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NATO - An Imperfect Defense

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A Case Study by Robert A. Martin

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NATO - AN IMPERFECT DEFENSE

I. SUMMARY

Collective Defense for Mutual Security - NATO was created April 4, 1949, to counter the perceived Soviet threat to the west following World War II. It was apparent that western Europe could not defend itself. The United States concluded that it was in our interest to join a mutual security arrangement with our European allies. However, at the outset the US had no expectation of a permanent tie to Europe; we would contribute economic assistance to foster European recovery. The European aim was to tie the US by treaty to the defense of Europe. This was fully accomplished in late 1950 when the US agreed to deploy substantial troops to Europe to participate in an integrated NATO command structure. Subsequently, NATO provided the framework within which to integrate an armed FRG. Indeed, the prime interest in mutual security for most Europeans was to ensure that Germany would never again pose a threat.

Massive Retaliation - It has always been easier for NATO to agree on security goals than to get the individual allies to provide the forces with which to implement them. Beyond the cost involved, the allies were reluctant to build up conventional forces because they judged a conventional war would involve the destruction of Europe. They would prefer to rely on the US nuclear umbrella. Thus, the US decided on a strategy of massive retaliation in 1954, under which conventional forces would only sound the alarm. The response would be US nuclear weapons.

Flexible Response - As Soviet nuclear capabilities grew the credibility of massive retaliation arguably diminished, and the NATO deterrent was reduced. The US, in an effort to restore the deterrent, proposed a new strategy in 1962. Flexible response involved a range of capabilities from conventional through theater nuclear to strategic nuclear forces, permitting controlled escalation of the conflict. The allies were not happy: flexible response called for conventional force increases; it would also make Europe more susceptible to conventional and theater nuclear conflict, and hence destruction. Europeans felt the threat of rapid escalation to strategic nuclear weapons represented a greater deterrent to initiation of conflict, but they ultimately agreed to flexible response in 1967. Flexible response and forward defense remain NATO's strategic doctrine.

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NATO's Nuclear Process - The possibility of US nuclear decoupling from Europe implied by flexible response created an allied desire for greater nuclear involvement. We misjudged the need and promoted the MLF. It failed miserably, but led to creation of the Nuclear Planning Group which provides for serious discussion of nuclear policy.

France and the FRG - Although still outside the NATO integrated military command, France has substantial involvement in alliance military activities. The FRG also has a singular position in the alliance. The FRG has considered security alternatives but has concluded that what is is best.

Out of Area - NATO has not agreed to act corporately outside the Atlantic area, but has agreed to consult where events in other areas may impact on allied security.

Deterring Aggression - Over 35 years NATO's conventional defenses have been considered inadequate and the credibility of nuclear deterrence has been in decline. But war has been deterred. Clearly the Soviet view has been different. After the USSR calculated the costs and risks of initiating military action some doubt and uncertainty remained about NATO's response.

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II. INTRODUCTION

There were fundamental foreign policy and national security purposes for the United States to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Domestic considerations relating to our economic well-being, our system of values, and the totality of our western heritage and traditions supported those purposes. Even so, the creation of the alliance was extremely difficult, achieved in some measure fortuitously, and probably would not have been possible had it been understood in the United States that our involvement would be other than relatively short lived.

Throughout its 35 year history there has been continuing interest in, and comment about, the state of NATO's health. That has never been more true than it is today. Prophets of doom have always figured large among the commentators. NATO has always been in disarray according to some, and alarmists have been warning for a number of years that NATO is about to collapse.[1] Increasingly there are cries that the alliance is dead. At the same time, others look at the reasons for creating the organization and conclude that NATO has brilliantly succeeded in achieving the purposes for which it was founded. Many would subscribe to that judgment; it is also clear from past and current commentary that many would take exception to it.

I wanted through this project to gain a better appreciation of:

-- How NATO came to pass;

-- What sort of a defense organization the alliance is; and

-- Whether continued membership and active participation is in the U.S. interest.

The project describes the initial concept for defense envisaged in NATO's establishment, the degree to which initial defense goals were met, how defense goals have changed through NATO's history, the impact on the organization and its purposes as a result of such changes, and assesses, in light of this, how well NATO as an instrument for defense has served its members.

I came to the project with positive notions about the balance sheet of the alliance with respect to the United States. I wanted to see whether my sense of things would hold up as I became more familiar with the commentary and the history. It did. The utility of NATO seems to me clearer than ever. Having said that, I can also say that I better understand contrary views.

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An economically prostrate Europe uncertainly and haltingly faced the future in the aftermath of the Second World War. From the east the shadow of the Soviet bear was giving pause. Vanquished Germany remained a cause of concern for the victors in western Europe. The United States, having answered the alarm twice, was at least giving some thought about how to avoid the problem of war thundering out of Europe yet a third time this century. The basic question for the west Europeans was how to keep the United States engaged in Europe to provide a counterpoise against possible Soviet ambitions.

