

**9. Summary and Conclusions from a report prepared for the
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Atlantic Alliance is without question in the midst of the most severe crisis it has faced for many years. The beginning of the crisis can perhaps be traced back to events that occurred during the Carter Administration - indecision regarding deployment of enhanced radiation warheads in Europe, differing interpretations of how to respond to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the failure of SALT II, and the evolution of American nuclear strategy toward more flexible options. The first year of the Reagan Administration has witnessed the deepening of the crisis with events and policies aggravating United States-European differences over nuclear issues, the role of arms control, and how to respond to the crisis in Poland. These issues, combined with the ever-present question of defense burden sharing in the Alliance, have led some Members of Congress to question the U.S. commitment to NATO.

To some extent, the Western crisis can be attributed to short term policy choices, leadership failures on both sides of the Atlantic, and other problems that are more or less variable over time. But the roots of the crisis are more profound.

A major source of the crisis can be found in differing U.S. and European attitudes toward East-West relations. Many of these differences are not new; they have been part of the dynamic of alliance relations since NATO was founded. In fact, part of the success of the Alliance over the years has been the ability of the allies to accommodate their differences over East-West relations within a political framework that permits coordinated action. That framework, the essence of which is captured by a combination of "defense and détente" policies, now has fallen into disrepair.

The question is whether, under today's conditions, the alliance will be able to accommodate U.S. and European differences in a way that rehabilitates NATO's role as the coordinating mechanism for Western security policies. The answer will depend in part on how well the United States and the allies understand the factors that lead to policy and perceptual differences. Any new consensus which fails to acknowledge that there are fundamental differences will be doomed to obsolescence before it is incorporated in NATO communiqués or blessed by summit declarations.

Geography. - Perhaps some most basic differences can be traced to the fact that “we are here and they are there.” Most Americans presume that the minimal physical distance between European countries and the Soviet Union should lead to greater European concern about the “threat.” The fact is that Western Europe’s proximity to Soviet power makes Europeans particularly concerned about the consequences of war, and therefore particularly determined to avoid them. For Americans, the European “theater” can be separated, at least intellectually, from their homeland; for Europeans, the homeland is the potential battlefield.

History. - The influence, of geography is reinforced by differing historical experiences. Europeans have hosted two devastating wars in the last 65 years, and are therefore preoccupied by the desire to avoid war. Americans also want to avoid war. But no major hostilities have been fought on American soil since our Civil War and we see our involvement in World War I and II as having been required by European inability to deal effectively with threats to peace. We tend to see the current European attitude as weak-kneed; Europeans see our attitude as careless.

History may also help explain why there is a greater willingness in Europe to choose the “red” side of the simplistic “red or dead” dichotomy. Occupation or subjugation by domestic authoritarian regimes is not part of the American experience - most Americans find the prospect particularly horrendous. Most continental European countries have been occupied by foreign powers or subjugated by domestic authoritarian regimes. Europe’s current political freedom and relative economic well-being tells Europeans that a condition of occupation or subjugation is not necessarily permanent; that resistance and recovery are possible, while death is quite permanent.

Ideology.- In spite of a wide area of shared ideological commitments, recognized in the North Atlantic Treaty, there are fundamental differences between the European and American ideological experiences. The Marxist critique of capitalism has deep roots in Europe. All European countries have social programs more extensive than those in the United States. Many Europeans regard the ideals of Marxism as a source of inspiration even if they reject the systems that have been spawned by the Soviet revolution.

To Americans, the Soviet Union embodies the primary external ideological challenge to the American system. Because the threat is most unambiguously an external one, the confrontation between the two systems is generally seen as occurring in other countries, in Europe and in the third world. The perspective from Europe is somewhat different. Germany, in particular, on the front Western lines toward the East, regards the success of its social and economic system as a vital component of German security policy.

Therefore, tradeoffs between defense spending and social programs pose far more difficult choices for Germany than for the United States.

