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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

"NATO: THE SHARED DEFENCE OF FREEDOM"

Georgetown University

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SECRETARY GENERAL OF NATO

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There is, as I am beginning to learn to my cost, a certain predictability about the subjects which Secretaries General are expected to address in public. Not for them the freedom of Foreign Ministers, who - if they do not exactly scour the world in search of speech material - can nevertheless make good use of geography to vary their rhetorical diet. While I find myself ringing limited changes on the themes of "Whither NATO?", and "East-West Relations Revisited".

I do not propose to revisit East-West relations this evening, or at any rate not much. And I shall try not to ramble too widely in the pastures of whither NATO. Instead, I should like to explore in a little more depth something the optimists call partnership and the pessimists call burden-sharing - and which is, in reality, very much one subject.

I have chosen it not because I think that the Alliance is about to come apart at the seams. On the contrary, the achievements of the last year or so give us good grounds for confidence in the future; and the high points are worth recalling:

- intermediate-range nuclear weapons are being deployed on schedule in Western Europe, despite a massive campaign by the Soviet Union to shake the determination of the governments concerned;
- the 35th Anniversary meeting of the North Atlantic Council here in Washington last May set the seal on a period of intensive work within the Alliance on our approach to East-West relations, from which there emerged a very satisfactory level of agreement on both analysis and political strategy;
- Allied Defence Ministers, at their meeting last December, took practical steps to correct deficiencies in Infrastructure and Sustainability; and underlined the importance they attach to improving our conventional capabilities by instructing the permanent machinery to come up with proposals for a coherent effort to improve NATO conventional defences;
- and, finally, the Soviet Union returned to the negotiating table in Geneva: a response, I would suggest, both to some constructive diplomacy by the United States; and to the cohesion and determination of Allied governments during a difficult period in East-West relations.

All this, as I say, gives us grounds for confidence in the future. But it does not make it any the less important to look out for the difficulties which may lie ahead; and I for one would take very seriously indeed anything which might serve to weaken the sense of transatlantic partnership on which the Alliance depends. And the burden-sharing argument, if it gets out of hand, could certainly do that.

A partnership, like a rowing eight, works best if everyone is pulling his weight. You can make an eight go a little faster by pulling a bit harder yourself; and you can make it go a lot faster by persuading everyone to pull a bit harder. You can make it go a little slower by concentrating more on the size of the other fellow's puddle than on what you should be doing yourself; and you can make it go a lot slower by cutting down your own performance because you think that others are not doing enough. Finally, you can cause a spectacular disaster by deciding halfway through a race that you don't want to be in the boat in the first place.

As Secretary General, my overriding concern is that the boat should go faster. I am not sure whether I am cox or coach, but my position does give me a pretty good idea of who isn't working hard enough. And - perhaps even more important - it gives me a pretty good idea of what all that effort is producing in terms of relevant output.

And output is the measurement which counts: or, from a burden-sharing point of view, output in proportion to capacity to produce it. If only that were as simple, and as uncontroversial, to calculate as military expenditure as a percentage of GNP, we would be well on our way to eliminating at least some of the difficulties which plague the transatlantic debate over burden-sharing. Like the argument over professional and conscript soldiers - the first of whom weigh very much more heavily the input scales than the latter, in terms of both wages and pensions.

In output terms, everyone needs to do more. By saying that, I do not mean either to draw a diplomatic veil over the performance of those who score least on the basic measures of input; or to appear undiplomatically critical of the United States, whose contribution is outstanding. But there is a point of general application here. Senator Nunn, for example, was surely right to point out that the common-funded infrastructure programme was, until the Ministerial decision of last December, devoting insufficient resources to providing facilities for reinforcing aircraft from the United States. But not all the airfield facilities in question come under the common-funded programme: there is also a lack of hardened hangars on the fields for the financing of which the United States is nationally responsible, under longstanding NATO arrangements.

I hope that continuing work within the Alliance will put us into a position where we can all place less emphasis on crude measurements of input and more on the indications of output which really matter. But even this will not answer the difficult question of what weight should be given to the unquantifiables.

The point can best be illustrated by looking at the Federal Republic of Germany, which is almost exactly the same size as the state of Oregon. All you need to do to complete the picture is to add about 58 million people to the population of Oregon; to introduce conscription; to keep nine hundred thousand

men under arms there in peacetime, of whom nearly four hundred thousand would be foreign; to conduct over five thousand military exercises each year on whatever countryside and farmland might still be left; and to add further over ten thousand military overflights a week, some of them flying as low as 250 feet, and a generous sprinkling of tactical and intermediate range nuclear weapons. And, of course, to imagine a very heavily armed enemy massed on the borders of Idaho and Nevada.