In that setting NATO was born on April 4, 1949, not without difficulty, nor with total clarity or convergence of views as to expectations for the future. The west Europeans wanted insurance against Soviet aggression, but virtually equally wanted to ensure against future German frolics. United States power, including our atomic monopoly, would be essential to that end. For our part, we were principally interested in curbing further Soviet advances westward. We also wanted to avoid undertaking a commitment calling for an automatic, predetermined response in any mutual defense arrangement. The U.S. wished to assist European economic recovery so that our allies could more quickly look to their own defense. We avoided automaticity in the North Atlantic Treaty, but by the end of 1950 had agreed to join, indeed lead, an integrated military command, and to deploy forces on the European continent as part of that command. It had also become unavoidably clear that any sensible defense required the participation of rearmed German forces. This too was ultimately achieved after endless French neuralgia and temporizing.

Force goals have proved easier to agree upon than to achieve throughout NATO's history. For this reason through the early years defense strategy was based on massive retaliation: alliance conventional forces would provide a trip wire sounding the alarm; the U.S. atomic monopoly would finish the job. As the USSR acquired a nuclear capability the credibility of the U.S. retaliatory threat decreased--in our eyes, in those of our allies, and doubtless also in the view of the Soviets. This led us to develop an alternative strategy--flexible response--in an attempt to check this loss of credibility. Flexible response involves appropriate action across the spectrum of conventional, tactical nuclear and strategic nuclear forces. It has been contended that flexible response would increase the likelihood of conventional conflict whose battlefield would be Europe. This is one reason why the allies initially resisted this approach, agreeing somewhat reluctantly only in 1967. Flexible response remains NATO strategy.

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Some Europeans would still argue that massive retaliation in fact maximizes deterrence, even though in logic U.S. strategic nuclear use in defense of Europe is less credible when the USSR has a comparable capability. Would the United States honor its commitment to NATO where there is essentially a balance of such forces, or does that commitment now represent for all intents and purposes only a bluff? Much of the gloom and doom commentary as to the hollowness of NATO is based on the bluff contention. Can the Soviets, however, have enough certainty on that point to act?

The argument on the other side would assert that belittling flexible response discounts the range of problems which it poses for the Soviet planner; it also confronts the Soviet decisionmaker with an unresolved, lingering uncertainty.

Although differences have existed within the alliance as a matter of course through all of NATO's 35 year history, the NATO framework has proven flexible enough so that the members have been able to pursue not only different, but even occasionally, opposite views. This has, in fact, amounted to a source of strength without which there might have been insufficient resilience to avoid more serious, and perhaps fatal fissures. Up to now the security interests held in common by the allies have outweighed the causes of conflict.

What is deterrence, and how much is adequate? The amount of defense necessary to provide deterrence has been the source of lively and essentially continuous debate in the alliance. There is no definitive answer; the question has become ever more difficult.

It is unlikely that the defense budgets of our European allies will ever be adequate to support an optimum NATO defense capability. Even with agreed force goals unmet NATO has been successful in achieving its principal aim of deterring aggression against its members.

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III. HOW DID NATO START?

In the beginning...

At the end of the Second World War Europe was in very parlous shape. Over the chaos and disruption the shadow of further Soviet ambitions loomed harshly and threateningly. But, at the same time, there was no agreement on the precise nature of the Soviet threat. No responsible leader felt the Soviet Union aimed at a war to overrun Europe in the face of the American nuclear monopoly; however, the Soviet appetite for further aggrandizement seemed by no means yet filled. There was also some concern in the unsettled situation which existed in the aftermath of the war of possible tendencies towards neutralism. Some starch was needed. Foreign Secretary Bevin underscored to Secretary of State Marshall in a discussion in London December 17, 1947, that "the essential task is to create confidence in western Europe that further communist inroads would be stopped."[2]

The U.S. looks outward

The United States recognized the need. The Truman Doctrine of March 1947 represented a significant step charting a new, outward looking American foreign policy. However, our perspective differed from our European friends. The aim for us was to strengthen and help rebuild Europe through economic support, and to avoid a U.S. presence. The Europeans wished the insurance that tieing the U.S. more directly and proximately would represent. Would that have been adequate, assuming the USSR did not want war? To the Europeans the answer was uncertain. For our part, the Marshall Plan was announced at the Harvard commencement in early June 1947. Prior to the stationing of American forces none of the U.S. programs suggested a permanent American tie to Europe. It is unlikely that the U.S. would have agreed to join NATO if the permanence of our involvement had initially been recognized. At that time, there was no thought--American or European--that the need for NATO would be other than short-lived.

Promoting alliance

The coup in Prague in late February 1948, replacing the Benes government with a pro-Soviet regime, did nothing to lessen the concern nor the uncertainty about Soviet appetites. Shortly thereafter, on March 17, the Brussels Treaty was created by the UK, France and the Benelux countries as an earnest of free Europe's commitment to joint efforts for defense. President Truman in a speech to Congress the same

day pledged U.S. support for European defense, noting the vital importance of keeping American occupation forces in Germany "until peace is secure in Europe."[3] The Senate recorded its support for U.S. participation in a collective defense treaty in the Vandenberg Resolution on June 11, 1948. To weeks later the Berlin Blockade concentrated Western minds on the problem still further.

