
NATO: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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I have been asked to speak about the challenges and prospects which face NATO; and I can certainly not complain that the subject is too narrow. The problem is rather one of deciding what to leave out. If I have made the wrong choice, I hope that we can make up for it in the question periods which follow.

As good a starting point as any may be the 35th anniversary meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington last year, which re-affirmed that the Alliance is committed to two basic functions: on the one hand, to defence and deterrence; and, on the other, to the political search for a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe.

The Washington meeting came after a period where the defence side had seemed to predominate — understandably enough, given the Western need to react to Afghanistan, Poland and the Soviet deployment of SS20s. We are now entering a period when there may be more scope for activity on the political side; but the problems will not necessarily be easier, and it is these political challenges to the Alliance that I would first like to discuss.

Last year was the year in which East and West started talking again. The major feature, of course, was the talks which President Reagan and Secretary Shultz had with Mr. Gromyko last Autumn, which prepared the way for the Shultz/Gromyko meeting in Geneva this January. But it is important to note also that these contacts were not confined to the United States. President Mitterrand and a number of Western Foreign Ministers visited Moscow last year; Mr. Gorbachev, who may or may not be about to succeed Mr. Chernenko, paid a very well-publicised visit to Britain and the pattern of visits and talks involved also the countries of Eastern Europe.

All that is very much to the good. What is rather less so is the mixture of uncritical relief and unrealistic expectation which can now be detected in the atmosphere. If not in Portugal, where comparatively recent

experience may encourage a more sober view; then in many other countries of the Alliance. The West has been doing business with the Soviet Union for a long time now. But, despite formidable accumulation of evidence to the contrary, people still seem determined to see the Soviet leaders at any one time as either black or white; and to favour policies geared to alternating simplicities, rather than to the much more complex — and much more consistent — reality.

If, as I hope, we are now moving into a period of opportunity in East-West relations, a proper sense of perspective will be more than usually important. Without it, we shall be all too likely to misinterpret or ignore what may be important evidence; and to take worse decisions as a result.

So one of the challenges to the Alliance is to form as accurate an assessment as possible of what is driving Soviet policy towards the West in what may be a period of more than usual importance. This will not be easy. It never was, even in pre-revolutionary days (Metternich story). But the fact that the question is difficult is no reason for not trying to answer it. To paraphrase some good military advice, time spent on analysis is never wasted.

One possible interpretation is that the Soviet leaders made an important tactical mistake when they left the negotiating tables at Geneva a little over a year ago; that they came to recognise the fact; and that their main concern at the end of last year was to start talking again with a minimum loss of face. Hence Mr. Gromyko's visit to Washington, and his meeting with Secretary Shultz in Geneva.

This analysis has the advantages of simplicity; and of providing ample scope for those who like to see things in terms of hawks and doves in the Kremlin. But I suspect that the real answer may be a little less simple.

The Soviet walkout from Geneva at the end of 1983 is perhaps better seen not as a mistake of the hawks, but as an integral — and probably essential — part of the Soviet campaign to prevent the deployment of CRUISE and PERSHING missiles in Western Europe. The campaign failed; but it was by no means bound to do so. It is thus perfectly possible to think in terms of a Politburo which decided by consensus that the gambit was worth playing; which accepted that it could not be successfully played with Soviet negotiating teams conducting business more or less as usual in

Geneva; which recognised that the walkout would involve some diplomatic and propaganda costs if the gambit failed; and which is now concerned both to keep those costs to a minimum, and to see what can be gained from a renewed period of negotiation.

An important Soviet objective in a campaign on these lines will have been to overlay the public image which Moscow does not want to see prevail in the West: that of a Soviet Union which had painted itself into a corner, from which it had to be extricated with the help of some constructive American diplomacy. Hence the Soviet concern to differentiate the Geneva talks from the earlier negotiations; while at the same time seeking to present Soviet participation as one aspect of a continuing commitment to negotiations on nuclear disarmament. This concern to differentiate may be part of the reason — though I am sure it is not the whole of the reason — for the emphasis which Soviet spokesmen are putting on what they call the demilitarisation of space.

The Soviet Union traditionally sees disarmament negotiations in more than one dimension. It seeks to influence the outcome not only at the negotiating table, but also by mobilising public and parliamentary opinion in the Western countries directly concerned or likely to have some influence. In the present context, the Soviet leaders seem particularly keen to assess the extent of Western sympathy — in and out of government — for proposals designed to constrain the strategic defence initiative in the United States.

