

NATO, EUROPE AND THE OUT-OF-AREA
(Notes for a discussion in the E.S.G.)

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The problem is twofold. First there is the defence of the Southern Region of the Atlantic Alliance and the Mediterranean. Second there is the question of how to deal with out-of-area crises. Nato is taken between the two.

First, the Southern Region. In the past, the military threat against Nato's Southern Region has been largely an indirect threat. Soviet troop deployments and readiness levels have all pointed toward an attack in the central European region. No Soviet divisions have stood ready for short warning attacks against Italy, Greece or Turkey.

Under the "flexible response" strategy, Nato has declared that it will meet any attack with whatever level of force is necessary, including nuclear weapons. The intent has been to deter war by posing a grave risk of nuclear escalation. And the same risk would ensure that any war would be quickly ended through negotiations or exhaustion.

For the Southern Region, "flexible response" has meant a minimum role. If Nato held in the Center with conventional forces, or if necessary, nuclear weapons, peace would soon come, with little action on the Flanks. If Nato were defeated in the center, the Flanks would have little choice but to accommodate to Soviet desires. Thus, Southern Region countries have had a vital stake in the success or failure of Nato defenses, but have had little effect on the outcome.

The situation is changing in the '80s. The growing nuclear capabilities of both sides have culminated in a fundamental change in both Nato and Soviet perceptions. Both appear to recognize that the only way to achieve a reasonably satisfactory outcome would be to limit any conflict to conventional means. The "double zero" agreement is reinforcing this trend, proposing the progressive elimination of theatre nuclear weapons from Europe. On the Soviet side, there is continued growth in numbers of divisions and conventional weapons of all types.

It remains true, however, that both sides have interests so vital that nuclear war at some level could appear preferable to abandoning them. For Nato, these interests are located in the Central Region of Europe: avoiding catastrophic defeat on Flanks also would be a vital Nato interest and could trigger nuclear defenses, but the fact is that there is more room for maneuver (either political or military, or both). If the Soviets choose to launch a military attack against Nato as a means toward limited gains, therefore, they

will have to do so without total victory over Nato forces and without seeking to capture West Germany. Consequently, a war for limited gains would make the Southern Region of Nato as attractive a target for the Soviets as the Center Region (and a less risky target).

Furthermore, while some agreements in being between the U.S., France, Italy and Spain, coupled together with the favourable balance of forces existing in the area, could easily strengthen the defence of the Western Mediterranean, the most important strategic problem of the Southern Region is how to deal with the threats against the Eastern Mediterranean. This requires a great capacity for projecting forces towards very distant and difficult theatres, where the military balance does not look favourably.

Should the trend towards increasing "conventionalization" of military strategy continue, both in Nato and in the Warsaw Pact, this could further increase the threats against the Southern Region of Nato. Nuclear deterrence as what can be termed a "unitarian" effect of common solidarity, and sharing of risks, between allied countries, while the conventional dimension is strictly linked to the the geo-strategic features of the various military theatres, widely scattered and far from each other.

Moreover, while the great concentration of allied conventional forces in the Central region (American troops included) could be regarded as a guarantee for nuclear deterrence, the absence of such a massive land presence in the Southern Region could further diminish the credibility of deterrence. The eventual agreement on a "double-zero" disarmament in the field of LRINF and SRINF singles out a number of Nato countries as more exposed to tactical nuclear threats. While West Germany is one of them, Turkey and Greece (together with North-Eastern Norway and North-Eastern Italy) are the others.

Second, the out-of-area. The fact that eighty Western warships are today present in the Gulf, is an unexpected and astonishing event. As unexpected and astonishing is the fact that forty out these eighty vessels belong to West European countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands and Uk), while for the first time since the war even the Federal Republic of Germany has indirectly contributed to this military effort by sending four warships to the Mediterranean. Only Japan, though contributing financially to the expedition, has refrained from a direct military contribution. Is this event to be interpreted as a turnabout, in the common Western stance

If Western Europe has opted for such a significant involvement in this out-of-area operation, it is because security conditions in Europe are changing and the role of South Western Asia (Swa) among these European security conditions is changing too. The Europeans cannot fail to consider that both the Usa and the Ussr have undergone a growing involvement in Swa. Independently of recent developments in the Gulf, this involvement is witnessed by the new military arrangements made by Washington and Moscow in setting up the Rdjtf (Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force) in Tampa and the new Southern Tvd (Russian acronym for "operative strategic theater") respectively.

