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NATO

Problems and Prospects

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MAJOR NATO PROBLEMS

by

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NATO—PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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MAJOR NATO PROBLEMS

The General Framework

Up to the present, NATO has been an organization of limited responsibility. It is defensive in nature, restricted to a given geographic area, and does not establish the means that each nation will employ for the defense of all concerned. However, this definition has proven to be too narrow in scope to meet with present day problems. Hence any serious study on the subject of NATO must first be considered in its true framework of world strategy.

The Principle Factors

Since 1945, world strategy has been dominated by two opposing forces, namely the United States and Russia. But this notion constitutes a simplification further and further removed from reality.

Actually, the present situation is characterized by the simultaneous emergence of several important factors.

The fall of Europe after two world wars resulted in a vacuum in Central Europe into which the Soviet Union rushed, and in the collapse of Europe's world empire, Western Europe, while recovered economically and politically, remains weak from the military point of view.

The emergence of the United States and Russia as superpowers. Their mutual opposition has led them to take reciprocal security measures in Europe and in Asia. But the inherent nature of the problems of nuclear warfare is leading them to establish among themselves a new kind of relationship.

The awakening of the Third World, instigated by its contact with European civilization, rendered possible by Europe's downfall and the mutual neutralization of the nuclear balance, and provoked by the old restraints of colonialism. The Third World is striving simultaneously for Europeanization and for a rediscovery of its old traditions. The Europeanization of the Third World nations wavers between the Western and the Soviet models. In the Third World, several giants of the future are slowly emerging, although they are still more or less in their infancy: China, India, and the Arab World. But elsewhere, the general perspective is one of chaos, offering numerous indirect and strategic opportunities to the two principle political camps.

The development of economics of plenty, thanks to modern technology. This development, which has engendered American prosperity, Soviet power, and the rapid recovery of Europe, is ill suited to the conditions of the Third World, which lacks technicians, capital, and adequate resources, while their rapidly expanding populations, resulting from modern health improvements, present virtually insoluble problems. Hence we have a dangerous disparity between economies of abundance and the economics of the underdeveloped nations. The Third World nations waver between American techniques of production and those of Soviet socialism more or less adapted by the Chinese.

The development of the Marxist ideology, a materialist interpretation, and secularization of Christian ideals leading to a messianic historical evolution through the complete overthrow of old values: property, profit, etc. This ideology seems to be becoming the credo of the proletariat.

The advent of nuclear weapons (and more generally the development of scientific resources serving military technology) leading to the creation of means of destruction which are disproportionate to the political objectives of war. This has resulted in a still incompletely realized new balance with specific problems of considerable importance.

These six principal factors combine to give the world its present character: on the one hand, a basic instability due to political and economic factors; on the other hand, an almost total stabilization due to nuclear weapons, where there is the knowledge of how to use their power.

This situation leads to a world strategy which brings to view two complementary and interdependent aspects: on the one hand, a direct strategy of deterrence, essentially nuclear, aiming at a military balance among the great economic and political potentials by means of an arms race which constitutes an increasingly heavy burden on the most advanced countries; on the other hand, an indirect strategy, essentially political and economic, perhaps even excessive, whose intensity depends on the degree of neutralization established by the military balance — a strategy that utilizes to the maximum the factors of instability, especially in the Third World.

In this perspective, world strategy brings to light (or should bring to light) two principal factors: the long-term political objective, and the internal laws governing contemporary strategy, particularly nuclear and indirect strategy.

The Long-Range Political Objective

The determination of this objective is purely political, not strategic, in nature. Hence it is not pertinent to the framework of this study. From the strategic point of view, one can merely state that it is unfortunate that such an objective has been defined only in uncertain and often contradictory terms. The reasons for this are obvious: the divergence of views among the United States and the former colonial powers; propaganda disputes; and illusions as to the possibilities of resolving simultaneously all existing problems, especially those of the Third World.

It is evident that the big problem will be to determine what, in the years ahead, is to be the nature of our civilization wrought under the

mark of productivity and technology in a cramped and overpopulated world, and to determine whether our Greco-Roman and Christian heritage will endure.

From this point of view, the unity and the prosperity of Europe and the Atlantic Community seems to be essential, as does the stemming of poverty in the Third World.

This implies two long-range options and it is only in the light of such political options that we can define a strategy.

