
EAST-WEST RELATIONS: A NATO PERSPECTIVE

Lord Carrington

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I suppose that it is a convention for visiting speakers to express pleasure at being wherever they happen to be. On this occasion, I can say with total honesty that I am indeed delighted to be in Portugal. Perhaps that is due in part to the fact that Portugal is a founder nation of NATO and has remained one of its loyalest members; in part because, even though I come as a servant of a multi-national organization, I am still British by birth and background, and the closeness of the links between Britain and Portugal is one of the truisms of European politics; and in part because I have always found those Portuguese with whom I have had dealings to be thoroughly friendly, nice and co-operative people. Add to that the fact that you inhabit a part of Europe well-removed from the grey skies and ice of Brussels, and you will see why I can say with such honesty that I am very pleased to find myself in Lisbon today.

I believe it is the practice at this Institute for speakers to say what they have to say, and then answer questions from the audience. That is a practice of which I greatly approve, since I almost invariably find questions from the audience more interesting than what I have to say. I therefore propose to speak to you for perhaps 30 minutes, unless the Director of the Institute regards the proposal as unpardonably heretical, to sit down, and to answer any questions you have to put to me.

I suppose that it is appropriate for me to talk about the current state of East-West relations, and the prospects for the year ahead. It is also, I suspect, what you would expect the Secretary General of NATO to talk about.

Perhaps I should take as my starting point the meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev in Reykjavik last Autumn. Though that may now seem to be already part of history, the perspectives

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it opened were so large that it has affected all our thinking about the major security issues we confront. That meeting was expected to be a summit to prepare for a summit. Instead, the leaders of the two superpowers sat down and talked seriously about the zero-zero option in Europe and negotiations on the drastic reduction of intermediate-range missiles. They seem to have come close to agreeing to an outline agreement that 50 % of strategic weapons should be got rid of in five years and to a United States proposal that, subject to certain conditions, there should be major reductions towards the abolition of ballistic missiles over ten years. The Russian side also raised the prospect also of the abolition of all nuclear weapons over a ten year period.

In the event, agreement was not reached, partly because of Soviet linkage with SDI, a subject to which I shall revert. But those issues really to make up a tremendous menu, and it is hardly suprising that there has been something of a pause for digestion, to think through the implications. Because whether or not any of these things is or possible or likely, the proposals are certainly very firmly in the minds of those in Western Europe and the United States who follow defence matters, and will affect their perception both of strategy and actions. In case you need reminding, work is being done on the ideas considered at Reykjavik. At the top end of the spectrum, the Nuclear and Space Talks between the two superpowers continue at Geneva. The US team, headed by Ambassador Kampelman, are engaged in to trying to translate some of the Reykjavik proposals into agreements. For its part, the Soviet Union have appointed a new chief negotiator, and we all await with interest to see what can be achieved.

My guess is that the most promising chances for agreement lie the negotiations to reduce substantially the number of ballistic missiles. After all, even a 50 % reduction would still leave both sides with more than enough to serve as deterrence to any possible attack. The problems of verification, which are certainly complex and difficult, are probably not insuperable for this category of weapon. Then there is the question of whether agreement will be reached over the zero-zero option for intermediate range missiles. Very specific solutions were on the table, and indeed some were almost agreed on, in Reykjavik.

There is a need to ensure that any reductions in our nuclear forces are looked at within the framework of the overall strategic requirements of the Alliance. We must be sure that changes in one area do not increase

existing disparities in other areas. Let me be more specific. I believe that negotiations on the removal of INF capable of striking back at Soviet territory from Western Europe must take into account the imbalance of numbers of SRINF — the Short Range Tactical Missiles. There is another key consideration which makes the European members of the Alliance understandably nervous, and that is and the Warsaw Pact's superiority in conventional forces.

One digression at this point. If I were an American, and had watched the less than eager way in which the European partners had been willing to accept deployment of Pershing 2 and cruise missiles on their territory, I would find it ironic to see how that reluctance melted away, and indeed turned into enthusiasm once the prospect was raised that those missiles might be removed.

Reykjavik has had one other very specific result for us. We have been reminded of the need to look carefully at the relationship between the nuclear and the conventional components of our strategy. And in particular we have had our attention drawn to the worrying disparity between the strength of the Warsaw Pact and NATO conventional forces. What can we do about that disparity? Logically, there are two ways to correct this imbalance. And correct we must, for if we do not we shall be undermining one of the two pillars on which the Alliance stands. This audience, at the National Institute of Defence, will not need reminding that for twenty years, since our adoption of the strategy of flexible response, it has been a basic doctrine of the Alliance that we should ensure an adequate capability in both the nuclear and the conventional fields.