The UN and Europe prove inadequate

By this time it was clear that the United Nations had not lived up to its original expectations, and could not be relied upon as a basis for maintaining peace. As the negotiations towards NATO developed steam, it became apparent that western Europe was not likely to be able to establish arrangements to defend itself, irrespective of U.S. aid. Therefore, it became clear that more than token U.S. forces would be needed, not only as a counterpoise to the USSR, but also to provide an umbrella under which the Europeans, including the Germans, would feel comfortable between and among themselves. A further important factor was the UK stance against European unity. The British believed a special, bilateral relationship with the U.S. would be more advantageous.

Form of obligation?

While supporting the general concept, Americans and Europeans differed fundamentally with respect to the basic formula for a collective defense treaty. The Europeans wanted the U.S. to undertake formal, binding guarantees that an attack on Europe would bring an immediate U.S. response. In a word, automaticity. The Americans wanted the guarantee cast in general language that would have permitted each member of the alliance to decide separately and independently what would constitute sufficient response to an attack under the treaty. In several words, we wished to avoid automaticity, and, at least initially, wanted no commitment included which called for the use of military force.

Automatic response

In the end, because Senate support was obtainable in no other way the language of Article 5[4], containing the guarantee, falls short of automaticity and leaves open the question of what might be included in a response and whether that would involve the use of military force. Plain meaning aside, however, the question becomes essentially academic with a large American military force on the ground in Europe. The physical presence of sizable American military units in Europe ensures that if NATO were attacked U.S. forces already would be involved; in reality, thus, automaticity.

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IV. A PERMANENT AMERICAN LINK

Tieing the U.S. to European defense

The European aim to tie the U.S. through the treaty to the defense of Europe was undercut by the final language of Article 5. With the attenuation of the guarantee in Article 5, the Europeans leaned on Article 3[5], which calls for separate and joint efforts to "maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack," to involve the U.S. more firmly in the defense and security of Europe. Their goal was judged successfully achieved through the stationing of U.S. military forces in Europe under General Eisenhower, who was appointed Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) by the North Atlantic Council on December 19, 1950.

Differing aims for establishing NATO

The principal European interest in establishing NATO was to ensure that Germany would never again pose a threat to its neighbors. While for the United States the key interest was to create a means to cope with the Soviet threat. The two aims were not mutually exclusive, but it did become apparent early that in order realistically to handle the latter it would be necessary for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which came into being September 21, 1949, to participate in alliance defense plans. Specifically, Field Marshal Montgomery, Commander of the Brussels Pact forces, concluded that any realistic assessment of what was required to defend Western Europe had to include the FRG. Having determined that the Brussels Pact countries lacked both the resources and manpower necessary for an effective defense, Montgomery began to promote German inclusion as early as January 1949.[6]

French resistance to rearming Germany

France's goal was to preclude Germany from rearming. The French hoped to achieve this by integrating the FRG into a western European political and economic fabric markedly distinct from the Atlantic security relationship. The proposal to form a European Coal and Steel Community put forward by Foreign Minister Schuman at the tripartite (U.S., UK, and France) foreign minister's meeting in London, May 9, 1950, was developed for precisely that purpose. However, French inventiveness was soon followed by North Korea's invasion of South Korea on June 25, which inevitably spurred efforts to bring an armed FRG into western defense arrangements. The U.S. military strongly advocated this, and had been quietly doing so for several years. Secretary Acheson resisted because of the neuralgia such a step would cause in France. The Korean War,

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by renewing fears about Soviet intentions, made FRG inclusion as part of alliance forces to defend western Europe an immediately serious prospect. The U.S. and France began seeking a compromise basis for arming the FRG. Even though the French acquiesced on June 25 in the FRG manufacturing arms, their opposition to Germans bearing arms persisted. In late October, Prime Minister Pleven proposed creation of a European Defense Community (EDC), but with FRG units too small to be effective. France seemed surely to be temporizing. However, U.S.-French agreement on a compromise was achieved in December. It involved U.S. agreement to participate in an integrated NATO command structure and to deploy troops to Europe, while the French agreed to eventual German rearmament limited to German territory. In Secretary Acheson's words, this gave a "depth and permanence"[7] to the U.S. commitment to NATO not earlier contemplated.

Realism prevails

Although the Treaty establishing the EDC was signed in Paris in May 1952, by France, Italy, the Benelux countries and the FRG, it was not, ultimately, to be the vehicle for arming the FRG. The French National Assembly voted against ratification of the EDC in August 1954, which had the effect of killing it. It is perhaps paradoxical that this action led to a proposal by British Foreign Secretary Eden that effectively established an independent FRG army within NATO's integrated military forces. It reminded me of a noted American Atlanticist's definition of French logic: a knife that is all blade![8]

V. THE HEART OF THE ALLIANCE

NATO's raison d'etre

The North Atlantic Treaty essentially lays out NATO's strategy: to deter aggression against the members, and if aggression does occur, to defend and aim to restore the NATO area.

Forward defense

In September 1950, the North Atlantic Council decided that the NATO area was best defended by a "forward strategy". The deployment required to implement this strategy should be achieved at the earliest possible time, was to function as an integrated military force under centralized command, and should resist aggression as far to the east as possible. France was the initial proponent of this strategy, which is somewhat curious since it inevitably requires Germany's participation to have any real chance to be effective.