They may also want to get across to the Western audience a point which goes wider than the disarmament field. Western countries concluded after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and then in the light of Soviet pressure on Poland, that it would be inappropriate to give the impression of business as usual in dealings with the Soviet Union. High-level visits were affected, and remained so until last year, when the need to re-establish working contacts at the political level after the Soviet walkout from Geneva began to be seen as the overriding concern. Meanwhile, Western countries had continued to maintain what in each case were thought to be appropriate levels of contact with the countries of Eastern Europe; and the Soviet Union, which had no doubt been watching the process with more care than enthusiasm, was finally instrumental in having put off intended visits to Bonn by Mr. Honecker and Mr. Zhivkov.

Against that background, recent developments in Soviet policy may have been designed, at least in part, to demonstrate that the road to and from Moscow is now open to normal traffic.

The point seems to have been taken fairly generally in the West. To such an extent, indeed, that there is once again a whiff in the air of what Monsieur Pompidou once referred to as the bicycle race to Moscow.

And there are also other echoes of the 1970s to be heard. The 10th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act falls due this August, and the idea that it should be marked by a meeting of the participating states at political level features in the Communiqué of the most recent Ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council. Meanwhile, journalists who ask either the Americans or the Russians about the prospects for a bilateral summit are given answers which remain properly cautious, but are hardly cold. And the cynics are asking themselves how long it will be before Western Europeans, so long concerned by the fact that the superpowers were not talking to each other, start worrying once again that they may start talking over their heads.

And that, in a sense, brings us back to Geneva — about which, I should add, the Americans have kept their allies very fully informed, through the consultative procedures which are one of the strengths of the Atlantic Alliance.

The Shultz-Gromyko meeting was always envisaged as «talks about talks» rather than a negotiation on the substance of the issues, but it was none the less important for that. And it seems to have succeeded in doing what it set out to do. The two sides agreed to negotiations on what the joint statement calls:

«a complex of questions concerning space and nuclear arms — both strategic and intermediate range — with all these questions considered and resolved in their interrelationship.»

And they also agreed on the objective of the negotiations, which they expressed as follows:

«to work out effective agreements aimed at preventing an arms race in space and terminating it on earth, at limiting and reducing nuclear arms, and at strengthening strategic stability.»

This, of course, is very much what we would all like to see; and it is not surprising that the outcome of the Geneva talks should have been very widely welcomed. These questions are much too important not to be the subject of constructive dialogue and continuing effort to reach agreement between the two superpowers. Just as it was a matter for regret that the Soviet Union should have withdrawn its negotiators from Geneva just over a year ago; so it is encouraging that the basis now seems to have been laid for a fresh start. A result, incidentally, which is owed in large part to the cohesion of the Western Allies during a difficult period, and to the constructive diplomacy of the United States.

But a fresh start, while undoubtedly necessary will not be sufficient. There are some very difficult problems to be solved; and a proper assessment of challenges and prospects requires that these difficulties be faced.

The joint statement implies that the negotiations will be organised to deal with three broad subject areas: strategic nuclear weapons; intermediate range nuclear weapons; and space. The first two categories broadly correspond to the START and INF negotiations which were broken off by the Soviet Union at the end of 1983; and the difficulties there are thus to a large extent a matter of record.

In the case of strategic arms, there is no doubt that the job of the negotiators has been made very much more complex by the asymmetries, which have developed over the years, in the strategic inventories of the United States and the Soviet Union. The Americans have put considerable weight on submarine-based missiles; while the Soviet Union has built up its arsenal of heavy land-based missiles. The resulting portfolios represent not only a very substantial financial investment, but a situation to which each side has grown accustomed and with which it feels safest. A negotiation which sought to establish numerical parity on a category-by-category basis would thus — to put it mildly — have some well-entrenched positions to overcome.

Theoretically, at least, there is an alternative: to establish a complex of trade-offs which both sides accept as providing for effective balance without the need for perfect symmetry in individual weapon systems. The idea is one which it is very much worth exploring, and it may well yield useful results

in practice. But it would be idle to pretend that the exchange rate between apples and pears will be easy to establish.