Whichever their relationship may be, disarmament in Europe and the new Us regional priorities coalesce in urging Western Europe to work out a new and enlarged security concept. It is an enlarged concept in the sense that it must

account for European and the Southern Flank (including Swa) regional security alike. In fact, as a consequence of changes occurring in Us-Ussr relations, especially in the European theater, West European countries are expected not only to take up more responsibilities in defending the European front, but also to do so out of the Nato area. For in order to keep alive American support to their security in Europe, Western Europe has to meet Us security requirements elsewhere. West European countries will not be allowed to think of their security as divisible any more. More and more, the East-West dimension in regional crises outside Europe, especially in Swa and more generally speaking in the Southern Flank, is going to become a mutual concern. Another argument to reach the same conclusion is that the detente now prevailing in the relations between the two superpowers is reassuring for Western Europe and as a consequence it allows for more Atlantic cohesion. Whichever the arguments, they suggest that West European presence out-of-area is likely to become an important part of the new West European security concept.

Third, Nato torn between conflicting priorities. In 1953, addressing the problem that we now call "out-of area", John Foster Dulles said that the U.S. preference was for an "Alliance without strings attached".

The problem for the Europeans today is one of defining the "vital interests" defended by the Alliance. This term has a direct bearing on the extension of American nuclear deterrence: therefore, it has to be used sparingly, especially when other doubts are growing on the credibility of such a deterrence.

In 1983, the South West Asia Impact Study did say that no "conceivable contingencies" in the area were bound to create unmanageable security problems for the Alliance.

Central European countries are particularly opposed to the extension of the concept of "vital interest". But the Southern European members of the Atlantic Alliance might be even more interested in avoiding such an enlargement.

It is of course true that, in the traditional behaviour of the Alliance, Central European interests are considered to be somewhat more "vital" than the Southern European and Mediterranean one. This is an important weakness of Nato, as we have pointed out previously.

It is also true, however, that, at least in principle, the territory of the Southern European Allies and the international waters of the Mediterranean, are presently covered by the concept of "vital interest": this still is the key political and strategic pillar of extended deterrence for the Southern Region.

Out-of-area interests are more "opinable" than "vital". A policy linking more and more the Southern Region of Nato with out-of-area contingencies will inevitably blur the strategic approaches to both, diminishing the importance of present distinctions. One of the major consequences could very well be a further decline in the perception of Allied solidarity and in the clear cut definition of the "vital interests", with sorrow results.

It is also true, however, that out-of-area crises are growing in strategic importance anyway, and that the American perception of the U.S. vital interests seems to be changing, in the direction feared by the European Allies. The problem therefore exists, and cannot be avoided. It has to be "managed".

The Atlantic Alliance did try to manage it, without success, many times in the past. During the Fifties and part of the Sixties, the Europeans, and particularly the French, failed in their effort of inducing the Americans to share their burden in the Third World. On the contrary, the U.S. government did eagerly and actively contribute to their eventual failure.

Afterwards the situation changed, but the Alliance did not succeed in shaping a clear out-of-area policy. The "let us do the best we can" and "if somebody wishes to do more let him" attitudes on out-of-area issues were already present in the 1967 Harmel report: "Crises and conflicts arising outside the area may impair its (Nato) security either directly or by affecting the global balance. Allied countries contribute individually within the United Nations and other international organizations to the maintenance of international peace and security, and to the solution of important international problems. In accordance with established usage the Allies, or such of them as wish to do so, will also continue to consult on such problems without commitment and as the case demands."

They were even more evident on the final communiqués of the North Atlantic Council meetings in the '80s. Typical are the paragraphs on out-of-area threats from the final communiqué of the June 1983 Nac in Paris: "The Allies recognise that events outside the Treaty Area may affect their common interests as members of the Alliance. If it is established that their common interests are involved, they will engage in timely consultations. Sufficient military capabilities must be assured in the Treaty Area to maintain an adequate defense posture. Individual member governments who are in a position to do so will endeavour to support, at their request, sovereign nations whose security and independence are threatened. Those Allies in a position to facilitate the deployment of forces outside the Treaty area may do so on the basis of national decisions." The only real agreement appears to be on the "timely consultations" in case of crisis, even though it is not clear what "consultations" are supposed to entail.