Decision Si, implementation Non

We pressed our allies to build up their forces during the early 1950s, as we increased from two to six divisions in Europe. Some increase was realized, particularly by France and the United Kingdom, and by 1952 allied forces amounted to about 25 divisions, but some were under strength and under equipped. At Lisbon in early 1952 the allies agreed to contribute 50 divisions by the end of 1952, 75 divisions by 1953, and 96 divisions by 1954. As has been the case in virtually every instance over 35 years, it was far easier to reach a decision than to implement it.

VI. MASSIVE RETALIATION

Unmet goals force the decision

NATO's massive retaliation strategy came about because the allies were not meeting agreed-upon force goals in timely fashion. One reason the Europeans have resisted conventional force increases is their fear that conventional defense would mean destruction of the European area. The use of battlefield nuclear weapons, they feared, would also lead to the devastation of the area defended. The European preference, therefore, was for U.S. strategic nuclear retaliation to serve as the principal component of western defense.

Massive retaliation's short half-life

In January 1954, Secretary of State Dulles announced that aggression against NATO would be met by massive nuclear retaliation. Conventional forces would serve as a trip wire to sound the alarm, but the response would be American nuclear weapons. While the United States had an atomic monopoly it was not of crucial consequence if conventional forces did not have adequate staying power. Or, indeed, if conventional forces at best could only deal with small scale contingencies. The heart of the allied deterrent was the threat of American nuclear weapons. When the U.S. monopoly was broken the credibility of massive retaliation was markedly reduced. Inevitably, and logically, confidence in the U.S. nuclear umbrella decreased as the Soviet apparent capability increased. The USSR detonated a thermonuclear device less than a year after the United States; the mid-1950s brought Soviet IRBMs, and the autumn of 1957 Sputnik. The U.S. nuclear monopoly existed no longer.

VII. FLEXIBLE RESPONSE

Shrinking credibility leads to change

The Kennedy Administration wrestled with the new situation and concluded that an alternative to massive retaliation was required in a mutual strategic nuclear world. The diminishing credibility of massive retaliation amounted to a lessening in the effectiveness of the NATO deterrent. It was clearly necessary to restore the credibility of that deterrent. After much agonizing the strategy decided upon was flexible response. This essentially consists of a full range of capabilities running from conventional through theater nuclear to strategic nuclear forces, permitting controlled escalation of the conflict. The Warsaw Pact would not know what NATO responses to expect.

European resistance

Secretary of Defense McNamara announced the new flexible response strategic policy at the Ministerial meeting in Athens in June 1962. The Europeans were disturbed by this. A difficulty in getting agreement on flexible response was that in the main Europeans felt that the threat of rapid escalation to strategic nuclear weapons represented a greater deterrent to the initiation of conflict, even though in a world where both sides had such forces their use might be less credible after conflict had begun. Massive retaliation arguably maximized deterrence against aggression; flexible response sharpened the possibility that Europe would be a nuclear battlefield and thus destroyed, and would require a greater conventional force effort by the allies.

European lag on conventional forces

It might seem logical, even reasonable since NATO and Warsaw Pact forces confront one another through the heart of Europe, for the Europeans to take whatever steps are required to achieve an optimum conventional force level. This, however, they have never been prepared to do. One reason that has persisted over NATO's whole history is the question of cost. Initially, the European economies were too wasted and weak following the war. Even after an adequate recovery had been effected, spurred by Marshall Plan and other assistance from the U.S., there was never an inclination to expend resources to bolster conventional force capability. To be sure, some steps have occasionally been taken, but not enough to meet the levels deemed sufficient by the allied military leadership.

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They feel it does not matter

There was never disagreement that there is a Soviet threat to which it is useful to have a counterpoise; however, from the beginning there has been lack of agreement as to the degree and nature of that threat. The Europeans are just not convinced that it matters whether the conventional force levels and capabilities for which the U.S. has always been the chief promoter are attained. As Joe Kraft pointed out recently: "The fact is that the Europeans are prepared to live with an inadequate conventional defense even as the credibility of nuclear deterrence declines."[9]

Flexible response reluctantly blessed

Albeit unhappily, the Europeans ultimately, with the exception of France which withdrew from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966, accepted the flexible response strategy. There were, however, no conventional force increases in the wake of the December 1967 Defense Planning Committee decision. Forward defense and flexible response remain NATO's strategic doctrine to this day.

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VIII. NATO'S NUCLEAR PROCESS

MLF is a disaster, but NPG works

France had decided in 1955 to develop an independent nuclear capability in order to avoid total reliance on the U.S. We hoped other allies would not follow such a course since further proliferation inevitably made the use of nuclear weapons more likely. As an alternative our non-nuclear allies might share in the decision to use our nuclear forces. We thought a Multilateral Force (MLF) involving multinational manning with the U.S. retaining a veto over nuclear release might be the answer, and promoted it in 1963 and 1964, first in terms of a Polaris submarine and then a surface ship with missiles. The FRG had obligated itself not to acquire nuclear weapons in the mid-1950s. The FRG did not want a finger on the nuclear trigger, or even the possible appearance of one. The Europeans did, however, want a role in the process of developing nuclear strategy and the possible use of such weapons. NATO's Nuclear Planning Group was created to provide that role. In 1969 McGeorge Bundy wrote about the death of the MLF:

