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SUMMARY OF CASTELGANDOLFO CONFERENCE  
April 10-11, 1978

1. Introduction

This extremely short paper has two aims: first to give a rapid outline of the debate at the Castelgandolfo conference, with special emphasis on those questions where a substantial consensus emerged and on those where differing viewpoints were expressed; second to identify on the basis of this summary, those elements in the situation in need of deeper discussion, thereby giving a broad outline of the themes due to be discussed at the next conference and thus the final results of the original project on NATO's Southern flank.

2. The main points discussed

a) Military questions

Differing views were expressed concerning the survival of the VI fleet and its ability to operate throughout the Mediterranean (including the Eastern sector) and thus to accomplish the mission assigned it in wartime. These doubts were due to the seriousness of the Soviet threat which has recently grown with the assignment of "Backfire" to the marine air force. The following opinions were expressed:

- The main task of the VI Fleet is now the destruction or neutralization of the Soviet fleet. There is no possibility of the VI Fleet being able to give air support to the land battles on the Italo-Yugoslav or the Greek-Turkish-Bulgarian fronts in the early stages of a conflict.

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- "Backfire"'s performance, which enables it to cover practically the whole of the Mediterranean, represents a further significant increase of the threat. This increased threat should however be evaluated together with other considerations (the efficiency of Turkish air defence, the high level early warning/intercept capability of the Hawkeye/F-14 system, the impossibility of escorting "Backfire" with Soviet fighters on anti-ship missions). All these factors allow a reduced evaluation of the threat.

- The survival of the VI Fleet is linked to its ability to blunt a surprise attack and to the entry into service of ships equipped with more advanced anti-missile and anti-aircraft defences (the Aegis system).

- It would be wrong, in the evaluation of the Soviet threat, to under-estimate the Soviets' significant mine-laying capability.

- The availability of air and naval bases in the North African countries is of considerable importance in determining the operational capability of the Soviet Fleet. This availability has a decisive role in determining the VI Fleet's ability to operate in the Mediterranean.

- The VI Fleet ability to carry out assigned missions and to survive also depends on the fleet's ability to deploy at least two task forces with carriers in the Mediterranean during crises and thus to have these available for use in a conflict.

- In a conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact it may be assumed that the Southern European NATO countries would participate actively in naval and air operations alongside United States' forces. It is logical to assume that French forces, which are far from being insignificant, would participate in the war thereby helping to strengthen the VI Fleet.

- At the same time it would be wrong to exclude the possibi-

lity, however improbable it might appear, that a number of North African and Middle Eastern countries might not only provide the Soviets with air and naval bases but might also play an active role in the conflict alongside Soviet forces.

There was considerable discussion over the possibility of increased use of ground bases for control of the Mediterranean. This could be achieved through the use of what new technologies can offer in the field of satellite observation of broad stretches of sea with localization and tracking of hostile naval forces, in navigation when the NAVSTAR system becomes operational, in new missile systems (both air-sea missiles with stand-off capability and air or ground launched cruise missiles), and in anti-submarine warfare (more sophisticated detection systems, particularly effective mines) etc. In other words the discussion was centred around whether or not it was possible to reduce or eliminate the Mediterranean role of the VI Fleet (with all its alleged vulnerability to the Soviet threat) and replace this role with aircraft deployed on land bases. These would thus take on the role of denying the sea to the Soviet fleet and thus, indirectly and in collaboration with the "lighter" navies belonging to the NATO countries on the Southern flank, of keeping open Mediterranean lines of communication. As a minimum it should be possible, if not to completely replace the VI Fleet in all its roles and for all missions, at least to achieve increased integration of land-based and naval forces thereby allowing the Americans to reduce their naval presence in the Mediterranean and increase that presence on other areas which are equally important from a strategic point of view: the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans, the sea routes to the South of the Cape of Good Hope and to the West of Gibraltar.

Nonetheless the objection was raised that if this concept of

ground basing were assumed as the only alternative to the American naval presence in the Mediterranean (or to those elements in the American force capable of projecting power ashore namely aircraft carriers and marines units) the result would be the loss of the fundamental role played by the VI Fleet in peacetime: that is not only the maintenance of the balance of military power between the two blocs but also the defence of unilateral super-power interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. What is more the flexibility of the VI Fleet, that is its ability to influence crises in the Middle East, in North Africa and in the Persian Gulf even without direct military intervention would also be lost. None of these areas are officially included in the sphere of responsibility of NATO although they obviously are included in the sphere of responsibility of a great power like the USA.

