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## CAN NATO SURVIVE ?

di Maurizio Cremasco

Thank you mister chairman. Ladies and gentlemen, first of all I would like to apologize for not speaking in Spanish, but I have too much respect for your beautiful language to try a dangerous experiment....Second, it is very late. I think we are all a little bit tired. It has been a long though very interesting day. So I will try to be very brief and concise and I hope you will forgive me for the fragmentation of my exposé.

I would like to return to the main theme of this afternoon's section: can NATO survive ?

The United States and its European allies have had differing perceptions and evaluations, disagreements on specific issues, divergences in policies toward the East Bloc and, at times, some bitter debates. But I think that this should not be overdramatized because it is natural within an Alliance of free and democratic nations. In fact, I feel that by any standard of measurement NATO should be judged as one of the most successful military alliances in history. If we look back, we see, as Hedley Bull rightly pointed out in a recent Foreign Affairs article, that NATO has survived the split which arose over the German rearmament and the Suez war in the '50s, over Gaullism and the Vietnam war in the '60s, over the oil crisis and the Arab-Israeli October war in the '70s, over the soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Poland crisis, the gas pipeline issue in the '80s. More importantly, NATO has held together on the difficult decision of the deployment of the euromissiles.

True, the differences exist, but I think it is a sign of vitality. We should not be surprised that they exist and at the same time we should be cautious in dealing with them, avoiding the tendency to dramatize.

There are many reasons for those differences. Let me sketch them very rapidly.

First, the geo-strategic reasons. The Soviet Union is close to the heart of Europe; as a matter of fact the Soviet Union is also, at least partly, a European nation, and this vicinity, both in military and economic terms, is an element that weighs more for Europe than for the United States in the East-West relations. Professor Henryksson has mentioned before this geo-strategic division. It is true that today, considering that the intercontinental missiles can rapidly reach any part of the world, the forward bases are less needed. But we should not forget that for the European countries the credibility of the conventional deterrence is of paramount importance and the Soviet military posture has politically more weight in the European capitals than in Washington.

Second, the political reasons. The European countries feel they can play only a regional role, while the United States play a global role. But having a regional role means putting the East-West relations and the East-West issues in

a more restricted and confined context. There has been more recently a tendency of the European countries to pay more attention to what is happening in regions outside NATO's area of responsibility, even though the actions they have taken have not been the result of a coordinated or common policy. Emblematic of this attitude was the European allies' refusal (when the Iran-Iraq war broke out) to join the United States in a multinational naval force with the task of keeping the strait of Hormuz open. However, after the deployment of an American naval task force in the Arabic Sea, France and the United Kingdom also sent warships to the Indian Ocean, but in a strictly national capacity and as a unilateral decision. Thus, the American-European cooperation that was not achieved at the political level, offering again the image of a fragmented alliance, was actually reached at the operational level, in terms of a very close coordination among the French, American and British naval units deployed and operating in the same area. There is little doubt that in case of necessity those naval forces would had integrated their tasks and missions into a coordinated military operation.

Furthermore, in the political context, there is between the United States and the European allies a different perception of the Soviet threat and a different evaluation of the Soviet role in the Third World. Thus, on the type of answer the West should adopt in case of crises arising on the periphery of the Atlantic Alliance. Basically, the Europeans tend to disagree with the tendency of the United States, in particular of the present Administration, to see all crises in the Third World in the light of an East-West confrontation.

Finally, there are different perceptions, even though in this case the differences are narrower, on the range of military threats posed by the Soviet Union and on the military strategy and military posture NATO should adopt to face it. A typical example is the present transatlantic debate on the issues of no-first use of nuclear weapons and of General Rogers' plan for upgrading the conventional capability of the NATO forces in order to raise the nuclear threshold and to strengthen the conventional deterrence.

Third, the economic reasons. East-West trade has become one of the key elements of the economic picture of the European countries and, as in the cases of Afghanistan and Poland, the Europeans have great difficulties in following the United States on the path of economic sanctions (by the way a difficulty the American Administration faces when confronted with the problem of placing an embargo on the selling of grain to Moscow).

Fourth, the psychological reasons. The Europeans paradoxically tend to complain when they feel the American leadership is not strong enough (as during president Carter's years), but also when the American leadership seems to be too strong and Washington is seen as trying to impose its political and military course of action upon its reluctant allies.

The Europeans have the feeling that they can grasp the Soviet "reality" better than the United States and they complain when there is little or no consultation and coordination within the Alliance before the American Administration takes its decisions.

The Americans complain that the Europeans want the best of all possible worlds. American protection and American nuclear guarantee, and American troops in

Europe, yet freedom of action with respect to their national and regional economic and political concerns, plus a kind of veto power over American policy in the superpower relationship.

The United States has the tendency to judge the European evaluation of and reaction to the Soviet threat and Soviet international behavior as an indication of the status, hence of the cohesion, of the Atlantic Alliance.

