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EUROPEAN SECURITY AND THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

by

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Meeting between

The Institute for World Economics of the
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

and

The Italian Institute for International Affairs (IAI)

Budapest, 23-24 November, 1982

IAI/33/82

For several years Western Europe was accustomed to considering its relationship with the Third World as unrelated to its security. In 1973 the oil crisis raised a first problem of security. It has been, however, the enhanced role of the USSR in the Third World in the course of the '70s that has forced Western Europe to look at its relationship with the Third World in an East-West security perspective. This paper comments on the impact of changing Western European security perceptions on its relationship with the Third World.

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The most striking change during these last years has been in the central strategic balance of forces. Whereas the argument for a Soviet conventional superiority may even be challenged, as for nuclear capacities nobody doubts the existence of a parity situation. It is true that the reach and significance in military terms of such a parity has not yet been clarified in every detail and implication. However, its impact on perceptions has been far-reaching and is at the root of the Alliance's present malaise.

Nuclear parity has put into question the Alliance's ability to deter a Soviet attack on Western Europe. The NATO doctrine rests on the theory that the Soviets would never risk attacking Western Europe since the United States would be able to threaten the Soviet while keeping its national deterrence intact. This is no longer true, for an American nuclear reaction to a successful invasion of Western Europe would expose the USA itself to an effective Soviet nuclear response. This is not likely to be accepted either by the American people or by the US President. As a

result, the Alliance's real posture is affected by feelings of a decoupling of Western Europe and the United States. In other words the Americans are not likely to use their nuclear capacity to defend Western Europe because the nuclear parity attained by the Soviets deter them from doing so.

A tentative Alliance's response to such a risk of decoupling has been the decision to deploy the LRTNFs in Europe. Is this the right response to that risk? The fact that such a decision was proposed as a reaction to a single modernization - the SS20s - of the Soviet arsenal has misled the Western debate. True, the LRTNFs are an attempt at keeping the Western defence integrated against the overall Soviet nuclear build-up - which among other things includes the SS-20s as well. Provided that the LRTNFs are actually and timely deployed, will they ensure the integration of the Western security system? There is not a straight answer to this question. For the time being, LRTNFs are too few to be a credible deterrent and responsibility for their use rests on the Americans. Their role within the Western defense is not so clear as to really avoid any feeling of decoupling. It is a weak response to the decoupling issue. What about their possible evolution? Were the European LRTNFs more or less to become an effective deterrent, they would keep the Soviets at a distance irrespective of the credibility of the American deterrent. This means that the deployment of a European theater deterrence would become a way of keeping the Alliance formally united while dividing decisions and responsibility: a more or less covert way of practising decoupling, if not an overt way of remaking the Alliance (1). On the other hand, if the LRTNFs were

to prove ineffective, Soviet decisions would depend on the credibility of the American deterrent. Were the Soviets to perceive the Americans as unwilling to expose themselves to a nuclear strike in order to defend the Europeans, the inter-Atlantic decoupling would again emerge despite any LRTNFs deployment. On the whole, LRTNFs seem to be a very ambiguous response to the challenge that nuclear parity has issued to the Alliance, because they either do not avert decoupling or they actually enforce it.

Significant conventional rearmament would be a further option open to the Europeans (2). It would make it more expensive for the Soviets to check the effective working of the American deterrent as a reaction to a conventional attack on Western Europe. In this sense it would work as a deterrent itself. Nevertheless, a conventionally strong Europe is not a sufficient condition to eliminate decoupling from the Alliance. It would not affect the American willingness to deliver its nuclear response whenever required. One has also to point out that a Western Europe with a strong conventional capacity may well induce the Soviets to escalate their attack to the nuclear level from the beginning. Due to its nuclear nature a Soviet attack against a conventionally strong Europe will not change the US basic attitude towards its own involvement in the conflict.

The decoupling basically brought about by the change in the global strategic balance requires a more diffuse responsibility within the Alliance. All we have said so far makes it clear that in the new framework a nuclear and/ or conventional deterrent should in any case be owned by the Europeans. A wider diffusion of military decision-making

within the Alliance, on the other hand, does not necessarily mean the end of the Alliance's unity nor of its effectiveness. Quite on the contrary, it would give back to the Alliance its strength by eliminating a factor of unsolvable political dispute. The remaking of NATO's doctrine - if any - may follow. The reality, however, is that the Europeans do not seem willing to take up the challenge of this wider power diffusion. As for the building-up of an adequate conventional force of defence, the necessary economic and social cost has already been ruled out. As for the setting up of a European theater deterrent, its significance has been dangerously downgraded by the very European initiative of linking its deployment to the new arms control negotiations in Geneva. This gives the Soviets an amazing say on European nuclear modernization. Finally, nobody - with the still unclear exception of the new French government - is asking for changes in the Alliance. What is true is that the feeling of decoupling created by the new global balance of power is reinforcing factors of decoupling already at work within European politics. We have to mention three main factors.