> "I had my share in the effort to construct and market the MLF, and all I can say in my defense is that in the end I also had my share in shelving it. It was an effort to square the nuclear circle, and it could not work. What has worked best, in the end, has been what is simplest: first, the fact of American men and weapons on the spot, and second, the growing fact of serious discussons on nuclear policy--both of them based on the reality of ultimate responsibility."[10]

IX. FRANCE'S UNUSUAL APPROACH

DeGaulle's dreams appear paradoxical

France has been the most unusual member of the alliance. Although a proponent from the outset of a mutual defense arrangement to counter the Soviet threat, France's more fundamental interest was in ensuring against the resurgence of Germany. For the Benelux countries German recovery was both required and feared. They wished neither French nor German hegemony. If hegemony there was to be, it should be in the form of the United States. In the end, French agreement to German rearming was only obtainable if the U.S. agreed to participate through the contribution of military forces to NATO. Later, deGaulle tried to wean Europe away from the U.S. because of the imbalanced dependence on the U.S. arising from U.S. strength. The Europeans, including the FRG, resisted the General's efforts. It is hard to see how France would have been comfortable had the General succeeded, even if the leadership position for the French which deGaulle sought had been achieved. Without the United States a huge relative increase in German strength and importance would have resulted. Inevitably the German role and position would have continued to grow--precisely the situation that the French feared most and wished to avoid.

De facto French military cooperation

While still formally outside the NATO integrated military command, France has considerable, and growing, involvement in the range of alliance military activities. For some years when France has judged a military action to be in French interest she has done it irrespective of the fact that it may also be important to the alliance. For example, when British maritime forces were withdrawn from the Mediterranean in 1975 a substantial part of France's fleet deployed there from the Atlantic.

X. THE FRG AND NATO

The alliance makes a comfortable home

The Federal Republic of Germany also has a singular position within the alliance. Without NATO there might not be an FRG; certainly, it would be markedly different than it is today. NATO provides the framework for an armed FRG which is integrated into the alliance in relative comfort, accepted by her allies and tolerated by the Soviets. The FRG's undertaking not to acquire nuclear weapons is looked upon favorably by friend and foe alike. The Ostpolitik effort, undertaken originally by Willy Brandt in the late 1960s, has been pursued continuously since then. It has been handled with balance and discretion and generally has not cast doubt on the FRG's fundamental security commitment to and with the west. Ostpolitik has involved significant costs for the FRG, but it has put in more realistic perspective the remote goal of reunification.

Alternative security judged less good

The Federal Republic's position in the world is, quite frankly, a difficult and even unpleasant one. However, up to now, although security alternatives have been looked at and debated countless times, the status quo always has been judged the best option.

U.S. essential to FRG view

The U.S. commitment to and participation in the alliance with substantial forces as well as U.S. strategic nuclear power, all play an important role in that continuing FRG judgment. Were the U.S. commitment to lessen and our involvement to decrease a new FRG security assessment unquestionably would ensue. Under these circumstances it seems inevitable that a different conclusion would be reached. Certainly the FRG would not accept France playing a nuclear protective role instead of the U.S., even if that had any credibility. Considering the implications, it seems equally unlikely that the FRG would renege on the obligation not to acquire nuclear weapons. The Soviets certainly would not stand still for that; the reverberations, even among FRG allies, in France, for example, would also be dramatic. The less risky tack, under which there would appear greater likelihood of advancing the ultimate reunification goal, would be more vigorous promotion of accommodation towards the east.

XI. JOINT ACTION OUT OF AREA?

The treaty does not require it

The question of whether one of the allies should go to the aid of another outside the North Atlantic area has occasionally arisen since NATO's founding. Certainly the obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty do not compel the allies to support one of their number with interests at risk elsewhere in the world. The North Atlantic area is defined with very precise limits.

Switching views

In one of the earliest instances of this question, France's deteriorating situation in Vietnam in the early 1950s led her to seek help from the U.S. which we were not prepared to supply. Although we did not end up supporting the application of NATO obligations outside the Atlantic area, the U.S. did have some early interest in the idea because of our Pacific territories. In the Suez affair, in late 1956, the U.S. actively opposed the British and French invasion to reopen the canal which Nasser had nationalized earlier in the year. We forced our allies to withdraw. Subsequent history has involved a flip-flop between the U.S. and France on the point. The French were the most publicly negative about our Vietnam war, and public support from the British was far from firm. The FRG was about the most positive, albeit general, in its comments. The Germans apparently concluded that the best way to retain American confidence was to express confidence in us. Our NATO allies would have been delighted if Vietnam had just gone away.

The U.S. argues for action

The U.S. has been the principal proponent in more recent years of allied cooperation in countering threats to western security outside of Europe. We have argued, for example, that increased Soviet military capability poses security problems for NATO beyond the alliance area and that NATO must be prepared to consider necessary action to cope with such problems. The allies have reacted cautiously. There has never been any serious corporate positive response to our arguments. This is not surprising considering the breadth of interests reflected by the membership, and the difficulty of making the case that alliance security is being negatively affected. A further inhibition is the unlikelihood that the allies, in light of their defense spending problems, could replace U.S. forces diverted from the defense of Europe. Also, in some cases they do not want to appear to be endorsing U.S. policies.

