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Can NATO survive?

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America's relations with its European allies are going through yet another period of crisis. NATO has been a 'troubled partnership' ever since its inception, and observers may be forgiven if they view the current difficulties with a sense of *déjà vu*. Nevertheless, there are indications that the present crisis may be significantly different from those that preceded it. In the past, troubles in the alliance stemmed from national resentment by the Europeans of American dominance. But even though the French went so far as to adopt a 'tous azimuths' doctrine, there was no widespread sentiment that the US nuclear umbrella was more of a threat to Europe than a guarantee of its security. What is distinctive about the present crisis, therefore, is that even while Soviet troops ravage Afghanistan and threaten Poland, there are mass demonstrations in Western Europe condemning America's nuclear presence as a threat. How has this come to pass, and what can be done about it?

Prelude to discord

NATO was formed in response to the fear that the Soviet Union constituted a real and immediate military threat to the security of Western Europe. Realizing that Western Europe could not successfully defend itself against Soviet invasion, and believing a free Western Europe to be vital to American security, the Truman administration broke with tradition and committed the United States to its first 'entangling alliance' outside the Western hemisphere. And although the Soviet Union did not attempt an actual invasion of Western Europe, the Korean War, the suppression of the Hungarian uprising, and the Berlin crises served to unite NATO through the early 1950s. The Suez crisis was the first serious crack in the alliance, and subsequent French dissatisfaction with American leadership ultimately led to France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure. Additional strain resulted from the MLF fiasco and the general European disapproval of the American intervention in Vietnam.

More important than any of this in the long run, however, was a change in Soviet policy that began in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis and gained momentum when Brezhnev replaced Khrushchev. Addressing a military audience in July 1965, Brezhnev stated that:

We shall always remember our great leader's instruction that preparing the country for defence requires 'not a burst of passion or a shout' but 'prolonged, strenuous, highly persistent and disciplined work on a mass scale'. The Party is sacredly fulfilling these behests of Lenin.¹

This statement is significant for two reasons. First, it reflects Brezhnev's awareness that Khrushchev's boasts about the Soviet Union's military prowess and his attempts to resolve international disputes, such as the one over Berlin, through coercive

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1. *Pravda and Izvestia*, 4 July 1965, in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 28 July 1965, p. 5.

threats had been counterproductive for Soviet foreign policy. Instead of splitting the alliance, he had inspired greater unity. In a major speech to European communists in 1967, Brezhnev explained the need for a softer public line towards the West:

What does this experience teach us? Specifically, it teaches that the situation of 'cold war' and the confrontation of military blocs, the atmosphere of military threats, seriously hinder the functioning of the revolutionary, democratic forces. In the bourgeois countries in a situation of international tension reactionary elements become active, the military clique raises its head, and anti-democratic trends and anti-communism in general are intensified.

Conversely, recent years have demonstrated particularly clearly that in a situation of reduced international tension the needle of the political barometer shifts to the left. The advances achieved in the relations between communists and social-democrats in certain countries, the noticeable decline of anti-communist hysteria and the growth of the influence of the West European communist parties are connected in a most direct way with the reduction of tension that is beginning to be felt on the European continent.²

The second significant point about Brezhnev's 1965 speech is that it gave notice of the steady Soviet military build-up that was already under way. Although Khrushchev had talked loudly, he had resisted building up the Soviet big stick, leading ultimately to the humiliation of the Cuban missile crisis. Brezhnev, on the other hand, believed that 'the foreign policy of the Soviet Union . . . rests on its economic and defence might'.³ Enhanced military strength would broaden the options available to Soviet policymakers while raising the risk to their adversaries, and in general would make the Soviet Union more respected and feared internationally. In the words of Boris Ponomarev, head of the Soviet Communist Party's International Department (roughly the equivalent of the US National Security Council staff): 'The stronger the economic and defence might of the Land of the Soviets, the more they are forced to reckon with us throughout the whole world.'⁴

Brezhnev's policy, in other words, was just the opposite of Khrushchev's: he spoke softly while building up the Soviet Union's big stick. This policy of calculated ambiguity has confounded the West's response. Everyone agrees that the Soviet Union engaged in a massive build-up under Brezhnev, but the absence of belligerent statements from the Kremlin has led many people, including some not sympathetic to the Soviet Union, to conclude that the build-up is the result of a paranoid insecurity, rather than a calculated drive to achieve a military advantage.⁵ It is only natural for people who feel this way to urge their own governments not to respond with their own countervailing build-up, but instead to take the initiative in breaking the cycle of the arms race. It is also natural for such a sentiment to be widespread in Europe, which has suffered the devastation of two world wars and which would be the likely battleground of a third.

