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DINNER OF THE BELGIAN ATLANTIC ASSOCIATION

Brussels, 6th March, 1985

EXTRACT FROM REMARKS MADE BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF NATO
THE RT. HON. THE LORD CARRINGTON

EMBARGO : 20.00 HOURS (LOCAL TIME)

[Introduction]

There is one point about NATO which struck me as particularly important long before I took over as Secretary General, and which strikes me as equally important now. It is the one which we associate with M. Pierre Harmel, whose influential report spelt out more eloquently than I can hope to do the need for the political and the military objectives of the Alliance to be kept in balance and pursued in parallel. We shall not achieve our political aim of a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe unless we maintain an effective defence and a credible deterrent. And, at the same time, we cannot hope to ensure the security we want for ourselves and for future generations by military means alone.

During the eight months or so that I have been fortunate enough to live in Brussels and to do an extremely interesting job, I have found this two-track approach to be very fully reflected in the work of the Alliance. Not only at the Ministerial level, where the importance of the two-tracks is aptly symbolized by the fact that both Defence Ministers and Foreign Ministers play an active personal role in the work of the Alliance; but also at the working level, in committees and in the papers which cross my desk.

On the defence side, we have been particularly active in the field of conventional defence, where improvements are clearly needed if we are not to give a dangerously misleading signal to the Warsaw Pact. And if we are not to find ourselves drifting by neglect into a degree of dependence on nuclear weapons which no-one would consciously choose.

This point is now widely accepted and, despite the obvious financial difficulties, Defence Ministers were able to take some important decisions at their meeting last December. Steps have been put in hand to strengthen infrastructure and improve sustainability; and the permanent machinery has been invited - an invitation it can hardly refuse, given that it was issued by Ministers collectively - to come forward with proposals for a coherent effort to improve NATO's conventional defences.

On the political side, we have been equally active; and I hope that the message has now got through to the Soviet leadership that we are determined to work for a more constructive relationship across the board, and for effective measures of arms control and disarmament in particular. And that we are equally determined to hold out for agreements which are fair and which can be relied upon to remain so. I very much welcome the fact that the Soviet negotiators will be returning to Geneva next week. This is a victory for common sense. And it is also, I would suggest, a result which owes much to some constructive diplomacy by the United States; and to the cohesion which the Allies have shown in sticking to their decision to deploy CRUISE and PERSHING missiles in the absence of negotiating results which would have made this unnecessary.

The subjects to be negotiated at Geneva are immensely complex. Some of the difficulties are already well-known to us from the START and INF talks which preceded them; and the addition of the space basket, necessary though it is, will not make things more simple.

The negotiating difficulties implicit in the subject matter of the three baskets and of the relationship between them are formidable in themselves. They will be made the more so by three important asymmetries which have a direct bearing on the negotiating process.

The first of these asymmetries comes from the way in which the strategic inventories of the United States and the Soviet Union have developed over time. The United States have placed particular emphasis on submarine launched missiles; while the weight of the Soviet effort remains very much centred on heavy land-based missiles. The negotiators may therefore have to establish an exchange rate between apples and pears; as well as grappling with conceptually more simple cases like intermediate range nuclear forces, where the problem is not one of apples and pears, but of a very large preponderance of apples on the Soviet side.

The second asymmetry concerns verification. As you know, the Soviet propaganda machine has done its best to represent the Western side as being over-demanding on the question of verification. The real explanation is rather different. The fact is that the Soviet leaders have no intention whatsoever of signing agreements which would allow the Western side to gain unilateral advantage in secret; and they cannot really be surprised that the West takes a similar view. But there is a crucial difference. The Western system - with investigative journalism, parliamentary control and the democratic tradition which underlies both - offers the Soviet leaders ample scope to assure themselves that the West is keeping its part of the bargain with little need for writing special verification procedures into the Treaty. The same could hardly be said the other way round; and it is therefore inevitably the Western side which is the demandeur where agreement on verification is concerned. If we want agreements which are reliable - and I can see no long-term advantage in signing ones which are not - it is important that Western parliamentary and public opinion should appreciate the importance of verification; and that they should provide the Western negotiators with the consistent political support they will need to make it clear to the Soviet Union that we are not prepared to take risks with our security.

The third asymmetry, like the second, reflects profound differences between the Western society and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, as it has shown most recently in the course of the long debate over the INF negotiations and the deployment of CRUISE and PERSHING missiles, is more than ready to involve itself in the decision making process of Western governments.

And equally ready to appeal to Western public and parliamentary opinion over the heads of the Western negotiators. Once again, there is nothing very much that we can do in the other direction, both because the Soviet Union discourages freedom of information and human contacts; and because the Soviet man in the street - and for that matter the rank and file in the Supreme Soviet - have little influence on what is decided in the Politburo.

The answer to this, of course, is not to build up barriers on our own side: to do so would be to undermine the very values which NATO is here to defend. But, if we want a successful outcome to the negotiations in Geneva, we should be aware of the way that the Soviet Union is likely to play the hand; and we should be aware in particular that the Soviet negotiating team is unlikely to get down to serious business until the Soviet leaders are convinced that what they want is not going to fall into their laps for nothing.

We all of us, in and out of government, have a part to play in sending the right signal to the Soviet leadership. That signal should not be that our negotiators will be obdurate or inflexible. But we must make it clear that they will be prepared to make concessions only as part of a joint effort to secure agreements which are balanced and verifiable. And we must make it equally clear that Western governments have the necessary patience and determination to hold out for what they know to be right; and that they will not be blown off course by outside pressure.

It will not surprise any of you to hear that I regard the decision which the Belgian government has to take on the deployment of CRUISE missiles as a very important one, not least where signals to the Soviet Union are concerned. I very much hope that that decision will be to do what Belgium's allies in Britain, Germany and Italy have already done. I have no doubt that those decisions did give the right signal; and that it was part of the reason why we can now look forward to serious negotiations in Geneva.

[Concluding remarks]