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NATO makes progress

However, an agreed NATO goal is to contribute to peaceful progress throughout the world. Admittedly this is communique rhetoric, but at least the state of things outside the Atlantic area is being thought about and discussed, with some views reflecting interest and concern publicly stated. Although NATO has not agreed to act corporately outside the Atlantic area, there is agreement to undertake appropriate consulation on events in other regions of the world "which may have implications for our security."[11] The threat to Persian Gulf oil supplies posed by the Iran-Iraq War is an obvious current example. U.S., British and French forces in the area have worked together closely on possible actions which might be undertaken to keep the oil flowing should that become necessary. Such actions could, of course, be undertaken even without recognition on the part of the alliance that members' interests can be affected beyond the Treaty area. Our help to the UK in the Falklands War did not hinge on any NATO obligation; we were prepared to respond positively to a bilateral request to provide certain assistance. Although progress has been minimal, some has been achieved. The willingness to note publicly the existence of external problems that may impact on NATO security interests is, I believe, helpful and healthy for the alliance. On the one hand, greater understanding is generated through the consultative process. On the other hand, in view of the wide range among the NATO members in size, strength, resources, and interests, it is probably only natural for them to have differing views about the possible implications of an out of area event.

XII. NATO's BALANCE SHEET

Aggression has been deterred

What does NATO's balance sheet look like as it launches into its thirty-sixth year? In simplest, and arguably the only meaningful, terms it has achieved its central purpose of deterring aggression against its members. NATO has not been attacked by the adversary against whose threat it was established 35 years ago.

Superior forces?

Is this because NATO's forces are superior? The argument is usually the other way. Certainly, the alliance's military leaders have consistently voiced their force shortcomings. It is not realistic, however, to think in terms of a high, optimum conventional force level for NATO, able to cope with any contingency. The allies are just not prepared to put up the resources necessary to achieve it. The argument has even been made that such a capability might increase the likelihood of preemptive nuclear use by the other side, judging that it could not prevail in a solely conventional conflict. NATO has at least gone beyond the low level of conventional forces amounting to a trip wire alarm bell that was its situation during the early days before the switch to the flexible response strategy. There have always been considerable differences, however, as to what is enough. There have, for example, been differing regional perspectives, as well as a civil view distinct from a military view of requirements. The current SACEUR, General Rogers, believes that a relatively modest real increase of 4% per year in defense expenditures by the allies could provide him adequate conventional forces. It is unlikely that even this increase will be realized, and this is recognized by the military. In meeting their responsibility, however, they will continue to make the case for what they consider adequate military requirements.

Greater strategic strength?

Is the lack of attack because of the greater strength of U.S. strategic nuclear forces? It is generally agreed that the credibility of nuclear deterrence has been in decline ever since the U.S. lost her nuclear monopoly and the USSR began building up its nuclear weapons stock. It has even been suggested that because of Soviet strategic nuclear capability the nuclear doctrine of the alliance lacks credibility, amounting to no more than a bluff. Even were that a widely-held view, it is not likely to be the one held by the USSR. The Soviets can not be sure that it is all bluff.

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Shrewder strategy?

Is NATO's superior strategy the reason there has not been aggression? The alliance has essentially only had two strategies. Whether aggression is more effectively deterred under a strategy of massive retaliation or one involving flexible response has been the subject of considerable discussion and debate. Substantial arguments have been made championing each approach. The United States concluded that adding doubts and uncertainty as to NATO's possible response to aggression would restore a deteriorating deterrent. Thus, it was necessary to switch from massive retaliation to flexible response. Europeans in the main judged that the prospect of very early resort to strategic nuclear forces provided the greatest deterrent. This group clearly preferred massive retaliation, even though where both sides possessed such forces their use after hostilities had started might be less credible. This reflected a growing belief that there is no longer any satisfactory military solution to the defense of Europe. Viewed from Europe it was becoming clear that any war, whether conventional or nuclear, would be a disaster. It was imperative to avoid war. The heart of defense must be based on deterring war.

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What is it?

But what constitutes deterrence? A former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Peter Hill-Norton, says: "The whole NATO enterprise is about deterrence, and everything within the alliance is there simply and solely to create and sustain this one overriding element."[12]

Uncertainty's role

General Andrew Goodpaster, a former SACEUR, has described deterrence as being, in part, based on uncertainty. He notes that the Soviets must calculate both the costs and the risks of undertaking military action, and "then recognize the uncertainty that remains."[13] The General goes on to point out that an assessment of credibility must include the question --credible to whom? He suggests that the Soviets will see all the uncertainties and will ask the question that he has asked to them many times: "Is there anything west of the iron curtain for which they wish to risk destruction of the motherland?"[14] General Goodpaster thinks the answer to that question "is likely to be no, in spite of the doubts that exist on our side."[15]

A free ride for the USSR?