The Europeans have the tendency to more rapidly forget the wrong doings of the Soviet Union on the international scene and to proceed "business as usual". It looks like they are tending to forget the difficulties they have in their relations with the Soviet Union, due to Soviet military and foreign policy, more rapidly than the difficulties and disagreements they have in their relations with the United States.

Finally, there are the reasons stemming from the division and the lack of a coordinated policy among the European countries and the internal division within the American Administration itself, sometimes speaking with different languages: that of the President and those of the Department of State and of the Department of Defense.

Assuming these are the reasons, is NATO heading toward what the French Foreign Affairs Minister Claude Cheysson has defined as a creeping divorce? Is NATO doomed to failure? Will there be in the near future a dissolution of the Atlantic Alliance?

I do not think so. If we judge from the events of the past years there are elements for preoccupation and concern, but we should also admit that one of the most important, divisive and difficult issues, that of the eurcommissiles, is not producing the result the Soviet Union was expecting and hoping for: a split between the United States and its European allies with some of them backing out of the decision taken in December 1979. In fact, even though the European countries are confronted with growing internal opposition from the various peace and antinuclear movements, they are responding with a comforting show of unity and firmness.

It should not be forgotten that NATO is above all a military alliance. And in the military field the Alliance is working well, in a smoother and more efficient way than at the political level. Military exercises are regularly conducted every year. The armament acquisition programs decided upon by the Eurogroup are proceeding, though slowly due to the economic constraints imposed by the difficult European economic situation. The NATO Commands are working perfectly integrated on a multinational base. NATO's air defense system is on alert 24 hours a day, seven days a week, etc. I think that these aspects of vitality and efficiency of the Alliance are often overlooked and the analysis on its status tend to concentrate too much on the political situation, which I agree is also important, but only a part of the whole picture.

In my opinion there is no place for complacency but no place for undue concern either. I think it is important to recognize that presently there are problems in the transatlantic relations, and work together to find a solution. I know it is not easy or simple.

In the security field, the problem of European defense should be separated from the issue of European support of American policy in the world. The economic and

political elements of the strategy the West intends to adopt toward the East, and the Soviet Union in particular, should be more closely coordinated. I think it is necessary to elaborate a new "Exercise Harmel", similar to the one which in the '60s posed the base of the Alliance policy, summarized in the two words of détente and defense.

The issues which should be addressed in this new Western effort of definition of new challenges and of new courses of action are, again very rapidly and schematically, the following:

- In the economic field, it should be determined which kind of economic and trade relations the Western countries, in particular the European countries, should conduct with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies. It should be taken into consideration if and how and to what extent the West is subsidizing the Soviet economy, actually favoring the strengthening of the Soviet military power, for example through loans given at the very low interest rate and with the transfer of technology which could be utilized for military purposes.

- In the political field, the problem is to determine how to deal with and what attitude to assume toward the Soviet Union, the first example in contemporary history of a totalitarian State having the means of conducting a global policy, possessing a very significant military capability and being obsessed by an almost paranoid feeling of insecurity. A State which is driven by a messianic ideology, which in recent years has conducted an expansionist foreign policy and where the military establishment plays a very important and influential role.

The elaboration of a coordinated Western policy is paramount to avoid what Pierre Lellouche has this morning defined as a European self neutralization, the United States and Europe dividing themselves on the major international issues and the European countries slowly drifting toward a more or less explicit neutralism or nationalistic unilateralism.

Furthermore, the problem is to decide what role the European countries should or could play in the Third World in support of American policy or as an alternative to American action whenever such action is handicapped by the superpower status of the United States and by the possibility that the American political and/or military intervention would eventually translate into a superpower (and then East-West) confrontation.

- In the military field, the problem is to determine if the present NATO strategy is still valid in the age of nuclear parity between the two superpowers and of Soviet conventional and nuclear superiority in the European theatre. Furthermore, the problem is to decide if Gen. Rogers' plan to strengthen the conventional forces is the best answer to NATO's present military impasse. Personally, I think that in the short term there is no valid alternative to the strategy of flexible response, with a strong tie between conventional and nuclear deterrence. The conventional forces should be upgraded but the nuclear element of the strategy should be maintained. Another point is to study how the European countries could integrate their defense efforts, to form the core a real European defence community and reduce the range of delegation now given to the United States for the defense of Europe.

Finally, the problem is to determine what the European countries should do to regain the consensus of their public opinions on the security decisions of their Governments. I think that one of the main problems NATO will face in the near future is not so much which strategy to adopt, which weapons systems to acquire, which political and military posture to assume vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, but is above all to convince the public opinion that a military effort, and the money that goes with it, is needed for the security of Europe.

Now, considering that it is about 8.30 p.m. and that I would like to leave at least half an hour for the discussion, I am closing here, again apologizing for the schematism of my intervention. Thank you.

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