We have already noted in passing the fundamental duality of current strategy.

The Nuclear Dilemma

Regarding the nuclear question, we are often led into error by the vestiges of our former (and now obsolete) ideas on war.

Modern means of destruction are much too powerful to be used. Furthermore, technological advance has introduced a completely new concept of enormous and inevitable reciprocal risks, which obviates the old notion of the victor and the vanquished. A war of this nature has become unthinkable, so unthinkable that we risk losing the stabilizing advantages of the nuclear deterrent, thus introducing once again the possibility of violent non-nuclear conflict.

Our interest, then, is centered on two conclusions which are, unfortunately, contradictory.

1. The use of nuclear weapons is unthinkable.
2. The threat of the use of nuclear weapons is indispensable.

Hence it is necessary to sustain the credibility of a first strike without actually bringing the threat to fruition.

There exist but three ways to resolve this contradiction:

1. To render credible the possibility of a first strike by possession of a counterforce capability sufficient to diminish significantly the effect of retaliatory measures. This solution is very difficult to achieve and is limited to the major nuclear powers.

2. To admit the possibility of an irrational decision to launch the first strike. This is the only possible choice for the smaller powers.

3. By humanizing or mollifying the first strike, to make it not unthinkable, declaring in advance its limited design in order to discourage massive retaliation. Such a solution (of a limited first strike) renounces the possibility of achieving an absolute deterrent.

Each of these three possible solutions has advantages and disadvantages. The error generally made has been to present one of these possibilities as the only worthy solution. Actually, an effective deterrent must embrace all three. From this point of view, the tactical nuclear weapon is absolutely indispensable if conventional forces are to enjoy the stability which only the fear of nuclear risk can bestow during a period of nuclear balance.

By contrast, if we were forced to resort to nuclear weapons, it would be essential to play a humanitarian and compromising role in order to stop the conflict at the lowest possible level.

This consideration naturally applies to the use of tactical nuclear weapons which, in any case, should be extremely limited.

Conventional Forces Problem

Conventional forces are essential to the achievement of nuclear deterrence. But the difficulty is to foresee the importance of this necessary complement.

As long as the policy of nuclear deterrence is sufficient to influ-

ence the conventional level, the use of conventional forces by the enemy is almost inconceivable.

But the nuclear balance could be such that the use of nuclear weapons might appear impossible, at least for small stakes. In this case, the strength of conventional forces, reinforced if necessary by tactical nuclear weapons, should be sufficient to discourage minor aggression not covered by the policy of nuclear deterrence.

If the nuclear stalemate should become total or almost total, the threatened use of conventional force could rise considerably, leading to the possibility of substantial conventional warfare. At any rate, the existence of strategic nuclear forces would nevertheless create a danger such that these conflicts would be stopped short and would be limited in their political objectives. Hence, we would not revert to the condition which prevailed during the two world wars, but to the need for a greater conventional force level.

Finally, in the areas where nuclear deterrence does not apply (for want of know-how) conventional forces must be capable of operating alone. The possession of highly mobile conventional strategic reserves is essential to the operation of indirect strategy. In certain instances, these forces must be able to be reinforced by substantial effective forces.

Since it is impossible to choose from among these alternatives in advance, it is easy to see the need for having available a minimum level of conventional forces which can be augmented as required by developments in the nuclear balance of power.

The Cold War Problem

The cold war persists under changing aspects and intensity. This is to be expected in the age of nuclear deterrence. Political, economic, diplomatic, and military factors are brought into play — but the military

means play only an auxiliary role. Foremost is the political-psychological factor — that is, the adopted political strategy.

Strategically, freedom of action depends above all on the scheme followed on the world chessboard, outside the disputed area. There, where the defense is difficult and the balance precarious, it is especially necessary to have the initiative.

Problems of NATO

In spite of its diverse limitations NATO can be understood and organized only within the general framework of unity described above.

Since 1950, in fact if not in theory, NATO has been an organization directed exclusively by the United States whose force has been and still is preponderant. The United States has strictly reserved nuclear strategy for itself and has carried out its world strategy with complete independence, generally without consulting with its allies, and sometimes even in direct conflict with some of them. The economic and political recovery of Europe — thanks, to some extent, to the Marshall Plan — has made it impossible to continue this way. NATO must find a formula for achieving a new balance in its policy and strategy. This is what General de Gaulle proposed in his November 1958 statement, which has never been effectively answered. The two issues he raised deal with the direction of world strategy and nuclear strategy — solutions for which still must be found.