In the case of intermediate range systems, the problem is in a sense less complex: what has to be balanced is not so much apples and pears, as a marked preponderance of apples on one side of a simple equation. The preponderance is one which the Soviet Union is doing everything it can to increase: by continuing to produce and deploy SS20 missiles, by doing what it can to frustrate the strictly limited Western deployments by almost every means save that of getting down to serious business with the Western negotiators; and — if only as a complicating factor — by introducing «Scaleboard» missiles into East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

This brings out another important asymmetry in the equation. The Soviet leaders have a very good idea of the importance to the West of cohesion between the Allies; and of the importance to Western governments of public opinion. Their first instinct, when faced with a position of the United States government which they do not like, will be to see if they can exploit differences within the Alliance to get that position changed by diplomatic pressure from Allied governments. Both as part of this process, and as an alternative to it should it prove necessary, they will seek to stimulate parliamentary and extra-parliamentary pressure on the Western governments concerned.

Only when they are convinced that they have tested the limits of this approach are they likely to get down to the serious business of confidential negotiation in the conference room. Which is where the Western negotiators have been all along. Partly because that is the way that we tend to do business anyway; and partly because the Soviet system ensures that we have little or no opportunity to do otherwise.

A further asymmetry is of particular relevance to the third area of negotiation, space; but it is also of more general significance. Arms control and disarmament should be seen not as an alternative to our security policy, but as very much part of it. It follows that we need agreements which not only respect the security requirements of both sides, but which can be relied upon to go on doing so. Which means that they must be verifiable.

In principle, this is accepted by both sides. But in practice, there is no doubt that it is very much easier for the Soviet leaders to assure themselves, without the need for verification provisions, that the Americans are complying with their treaty obligations than it is for the United States to do the same with respect to the Soviet Union. Investigative journalism is part of the explanation; and so too is effective congressional supervision of the executive.

The combination of these two, and of the democratic tradition which underlies them both, is very powerful. Powerful enough to make it inevitable that, for example, the Soviet Union would quickly discover an American attempt to fund and execute a major programme of research into strategic defence, outside the constraints which might have been imposed by agreement.

It is a fact of life — and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future — that no such process would operate in the other direction. While, therefore, it is possible to envisage an agreement leading to verifiable constraints on the testing or deployment of certain elements of an anti-ballistic missile system, I do not see how one could have a sufficient degree of confidence in an agreement which sought to prevent research.

Beyond that lies the question of substance: is it possible to devise and deploy a system of strategic defence which would increase the security of the United States and its allies? This is a controversial question; and, although there are some who would be prepared already now to stand up and answer it by saying «certainly» or «certainly not», I am not convinced that the case has been proved either way. What the US government is saying is that the subject is an important one, and that it is worth researching very carefully. That must surely be right, not least because of what we know of Soviet capabilities in this field.

The American and Soviet negotiators at Geneva will thus be faced with a number of old difficulties, well-known from the START and INF talks; and with the new ones which will be involved in adding the space dimension to an already complicated picture.

It is too early to say how they will get on, or even to predict the form in which results are most likely to emerge. But for all of us in the

West, in or out of government who want to see real progress on arms control and disarmament, there are two important points to bear in mind. First, that it is in the interests of the Soviet Union as well as of the West to limit, and if possible reverse, the remorseless accumulation of destructive weaponry. And, second, that the Soviet leaders will not be persuaded to negotiate equitable and verifiable agreements to this end if they believe that what they want from the West is going to fall into their laps anyway. We all of us have a part to play in ensuring that the Western negotiators have the firm, constant and visible political support which they will need to convince the Soviet leadership that we will not settle for something less than fair and reliable.

I am sure that such agreements are possible. And I am confident that we shall be able to get them—and other much-needed improvements in East-West relations—if we are prepared to work for them with patience and consistency. And if we continue to what is necessary to keep up our defences.

I have spoken so far about the political challenges which face us in East-West relations, because it seems to me quite clear that security cannot be guaranteed by military means alone. But it is equally clear that, without adequate defences, we would have little chance of getting the more constructive relationship between East and West which we would all like to see. So a sound military strategy is just as important as a sound political strategy.

And a sound military strategy is precisely what I think we've got, in the strategy of flexible response. But there is no doubt that its nuclear aspects in particular are criticised by many who would have difficulty with the political points I have been arguing: and this too must rank as a major challenge to the Alliance.

