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A NOTE ABOUT BURDEN SHARING

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Paper presented at ESAN meeting
Rome, 14 October 1993

IAI9323

ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI

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1. THE PAST.

In the 1960s and 1970s the American concern over an equitable burden-sharing within the Atlantic Alliance found its expression in a series of legislative proposals.

For nine consecutive years (1966-1974), sen. Mike Mansfield introduced legislation calling for the reduction of the US troops stationed in Europe if the allies did not increase their defence outlays and their share of overall Alliance defence expenditures. The Mansfield emendments were never enacted but the thrust of the raisons on which they were based was a constant influencing element in intra-Alliance relationship.

The latest upsurge in the burden-sharing controversy between the United States and its European allies occurred in 1988. Among the many factors which led to this new flare-up of the issue the most significant were: the perceived decline of the US economy vis-à-vis those of its European allies; the perception that they were becoming strong competitors in international trade; the allegations that US allies had violated the COCOM rules and constraints; the bitter feelings left by the difficulties encountered during the re-negotiating of base rights and in obtaining overflight permissions during specific US security contingencies; finally, the impression that the allies were certainly happy about the American protection but unwilling to share the right level of responsibility and cost.

It is interesting to note that the American quest for a better sharing of common burden was not exclusively limited to military expenditures, though they were preminent in the US concern, but expanded to include the more generic sharing of political costs.

2. THE PRESENT.

a. The United States policy.

This element of sharing is particularly present today in the framework of Euro-American relations.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, the disappearance of any meaningful military threat to European territory, the emergence of out-of-area crises as the main threat to European security, the slow and difficult proceeding of the EC toward a political union which will eventually encompass a security and defence dimension -

- although envisioned in different ways by its members -- have shaped a different perception both in the United States and in Europe of what constitutes a fair burden-sharing among allies.

Today, the U.S. request to the allies is less to contribute to the continuous viability and effectiveness of NATO -- but the issue of an equitable contribution is not totally solved -- and more to fully participate in the difficult and costly effort of crisis management.

In this context, the US foreign policy appeared in the recent past conditioned, at least in certain measure, by the attitude and response of the European allies. In the Gulf crisis, and even more in the course of the Yugoslav crisis, the US has refrained to act alone and researched the political support and the military participation of other countries, and in particular of its NATO allies.

On the other hand, the recent speeches on American foreign policy of Secretary of State Warren Christopher (at the Columbia University on September 20), of national security affairs adviser Tony Lake (at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies on September 21), of the US permanent representative to the United Nations Madeleine Albright (at the National War College on September 23), and finally the address of President Bill Clinton at the UN General Assembly (on September 27) give a clear picture of the way the United States intends to engage itself in the post-Cold War era.

The main elements of this new approach can be summarized as follows.

(i) The United States is moving from a doctrine of containment to a strategy of enlargement.¹

(ii) There will be relatively few intra-national ethnic conflicts which will justify the U.S. military intervention. Ultimately, on these and other humanitarian needs, the United States will have to pick and choose.²

(iii) There is no need to make rigid choices between unilateral and multilateral, global and regional, force and diplomacy.³

(iv) Multilateralism should be considered as a means and not an end in itself. It is one of the many foreign policy tools at disposal of the United States. And it is warranted only when it serves the central purpose of American foreign policy: to

¹. Lake.

². Lake

³. Albright.

protect American interests. The United States will never subcontract its foreign policy to another power.⁴

(v) Multilateralism should not be the U.S. presumptive mode of engagement. Only one overriding factor can determine whether the United States should act unilaterally or multilaterally, and that is America's interest.⁵

(vi) The issue presently debated whether the United States should exercise its power alone or with others creates a false polarity. It is not an "either-or" proposition. Yet, in protecting its vital interests, the United States should not ignore the value of working with other nations. Collective actions can advance American foreign policy goals. When appropriate the United States can leverage its might by sharing the burden with other nations. But the ability to generate effective multilateral responses will often depend upon U.S. willingness to act alone.⁶

(vii) When deciding whether or not to support U.N. peacekeeping or peacemaking operations, the United States will insist that the following questions be asked before and not after new obligations are undertaken:

- Is there a real threat to international peace and security caused by international aggression, or humanitarian disaster accompanied by violence, or by the sudden, unexpected and violent interruption of an established democracy?

- Does the proposed peacekeeping mission have clear objectives and can its scope be clearly defined?

- Is a ceasefire in place and have the parties to the conflict agreed to a U.N. presence?

- Are the financial and human resources that will be needed to accomplish the mission available to be used for that purpose?

- Can an end point to U.N. participation be identified?⁷

As it has been observed, these conditions for U.S. support of peacekeeping are quite strict and if applied literally they could prevent U.S. participation in all U.N. missions.⁸

(viii) The United States would act militarily with others when possible but "alone when we must".⁹

⁴. Christopher.

⁵. Lake.

⁶. Christopher.

⁷. Albright.

⁸. Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "The Clinton Foreign Policy: From Discretion to Retreat", International Herald Tribune, 2-3 October 1993, p. 4.

