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Session II

NEW CONCEPTUAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES: NUCLEAR AND SPACE WEAPONS

INTERVENTION
by Cesare Merlini

1 - I share most of what is said in the Jonathan Alford's paper. In order to stimulate the discussion let me begin with one point which in my view requires some qualifications. The paper assumes that the challenges to the current strategic thought are technological and not conceptual. It has to be said however that no major technological breakthrough prompted the President Reagan's speech that is considered at the origin of the Strategic Defense Initiative. Rather it was uneasiness about the state of affairs in nuclear deterrence --whether justified or not, it is another matter.

Most analysts are convinced that nuclear deterrence is there to stay. However revolting the dimension of the threat to the world survival, the relative peace we have so far enjoyed in terms of preventing escalation and/or containing conflicts derives from it. I concur with that.

It is recognised that risks come more from instabilities than from the size of the arsenals. I concur with that too. One factor of instability is excessive efficacy of a first strike, which then becomes potentially rewarding, thus tempting. Partly helped by the campaign about the consequences of a nuclear war --campaign originated on the other side of the American political spectrum-- new perceptions arose which Reagan interpreted and exploited to assemble support for his proposals. Perceptions are inevitably part of deterrence.

Two solutions are being considered: reduction of offensive weapons and introduction of defensive interceptors. Neither of them is such as to solve the problem by definition. The ways and means of implementation are more relevant than the concepts themselves.

2 - Cuts in offensive strategic weapons can be done in gross figures only to a point. If the goal of stability is recognised as more important than the one of the quantity of warheads, reductions must necessarily be articulated, i. e. negotiated. There is little the Europeans can do about it besides encouraging, indeed urging constructive negotiations.

Similar considerations apply to the development, possibly the deployment of anti ballistic missile defenses. Research is apparently dispelling now some of the excessive expectations of the early phases. The efficacy of limited shields will be assessed in the coming years and the assessment will require testing which is hardly compatible with the ABM treaty, if the restrictive interpretation is to be maintained. The confirmation of such interpretation and

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testing performed under negotiated conditions seem to be in the interest of all, even in partial violation of the treaty, and preferable to the unilateral looser interpretation, which would likely open a chain of reciprocal recriminations and de facto unrestrained violations. The quid pro quo would necessarily have to be determined by the negotiators. Early hints to sharing findings have apparently lost momentum besides being met with little warmth by the other side. Still they may be part of the deal.

The linkage issue should not be overstressed. The degree of reversibility that inevitably characterises cuts in offensive weapons associated with the timing of the deployment of the defensive devices should be taken into account and allows for the former to be made without excessive conditions to limit research activities related to the latter.

3 - If the criterion of stability is given the premium which is suggested here, ASAT activities are of a major concern, as two of the paper authors, Alford and Heisbourg, rightly underline. Surveillance satellites have a substantially stabilising role both in terms of detection and of verification. The preservation of such satellites, whether deployed by the superpowers or by other parties, national or international, should be a primary aim of future negotiations. West European efforts to build a presence in space is legitimate and welcome. It will have to be associated with policies to make space accessible and safe.

4 - The longest paragraph of the Geneva joint communiqué was devoted to endorse nonproliferation. In this respect I think it is appropriate to recall another statement which was issued in the same city a few months earlier. I am referring to the final declaration of the Third NPT Review Conference, which made its strongest plea for more productive negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. As J. Alford says, no major new breakthrough is to be expected in the development of nuclear weapons. Thus, without neglecting the remaining obstacles on the way of a successful outcome of this negotiation, it appears that progress can be made so that it would profit in both directions, horizontal and vertical proliferation.

The European theater

5 - Monsieur Heisbourg in his paper advocates "non banalisation du nucléaire" and at the same time non conventionalisation of deterrence. The argument is convincing but the margin between the two may turn out to be too narrow. Responsible for excessive "banalisation du nucléaire" are the many Short Range Tactical Nuclear Weapons deployed in Western Europe. Nato has twice decided to reduce them and I was glad to hear Undersecretary Perle stressing this policy in his intervention. Not only there is no serious motive not to fully implement those decisions but further reductions are conceivable which are in part still to be made unilaterally because they are in the interest of the Alliance strategy and in part to be made only if reciprocated by the Warsaw Pact either with cuts in similar weapons and/or with reductions in conventional forces.

6 - The deployment of Intermediate range nuclear missiles in Western Europe has not proven to be as irreversibly destabilising as it was originally purported by the Soviet Union. Ceilings to their numbers are now possible either as a consequence of negotiations or as a result of subsequent mutually responding

unilateral steps. Figures of the magnitude--and the kind--that was sketched for instance in the "walk in the woods" still provide a suitable target, better--to be said incidentally--than the zero level.

7 - Nobody has spoken of the current attention of West European countries for concepts of defensive devices aimed at intercepting incoming ballistic missiles during the reentry phase or other vehicles. This attention seems to be very preliminary, possibly just tentative. It is inevitable that some consideration be given to them in view of the possible future development of weapons and of strategic conceptual reassessments. They do not mean per se any coming closer to the SDI approach.

8 - Atlantic cooperation has not suffered much from those attempts that were made to insert the arms control issues as a divisive element. One of the major motives for this outcome has been the attention given by Washington to the views the Europeans have expressed, often with a fair amount of euphoria. These views have been consistently supporting arms control. One wonders whether East European governments have had the same impact.

9 - Ambassador Rostow in his paper makes a plea in favor of international law, thus international institutions as guiding principles for our policies, including security policies. Since sometimes one is brought to wonder whether in Washington such principles still enjoy the same popularity, such plea is very welcome. The current phase of communication, if nothing else, between the United States and the Soviet Union is certainly a necessary precondition and potentially a vital component of any settlement for the arms race and for other global or regional sources of tension. However, effective arrangements cannot be based only on bilateralism, summitry and ad-hoc-ery. Solutions require the participation of other countries directly in multilateral forums or through international institutions. The role of these institutions must be strengthened and I am glad to make such final point in a conference like this sponsored by a United Nations body.

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