2. L. I. Brezhnev, *The CPSU in the struggle for unity of all revolutionary and peace forces* (Moscow: Progress, 1975), pp. 28-9.

3. L. I. Brezhnev, *Leninskim kursom* (Following Lenin's course), Vol. 3 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1972), p. 182.

4. *Pravda*, 13 February 1979, p. 2. Besides heading the International Department since 1955, Ponomarev is also a candidate member of the Politburo and a Secretary of the Central Committee.

5. Stanley H. Kober, 'Causes of the Soviet military buildup' in *The Soviet Union: what lies ahead* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office) forthcoming.

The task before American diplomacy, therefore, is to allay West European fears while at the same time responding to the ongoing Soviet military build-up. Unfortunately, the Reagan administration came into office with a fundamental misperception of the situation in Europe, having taken too much to heart the neutron bomb debacle of the Carter administration. To the Reagan team, this episode demonstrated that what the Europeans wanted was firm leadership in countering the Soviet build-up. Accordingly, the new administration began trumpeting its intention to increase massively the US defence budget to close the 'window of vulnerability'.

The administration's emphasis on the military dimension of East-West rivalry had the opposite effect to that intended, however. Instead of falling in line behind this firm American leadership, Europeans began to wonder if all the talk about war indicated that a war was coming in the near future. The administration's decision to proceed with the production of the neutron bomb was especially damaging. The explanation that weapons already assembled could be sent to Europe faster could only make people wonder at the need for such urgency. Moreover, the administration's explicit indifference to European concerns only reinforced fears arising from the realization that those with the power to devastate Western Europe do not live there. Given the absence of similar statements from Moscow, the United States began to appear to many as the more dangerous superpower. Realizing this, the administration began to emphasize its interest in arms control in November 1981, with President Reagan personally proclaiming US support of the zero option. This proposal, combined with the imposition of martial law in Poland, led to a decline in the activities of the peace movement. This decline was only temporary, however, and consequently the United States is once again confronted with growing opposition to its policies in Europe.

NATO's present crisis

In December 1979 NATO adopted the twin-track decision: to negotiate with the Soviet Union about the limitation of nuclear arms in Europe while at the same time preparing to deploy Eurostrategic missiles. This approach both responded to the growing theatre nuclear threat from the USSR and reflected the realization that unless NATO had systems to trade for Soviet systems, negotiations about arms control would be fruitless. Not only is it unreasonable to expect any country to give up something for nothing in arms control negotiations, history has demonstrated that unless the United States has systems to trade, arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union are unsuccessful. In 1967, for example, Secretary of Defense McNamara pleaded with Premier Kosygin at the Glassboro summit to forgo development of an ABM system, but his effort was unavailing. The following year, Congress approved funds for an American ABM system, and immediately Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko expressed the USSR's interest in negotiating limits on such systems. In this instance, the United States was able to exert leverage with its ABM programme to obtain not only a limit on ABMs, but also a freeze on offensive systems. On the other hand, when the Carter administration proposed deep cuts in 1977, its overture was rejected out of hand, for the United States did not have the systems in hand, or even close at hand, to trade against the Soviet heavy missiles.