⁹. President Clinton.

The United States considers that the common action and the sharing of responsibility should concentrate on confronting and fighting the new threats -- further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, growing stockpile of plutonium and highly enriched uranium with the related danger of nuclear terrorism, increasing ethnic and subnational violence -- and in addressing the most pressing world economic and social problem -- updating international economic institutions, coordinating macroeconomic policies and striking hard but fair bargains on the ground rules of open trade.¹⁰

In fact, economic relations and peacekeeping operations appear as the two main sectors in which the United States expect allies cooperation, support, fair division of labour and sharing of political and financial costs. The forthcoming GATT negotiations and the European participation in the NATO-UN force destined to enforce an eventual peace agreement in Bosnia are two good cases in point.

b. The European allies.

During the Cold-War period, the European allies responded to the complains and pressures of the United States with a mix of a defensive attitude, and a show of greater appreciation for American concern. On the one hand, the effort to demonstrate through hard facts and more pointed analyses of NATO military expenditures that European contribution was not as unbalanced as it was portrayed in many U.S. quarters. On the other hand, the recognition that the European countries could do more to share in a more equitable way the financial burden of the Atlantic Alliance.

Today, the European approach and response is more articulate and less forthcoming, in particular in the economic field.

As it was easy to predict, the dissolution of the "Soviet threat" has complicated the Euro-American relations. Now, different and divergent national policies and interests are less likely to be reconciled, as in the past, in the name of the common threat, in particular if one considers that Europe is passing through a period of deep economic recession.

Moreover, the today's post-Cold War, out-of-area crises which are expected to involve Western security interests present complex elements of decision-making and crisis-management. For domestic political and military reasons, the European countries find it difficult to adopt a common foreign and security policy. This, in turn, has a negative impact on trans-Atlantic relations within and outside NATO's framework.

The United States still plays a lead role in the Alliance and this role is still basically recognized by its allies. However, the European countries appear to be developing a growing resistance to acritically following the American leadership, and a stronger attitude toward outspokenly expressing their views. Even though the May

¹⁰. Lake.

1993 diplomatic trip to Europe of U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher has been considered as a "fact finding" mission more than an attempt at convincing the allies to follow the American policy on Bosnia, the fact remains that there was a Euro-American split and the advocacy of two different policies for the solution of the Yugoslav crisis.

The U.S.-European relationship is further complicated by the inherent European weakness in dealing with the potential military responsibilities connected with crisis management operations. In fact, the EC countries do not possess today -- and maybe they will not possess tomorrow -- the military capabilities which could make them able to act autonomously to confront in-area or out-of-area crises.

The EC difficulty in shaping a common foreign and security policy on the one hand jeopardizes Europe's possibility of playing a significant role in the international arena, while on the other hand gives to single, willing to act European countries the chance of adopting a course of action more attuned to their "national" interests. The decision by France and the United Kingdom to agree with the United States and Russia on a Joint Action Program for Bosnia (Washington, 22 May 1993) without any previous consultation within the EC framework is a good case in point.

3. THE FUTURE.

Unless the strategic situation is radically drifting away from the trends that, not without strains and uncertainty, are shaping the present post-Cold War developments in Europe, the burdensharing issue will continue to be based on the following elements.

(i) The United States will expect its allies to take on a greater share of the European security. But it expects also that the eventual creation of a military force within the framework of a European Security and Defence Identity should not interfere with NATO's integrated command structure. In other words, European forces should be anchored in NATO, meeting NATO obligations. They should be separable, but not separate, from NATO.

(ii) The American emphasis will be on working together with its allies and within the U.N., but this will not mean that the sharing of burden and responsibility will not account and weigh on the overall schemes of trans-Atlantic cooperation.

(iii) In confronting international crises the United States will avoid to be mesmerized by the dichotomy between unilateralism and multilateralism and will decide upon its engagement on the basis of what will work best to advance its interests and serve its purposes.

(iv) Unless vital or very important American and allied interests are at stake, the United States will tend to operate within and under U.N. mandate. This will tend to dilute potential Euro-American differences and divergencies on crisis management and cast the burden sharing issue in a larger framework.

(v) It is likely that future Euro-American controversies will stem more from economic than political and security issues.

(vi) The European countries will continue to find difficult to form and project a true Common Foreign and Security Policy. As in the recent past, it is likely that the future EC/EU policy will still be based on the minimum common denominator and heavily influenced by domestic economic and political factors.

(vii) The issue of sharing of responsibility and cost will emerge with greater force in the context of the crisis management process.

(viii) It is likely that European participation in peace-keeping, and even more in peace-making and peace-enforcing, missions will continue to be conditioned by the lack of true military capabilities and by many and different domestic factors, in particular if risky military operations are expected.

(ix) The establishment of a European Security and Defence Identity will have an impact on Euro-American relations and the burden sharing issue, no matter what shape it will eventually take. The United States will not accept to be marginalized in NATO and that NATO will end up to be considered as a "last resort" Alliance.