Out-of-area developments are normally discussed at ambassadorial level within the Atlantic Council framework. But these discussions are general in nature and amount to information gathering and perception exchanging sessions rather than to a real discussion of policy options. Furthermore, consultation, while considered desirable, has often been carried out in a cosmetic way and very late with respect to the development of events.

The United States tendency has been more to inform its allies and seek their blessing than to consult, except in cases where it was felt that the issue had to be multilateralized in order to insure military support and burden sharing. Even then, reliance has been placed on bilateral consultations with each European country, but with special treatment to "special" allies, in terms of level of officials involved and amount of information provided. The American consultation process before the April 1986 air attack on Libya is a very good example of this.

Finally, the United States has, understandably, never been very willing, in the course of consultations, to provide details of its military operations being planned, or ready to be implemented. The risk of very damaging leakages is considered too high to be taken lightly, and information is passed on a selective basis, and only if and when necessary. Thus, again considering the April 1986 bombing of Libya, the information provided by the United States to the British Premier, Mrs Thatcher, was more detailed than that given to French President Francois Mitterand, which was, in turn, more ample than that submitted to the Italian Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi.

Furthermore, the statement of the 1983 Nac Final Communiqué on the need to maintain "an adequate defense posture in the Treaty area" implies a willingness on the part of the Europeans to fill the gap created by the possible re-deployment of American forces and equipment from Europe, in case of an out-of-area contingency. This is far from being technically or politically feasible. The decision to facilitate the re-deployment is recognised to be not an automatic response but a choice based on a case by case evaluation. This impairs its certainty and reduces its value.

But the significant words of the communiqué are "if it is established that common interests are involved". They are the key clue to the difficulties, a clear indication of the uncertainty of the Allied commitment, of the different national perceptions of out-of-area challenges, and of the blocks on the road to an effective and coordinated Allied response to crisis outside the Nato-Warsaw Pact context. However, despite the cautious and ambiguous wording, the language on the out-of area problem in the Nato communiqués has constituted the framework within which it was formally possible and politically feasible for the European countries to establish bilateral agreements with the United States on the utilization of European facilities by the American Rdf and on military compensation measures if American forces are taken out from Europe.

It might well be that the Atlantic Alliance will be unable or unwilling to confront this problem.

The present situation however is getting worse. The Eastern Mediterranean is militarily less and less secure, and politically far from the perceptions and priorities of the rest of the Alliance. The projection of Nato's military power towards the Eastern Mediterranean, in case of need, could be very costly and difficult, and might be considered at best uncertain and slow. Deterrence is slowly diminishing its credibility. The management of out-of-area crises appears more as wishful thinking than actual policy. The crisis in the Gulf, coupled with the Lebanese civil war and the persistence of the terrorist threat, are not dealt with jointly by the Western allies.

A better policy of crisis management has to confront squarely the problem of differing perceptions and interests, and of possible "divisions of labour" between Europeans and Americans.

If the Alliance as such cannot decently deal with a problem so intimately linked with its overall security policy, than a case has to be made for other ways and means, other channels of communication, other coalitions, to act.

The emerging European tendency to deal with out-of-area issue, has been underlined in some European Parliament reports, namely the 1981 Diligent Report on the protection of maritime lines of communication in the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf and the 1982 Haagerup Report on European security policy. In Haagerup's judgement, it would be wrong to deny a strategic role to the European Community, even if not supported by military means, due to the great commercial and economic importance that it holds in the world. In addition - he continues - single member states are free to act in the military field and launch military actions.

Each European power (with the exception of the Federal Republic of Germany) is preparing its armed forces to operate with enhanced rapidity and increased flexibility far from the national borders. Since November 1983 the United Kingdom has developed a Rapid Deployment Force (Rdf) of about 10,000 men. France is building up its own Force d'Action Rapide (Far) 47,000 man strong. Italy has constituted a Forza di Intervento Rapido (Fir) similar to the English one.