At the same time one should not underestimate the importance of the fact that once the USSR has completed construction of the 4 "Kiev" class aircraft carriers it will be able to deploy a task force in the Mediterranean which will be similar to, if not as strong as American task forces. The obvious aim here is to increase the influence of the Soviet naval presence and to increase the Soviet naval intervention capability in a crisis due to the availability of carrier-based V/STOL aircraft capable of projecting power ashore.

It should also be remembered that ground bases would reduce the flexibility of intervention and are particularly vulnerable to attack from the air particularly if the necessary hardening for aircraft and infrastructures (hangarages for aircraft, hardening for command, control and communication centers, bunkers for personnel, rapid runway repair capability etc.) were lacking. Finally ground bases could prove to be unavailable to US forces

if the allied countries on whose territory they were located decided that the dispute or the confrontation between the superpowers was not covered by the North Atlantic Treaty.

b) Political questions

Many important political and politico-military questions were raised during the conference. I will not attempt here to give a complete account of the discussion but rather to concentrate on those points on which interest was concentrated.

- It is difficult to see the Mediterranean, within the limits of Nato's area of responsibility, as an area of direct military conflict between East and West except in the context of a general conflict originating in other NATO theatres or in other areas.

- Crises on the Southern flank may originate from crises outside the two blocs with direct linkages to Mediterranean countries (a post-Tito crisis in Yugoslavia, a new confrontation in the Middle East, a crisis between Algeria and Morocco over Mauritania etc.) or to other external crises (which are more probable and at least equally dangerous) linked to destabilizing events in non-Mediterranean areas (Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea and Indian Ocean areas). In both cases NATO would be faced with particularly complex and difficult options. The European countries' attitudes would be determined by a whole series of factors: - policy towards the Arab countries or African policy in general, economic interests in the crisis area, political ties with the countries included in the crisis, relations with the United States and the effectiveness of any pressure from the US, the stability of Governments in power and their ability to assume responsibilities and to take decisions even when these are unpopular, etc. Oil

would be particularly important and could well play a decisive role in shaping the final decision.

- Crises on the Southern flank could originate in crises within the alliance such as a show-down between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus or the Aegean continental shelf. As in the past it is extremely unlikely that NATO would be able to exert a direct influence over the course of events.

- The factors of political, economic and social instability sometimes dramatically present in NATO Mediterranean countries have become more important for the effective viability of the Alliance than the military factors which predominate in the Northern and central sectors. In other words NATO vulnerability on the Southern flank is more due to the internal instability of Mediterranean alliance members than to any superiority of the Pact in conventional military forces.

- In the present Mediterranean situation the United States are aware that they have to maintain their presence in the area in order to meet demands and crisis situations lying outside official NATO responsibilities, but which nonetheless involve the world balance of power. At the same time they are also aware that it is precisely in this situations in which they could find themselves without essential (or, at any rate, useful) allied logistic support (airports for air-lifts, port infrastructure, etc.). This could lead the USA to look for alternative solutions which would eliminate the need for ground bases. These might involve a re-evaluation of the deployment and size of US forces and/or of contingency plans for intervention in crisis zones in view of possible changes in the internal situation in NATO Southern flank countries or in the at-

titudes of other European allies.

There is also the problem of how far the VI Fleet's intervention capability in crises outside NATO, with or without allied help, is a real rather than a theoretical capability, of the levels of violence which should be hypothesized in such an eventuality and thus of the effective constraints on the flexibility which a naval presence is claimed to grant the USA in the Mediterranean.

- It is thus of great importance to achieve a greater coherency of view between the United States and the European allies over crises outside NATO which would be bound, directly or indirectly, to involve the Mediterranean area and/or affect Europe's oil supplies and/or the overall military balance between the two blocs. The achievement of this coherency of views obviously depends on different perceptions of the "threat" by the USA and by different European NATO countries; views in the central sector and on the southern flank clearly differ. Different perceptions obviously influence European priorities concerning crises outside the Alliance. At an operational level this coherency of views could lead to joint contingency planning or to the discussion and approval of a series of coordinated political principles, at least on essential questions so as to avoid policy differences, differing positions, misunderstandings and ruptures between the United States and her European allies.

