

Chapter 7

Europe, the Soviet Union, and the Atlantic Alliance

PAULINE NEVILLE-JONES

THE foundations of the Atlantic Alliance relationship and its underlying rationale have remained unchanged since its inception: it rests on the threat posed by the Soviet Union to Western Europe. If the Soviet Union were to expand her influence in this key theater of East-West systemic competition, this would not only spell the end of Western European autonomy and sovereignty, but also constitute a profound and probably decisive weakening of America's role as a global superpower. Both the United States and Western Europe have therefore seen this threat from the Soviet Union as aiming at their vital security interests; their response has been to combine their resources in a joint system of defense in a single zone of security against this threat.

Since war-ravaged Europe initially did not have the military strength and the necessary resources to provide the core of European defense, the United States committed a substantial number of conventional forces to the defenses of Europe. It has also underwritten Western Europe's security by threatening to initiate nuclear escalation in the event of a Soviet military attack. The nature of the threat and the doctrines and instruments applied to the defense of Western Europe have changed much since the early 1950s, but their basic features remain: Europe's defense still rests on a combination

of Western European and American conventional forces in Europe (although their relative importance in the overall defense effort has shifted substantially towards the European component, the central front in Germany could still not adequately be protected without a sizeable number of American troops) and of the U.S. nuclear deterrent to dissuade the Soviet Union from seeking to change the status quo in Europe by military means. This basic structure provides the backdrop, against which recent developments in East-West relations should be seen. I shall try to summarize these developments by focusing on three questions: How has the Soviet threat evolved under the new leadership? How has the Atlantic Alliance responded? How has this affected the Alliance itself?

THE SOVIET UNION

Any assessment of the Soviet Union's role in East-West relations today will have to start with the Soviet economy. Western analysts generally share the view that the Soviet Union's economic prospects are far from bright. The Soviet economy has encountered growing difficulties in a number of key sectors such as agriculture and energy. More fundamentally, it has been plagued by endemic low productivity, technological backwardness, and inefficient use of resources. The quickening pace of technological innovation threatens to widen the gap between the Soviet economy and those of the West dramatically. The Soviet Union will find it hard to make the transition towards the high-technology, information-based economy of the twenty-first century. This has a number of implications for the Soviet Union's position as a global power. The most important of those are political, rather than military. While there is little chance of the Soviet Union being unable to compete in an escalating arms race moving into ever higher levels of technology, the Soviet Union's role in international relations might be eroded, and that of the United States enhanced, by the growing gap in economic performance. The U.S.S.R. has long lost its attraction as an ideological and economic "model" for Third World countries; in the future, provided the West plays its hand intelligently, the Soviet Union could lose even more ground.

General Secretary Gorbachev has acknowledged those difficulties and is committed to a revitalization of the Soviet economy. Although

this has produced a new style of leadership, the substantive changes initiated so far have been limited and certainly insufficient to produce a major shift in unfavorable longer-term economic trends. Given the, by now, deep-seated resistance of the Soviet Communist party and bureaucracy to change, the chances for Gorbachev to succeed in his ambitious plans to effect systemic change are not bright.

There is a new style politically, too. One aspect has been a torrent of new proposals for arms control. It is clear that arms control agreements could help the Soviet Union by alleviating its resource allocation problems, thus enhancing the Soviet leadership's economic margin of maneuver. The benefits could only be felt over the longer term, however, and one should not assume, therefore, that Moscow is desperate for agreements. Gorbachev intends, for tactical reasons, to remain at the negotiating table but is not likely to act as if pressed for time. Arms control can therefore be expected to play a broad role in East-West relations over the coming months, but not necessarily lead to agreements.

Is the Soviet Union still a threat? Professor Kimura suggests in his paper that the Soviet Union is no threat to Japan; but he did not explain whether this is so because there is no threat or because Japan is effectively protected against it by the United States. When it comes to Europe, Western Europeans and Americans agree that the Soviet threat remains (even if Soviet tactics are changing) and they are broadly agreed on the ways in which the threat should be met. In the Third World, there are differences of assessment. Professor Kimura rightly points out that the Soviet Union has at times successfully expanded her influence in the Third World by military as well as other means. The differences arise as to the best policy for the West in the Third World. Most Europeans would agree that, historically, the Soviet Union has been expansionist, but they see this more as a product of opportunism than as part of a grand design to seize the vital "choke points" of the West. Nor should Soviet success be exaggerated. The Soviet record of expanding influence in the Third World is far from impressive. Gains have been at least balanced by dramatic setbacks (such as the expulsion of Soviet advisers from Egypt or Somalia); and countries where the Soviet Union has succeeded in building up positions of influence are often weak and economically backward and are a major drain on scarce Soviet resources. Ethiopia, Vietnam, and Cuba all have to be propped up

economically at substantial cost to the Soviet Union (and Eastern Europe). While the West should not be complacent about any Soviet gains, to Europeans the record does suggest that more significance than is attached at present by all the allies should be given to creating the conditions in which the spread of Soviet influence will be prevented, rather than relying too much on countering it as it occurs. Providing development as well as military assistance to local governments should be important elements of Western policy.