I was saying that there are two ways to redress the conventional imbalance. Either we can increase our own forces or we can negotiate reductions with the Warsaw Pact which will remove their superiority and lead to stability at lower levels of forces. One thing is clear: NATO is a defensive Alliance whose primary purpose is to prevent war, so we do not seek and do not need superiority. We do not have to match the Warsaw Pact tank for tank, gun for gun or man for man.

The first course is very difficult. NATO is a free alliance of democratic countries, and all our governments have to make hard decisions about what should take priority when it comes to drawing up their expenditure programmes. The requirements to pay for social security, health, education and all the rest have to be met, and spending on defence is not always much

of a vote winner. After the long years of freedom from war in Europe, a generation has grown up who find it difficult to believe that there really is a threat, and they question the need for their elected governments to spend on what may seem to them an unproductive item.

What the doubters forget is that defence is the most basic social service of all. If we fail to make clear that we are ready and able to deal with aggression, we risk losing our basic liberties. And that would be a terrible price to pay. Perhaps that is a point which is less necessary to make here in Portugal than in some other NATO countries. It is only thirteen years ago that you had a close-up glimpse of how vulnerable were the new liberties which you had recovered only the previous year, even though it did not take the form of an armed attack from outside. You therefore need no lecturing on the value of freedom.

If we cannot do much to increase our defence expenditure we can make sure that we get the best possible value for the money we do spend. We have been working hard on conventional defence improvements within the Alliance. Our aim is to concentrate on those areas where improvements are most needed in the widest interests of the Alliance. But there is still much to be done. I would be grossly over optimistic if I were to say that money in sufficient quantity was likely to be forthcoming to strengthen and modernize our conventional defences to the point where General Rogers, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, would be able to say that he was tolerably well satisfied.

One of the problems is that conventional forces are ever more expensive. Men cost money, and the price of the modern sophisticated conventional weapons we now use have increased out of all proportion to inflation. Of course, today's weapons are much more capable, but at a price. I was reading a book the other day in which I discovered that some 90 years ago when Great Britain was playing the role of a nineteenth century superpower with its ships and soldiers covering wide parts of the globe, the total defence budget was £32 million. Today, I don't suppose that would pay the annual costs of a battalion, much less buy a single major ship. In my own lifetime, I remember that during the Second World War, patriotic appeals were made to the wealthiest British citizens to contribute to buying a Spitfire fighter as their contribution to the national cause. If my memory serves me well, a single Spitfire cost £5000. I believe that Britain's front line fighter of today, the Tornado, costs more than £14 million.

The second course, I suggested, was to pursue negotiations with the Warsaw Pact to bring about agreed reductions in the level of conventional forces. It will not come as a surprise if I tell you that we are doing just that. Not that it is easy. The difficulties are formidable, much greater even than they are for nuclear disarmament. It is comparatively simple to equate numbers of missiles on both sides, or throw-weights or warheads. Here, the negotiations can compare what is broadly like with like.

The complications of conventional disarmament are of quite different order. I wonder how many of you remember being taught as children about the medieval schoolmen who passed their lives disputing the then crucial issue of how many angels could stand on the head of a pin? They were simply disarmament delegates born ahead of their time. The possibilities for argument are almost infinite. Think for a moment of the MBFR talks in Vienna. They are specifically limited in scope, limited to the Central Front and limited to reductions only in military manpower. Yet after nearly 14 years, and despite many eminently sensible Western proposals, the two sides have not been able to reach agreement on the basic data.

It would be easy to be pessimistic in the light of that experience. But we cannot afford to stop trying. The Warsaw Pact have claimed repeatedly that they want to talk seriously about achieving reductions. They have made suggestions which, even if they appear to be designed mainly for public relations, require a response. And we have responded. At last year's Halifax meeting of NATO foreign ministers, we decided to set up a High Level Task Force. That body, under the Chairmanship of NATO's Deputy Secretary General, reported back to the ministers in December, and the Brussels declaration was made, pointing the way forward. And the High Level Task Force held another meeting yesterday in Brussels. We hope that, in the not too distant future, there will be substantive negotiations to discuss specific measures to reduce force levels from the Atlantic to the Urals.

