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"DEFENCE & DISARMAMENT"

SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF NATO
THE RT. HON. THE LORD CARRINGTON

KINGS COLLEGE, LONDON

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Topsy, so we are told, just grew. So she would probably have understood what has happened to me today. I was kindly invited some time ago to join you for lunch; and a little less kindly invited to say a few words afterwards. Now I find myself facing something suspiciously like a conference audience, and a rather knowledgeable one at that.

As I gave thought to how best to cope with this misfortune, it struck me once again that the Secretary General is a man of many words but few speeches. Or, to be more honest, few subjects for speeches. Politicians may enjoy the rhetorical freedom of the seven seas - most of which are presumably in what NATO rather less romantically refers to as "out of area". But international civil servants must stick to their last.

That gives me the choice of two subjects: "East-West relations revisited - again"; and "Son of whither NATO". And the occasional luxury of combining both - as you yourselves have done, by picking defence and disarmament as the theme of your conference.

And, if I may say so, quite rightly; because the recognition that you cannot sensibly pursue one without the other seems to me fundamental to a soundly-based security policy.

A sub-theme of your conference, if that is not to sound dismissive of a very important point, is the need for those of us who are actively involved in foreign and defence policy to get accurate facts across to the general public. And not only facts, but arguments. Comparative lists of weapons and weapon capabilities, however detailed and up-to-date, do not of themselves generate policy conclusions. If they seem to do so, then it is because the facts and the conclusions have been linked by a hidden chain of logic or prejudice. The purpose of rational argument is to test the former and to expose the latter.

It is the combination of weak logic and strong prejudice which is particularly dangerous, and unfortunately not as rare as one might wish. The answer - and I know I am speaking here to the converted - is not to yearn for a past that probably never was, when the great issues of the day were left to a small group of the wise and the knowledgeable; but to work for an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of these issues in the much wider constituency of a modern democracy.

There are two parts of this constituency which are particularly difficult to reach. The first consists of those who aren't interested; the second of those who are interested only in one issue. Both in their different ways make it more difficult to establish the degree of consensus - and of bipartisanship - which make for consistency of approach to the major issues of foreign and defence policy. And without such consistency, the parliamentary democracies will quite simply fail to exercise as much influence as they should over the politics of the world in which they live.

As Secretary General, I obviously have to be very careful not to be thought to be interfering in the domestic politics of the sixteen sovereign states which make up the Alliance. And carefulness should in this respect be like charity, and begin at home. At the same time, the Secretary General would surely be neglecting an important part of his job if he did not express concern at some of the ideas which are advocated as defence policy in some of the major political parties in allied countries.

It is one of the more depressing of political spectacles to see advancing, through the policy-making machinery of a political party in opposition, ideas which its more experienced members would have nothing of when they were in government. And which they must suspect would be a source of weakness to any future government.

The problem, of course, is that politicians with experience of government find it more difficult when out of office to hold out against the activists who tend, during periods in opposition, to move left of centre parties further to the left and right of centre parties further to the right. The single-issue merchants contribute directly to this tendency. And the not-interested group do so indirectly, by encouraging those who argue that flights of policy-making fantasy in foreign affairs or defence can be pursued without electoral cost.

You did not invite me here to discourse on single issue politics; and I shall therefore resist the temptation to speculate on how the democracies will cope with what seems to be a growing phenomenon. One with its good side - because commitment and energy are essential to a healthy political system; and with its bad side - because packing the legislature with people with the "right thoughts" on abortion, sulphur emissions or what-have-you leaves unanswered some rather important questions about government policy. Including how one could hope to form a stable government if the logic of single issues were taken to extremes.

This is not a complete digression from the subject of defence and disarmament, because the CND - and their equivalents in other allied countries - are very much a single issue group. Though I suspect that they would argue that their chosen issue - which they will claim to be peace - is of such fundamental importance as to put them in a different category. After all, is it not the basic function of government to keep the peace? And what other functions can government successfully perform if there is a nuclear war?

The argument is flawed, because the anti-nuclear campaigners cannot legitimately claim peace to be their issue in this way. Peace is just as much - if not more so - our issue in NATO; and the issue of allied governments. What distinguishes the so-called peace movements is not that they want peace - who does not?; but that they have particular views about nuclear weapons. Their single issue is not peace, but "ban the bomb".

They share with other single-issue campaigners the qualities of commitment and energy which I mentioned earlier. And they present similar difficulties because of the questions they leave unanswered. Their tendency is to prescribe what should be done about nuclear weapons, and to assume that what is left constitutes or can be made into a defence policy. Governments, on the other hand, must start from the premise that they are responsible for defence, and consider in that light what to do about nuclear weapons and disarmament.

It will not surprise you to hear that I find the approach of allied governments to be the more convincing. It certainly has two considerable advantages: first, because we are advocating policies with a proven record of success; and second, because we are able to give coherent and, I hope, fairly clear explanations of what those policies are.