We must not lose sight of the fact that the USSR is not free of inclarity and uncertainty with respect to these questions. The Soviets bear the burden of the same unanswerable conundrum that burdens us. Whatever their degree of doubt as to the likelihood that the United States will use nuclear weapons, some doubt must exist. The Soviet Union cannot be sure that we will not. Indeed, a prudent military planner must plan for that contingency, and the Soviet military historically have been prudent and conservative.

Is there still deterrence?

The fact that deterrence has worked, and NATO has not been attacked for over 35 years, is far better than the alternative. But what of the future? Will the USSR continue to be deterred? There can, of course, be no definitive positive (or negative) answer to that question.

An invasion of NATO by the Warsaw Pact cannot be excluded, but it is about as likely, I believe, as the reverse, and for about the same reason. Is there any potential gain to make the undertaking attractive enough to outbalance the risk and costs? I would submit that there is not. The International Institute of Strategic Studies, the most respected public source, reaches the same conclusion. The East-West conventional force balance in Europe is described in the IISS's "The Military Balance 1983-1984" as follows:

> "Assessing the balance between NATO and the Warsaw Pact...our conclusion remains that the overall balance continues to be such as to make military aggression a highly risky undertaking. Though tactical redeployments could certainly provide a local advantage in numbers sufficient to allow an attacker to believe that he might achieve limited tactical success, there would still appear to be insufficient overall strength on either side to guarantee victory. The consequences for an attacker would be unpredictable, and the risks, particularly of nuclear escalation, incalculable."[16]

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XV. CONCLUSION

The question has been asked many times: If not NATO, then what? The clear implication being that if NATO did not exist it, or something comparable, would have to be invented. Fortunately, from that standpoint, it does exist, because it is unlikely that it could be created today.

The fundamental issue to be considered is whether it is in our national interest for the United States to remain in NATO. Would the U.S. be better off out of the alliance, or if there were no NATO?

The central American security issue must be judged to be our relationship with the world's other military superpower the Soviet Union. If the U.S. were not in NATO, or if there were no alliance, we would be at least in an apparently weaker position, it seems to me, in dealing with the USSR and the USSR would be in a stronger position in dealing with western Europe. Certainly, there would be some distance between western Europe and the U.S., a high priority goal of the Soviet Union since NATO's creation.

The U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship is obviously of great interest and importance to our allies. Whether its state is good or bad the Europeans tend to be nervous. In periods of entente they worry that we may be doing them in by our dealings behind their backs; when U.S.-Soviet relations are tense they fear that a conflict may result and Europe will be destroyed. The reactions are both somewhat paradoxical as well as somewhat understandable. They derive from the inequality in NATO: one superpower, and the rest.

Inevitably the future of NATO will depend on American interest, involvement and leadership. Our strength makes that inescapable. So long as the U.S. stays in NATO the rest of the membership will too. If the U.S. were to pull out the Europeans tell us that NATO would no longer exist, and the Europeans, rather than pulling together within the west, would turn eastward to see what security arrangements might be possible. Some of that sort of talk is almost certainly intended to get our attention but, sadly, it also seems pragmatic and realistic.

The power disparity between ourselves and our allies tends to exacerbate differences among us, and aggravates frustrations that may arise. Another factor is related to their proximity to the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, even with the power disparity, and the frustrations and differences that exist, there would not appear to be any security alternative currently attractive enough to lead to a change on the western side. There is, of course, no possibility

[illegible] on the eastern side. For one thing, virtually any alternative on our side would be more costly. Additionally, there is already ample scope for individuality under NATO. Indeed, the degree of freedom and flexibility permitted alliance members under the North Atlantic Treaty constitutes a singular strength of the alliance. The Bonn Declaration of June 1982 expresses this admirably, describing NATO as "...an association of free nations joined together to preserve their security through mutual guarantees and collective self-defense..." whose "...solidarity in no way conflicts with the right of each of our countries to choose its own policies and internal development, and allows for a high degree of diversity."[17]

What are the essential constituent elements in the NATO equation?

-- the United States obligation to defend western Europe contained in the North Atlantic Treaty;

-- U.S. strategic nuclear power which is committed to fulfilling the American obligation;

-- a U.S. military presence on the continent as part of an integrated alliance military command under an American SACEUR;

-- in sum, a means to balance Soviet power (and hence give pause to Soviet ambitions); and

-- the alliance provides a framework within which acceptably to fit the FRG.

These points have been fundamental throughout NATO's history. Were there to be any change in them it would almost certainly prove fatal to the alliance; fortunately, there does not seem to be realistic prospect for any of them changing.

An attack westward by the Soviet Union seems most unlikely, but the power of the USSR, in spite of all the problems that plague the Soviets, remains formidable. It is useful to continue to make clear in the face of it that should ambitions arise it will be painfully costly to attempt to realize them.

NATO does provide a framework within which to integrate an armed FRG with relative comfort. The Federal Republic's position in the world, frankly, is a difficult one. The FRG has on occasion considered other security options, but has always concluded that the status quo is best. Certainly the FRG would not accept France in the central nuclear role of the United States.