This greater coherency, which as far as an intervention policy is concerned, could be defined as a two way street, would increase both the United States' and the European countries' flexibility of action. Furthermore such a series of principles made public through appropriate channels could act as a deterrent against any further expansion of Soviet international activism.

- The enlargement of the EEC and the possibility that Spain might become a member of NATO both represent "novelties" in the Med-

terranean area and as such are worthy of discussion. Enlargement could improve the effectiveness and credibility of EEC Mediterranean policy and might favour a more open North-South, Euro-Arab dialogue. Spanish NATO membership would mean an increase in allied naval forces deployed in the Mediterranean and this could act as a further counterweight to the threat from the Soviet fleet.

- Within the Mediterranean framework the Alliance seems to be moving away from its traditional tasks towards a different form of crisis management involving not only individual military security factors but also other political, economic and social questions. Involvement in these questions requires new policies and policy tools.

### 3. Hypotheses for research

- The research should analyze in greater depth the American Mediterranean naval forces' ability to survive, with particular reference to the Eastern Mediterranean. We should also investigate the question of whether, in the future, the US naval presence is destined to be replaced with ground-based air forces, that is of whether there is likely to be a transition from naval projection of power to ground-based projection of power. Among other factors this analysis will have to consider: - new technologies; trends naval development in the United States and the Soviet Union; the respective capabilities of the two navies including their mining and ASW capabilities; the possibility of periods of peace, of tension or of war, either as a result of a conflict between NATO and Warsaw Pact or alternatively of a confrontation between the two superpowers as the result of a crisis in the area escaping their reciprocal control; the adaptability of the ground-basing concept to crises outside NATO and to the possibility of domestic change in individual Mediterranean



Alliance members; the adequacy of ground basing for assuming all the roles previously belonging to naval forces; survival and flexibility considerations; weapons system to be used; the respective cost effectiveness of ground-basing and of naval forces; integration and coordination with allied forces etc.

- The research will have to give a more detailed analysis of the real relationship between internal instability in the NATO Mediterranean countries (with a detailed examination of their political, economic and social problems) and the risk of increased Alliance vulnerability vis-à-vis the Eastern bloc. It is also necessary to consider what is the real connection between internal political change, changes in foreign policy and more particularly changes in attitudes towards NATO (commitments, participation, military expenditure, American bases on allied territory, the nuclear weapons' storage sites, attitudes adopted in NATO crises etc.), how far this connection may be affected by external and above all American attitudes, NATO perceptions of this kind of change, the kind of reactions which are likely to result and possible consequences. The possibility of direct participation in government by the Italian Communist Party could be used as a case study.

- The research will have to provide a more detailed analysis of possible scenarios for crises outside NATO, the "strategic" linkages between the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, the most possible and the optimal response by the Alliance and the likelihood that such a response could be coordinated with the USA. In this context it is necessary to examine the strategic implications of those economic considerations which are beginning to exert an ever greater influence on the European countries' Mediterranean and African policies and of the opening of a Euro-Arab or a Euro-African dialogue.

It is also necessary to examine differing perceptions of the threat and the importance of these in decision-making. Finally it is necessary to examine possibilities for and the viability of a more concrete coordination of diplomatic, political (and maybe even military) action between the USA and the European allies when faced with crises outside NATO, as well as the ways in which such coordination could be organized and put into effect and the limitations of this effectiveness. As far as American reactions are concerned the analysis should cover practical and theoretical possibilities for intervention, that is the constraints existing on the use of force and of air and sea forces in the Mediterranean.

- The research should analyze in greater detail the posture the Alliance should adopt towards the Mediterranean situation, both from the usual restricted viewpoint of the confrontation between the two military blocs and from a broader viewpoint taking in linkages between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf and between the Mediterranean and Africa. In other words the research should face up to the problem of possible alternatives to NATO in its present form (a broadening or a narrowing of the Alliance to include new elements or to increase the role of bilateral relations, etc.) and that of the role to be played by the United States. It should also be considered what role France could play and the way in which other European institutions, such as the EEC could credibly take on particular responsibilities in the Mediterranean area..

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