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 against us, whether it be nuclear or conventional; to provide credible retaliatory capabilities if deterrence fails and we are attacked; and to give us an effective counter to nuclear blackmail in a world where nuclear weapons exist and cannot be disinvented. Those who argue that we should dispense with nuclear weapons must surely be required to demonstrate either that one or more of these purposes can safely be abandoned, or that it can be achieved in some other way.

The test is a rigorous one. It cannot be met by catch-phrases about conventional deterrence and non-provocative defence. And neither can it be met by anti-nuclear campaigners denying in private that the so-called peace movements are advocating policies which would leave the Soviet Union with a nuclear monopoly; while failing to make clear in public what nuclear weapons they envisage that the West will maintain; and where, and for what purpose, and under whose control?

I accept that these are difficult questions. They are difficult for allied governments as well as for critics of allied strategy. But the difference is that governments face up to them; while many of the critics tend to duck. Often, I suspect, because marchers and petition-signers are more easily mobilised in favour of general objectives than of the complex network of policies which may be necessary to achieve them.

Once again, we are all for peace. But we don't all agree - and I suspect that the members of the CND don't all agree - on what percentage of GNP should be allocated to defence, and on precisely what those sums should be used for.

There is nothing very new in any of that, you may say. And you would be right. But I do think that we can now invite the critics to look at the policy of allied governments in a rather different perspective.

The new perspective in this case is that of Geneva. We are not now in a world where the super-powers are glowering at each other over six thousand miles of silence. On the contrary. We have just had a summit meeting at which President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev spent a good deal of time talking to each other, and agreed to meet again in the nearest future - meaning next year and the year after.

They also agreed, in the words of the joint statement, that they will not seek to achieve military superiority; that work at the negotiations on nuclear and space arms should be accelerated; and that there was common ground between them "including the principle of 50% reductions in the nuclear arms of the US and the USSR appropriately applied, as well as the idea of an interim INF agreement."

I don't need to explain to an audience such as this that words like "appropriately applied" do not find their way by accident into statements of this kind. It will not be easy to translate the 50% principle into an agreement satisfactory to both sides; there will be difficulty also in fleshing out the concept of an interim agreement on INF; and we have to bear in mind also that there remain important differences on the SDI.

But, having said that, I am convinced that there is very much more chance of radical measures of nuclear disarmament coming out of Geneva than out of the alternative strategies advocated by the critics and the protesters. And what comes out of the Geneva process is also very much more likely to contribute to a stable strategic balance.

The conclusion I would draw is that those concerned about strategic stability and nuclear disarmament should do all they can to encourage a successful outcome to the negotiations. People can reasonably argue about how best to achieve that. But it surely makes no sense at all to provide the local Soviet Ambassador with material for telegrams on the lines of: "don't move now: wait until the next elections - or even the next parliamentary debate - and they'll move towards us".

Obvious enough, you may think. And yet, is not that precisely what is achieved by those who campaign so persistently for significant measures of unilateral disarmament by the West? And, a shade more subtly, by those who say rather condescendingly that they are prepared to give the negotiations one last chance, but that they will have to deliver the goods pretty quickly?

Nobody negotiates like that over matters of importance in their personal or business life; and I do wonder why it is assumed that these elementary tactical lessons can safely be ignored when negotiating with the Soviet Union.

I suspect that the answer goes back to what I said about defence and disarmament at the beginning of my remarks. If you accept that they go together, and that both have their part to play in a well-judged security policy, you have a yardstick against which to judge what emerges from negotiations on arms

control and disarmament. Agreements which enhance our security, or which leave it undiminished at a substantially lower cost in arms or armed forces, obviously make sense. Agreements which fail to strike an equitable balance, or which strike a balance which cannot be relied upon through provisions for effective verification, do not make sense; and both the political and financial benefits which their advocates may predict are likely to prove short-lived.

I have no doubt that there are agreements to be reached which respect these conditions, and which at the same time respect the legitimate security interest of the Soviet Union. We are not seeking our security at their expense; and, if it takes more time to convince Mr. Gorbachev of that, then it will be time well spent. But I suspect that what will really take time is to convince him that his negotiating team will not succeed in gaining ground at our expense.

Much of what the Soviet negotiators are presently arguing for seems designed to do precisely that. In the negotiations on strategic weapons, for example, they have gone back to a definition of strategic which counts all American systems capable of reaching the Soviet Union, but ignores many Soviet systems with characteristics which are essentially or substantially the same. Soviet land-based missiles targetted or targettable against Western Europe are left out of account; and so are some air- and sea-based systems which could pose a direct threat to the United States. There are no equations to be solved on the basis of this sort of arithmetic; the Soviet negotiators agreed to drop it in SALT I and II; and, if you will excuse the pun, they will have to come back up to the start if they want to make progress in the present round.