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What of the United States and the alliance? A thoughtful commentator has stated that the U.S. commitment to the security of western Europe is principally because of the "vital importance of the transatlantic relationship as a central element of American global strategy."[18] Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Tower recently made a simpler, but similar comment in explaining why the Senate had refused to cut U.S. contributions to NATO. The proposal was to decrease U.S. funds unless the Europeans start spending more for the common defense. Senator Tower argued that such a move would damage the effectiveness of the 330,000 U.S. troops in Europe: "We're not there just to defend them. We're there to defend our interests," Tower said.[19]

However, even many of those most critical of the current state of the alliance, the prophets of gloom and doom ever casting the disarray characterization at NATO, are not promoting the idea of the United States leaving the alliance. A noted NATO critic has stated: "To this day, the development of the Atlantic relationship remains the most successful foreign policy designed by the United States since the end of World War II."[20]

Even among the critics there seems a realization that the defense of Europe requires American involvement. Neither east nor west wants a German finger on the nuclear trigger. The west needs a nuclear umbrella, which neither France nor the United Kingdom, nor both together can provide. The U.S. presence enables a comfortable fit of the FRG into the western security fabric. It also ensures a cohesive fabric where through history there had been only discord.

A NATO world is not free of problems for its members; a non-NATO world would be worse for the United States as well as western Europe.

The linking of Europe and America in a larger Atlantic framework, although a natural development, represents a remarkable achievement in view of the great obstacles that had to be overcome. The fact that the link has held for over 35 years is even more remarkable. Part of this derives from the degree of flexibility in the basic undertakings contained in the North Atlantic Treaty. Part of this rests on the security underpinning NATO provides in an unstable world. The members recognize that the community of security interests they share outweighs their differences.

These strengths are not, however, without limit. It will be important to try to avoid overloading NATO's future agenda. The alliance has served its central purpose very well. We must be careful to preserve that, and not seek to use it in ways and for purposes for which it is not the proper vehicle.

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XV. POSTSCRIPT

As with so much in life, it is quite clear that with respect to NATO one's view depends upon one's viewing point. Or, as the old saw goes: where one stands depends on where one sits.

This is all quite natural. It does, however, result in NATO's being more publicly belabored about shortcomings than is useful. I recognize that it is necessary to get the attention of the Europeans at the political level. Once that is accomplished, however, we are far more likely to get them to take concrete steps if the effort goes forward out of the spotlight.

Few things in this world are perfect. NATO falls in a clear majority! Let it alone to get on about its business. Start saying--metaphorically--the glass is half full, rather than always bemoaning the fact that it is half empty. Take off from the next shortfall determined to try harder, and do not wring hands and conclude that belly up is virtually upon us.

In sum, pocket 35 years of peace and press ahead, striving to make better NATO's less than perfect defense, recalling all the while Senator Tower's recent perceptive judgment: "We're not just there to defend the blue-eyed Europeans. We're there to defend our national interest."[21]

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1. Defense analyst B. Bruce Briggs in an article, "There's Life in Old NATO Yet", in the Wall Street Journal of October 20, 1983, sets the scene as follows:

> "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is in dire straits. Growing tensions between the U.S. and European members threaten its cohesiveness, and at least will force radical changes in the alliance. Or so we have been hearing, again--again, again and again. For almost 35 years scribes and pundits have heralded the 'disarray' of NATO."

2. Escott Reid, Time of Fear and Hope - The Making of the North Atlantic Treaty 1947-1949 (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1977), p. 37.

3. Timothy P. Ireland, Creating the Entangling Alliance - The Origins of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press - Contributions in Political Science, Number 50, 1981), p. 91.

4. The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, D.C., April 4, 1949: Article 5.

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 consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, 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.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

5. Ibid.,

Article 3

In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

6. Ireland, supra, p. 169.

7. Ireland, supra, p. 208.

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8. J. Robert Schaetzel, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, at a meeting with European Community officials at the Department of State, June 1967.

9. Joseph Kraft, "Bickering With Europe - It's time to change the subject.", OUTLOOK Section, Washington Post April 1, 1984.

10. McGeorge Bundy, lecture at The Ditchley Foundation in England, July 18, 1969.

11. Declaration of the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at Bonn, June 10, 1982, Paragraph 5(E).

12. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Peter Hill-Norton, No Soft Options - The Politico-Military Realities of NATO (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1978), p. 21.

13. General Andrew J. Goodpaster, USA (Ret.), "Should the U.S. Stay in NATO?", HARPER's, April 1984, p. 35. (This was a discussion among 10 American and European authorities on the political and military condition of the alliance. The questions: Can NATO survive? Should it?).

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. The East-West Conventional Balance in Europe, "The Military Balance 1983-1984" (International Institute for Strategic Studies, London: Autumn 1983).

17. Bonn Declaration, supra.

18. Jacquelyn K. Davis and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., The Atlantic Alliance and U.S. Global Strategy (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1983), p. 5.

19. Senator John Tower (R-Tex.), Chairman, Armed Services Committee, as reported in the Washington Post, June 8, 1984, p. 4.

20. Simon Serfaty, "Atlantic Fantasies," in The Atlantic Alliance and Its Critics, eds. Robert W. Tucker and Linda Wrigley (New York: Praeger Publishers - A Lehrman Institute Book, 1983), p. 96.

21. Senator Tower, as reported in the Washington Post, June 21, 1984, p. 15.

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