This is perhaps the right moment to look at the scale of conventional defence effort, or rather at what the European partners can do. I know only too well that comparisons of who does what in terms of percentage of GNP devoted to defence are a crude measure of productive effort; even so, those figures can tell us something. The Soviet Union spends about 15% of its GNP on defence; the United States is spending about

6½ % of its considerably greater GNP; and the West European members average nearly 3½ %.

Those figures have always been a source of concern to me, and my concern is the greater because I believe that the new United States Congress is likely to take another hard look at the way in which the burden of the alliance is being shared. And how can we talk about a stronger European defence identity — a phrase which enshrines an excellent concept but which seems to have little practical content — if the European effort is not better than that? It seems to me clear that it is more important to improve the collective performance of the European members than to argue over forms of words or to search for new institutions.

The majority of NATO governments have really tried very hard to meet the target of achieving a 3 % real growth in defence expenditure in recent years, to make up for the shortfalls of the past. But of course it is impossible for any government to continue to increase at this level without producing serious distortions in the balance of overall expenditures.

I should add one gloss to my headmasterly admonition about member states doing better. I recognize that for some of the less wealthy member states, making their contribution to the Alliance involves hard decisions, and I should pay particular tribute to those who, like Portugal, resolutely pay what price they can for our Alliance's objectives. It is essential that the wealthier member states should look very hard for ways to help the less wealthy to accomplish the tasks the latter have assumed for our collective security.

The other thing we must do is to improve our capacity to co-operate in arms production and procurement. I suspect that all round Europe there are people who would sympathize with you at this moment, recognising that you are about to be subjected to my usual sermon on what has become an obsession of mine. I make no apologies for the obsession.

How can it be sensible for different members of this Alliance to operate battlefield communications systems that cannot talk to each other; or to fly aircraft which cannot identify themselves as friendly to their own allies; or to pour resources into designing and developing four different basic I tanks? I will spare you more examples. I'm sure you can see my point. Given the importance of using available funds to the best effect, it must make sense for the allies to set aside narrow national interests and to co-operate more closely.

The Warsaw Pact does not have to face these problems, which are, I recognise, inevitable in a free alliance of equal partners. But it is probable that they too are concerned by the costs of military programmes. And that leads me on to say something about the impact of Mr. Gorbachev.

There is no doubt that things are stirring in the Soviet Union. Mr. Gorbachev is a new kind of leader. Unlike his predecessors, he did not participate at first hand either in the October revolution or in what the Russians describe as the Great Patriotic War. He appears to be set on a series of reforms of Soviet society, and for the present I do not intend to ask whether those reforms are intended to mark a radical new political direction or rather to modernize within defined limits and to reduce to exposure to easy criticism. So far, I incline to the latter view, but that is not the point. The point is that we now have a Soviet leader who is capable of making astonishing initiatives, as he did at Reykjavik and of acting to improve the Soviet Union's international reputation. We see, for example, the release of Sakharov, talk of elections for party officials (not new, incidentally, since it was first laid down by Lenin), and the unjamming of BBC broadcasts. In the specifically NATO context, we have seen several attempts by the Warsaw Pact to establish direct contacts.

How should the West react? It is not for me to attempt to prescribe policies to our sixteen member nations. But I may perhaps be allowed to comment insofar as all this does affect NATO. I take the view that we cannot afford to dismiss Mr. Gorbachev's actions as mere window-dressing, designed to strengthen public doubts in the West about the reality of the Soviet threat. Even if that interpretation were right, to do nothing would be a mistake, for it would add to the very doubts to which I refer. Nor, on the other hand, should we conclude too eagerly that the Soviet Union is embarking on a change so fundamental that it has abandoned its expansionist ambitions. In my lifetime there has been a certain continuity to Soviet action, from the invasion of Finland in 1939, to the invasion of Afghanistan seven years ago.

I believe that we should test out Soviet intentions, measuring them by deeds and not by words. Let us look at how seriously they are prepared to try to reach agreements on arms control, in Geneva, in Vienna or anywhere else. Let us look at how far they and their allies move to implement properly the freedoms to which they committed themselves at the Helsinki CSCE meeting. Let us see what they do about their remaining political

prisoners, about withdrawing from Afghanistan, and so on. If our experience shows that there is a new direction to Soviet policy and that serious advances towards balanced arms reductions can be achieved, well and good. If it does not, at least we would not have been wrong-footed in the eyes of our own electorates.