And, there is a West-West ideological dimension. In the early days of the NATO alliance, the United States was regarded by many Europeans as a model political system. Now, many West Europeans perceive their system of society and government as superior or at least equal to that of the United States. A certain degree, of greater self confidence inevitably leads Europeans to think that policies based on their assessment of national and Western interests are at least as valid as those recommended by the United States.

Demography may also be, working slowly against U.S.-European understanding on security policy requirements. Immigration trends have reduced in relative terms the, European contribution to the American melting pot and increased the Latin American and Asian contribution. These trends are already being used by some observers to argue that American interests and commitments should be redirected away from Europe. Differing global roles and military capabilities also produce U.S. relations. The decline since the Second World War in Europe's ability to affect developments in Third World nations was accompanied by an evolving strategic approach to instability in Third World. European policies came increasingly to depend on political and economic instruments to influence events in the Third World. The Europeans reject what they see as an occasional American tendency to concentrate too narrowly on military responses to potential or actual Soviet challenges.

They are at least equally - if not more - interested in developing economic ties and political bonds that will both ensure cooperative relations with third world nations and discourage Soviet adventurism.

Fruits of détente. - Europe has gained far more in tangible benefits, some of utmost importance, than has the United States from the period of détente. This fact makes Europeans more inclined to regard détente as "divisible," to protect the gains of détente in Europe. The United States, carrying the majority of Western global military burdens, has a much greater interest in treating détente, as "indivisible," with Soviet actions outside of Europe seen as providing cause for Western response within the European framework.

Economics. - It is a popular American belief that European attitudes toward East-West relations are driven to a significant degree by avarice-greed for the fruits of expanded trade with the East. It is a popular European retort that American practice does not match its rhetoric when real American economic interests are called into question.

On balance, Europe does have more to lose than does the United States in terms of content from disruption of trade with the East. The United States is not heavily dependent on trade with the East, nor does it count on growth in that trade as a vital component of its economic growth. West European trade with the East involves mutual Dependencies, and whether the ultimate balance favors East or West is a matter for debate. To many Europeans, the risks are worth taking. The cost/benefit relationship does not look nearly as favorable from an American perspective.

Specific national perspectives. West Germany's approach to East-West relations is very much a product of the division of the German nation, the vulnerability of Berlin, and the legal and psychological limits on Germany's military capabilities. A policy of strict confrontation with the East would entail far higher human and financial costs for West Germany than for the United States. France sees for itself a special role as the leader of Western Europe in relations with the East. French Governments since de Gaulle have protected carefully France's freedom of movement in policies toward the East. But France also has acted as a European "balancers" demonstrating independence of the United States when Germany seemed dominated by American policy and power and, now, increasing its criticism of the Soviet Union to balance Germany's more independent role between the two superpowers. The recent differences between the United States and the European allies over sanctions against the Soviet Union and Poland illustrate a number of the profound differences between American and European perspectives. Geography makes Europeans far more concerned than Americans about the possibility that instability in Poland could turn into a continental military confrontation. The Europeans may therefore place a higher value on internal stability in Poland. History reinforces this concern, and also inclines West Europeans to believe that the Polish "renewal" has a chance of resuming so long as there is no direct Soviet intervention. Furthermore, differing economic stakes create different perspectives on sanctions against the Soviet Union. West European nations have much to lose and very little to gain from, for example, aborting the gas deal with the Soviet Union or declaring Poland in default. Given Europe's current economic recession, which many Europeans perceive as due in part to high U.S. interest rates, the gas pipeline deal means jobs now as well as energy later. Furthermore, while declaring Poland in default would constitute a strong signal against martial law, it would be West European, not American, banks which would suffer the consequences. The recent prominence of nuclear issues in United States-European relations has also illustrated sources of divergent perceptions. Differing geographical locations and historical experiences produced different attitudes toward the prospect of nuclear war in Europe.

More benign West European perspectives on the Soviet Union (seeing Moscow as motivated primarily by fear for its security rather than by dreams of conquest) also have led Europeans to interpret differently recent improvements in Soviet theater nuclear force capabilities. In the West European democracies as well as in the United States, foreign and defense policies are formulated with at least some regard to public opinion. Policy makers and legislators should therefore have available accurate information on public attitudes within the alliance. American headlines have given the impression that neutralism, pacifism, and anti-Americanism are spreading across the continent. This impression is not confirmed by public opinion polls.