The creation of these rapid employment forces has its rationale more in the need to adjust the military instrument to the changing threat environment, and on the need for a better defense of the national territory - even the French Far can be seen in this light, considering that its priority employment is on the Central Front - than on the need to perform out-of-area missions. However, enhancing the mobility of some units, establishing a skeleton structure of C3 for the force, and planning for integrated training exercises means creating the capability - and the mentality - to employ the military instrument rapidly, selectively, with specialized, mission-oriented forces. And these are the relevant features needed for many out-of-area contingency military interventions in future contingencies.

To some extent the European Rdf are more shadow than substance, especially in terms of long-range air transport capability, logistic sustainability and specialized armament. It would be naive to believe that they can effectively be employed in an out-of-area contingency different from simple peacekeeping operations, without being strengthened and supported by other national forces. However, the mere possession of a force which can be rapidly employed outside the national territory can have a deterrent effect, apart from any judgement of its true level of effectiveness and operational capability, always difficult to assess exactly.

France and Britain - and Italy to a lesser degree - possess Naval forces capable of fulfilling the role and the missions typical of out-of-area operations requiring a maritime component. They have the proven logistical capacity to sustain limited naval forces at long range regardless of local resources. But, apart from Britain, France and Italy have inadequate long-leg air transport capacity, and airlift over long distances will either require the utilization of staging facilities en route to the crisis area or the use of the American air transport assets. Furthermore, any out-of-area military commitment, particularly if it is of some size and of long duration, will have to be considered in the context of its possible detrimental effects on the Alliance's conventional capabilities in Europe.

Moreover, the utilization of naval forces as a foreign policy instrument to exert pressure or influence ashore, in other words their contribution to the solution of out-of-area contingencies, has been shown to be seldom effective and always very costly.

On the other hand, Air forces cannot be utilized except in the transport and attack roles, in support of troops on the ground (as in Lebanon), but with dubious effects in those environments typical of many out-of-area scenarios. And the employment of ground forces would be likely only in peace-keeping or peace-building type operations, unless vital national interests are evidently at stake.

As far as institutions are concerned, the first context that is usually taken into consideration is the Weu (Western European Union). Art. 8, par. 3 of the treaty modified in Brussels specifies that, upon the request of a member country, the Council can be immediately called to consult on any situation that might pose a peace threat, in whichever area that threat may arise. This is obviously the thesis of the WEU Assembly which, especially now that the restrictions on Germany have been dropped, believes that no clause is left that might prevent the Seven from moving freely outside their confines.

Up to now however, no out-of-area crisis was managed through the Weu, and one could very well doubt that such an institution would be able to do more than simply hosting some diplomatic consultations between the interested countries.

The main problem of the Weu is the complete absence of any kind of established machinery for timely consultations, decision making and crisis management, in the political as well as in the military field, in or out of the Atlantic Alliance area of responsibility. The lacking of such a machinery is casting serious doubts on the real intentions of those claiming that the Weu should become the "center" of a new European security identity.

In these last years many attempts have been made to include the policy of European security in the Epc (European Political Cooperation). Despite those efforts, all that has been obtained is a mention of the concept of political and economic security. In the 1981 London Report, which aimed at improving the Epc procedures, in the solemn declaration at Stuttgart in 1983, and in the European Act approved by the European Council at Luxembourg in December 1985, mention is made of the need to deal with these security aspects, leaving aside the military ones.

In the past, however, the EPC has dealt, albeit in a pragmatic way, with situations that had a direct link with security problems, as when it decided to support Great Britain during the first phase of the Falklands affair, or when it took economic sanctions against Iran during the imprisonment of the American diplomats. Obviously the natural vocation of present cooperation within the Epc is to deal with the political aspects of international crises.

Nevertheless the "blessing" given to the British, French, Italian and Dutch troops during their participation in the Sinai peacekeeping force was important both in making it easier for the governments involved to reach a decision in that sense, and in distinguishing between European participation "as such" and that of the other countries. On the contrary, the lack of a similar "blessing" during the Italian, French and British intervention in Lebanon represented an objective element of weakness, highlighting the fact that the decision was taken by a single member country and was not the fruit of a solid and unanimous agreement between the Seven.

The idea (discussed in Community circles) is to give groups of countries the concrete responsibility, from time to time, to intervene in determined situations and regions.

There should be two levels: a political one which adopts the common positions within the Epc, on which all the member countries could participate; and an operational level, involving the use of economic, financial and military instruments, which would be used only by some member states able to take on the responsibility of the action (whereas the others would be exempted).