World Strategy

World strategy is essentially that indirect strategy which, within the context of the cold war, seeks to promote a new balance of power required by world change. It is in this area of "indirect strategy" that we must re-establish a profitable Western initiative. If we acknowledge that national independence must be safeguarded, three solutions are pos-

sible: widespread unilateral action; consultation within the NATO framework; formation of a joint strategic policy wherever possible.

Because of failure to adopt a joint strategic policy (as had been suggested by General de Gaulle), an attempt has been made at a system of consultation within the framework of NATO which has not really worked, and which, moreover, could hardly have practical results since within NATO interest in extra-European questions is constantly changing. Thus, we have returned to a policy of disunity, the shortcomings of which are obvious.

The only logical solution (although admittedly difficult to achieve) is a return to consultation on common strategy among nations having worldwide interests, subsequently restating that strategy to apply regionally for other nations with allied interests — all of which presupposes appropriate vehicles for carrying out such a solution. (The remarkable task accomplished in regard to the Berlin issue constitutes an interesting precedent and shows how a practical solution could be found.)

Nuclear Strategy

The issue of nuclear strategy presents the same difficulty. In this area, NATO suffers because up to now the Americans have considered nuclear strategy to be strictly national, although it constitutes the basis of NATO joint strategy. It is no longer possible to restrict NATO's sphere of influence to the question of the tactical defense of Europe when NATO's strategic framework is much more extensive. The problem arises now in the atomic sphere because of the French independent nuclear force, but it is in fact a problem for the whole alliance to the extent of a developing strategic awareness within the various European nations.

Since 1960 the development of American thought in this area has served to complicate rather than to resolve the problem. Of prime con-

cern are two essential considerations: the fear of nuclear proliferation and the necessity for a completely centralized nuclear control. These preoccupations are partially unfounded, and there exist other considerations which are at least as important.

The fundamental error has been to think that: politically it would be possible to maintain indefinitely the complete authority that the United States has exerted in the nuclear sphere; materially it would be possible to prevent France from carrying out its nuclear program. This error has precluded consideration of alternative solutions which will be necessary sooner or later.

On the other hand, the fact that the allies of the United States (except perhaps Great Britain) had not closely followed the development of American ideas with regard to nuclear force has produced a dangerous intellectual time lag which is manifested by the divergence of opinion which in many cases could have been avoided by a joint study of these problems years before.

The formation of alliance nuclear strategy raises two problems: the theoretical one, the role of allied and independent nuclear forces; and the practical one, the possibilities of coordination of allied nuclear strategies.

The Role of Allied and Independent Nuclear Forces

Theoretical studies made by the French Institute of Strategic Studies regarding nuclear deterrence have brought to light certain laws concerning multilateral deterrence.

When two principal and opposing nuclear forces are in a counterbalancing deterrent position, the existence of a third nuclear influence allied to one of the two forces, although remaining independent as far as decisions are concerned, presents to the deterrence problem some very

important modifications which are not proportionate to the destructive capacity of the third force. In effect, the resulting phenomena can be compared to the influence of a catalytic agent in chemistry.

With Regard to a Potential Aggressor

To a potential aggressor, desiring to avoid an all-out nuclear war, the existence of several focal points of independent decision complicates the deterrence problem to the point of preventing even plausible predictions. This uncertainty is for all intents and purposes a deterrent and stabilizing force.

In bringing to light the potential risks of attacking the vital interests of this third influence, the independent nuclear capability prevents an error of judgment, which would endanger these interests even if they appeared secondary for its principle opponent.

In creating an element of uncertainty, small as it may be, with regard to the possible reactions of the third influence, the existence of a focal point of independent decisions serves to confer upon the principal ally's nuclear forces (more or less neutralized by the new existing balance), a more extensive deterrent power. In fact, the existence of a third influence considerably augments the opponent's belief in the possibility of a first strike.

This combination of possible consequences serves to fortify deterrence considerably.