I hope that I have at least marked the fact that an approach to European security must be focussed on the politics of East-West relations as well as on defence. And I can assure you that none of the leaders of the NATO Alliance is likely to underestimate the importance of working politically to secure a more constructive relationship between East and West, and beyond that a more stable system of European security at much lower levels of arms and armed forces. What is more likely, and this concerns me as Secretary General of NATO, is that some of them may under-estimate the extent to which the chances of achieving that depend on a continuing determination to do what is necessary by way of defence. In other words, we are more likely to keep the peace if we keep up our guard.

I am reminded by the phrase «keeping up our guard» but I have mentioned the Strategic Defence Initiative, and I suppose that you will expect me to say something about that. SDI was conceived by President Reagan as a dramatic new way of providing *defence* against ballistic missile attack. It was his, and our, bad luck that, because a very popular film called «Star Wars» had caught public imagination, that epithet was applied to his programme, giving it a sinister aspect to those who choose to look for one and who choose to ignore the considerable work being done in the same area by the Soviet Union.

I am no scientist, and I cannot and not will make a judgement on what technological advances will be achieved, or when. But there is little doubt that Mr. Gorbachev has a very deep opposition to the SDI programme, so much so that he has sought to introduce a linkage between progress in the Geneva disarmament negotiations by insisting on putting a stop to SDI. Why? In the nature of things, we cannot know. My guess is that he has several motives. He may well fear that the enormous technological capabilities of the American economy will come up with new systems which could significantly alter today's strategic balance. He must also have anxieties about the spin-off in both the civilian and military fields which this kind of research always brings. And he must also be concerned that for the Soviet government to attempt to match the SDI programme would

mean an even greater allocation of resources to the military budget, with all that would imply for his plans to improve the civilian sector of the Soviet economy.

It seems to me fairly evident that Mr. Gorbachev would like to be the leader who brought the Soviet people out of the economic dreariness which has characterized their system, and lead them towards the levels of prosperity which exists in Western Europe. I saw last week that he was quoted as saying that democracy is not just a slogan. It seems too much to expect that he means the same thing by democracy as do you and I, but he clearly does want to bring about some changes.

And you will have read in your newspapers of the many other straws blowing in the wind, bringing with them the message that real changes are beginning to be made to the social and economic structures of the Soviet Union. Real changes, but of course still modest changes. Some commentators are taking the view that Mr. Gorbachev is initiating some sort of liberal revolution. I doubt that. I incline more to the view that he is first and last a *Soviet* leader, and that the changes he is promoting reflect a hard, pragmatic view of what is needed to keep his country strong.

It follows that Mr. Gorbachev must wish to see agreements on arms control for the same economic reasons: to hold military spending at current or even lower levels. Not of course at any price. And he certainly will not pay any higher price than he has to. That is why I have argued persistently that NATO governments should not take unilateral measures which weaken the Alliance. The Soviet Union will make no concessions so long as it believes that it can achieve its objectives without doing so.

Lastly, there is something I would like to say about this Alliance of ours. It is easy to be lulled into a state of anxiety when one is involved in the day to day business of NATO. Precisely because we are a free association of democratic countries, we seem to find it hard to agree some of the time on what has to be done, at least with any speed.

But if you stand back a bit and look at what we have achieved over the period, since this Alliance was established, I think you will agree that we have reasons to feel modestly satisfied. After all, we have done the one thing that really had to be done, which is to prevent a third world war; in a difficult situation where Europe remains divided and where the two seemingly irreconcilable systems that face each other have unprecedented

destructive power at their command. And we have not only kept the peace, but kept it with our freedom undiminished and with increasing prosperity. Second, I would like to say something about the role of the smaller member states, of which Portugal is one. I have said already that we are an Alliance of equals. Of course, it is perfectly obvious that we are not equal in terms of wealth, population, size or military capacity. But I believe passionately that we are partners, and that every member state has its own vital part to play.

Portugal is one of the poorest members of the Alliance, in economic terms. But you have been staunch and willing to play the fullest part which your resources permit, and NATO's senior commanders value your contribution. We are delighted that the long-running story of re-equipping your Navy has come to a successful conclusion, and that as Portugal's prosperity increases, as it surely will, you will continue to play your role.

I have taken enough of your time, and I have sung my song. May I leave you with one last thought. All of you will have been faced from time to time with the question, why should our country be in NATO? Or more simply, why NATO? I suggest that this is not a difficult question. Western societies have nothing to fear from peaceful competition with the Soviet Union. So the short answer to «why NATO?» is, to keep that competition peaceful; and to ensure that our generation, and our children's generation, can get on with living their lives free from the curse of war.

Lord Carrington

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