First of all, the fighting of a war, either nuclear or conventional, on European soil is considered unacceptable. The experience of the Second World War, the European population density and the awareness of the destructive power of the new weapons make every European simply rule out war as an option. The cornerstone of European security policy is that war cannot be considered either an option or a possible occurrence. That this is the mainstay of the European security conception is not new. At the time of

the American nuclear superiority, however, the occurrence of a war on Western European soil was basically played down because the Europeans trusted the Americans deterrent. Now that a "limited" war, either at a nuclear and conventional level, on the Old Continent is a possibility, the European strategy of avoiding war is becoming unveiled. This explains the absence of European pressures and proposals for changes in the Alliance. Whatever the change, while it would never bring back the American deterrent, is supposed to set a more precise European responsibility on the ground of its conventional and/or nuclear power. Since this would openly imply that a European "limited" war is possible, no claim of changing the Alliance is made.

As a consequence of the coming up of this basic European security strategy one has to stress the fact that decoupling becomes a self-reinforcing process: the failure of the American power produces a decoupling towards the Europeans; a posture of decoupling is then adopted by the Europeans with the aim of avoiding the risk of getting involved with a power which is declining. Though it is made less visible by the weight and complexity of the political and institutional Atlantic relations, the European reaction is not substantially different from that of the Saudis after the fall of the Shah. As noted by Robert Tucker (3), the Saudis cannot accept the American military presence they wish in the Gulf, for they feel that the USA is unable to guarantee its regional presence at the global level. In these circumstances a local American military presence would only bring about external vulnerability and domestic instability to the Saudis without offsetting it with a last resort guarantee. The difference with the Saudis lies in

the nature of the security which is searched for. Whereas the Saudis are seeking to secure their wealth and power, the Europeans by avoiding a war they perceive as ultimate, wish to secure their basic civilized existence. In the eyes of any allied country, however, the US cannot help shifting from a role of security source to one of almost insecurity, as soon as its power is perceived as declining.

The second factor affecting European politics is the European countries' inability to unite. It is clear that the individual European countries are unable to defend themselves from any Soviet threat. On the other hand, Western Europe has failed to set up an integrated system of defence. As long as the American nuclear deterrence worked, the flexible response doctrine has given the European countries a sense of security even though they continued to be disunited. Now that the American deterrent has been undermined, the European countries' inability to defend themselves cannot be concealed. For this reason, one would expect a new and major European effort to unite. For a strengthening of Western Europe's institutions and the pooling of its resources would make available the economic means to build up a credible European nuclear and/or conventional deterrent. What is more it would allow for a wider diffusion of power and responsibility within the Alliance which - as we noted - may be the way out of the present crisis. Unfortunately the European countries far from undertaking this effort, are fragmented as never before.

Pierre Lellouche (4) wonders why the Europeans are not pushing for a change in an Alliance which is supposedly not giving them the security they need. Besides the explanations he gives, one has to add that they do not ask for

this change because if they did they would consequently have to unite. For only if they unite would they be able to take up the wider responsibilities implicit in the Alliance's change.

In these circumstances one may wonder what is the meaning of the European countries' continuing reliance on the Alliance. Since the flexible response cannot work anymore and the Europeans have failed to revitalize the Alliance by integrating themselves, NATO is becoming more and more a set of barely coordinated bilateral relationships. Perception of the European role within the Alliance is therefore changing in both the American and European eyes. From active contributors to the common defence, Europeans are becoming beneficiaries of an external defence guarantee. The Americans perceive the Europeans as people demanding protection (and quite naturally are questioning the limits of that protection), whereas the Europeans simply expect an American support under NATO's label. In this sense, the European countries' inability to unite is a factor which reinforces the decoupling springing from the change in the central balance of power.

This military asymmetry, on the other hand, is not without political consequences. Turned into an external military guarantee, the Alliance becomes an assurance to the European non-military policies of security (economic cooperation, arms control, détente) at the regional level, which are the basic elements of the avoidance of war strategy which we talked about some paragraphs before. Here again we come to see how close the European politics is getting to that of the Third World countries. As in the case of these countries, any alliance is bidimensional for

it will be part of a global gear from the point of view of the superpower, whereas it is the under-pinning of local policies from the point of view of the regional countries.