Now perhaps all that does no more than spell out the fairly obvious truth that the central front does not run along the Snake River. But the fact that it does run through a divided Germany is certainly very relevant to German perceptions of the burden; and if one could somehow capture on film this picture of high density military effort superimposed on Oregon, the point might come across more vividly on this side of the Atlantic.

But the fact that the Europeans may be bearing more of the burden than is generally recognised in the United States does not answer the more fundamental question of why the United States should be making the very substantial contribution it is.

And one should perhaps start by asking, contribution to what? To the defence of Western Europe? To the defence of the United States? Or to a bit of both and something else besides? I need hardly point out that the answer one chooses to give has implications for one's perceptions of burden-sharing.

The argument that American troops are in Europe purely to defend America - or even purely to defend American interests - is one on which we need not waste time. That view is held in Europe, if it is held at all in its absolute form, only by committed anti-Americans on the far left; and common sense - and a sense of history - should be enough to prevent it from gaining further ground.

Common sense and a sense of history seem to me also to provide a very effective counter to the argument at the other extreme: that American troops are in Europe purely to defend Western Europe or Western European interests. Americans have been sucked twice this century into wars which began in Europe, and the world has grown smaller since. Modern weapons alone would have seen to that. And there is also the fact that the Soviet Union is seen here - and to my mind quite rightly - as presenting a global challenge, both to American interests and values, and to the security of the United States.

If that concept of global challenge is accepted, then it would make no sense at all for the United States to neglect the challenge in the very area where the Soviet Union has chosen to concentrate its political and military resources. And that, beyond any shadow of doubt, means Europe. And I would guess that it will continue to mean Europe, under Mr. Gorbachev and indeed under his successors, however much the nations of the Pacific Basin may gain in importance in other ways.

There are no doubt some who may find this picture of a global challenge somewhat overdrawn; and who may be concerned about the military and financial implications of such a far-reaching thesis. The argument for a sense of proportion and for a sense of priorities is of course a strong one. But I do not believe that it can be made to yield the conclusion that the United States could safely withdraw from Europe.

It may be tempting to argue that Western Europe is rich enough, and at least potentially strong enough, to contain the Soviet Union in Europe; and that American withdrawal would shock it into getting its act together. But that leaves two important questions unanswered.

The first, of course, is what if the shock treatment failed? American withdrawal could serve to dishearten rather than encourage; and there would be voices ready to fill the vacuum by urging accommodation with Moscow. Would America really accept without demur a possible extension of Soviet influence to the East Coast of the Atlantic and the North of the Mediterranean? Or would it reverse the policy of withdrawal, in circumstances which had become less favourable to the West?

Alternatively, what if the shock did work? The job of containing Soviet military strength in Europe, without American help, would require the diversion of resources from the civilian to the military sector on a scale which it is difficult to envisage democracies being able to sustain in peacetime.

A heightened sense of threat might change that. But how in such circumstances would the Soviet Union respond to a sharply increased Western European military effort, in which West Germany would play a leading part? Further increases in the Soviet military efforts, and heightened tension all around, might be the least of it; and I doubt very much that the United States would feel any the safer.

So my answer to the question about what the United States is in Europe to do would indeed be a bit of both; and something more besides, because the strength of the Atlantic Alliance is of concern also to other parts of the world. It is within these parameters that the debate on burden-sharing can best be focussed on what we need to do to make the boat go faster.

That is very much the objective of the important initiative on conventional defence improvement which Defence Ministers took last December. It is clear from the work being done in the permanent machinery that the governments concerned are taking this very seriously; and I am optimistic that we shall be able to come up with practical improvements of the kind we need.

To the extent that well-defined targets can help to encourage more effective output, I am all for them. The technique is one already built into our defence planning procedures; but members of Congress could be forgiven for

concluding, not least from the decisions on infrastructure and sustainability taken by Ministers last December, that some political reinforcement can also be helpful. Fair enough; although we should be careful not to assume that it was the threat of sanctions which did the trick, rather than the accurate pin-pointing of jobs which really needed doing, in the interests of the Alliance as a whole.

Accurate focussing will be no less important in the future, if the undoubted benefits of political attention are not to be dissipated by trying to give top priority to everything. And we must remember also that targets which are set too high - and more especially targets which seem always to be receding - tend to discourage rather than encourage.

Which brings me on to a difficult point. I am, as I say, optimistic that we shall get some worthwhile practical results out of the conventional defence initiative; and I shall certainly be doing everything I can to keep up the momentum. But the objective which Defence Ministers had in mind - and this applies just as much to Secretary Weinberger as to his European colleagues - was one which falls quite clearly within the Alliance strategy of flexible response. Their aim, indeed, was to make that strategy more effective: by guarding against a hardening of the conventional arteries which would reduce our flexibility; and which might lead to our drifting by neglect into a degree of dependence on nuclear weapons which none of us would consciously choose.

