOFA seems to me to do no more than encourage the application of new technology to what has long been an important element in our strategy.

Another thing which is claimed to be new - and which is at the same time as old as the hills - is the current debate about what some of its proponents call defensive defence: a subject on which I suspect that I will not sound very convincing, because I've never been quite sure that I know what it's all about.

If defensive defence meant using your weapons only in response to attack, then the concept would be perfectly clear, because that has long been NATO policy. So it must be more complicated, and no doubt it is. Because one hears on the one hand of classifications of weapons and tactics which seek to divide the good from the bad and to suggest that weapons themselves are either inherently offensive or defensive, or provocative or non-provocative; and, on the other hand, of definitions of defence which end up with the destruction being confined to our own territory.

My own inclination when someone tries to draw me into this sort of territory is to go back to the objectives which I discussed at the beginning: war prevention, and defence. Strategies which lessen the cost of aggression, and which make it possible for a potential aggressor to predict with reasonable certainty that the costs will be less, strike me as dangerous on both counts.

Finally, before turning this over to discussion, I should perhaps say a word about another idea which departs from the prevailing orthodoxy; which its advocates claim is very much an example of defensive defence, because it aims to hit weapons instead of people and, indeed, weapons only after they have been fired; and which is intended to provide protection against the dangers of nuclear weapons.

Many ideas with these or similar characteristics have been enthusiastically taken up by the anti-nuclear movement. This one - and I am, of course, talking about the SDI - seems to be an exception.

The SDI appears at present rather like an iceberg. There is a spectacular superstructure, consisting in this case of rhetoric and commentary; and much larger but less discernable underpinnings, in the form of a major research programme.

I am not a scientist, and I shall not be able to follow you in a discussion of what may or may not be physically possible. But I have always found a certain good sense in what I understand to be the scientific method: that you do the research first, and come to the conclusions afterwards.

The method is one which seems to me to be applicable in this case too; and there is also a strong prudential argument for research in the light of what we know of the Soviet programme. But, having said that, let me emphasise what I have always regarded as the other side of that coin: which is that the indications of technical and financial feasibility which may emerge from the research programme are not the whole of the answer; that we shall need time - I have called it a firebreak - to consider very thoroughly also the political and strategic implications of a move towards a differently constructed strategic balance; and that we should not make such a move unless we really are convinced that there is a better hole, and that we can get to it in safety.

In short, everything that I have said earlier in these remarks about consultation and decision-taking in the Alliance applies to the SDI just as much as to any other proposal to change agreed strategy. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

That is perhaps not a very elegant thought with which to leave a distinguished audience, although it happens to go very much to the heart of what is needed to sustain a system of collective defence. But let me add one other.

I do not have to tell you as politicians that defence is expensive. And yet the really expensive decisions in that field are not the ones we take to maintain the credibility of the deterrent or the effectiveness of our armed forces; but decisions which might have the opposite effect. Not only, as I have tried to argue, because to weaken the deterrent is to increase the risk of war. But also because we would all like to see a world in which our security depended much less on the accumulation of arms, and much more on an equitable and reliable system of mutual obligations between East and West. And I see no reason to believe that we shall be able to negotiate anything like that if we are not seen to be both able and determined to do what is necessary for our defence.

To negotiate successfully, we shall have to persuade Mr. Gorbachev of two things. First, that the security we seek for ourselves is not security at the expense of the Soviet Union. And second, that we are not prepared to concede one-sided advantage.

If politicians in the West seem on occasion to be talking past each other on the subject of East-West relations, I suspect that it may be because they are busily drawing attention to different parts of that message, and thus to different sides of what the Harmel Report rightly concluded to be the same coin.

Harmel was reaffirmed at the 35th Anniversary session of the North Atlantic Council in Washington last year; and with it a conception of Allied strategy which is political as well as military. If we can stick to that, and concentrate on both parts of the message I have outlined, then we shall be much more likely to achieve the necessary measure of consistency. And much more likely to establish a constructive relationship with a new Soviet leader who is tough, but who may really be prepared to take decisions.

I have no doubt that that is what the Alliance is working for; and the latest American proposals in Geneva and Secretary Shultz' visit to Moscow underline that. What remains is for us to work together to get results. As I am sure that we shall be able to do: with patience and determination, but also with imagination and political courage. And with your help.