The third factor at work is the German issue. The construction of a European federation was to be for all European peoples the way out of nationalism. For Western Germany it was to be the alternative to the reunification of the German nation. Neither the federalist doctrines nor the European common institutions have grown so much as to represent the necessary alternative to the German nation. Nevertheless, the Federal Republic of Germany has not evolved a new nationalism. Its policy has been that of leaving the reunification option open in the long run. For this reason the FRG has never set in motion a national reunification policy nor any other nationalistic policies. Rather, any policy set in motion has been designed to produce and promote such an international environment as to keep open its long term reunification option. In this frame détente with its paraphernalia (arms control, economic cooperation, etc.) has become the most important component of German international policy. As long as there has been a USA-USSR détente at the global level, the management of a regional détente in Central Europe was not to cause any fundamental problem. Now that the global détente is failing, along with détente in such crucial areas as Southwestern Asia, there is a problem of consistency between both the perceptions and security interests of Americans and Germans. On the other hand, one has to underline that divisibility of détente is shared by other European countries for reasons ranging from domestic constraints, to economic pressures,

to differing geopolitical perceptions. Like the factors already discussed, the European claim that détente is divisible is bound to affect the decoupling trend opened by the change in the central balance. For the interpretation of the Alliance in strictly regional terms cannot allow the survival of a relationship which is supposed to be of a special nature between the USA and Western Europe.

To grasp the full scope of European security perceptions one must also bear in mind the fundamental European dependence on trade and raw material imports, particularly oil. The international economic order assured by the American power and the safe and cheap flow of oil taken home by the American companies until the beginning of the '70s, led the Europeans to endorse their dependence on the USA both for trade and raw material supplies. The decline of American power and the profound changes undergone by the international oil market have forced the Europeans to envisage a larger concept of dependence, namely not only on the USA but on the entire world. For in the absence of a last resort guarantee the typical insurance against a risk is that of spreading as much as possible both supply and demand. It is not by chance that this is the foundation of the Eurocurrency markets, where a last resort guarantee (a central bank) is missing and consequently the risk is curtailed by spreading loans supply and keeping alive a substantial amount of loans demand. Likewise the Europeans on the one hand have tried to strengthen Third World and Socialist countries as trade partners in order to enlarge and diversify demand and, on the other, have begun to diversify the pattern of their suppliers of raw materials - particularly energy materials - by developing relations with the Soviet Union and gas imports.

Supply security, therefore, is based on policies which bring about a declining relationship with the United States and, conversely, a growing relationship with other partners including the USSR. Although this factor is not of a strictly military nature, on a strategic ground here again one can notice an aspect of the Euroamerican decoupling springing from the change in the overall balance of power.

On the whole the factors discussed so far shed light on a European security perception of growing regional character, based on non-military policies and designed to keep non-conflictual relations with the USSR. This new overall security concept has a number of important consequences on the Western European posture towards the Third World countries:

- a) The overwhelming goal of keeping non-conflictual relations with the USSR forces the Europeans to adopt the concept of divisibility of détente. Consequently they are leaning more and more towards either swallowing any Soviet aggressive moves in the Third World - with some remarkable exceptions of France in Africa - or to play down its importance. This amounts to saying that the European posture towards the Third World on the political and military ground is considerably determined by its Central-European relation with the Soviet Union.
- b) A first corollary of this crucial constraint on the European policy towards Third World countries is that Europe is showing an increasing propensity to envisage a positive and cooperative role of the Soviet Union in the Third World. The European dissatisfaction towards the Camp David process has been, among other things, also

an acknowledgement that political settlement in the Middle East might include the USSR. On the other hand, proposals as groundless as that of giving the Europeans a guarantee on the oil flow from the Gulf (5), do reveal how aware the Soviets are of the European security perception and are a means of encouraging the Europeans to think of the USSR as a cooperative partner within the framework of insecure industrialized Third World supply relations;

- c) A second corollary is that Europe is inclined to encourage a certain competition between Third World and Socialist countries in order to obtain economic advantages and most of all security. This explains the European energy import policies - as we have already noticed - but also European soft financial policies. This competition prevents a larger flow of European resources from going to the Third World countries. From the point of view of the long term commercial European interest, this diversion is detrimental. On the other hand, one has to admit that, regarding both oil and money, the Third World countries do not appear as safe as the Socialist countries.

Notes

- (1) A point of view over the remaking of the Alliance is in Irving Kristol, "Reconstructing NATO: A new role for Europe", The Wall Street Journal, August 12, 1982
- (2) See the assessment of the conventional balance in Central Europe in The Economist, July 31, 1982, pp. 30-31: "Do you sincerely want to be non-nuclear?"; see also Pierre Lellouche, "A Revolution in NATO Strategy", Newsweek, November 1, 1982 and Neville Brown, "The Changing Face of Non-Nuclear War", Survival, Sept.-Oct. 1982, pp. 211-219.
- (3) Robert W. Tucker, "The Purposes of American Power", Foreign Affairs, vol. 59, No. 2, Winter 1980-1981, p. 252 and 254.
- (4) Pierre Lellouche, "Does Nato have a Future? A European View", The Washington Quarterly, Summer 1982, pp. 40-52.
- (5)

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