Large majorities of Europeans “like” Americans. They want a strong but not belligerent America; they welcome strong U.S. leadership in the world. They remain, for the most part, committed to NATO. At the same time, they do not believe that dramatic increases in their defense spending would lessen the threat they face.

And, they look for evidence that the United States is making a nine attempt to reduce tensions and negotiate anus control agreements. The currently-popular European image of Americans as bent on confrontation with the Soviet Union is also inaccurate. There is strong support in the United States for efforts to rebuild American military capabilities. Many Americans would feel more comfortable if the United States were superior to the Soviet Union. But most Americans would be willing to live with a condition of overall military parity. Large majorities of Americans want the United States to try to negotiate arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. Americans would support the use of military force when vital American interests are threatened, but there is a strong residue of opposition to any military involvement that even vaguely resembles the start of another Vietnam. How serious is the current crisis? A number of analysts argue that NATO has outlived its usefulness; some contend that its strategy is outdated and irrelevant. But others argue that we are talking ourselves into a bigger crisis than is justified by events; NATO, for these analysts, still represents the best framework possible for preserving East-West peace and internal West European stability. In any case, it appears that American objectives and policies in Europe will increasingly come under close scrutiny. This examination presumably will take place with reference to various concepts of the future of American involvement in European security arrangements. No matter what policy objectives the United States selects, it seems unlikely that the alliance will move either toward a reassertion of American preponderance or, on the other extreme, fragmentation of Western Europe and subordination to the Soviet Union.

The more likely range of possibilities lies somewhere in between. Continuity with traditional American approaches to the alliance does not promise an early end to the expensive U.S. troop presence in Europe or an end to the frustrating process of coordinating policies with recalcitrant allies.

Furthermore, the United States and Europe will likely continue to have different economic stakes in relations with the East, and therefore divergent attitudes toward the use of economic ties as weapons in East-West competition. Continuity does, however, narrow the range of uncertainty about the future and perhaps contains fewer risks than other alternative futures. Congress can support this approach to the alliance by continuing to support an active U.S. participation in European security arrangements and a substantial U.S. commitment to NATO which constitutes our entree to the European security game. If one concludes that the alliance is not vital to American interests, an evolutionary approach may fail adequately to protect U.S. interests in the future. The Congress, through its ability to affect U.S. force levels and commitments, could mandate either a gradual or rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe. Such a move could permit the United States to save some money (if the withdrawn troops are disbanded) or reallocate defense resources to other commitments. It would be, consistent with this approach to put aside any concern about European economic interests and, for example, to attempt unilaterally to block the gas pipeline deal with the Soviet Union or to declare Poland in default, of its international financial obligations. Such a break with traditional American approaches to the alliance promises more uncertainties than does an evolutionary approach. The Congress presumably would mandate such an approach only if it had decided, as some have argued, (1) that it makes little difference to U.S. interests whether or not Western Europe falls increasingly under Soviet influence; or (2) that the shock of a U.S. withdrawal would force the Europeans to organize a unified nuclear and conventional defense of Europe allied to the United States. The formation of a "United Europe" would, in theory, relieve the United States of some difficult burdens. U.S. policy since World War II has encouraged European integration without trying to force the pace of the process. Would "shock treatment" finally convince, the Europeans to overcome all the traditional obstacles to greater unity? How can the shock treatment be applied without guaranteeing European unity on terms that are potentially unfavorable to U.S. interests? Even if the Europeans decided that, in principle, they wanted to organize an independent defense in alliance with the United States, could they do it?

How great is the risk that the European nations, left more-or-less to organize their own defense, would be driven apart and into the arms of the Soviet Union? Are the benefits of disengagement from European defense worth the potential risks? There are no certain answers to any of these questions.

The answers ultimately lie in the realm of subjective judgment, and each, analyst, official, Senator, and Representative must ultimately make his or her own best bet.