The Epc could therefore act as a political cover for the action of a few states in sectors and areas that are particularly delicate for the Twelve's foreign policy.

It would be necessary to conceive the financial cover (possibly an "ad hoc" fund) in order to support those initiatives, to be shared by the entire Community. This would strengthen the international role of the European Community, showing its ability to sustain collectively the direct actions undertaken by a few of its members.

This is still a very far perspective. It could work however both for the Epc and for the Weu (even if the Epc machinery is still far stronger and better organized than the Weu Council and Secretariat). The choice between the two would be a matter of convenience.

For the time being however, some technical and operational improvements would be welcome, and could be worked out in the Atlantic as well as in the European frameworks. They have no clear counterindications.

The first important point is for the European countries to intensify their intelligence collection effort in out-of-area regions and then share the information with the most concerned and involved allies. This would be particularly useful for fighting international terrorism and for coping better with the local situation in cases of participation in multinational peace-keeping forces. France has acquired with the "Spot" satellite a good capability for high-resolution photographic survey of areas of interest. European countries could jointly develop a more sophisticated military reconnaissance satellite capable of providing precious intelligence. The present agreements between France, Italy and Spain on the Helios satellite are a step in the good direction. The joint European development of a new satellitary capacity, involving optical, radar and communications intelligence would be the obvious second step.

The second point is related to the necessity for European governments to show greater determination in addressing the out-of-area crises. The sad picture of hesitation and ambiguity shown by the Eec in the aftermath of the terrorist massacres at the Vienna and Rome airports in December 1985 should be avoided. European action in such cases is important as a political deterrent instrument and as a valuable, even though indirect, diplomatic support for the country that eventually will decide to act autonomously in an out-of-area contingency. In other words, it is not always necessary to have a common European response, sometimes, common actions might have an adverse effect on the development of the crisis situation. But a coordinated attitude in terms of diplomatic support and collateral initiatives is bound to buttress the action taken by a single country.

The third point is related to the European rapid employment forces. It would be useful if these forces could train together in specifically devised exercises, in a way similar to the training conducted by Nato Ace Mobile Force (Amf). If the possession of a rapid employment force increases the capability to deter and to intervene if necessary in an out-of-area crisis - even within the operational and logistic limits previously outlined - common training will facilitate a coordinated military response if and when it becomes politically feasible. In the long term, the European rapid deployment forces could constitute the hard core of a truly "European" military intervention capacity in out-of area contingencies involving vital European interests.

The fourth point concerns the European political coordination during the development phases of an out-of-area crisis, even though it should be underlined that even a timely and thorough coordination would not overcome the roadblocks represented by differences of priorities and objectives. In recent years, European countries have created high level crisis management centers. Their connection and a closer link with the American center in terms of technologically advanced communication means would be very important for a rapid transmission of information, for quick consultations, for real time coordination of military initiatives. In the post-Achille Lauro affair, when American F-14 fighters forced the landing at the Sicilian airbase of Sigonella of the Egyptian aircraft with the four Arab terrorists on board, the communications between Washington and Rome were far from perfect, and reportedly were complicated by translation problems. The possibility for the top decision-making bodies of the Atlantic Alliance countries to directly and fully communicate outside the Nato framework would enhance the badly needed timely consultation and coordination process, thus indirectly strengthening at least at the "technical" level, the Western response capacity to out-of-area crises.

The fifth point regards the possibility of coordinating the European arms transfer to Middle East, Gulf and North African countries in such a way that it could be utilized as an instrument to consolidate regional stability, and to isolate trouble-making countries, to support pro-Western nations threatened by neighbouring countries. Obviously, this can be realized only within the framework of a truly common European policy towards those regions, an objective still very far from being realistically attainable. However, the European countries should try to impose on themselves at least a certain degree of unilateral restraint, especially in those cases - and toward those countries - where for political reasons other Western nations are imposing limits to their arms exports. In other words, the European countries should at least try to

consider not only the economic, but also the political implications - and the effects in any future out-of-area crisis - of their arms transfer policy.

The measures recommended are basically technical in nature and do not and cannot solve the most important out-of-area problem, which is political and refers mainly to the lack of political will of European countries to operate with a coordinated policy. No technical fix can replace the political will needed to effectively deal with out-of-area issues. In this respect, much needs to be done.

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