With Regard to the Principal Ally

As far as the principal ally is concerned, the existence in his camp of a focal point of independent nuclear decisions creates the need for effective coordination between the deterrent strategies of the two allies in order to prevent the adversary's uncertainty from spreading into the al-

lied camp. This necessary coordination tightens the bond between the two allies resulting in a powerful, organic solidarity. In the event of serious tension, the existence of two or more centers of decision allows for graduated pressure, leaving the enemy in doubt about the degree of coordination, and makes it possible (if it is deemed useful) for the principal ally to refrain from or delay participation.

This combination of possible consequences serves to make allied deterrent measures both more flexible and more efficient, while, at the same time reinforcing alliance cohesion.

The Problem of Coordination of Deterrent Strategies

Up to the present, this problem has been approached by the United States only to the extent of their trying to avoid it by complete integration of allied nuclear forces. The main reason behind this unifying tendency has been the fear of seeing the subtle and terribly dangerous game of deterrence confused and compromised by the unfortunate impulsiveness of one or more allied nations acting independently.

Hence we have cast doubt upon the maturity and judgment of the nuclear allies, although there are many compelling reasons for their fear that they would be the hardest-hit victims in the event of a nuclear conflict. Furthermore, it should be noted that the American reaction of distrust of their European allies is very similar to the attitude which existed in several of the European countries with regard to the United States when the theory of massive retaliation held sway. To a great extent it had been caused by threatening statements regarding the policy of deterrence, as well as the undeniably privileged position which the United States enjoyed. But above all, the present error is a result of ignoring or forgetting the real nature of nuclear weapons, whose role is not to wage a war which would be unthinkable, but to prevent war through a policy of deterrence. It is in this context of deterrence that the coordination of strategies, resting in several decision centers, must be viewed.

In order that the allies might maneuver in confidence and freely converge their efforts for the prospect of maximum deterrence, it is necessary first of all that they have a full understanding of the phenomenon which they seek to direct. This presupposes thorough joint study and frank discussion aimed at deriving understanding of the true collective interests of the alliance in the nuclear realm. This stage of reciprocal education is indispensable and should not be short-lived, for nuclear truths demand a long incubation period. Let us say that up to now the surface has hardly been scratched.

Thanks to this preparation — the duration of which is no longer than that of material accomplishments — the nuclear allies could form a team ready to win together the game of deterring the enemy — like a real football team, and not like a bunch of robots under the remote control of a single will.

Naturally, appropriate vehicles would be necessary; on the one hand for the *study and preparation phase* (similar, no doubt, to the quadripartite group in Berlin), and on the other hand for the *coordination of the operation* of deterrence, thanks to various communications systems which make possible instantaneous communication between the various government heads and their chain of command. It would not be a question of impairing the freedom of the various participants and even less of allowing an arbitrary veto right, but rather of allowing harmonious or planned decisions.

Hence it follows, that the coordinated *use* of forces would be planned for the improbable eventuality that nuclear deterrence would fail; but, as we have mentioned above, it is from the viewpoint of *deterrence* and not of *use* that the whole plan must be conceived.

Conclusion

This brief study, intentionally limited to a rudimentary scheme, has attempted to emphasize the principal gaps in the alliance and to seek joint solutions which would fill these gaps within the scope of world strategy and of nuclear deterrence.

Actually, it is a question of establishing a formula for a truly collective control within each of these spheres, rather than limiting interallied action to operational problems of local defense in the European theater. The fact that nuclear strategy has evolved from defense to deterrence makes this adjustment absolutely necessary, while the creation of independent nuclear forces compels the establishment of a system of coordination.

In spite of the prejudices which persist in this area, it is self-evident that a multipolar nuclear system, uniting the initiative of the allies thanks to a common ideal, could achieve a deterrent more complete and more stable than a strictly bipolar system. Some organizational schemes seem to be achievable. Besides, a more intensive analysis would show that there exists only a difference of degree, but not of kind, between the coordination which prevailed on the conventional level (with regard to Berlin, for example) and that which it would be necessary to achieve on the nuclear level.

If these needs, as well as the very real advantages which could be gained from them, were recognized, the obstacles which are currently presented by technical osmosis between allies would be lifted, and the entire alliance could benefit greatly from the large sums spent on armaments.

But it is probable that the road leading in this direction is still quite long, since certain quarters are not yet ready for such solutions. However, one needs to realize that it is only in this direction that NATO will

be able to bring to fruition a more cohesive organization. If this road is not taken, nuclear and world initiative run the risk of becoming more and more uncoordinated, and the result would be serious disagreement.