I suspect that some of the more enthusiastic proponents of conventional defence improvement out of government may be looking for something intended to change rather than reinforce present strategy. My first plea here would be one for clarity; so that the case for change - and the implications for our conventional defence effort - can be considered openly and on its merits.

The underlying problem is of course the problem of nuclear weapons. Our overriding aim is to deter war, whether nuclear or conventional. Or, to put it more tersely, to prevent World War III. But we need also to have an answer to what would happen if deterrence failed; which means a defence policy designed to end that war as quickly as possible, and with the least harm to ourselves. Neither of these objectives is easy; and neither can be neglected without risk in the face of what we know of Soviet capabilities in both the nuclear and the conventional field.

Some, however, have tended to discount the effect of nuclear weapons as a deterrent against conventional war; and to argue that we should do what the Soviet negotiators have been asking us to do in Stockholm - which is to renounce the option to resort to nuclear weapons in response to an attack by conventional means. The more serious minded go on to argue that we could reduce the risk involved in such a policy by building up our conventional defences. Or even by developing through

conventional means a deterrent properly so-called: by which I mean a policy or set of policies which goes beyond defence, by confronting a potential opponent with the possibility not only that his attack may be rebuffed, but that he may also incur damage going well beyond that.

I am not at all convinced that it would be possible to construct by conventional means a deterrent which would be both effective and politically acceptable; and a policy of conventional defence alone, however many fresh resources were channelled into it, would remove a vital element of uncertainty from the calculations of a potential aggressor. So I think our present strategy to be right. That may make me conservative, but it does not make me dogmatic. If someone can convince me, in the words of the 1st World War cartoon, that there is a better hole - and that we can get safely to it - then I shall be ready to move. And, indeed, quite happy to move; because I do not need reminding that our present hole has its discomforts.

This may be the appropriate stage to say a word about the Strategic Defence Initiative. The subject is one on which a servant of sixteen nations must venture with particular care. And yet this is perhaps an occasion when absence of valour might be regarded not as discreet but - if I may coin a phrase - as duplicitous. And the question is in any case very relevant to those I have been addressing.

I have been asked about the SDI on every possible occasion, and in every country I have visited, since the beginning of this year. What I have said first of all is that it would be very imprudent of the United States not to be conducting research of its own in the light of what we know of Soviet capabilities and Soviet interests in the field; and that your allies would have reason to be critical if they woke up one morning to find that the Soviet Union had made a strategically significant breakthrough for which the United States was unprepared.

I have said also that the better hole test - is there a better one, and can we get safely to it - is applicable to the SDI; that I am not convinced by those who claim that it is already clear that the SDI is bound to pass the test or bound to fail; and that the wisest course, therefore, is to do what the US Administration are doing - which is to establish the facts. And the facts to be established, as Administration spokesmen have made clear, include not only the technical and financial questions of how and how much; but also the implications of any new departure for the security of the Alliance as a whole.

There is, in fact, a wide range of possible implications; and those which we shall have to address in policy terms will depend on the outcome of the research programme. So I hope that I may be forgiven for not indulging at the moment in the no doubt fascinating game of building speculation upon hypothesis. But we should bear in mind that there is a link

between strategic and conventional defence, both in the sense that resources devoted to the former are not available for the latter; and, more importantly, because a process which succeeded in eliminating nuclear weapons would indeed cause us, in Mr. Nitzze's words, "to study how to diminish the threat posed by imbalances of conventional weapons".

There would, in short, be burden as well as benefit even in an SDI which did everything that was hoped of it; just as there is benefit as well as burden in our present strategy, which we must maintain until we are sure that something better is attainable.

These questions are both complicated and important, as questions of strategy in the nuclear age inevitably are. But I see no reason why we should not be able to answer them successfully. And every reason why we should make a vigorous and determined effort to do so. I need hardly add, from my vantage point as Secretary General, that to answer successfully must be to answer as an Alliance.

We cannot afford as an Alliance not to make the best use in our defence policies of what new technologies may have to offer; and that applies just as much to strategic as to conventional defence. What the best use may be is a question which affects us all, and which we should all play a part in deciding. And, having thus decided it, we should all play our part in implementing the decision. That is what partnership is all about. And whatever else may change in defence policy, I am convinced that the partnership between North America and Western Europe must endure. It has been the guarantee of our security, our freedom and our prosperity since the Atlantic Alliance was founded. And it will be just as important in the years ahead.