THE UNITED STATES

As already noted, European-American relations have recently been marked by broad agreement about East-West issues as they relate to the European theater but there have been differences with regard to the Third World—especially the so-called “out-of-area” threats to Western security. The Reagan administration tends to perceive the Soviet Union as involved in a relentless drive to expand influence in the Third World; the United States must be prepared to use force to bring the Soviet Union, by that route, to the negotiating table. This approach has been laid down formally in the “Reagan Doctrine,” which stipulates that the United States will help “freedom fighters” involved in a struggle with Soviet allies and Soviet forces over control of Third World countries “to fight and to win.” Europeans often tend to be skeptical about the underlying assumptions behind this analysis and uneasy, even worried, about the conclusions and policy decisions flowing from it.

As noted at the outset, cooperation within the Alliance has held NATO together successfully for over thirty years. But questions do now arise about the respective roles of the Americans and Europeans within the Alliance and about the aims of the allies. Europeans wish to see the Alliance strengthened. They also want to increase their influence *in* the Alliance. This contrasts with Japan’s approach, which has been to support U.S. leadership, with little or no questioning of the substance of U.S. policy. European governments, on the other hand, want a full consultation process in which all issues touching the common interest are hashed out together. This implies not only shared responsibilities and shared burdens, but also shared rights. It also means fair contributions. While Europeans argue (with good reason) that the European contribution permanently to

NATO's conventional force has grown considerably, and that this contribution is often underestimated and misrepresented in the United States, many would also agree that this contribution has not been consistent nor sustained enough to command unstinting U.S. respect. Moreover, there is a clear structural asymmetry in Europe's reliance on U.S. forces in Europe to deter a Soviet attack. While this asymmetry may partly reflect geopolitical factors, Americans can fairly point to the human and economic resources of Europe and question the willingness of at least some European countries to make a sufficient defense effort.

The argument about contributions has at least two implications. On the one hand, Europe will have to strengthen its contribution to the Alliance if it is to continue to retain the U.S. commitment—especially ground troops—vital to it. Equally, an increasing European contribution will both justify and necessitate more effective expression of this enhanced role. It is important that Europeans engage in the defense of Europe for European as well as broader allied reasons. A good forum for expressing the European commitment to the security of the NATO area is a strengthened Western European Union. Some Europeans would even go further. They would advocate first steps towards European defense structures, which would be independent from, although presumably aligned with, the United States—a substitute arrangement for NATO. Other Europeans, including this writer, have severe doubts about the practicability of this, even if it were desirable, which is open to question. Rather it is desirable that European priorities become more visible within the Alliance; Europeans become more prepared to accept responsibilities; and since security is a global matter, Europeans become prepared to take initiatives, including “out of area.” If Europeans do not like the Reagan Doctrine, they should not just complain but formulate their view of the proper use of power. It would, however, be dangerous to search for a separate European security identity outside the Atlantic Alliance. The challenge is rather to develop ways and means to evolve a European identity within the framework of the present security relationship—as a means to strengthen the Alliance as a whole, to develop the “European pillar” as a contribution to the common defense, and as an extra element of insurance against future uncertainties. But for

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the indefinite future, strong and clear U.S. leadership will remain indispensable to the Alliance.

European governments know this, and they accept it. Yet the transatlantic relationship seems to be entering a difficult period. Unilateralist tendencies are alive in the U.S. while neutralist tendencies vie for influence in Europe. They must not be allowed to interact and strengthen each other. Transatlantic consultation will remain as essential as ever. In one of the more recent formulations of the Reagan Doctrine, there is no mention of consultation with allies; in fact, allies are mentioned only as states to be protected. This will not work over the long run. The notion of partnership—including Japan—must continue to prevail. Paradoxically, since out-of-area problems are probably the greatest threat to Alliance security, it is on these that a major effort of alliance consultation must be made to ensure policy approaches which meet Western objectives, which command agreement within the Alliance, and which thus reinforce, rather than undermine, its cohesion.