The critics fall into two main camps. Some advocate what they call a non-nuclear defence; others would like to see NATO renounce its option to be the first to use nuclear weapons in response to an attack.

Those in the first camp can reasonably be asked to provide answers to some difficult questions. If they want NATO as a whole to abandon nuclear weapons, they must explain how we would face up to a Soviet Union which enjoyed a nuclear monopoly. To talk of increasing conventional forces in such circumstances is not enough. First, because the resource costs would be very substantial. And secondly, because no amount of conventional impro-

vement would protect the West from nuclear blackmail. Why would a Soviet Union with a nuclear monopoly launch a conventional attack against a conventionally well-defended position, when it could threaten a devastating nuclear strike without fear of effective retaliation? And what would the advocates of non-nuclear defence do if such a threat were made?

If the suggestion is rather that Western Europe should abandon nuclear arms while the United States continued to provide a nuclear umbrella, then a different set of questions must be posed. What this really boils down to saying is that we accept, however reluctantly, that the umbrella is a necessary precaution; but we think that it may be immoral or dangerous to carry it; and we would, therefore, prefer to leave the job to others.

That may be tempting, but it is surely not very moral. Or very practical. How long would a policy which left the whole of the nuclear burden to the United States be acceptable to the American people? And how sure are we that it would serve to deter anything but an attack on the United States itself?

There are some who agree that NATO should retain a nuclear capability, but who go on to argue that we should pledge not to be the first to resort to nuclear weapons. Such a policy would preserve a deterrent against nuclear blackmail or nuclear attack; but the problem is that it would not preserve the deterrent against conventional attack.

The essence of deterrence lies in uncertainty: a potential aggressor cannot be certain that an attack would not meet a nuclear response, will surely not be tempted to conclude that the gains from aggression could conceivably outweigh the potential cost. But if we were to say that we would never in any circumstances respond by nuclear means to an invasion by conventional forces, we would remove that uncertainty. And the calculation might then come out rather differently. That is a risk which anyone who remembers the horrors of the two conventional wars which devastated Europe in this century would surely prefer not to take.

So let us give a simple answer to the Soviet negotiators in Stockholm, and to others who argue that a Western declaration of no-first-use of nuclear

weapons would strengthen security. We, in the West, have repeatedly made it clear that none of our weapons will ever be used except in response to attack. That, if you like, is a pledge of no-first-use in its most absolute and most general form: a pledge of no-first-use of force. If the Soviet Union is prepared to stick to the same policy, it has nothing to fear from us. All that it needs to do to preserve the peace is to refrain from attacking us.

So, although we all hope that the negotiations at Geneva will lead to substantial reductions in nuclear weapons, a nuclear capability remains essential to the security of the Alliance. And we also need a strong conventional capability. Not least because we do not want to slide by default into a degree of reliance on nuclear weapons which no-one would consciously choose.

This too is a controversial question, and the transatlantic debate about burden-sharing has tended in some respects to confuse the picture of what is really being done and what is really needed. However that may be, I have no doubt that there are improvements to our conventional capabilities which need to be made. This, too, is a challenge to the Alliance; and one which I am glad to say that it is already doing something to meet. Defence Ministers made a good start last December, when they agreed to devote greater resources to infrastructure and sustainability; and when they set in train a programme to look more widely at what more we need to do in the conventional field.

The follow-up to that decision is now one of the major subjects on the agenda at NATO Headquarters, and this year's ministerial meetings will be of more than usual importance as a result. There are no easy answers, not least because of the economic difficulties which most, if not all, Allied governments are facing. But a more effective conventional capability is of political as well military significance to an Alliance which depends on effective partnership between North America and Western Europe; and the challenge is one which we cannot afford not to meet.

In short, there are difficult problems ahead. We must keep the Alliance together as the political situation between East and West becomes a bit more fluid. We will need patience and cohesion as well as constructive diplomacy to get the results we want out of Geneva. And we won't be successful at the politics of East-West relations if we fail to do what is necessary on the

military side to maintain a credible deterrent and an effective defence. The challenges are there and they are formidable. But the Alliance has shown itself equal to them in the past; and I see no reason to be pessimistic about the future. On the contrary, I think that we have the right formula, both politically and militarily. If we stick to it, then the prospects are good.

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