The Soviet position on INF also retains elements which they must know to be incompatible with an equitable solution. The zero option, Moscow style, still seems to mean zero for the United States and a larger number, still to be negotiated, for the Soviet Union. The attempt to bring in British and French systems is something else which would have aborted SALT had it been insisted upon by the Soviet negotiators. The fact that they have now gone back to it, given the existing levels of nuclear capability, must be regarded either as a stalling device, or as a claim to superiority over the United States.

The third of the negotiating areas in Geneva - space - is new in the sense that it was not involved in the START and INF talks from which the Soviet Union walked out at the end of 1983. But you only have to look back to SALT I and the ABM Treaty to realise that the relationship between offensive and defensive systems, which is what the space basket is all about, has been a central element in the strategic dialogue from the beginning.

The Soviet approach to the SDI has emerged from the Geneva summit without any very noticeable smoothing down of the rough edges; and the shape of anything approaching a bottom line is still hard to discern. If the Soviet negotiators now have instructions which will allow them to work for an equitable

agreement on INF without maintaining artificial linkages with the space basket, that will be a step in the right direction. But where strategic arms are concerned, Soviet spokesmen continue to insist on a link with the space basket and, more particularly, with their position on the SDI.

In its more extreme formulations, the Soviet position on SDI seems to require that the United States should abandon its research programme, with at best some assurances of Soviet reciprocity that everyone knows it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to verify. An agreement on these lines would simply not make sense from the Western point of view; and it would not make sense even if the verification point were the only one at issue.

But that is not to say that there is no relationship between the level, or the desired level, of offensive arms and the level of strategic defences in place, in prospect or in the realms of the possible. If what the Soviet leaders are really concerned about is the possibility of a sudden American break-out into strategic defence, then they should understand all the more clearly why the Americans are concerned about the Krasnoyarsk radar - which, to put it no more strongly, is something which would come in rather handy if the Soviet Union were planning just such a break-out.

In short, there is a relationship between offensive and defensive strategic weapons - as the Americans have been insisting all along. And it is a relationship which the negotiators will surely be able to take into account if the objective is to define the safeguards necessary to an agreement on substantial reductions in offensive systems. If the Soviet negotiators continue to insist on linkages going beyond that, Mr. Gorbachev's talk of 50% reductions will come to look very much more like propaganda and wedge-driving than a serious indication of willingness to do business.

Time will tell; and is certainly more likely to tell the story we would like to hear if the Western negotiators in Geneva - and, for that matter, in Stockholm and Vienna - are given the political support they need to make two points clear: that we are ready to do business on terms which are fair; and that we will not be pressured into doing business on terms which are not.

The game will be played for high stakes. Over the last few years allied governments in general, and the United States in particular, have made a significant effort on the defence side. We are now determined both to maintain that necessary momentum, and to reach agreement on the substantial measures of arms control and disarmament which are so clearly in the interests of East as well as West. If we succeed, we have the opportunity to establish a virtuous circle, in which sensible defence policies are seen to go hand-in-hand with sensible agreements with the Soviet Union.

There may be some in Moscow who will advise against a serious approach to East-West negotiations for precisely that reason. Don't bother too much about Western governments, they will say - they're a pretty right-wing lot at the moment; concentrate on public opinion; wait until the next election - or the one after that; and things will start falling into our laps.

In other words, they hope that the West can be manoeuvred into a vicious circle, with weaker defensive positions leading to weaker negotiating positions, and so on.

There is absolutely no point in wringing our hands in the face of such tactics, lamenting their unfairness, appealing to statements of good intention, or hoping that some cosmic referee will blow a whistle. The answer is both more simple and more difficult: it is to make it quite clear that this approach will not work. Not only by saying that it won't work, but by organising ourselves to make sure that it doesn't. And that, as far as NATO is concerned, means sticking to the main lines of our present policy and giving the right formula time to produce the right results.

Easy enough you might say. Until you stop to consider that this is a prescription which runs counter to some of the most fundamental instincts of modern democratic man. And modern democratic woman.

The instinct to pull up the plant to check the roots; to seek a second opinion; to try a short cut; to put new variables into the equation and run them through the computer; and, not least, the instinct to disagree with the party opposite on as many points as possible. Even the reassuringly old-fashioned and nautical cry of "steady as she goes" turns out on examination to be about changing tack rather than holding course.

I am not, of course, suggesting that we should try to do the political equivalent of sailing straight into the wind. Or that we should suppress the instincts which go with a healthy democracy and a dynamic economy. But where security is concerned - if I may change the sporting metaphor - we really must find a way to adapt what may be our natural game to the opponent and to the circumstances. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze no doubt make a livelier tennis pair than Chernenko and Gromyko, but the real test with the Soviet Union remains more likely to be played on clay than on grass.

So we shall need stamina, as well as skill and determination. And a crucial ingredient of that will be what this conference is all about: a clear recognition of the links between defence and disarmament; and a much better understanding of the facts and the arguments relevant to both. We have a good story to tell; but experience shows that we can't tell it too often and that we can't leave it all to government.