Unfortunately, this eminently sensible approach to the subject of arms control was shunted aside in favour of a dogmatic theory of deterrence. According to this theory, unless NATO possessed nuclear capabilities across the entire spectrum of conflict, there was a risk of decoupling the American nuclear deterrent from Europe's defence, particularly since the codification of strategic parity in SALT cast doubt on the credibility of extended deterrence. As Helmut Schmidt explained in 1977:

. . . strategic arms limitation confined to the United States and the Soviet Union will inevitably impair the security of the West European members of the Alliance *vis-à-vis* Soviet military superiority in Europe if we do not succeed in removing the disparities of military power in Europe parallel to the SALT negotiations. So long as this is not the case we must maintain the balance of the full range of deterrence strategy. The Alliance must, therefore, be ready to make available the means to support its present strategy, which is still the right one, and to prevent any developments that could undermine the basis of this strategy.⁶

This risk of decoupling was probably exaggerated. Deterrence is the result not of the certainty of nuclear retaliation, but of the uncertainty that there will not be retaliation in the event of aggression. Given the destructiveness of the superpowers' huge arsenals, that uncertainty does not have to be very high to be effective. Thus, if extended deterrence appears riskier for the United States in conditions of nuclear parity than it did before, it is still doubtful that the Soviet leadership feels it could unleash an attack against Western Europe confident that the United States would refrain from escalating to central nuclear exchanges, especially in view of the continued presence of hundreds of thousands of American troops in Europe.

Nevertheless, even if one accepts that the risk of decoupling has been exaggerated, Schmidt's call for building up NATO's theatre nuclear forces to match the Soviet Union's forces is unobjectionable. What happened, however, is that the Eurostrategic weapons began to take on a life of their own as American officials, who have lately been excessively running down US defence capabilities, insisted that NATO required these missiles to plug a gap in the deterrent spectrum. These sentiments cast doubt on American sincerity in pursuing the arms control track of the 1979 NATO decision, an impression that was reinforced by the administration's initial resistance to the zero option. Even the Secretary-General of NATO felt compelled to admonish Washington that 'it has allowed the impression, albeit false, to grow that it is reluctant to pursue [arms control] and is preoccupied with the pursuit of military supremacy'.⁷

To its credit, the Reagan administration listened to these criticisms and, reversing course, publicly embraced the zero option. This shift in policy was a clear response to European concerns, and initially the zero-option proposal was well received. In the year and a half since the proposal was made, however, European opinion has continued to shift, so that an offer that looked forthcoming in autumn 1981 appears intransigent in spring 1983. This change in European sentiment has placed the Reagan administration in a difficult position. If it weakens its negotiating position to respond to every shift in European opinion, it establishes a pattern that gives the Soviet Union little incentive to moderate its own position. On the other hand, if

6. Helmut Schmidt, 'The 1977 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture', *Survival*, Jan./Feb. 1978, p. 4.

7. *New York Times*, 1 Oct. 1981, p. A4.

the United States appears inflexible, it endangers the European political consensus that is essential to the credibility of its negotiating posture.

Clearly, then, the United States cannot afford either extreme, but instead must choose a middle course of reasonable flexibility. In this regard, the United States is fortunate to have Paul Nitze as its chief negotiator in the INF talks. Mr Nitze's credentials as a 'hawk' are impeccable, yet he has also demonstrated, especially through his endorsement of the SALT I agreements, a convincing belief in the utility of arms control as a means of reducing the possibility of nuclear war. Perhaps most important, Mr Nitze has an understanding of the essential *political* aspects of this negotiation. Accordingly, he should be given the negotiating leeway he deserves, so that if these talks do not produce an agreement before the time for deployment of the Euromissiles arrives, no one will be able to entertain any reasonable doubt that this result is not the fault of the United States. It is, therefore, encouraging to note that President Reagan recently affirmed that 'ours is not a take-it-or-leave-it proposal,' adding that 'Ambassador Nitze has been instructed to explore in Geneva every proposed solution consistent with the principles to which the alliance subscribes'.⁸

Even so, it is possible that all of this will prove unavailing, and that the Europeans will still resist the deployment of the Euromissiles. In that case, Europe should be aware that if these negotiations have failed to produce agreement by December 1983, when deployment of the Euromissiles is scheduled to begin, the United States will almost certainly regard European willingness to accept these weapons in line with the December 1979 decision as a referendum on the continuing viability of NATO. The Alliance, after all, is founded on a shared perception of a Soviet threat. If the Europeans by 1983 are unwilling to accept these weapons despite a lack of progress at Geneva, it will mean that the basis of NATO has collapsed, and the United States at that point will be compelled to reassess its commitment to the defence of Europe.

Pressures for disintegration

The prospect that the United States might actually abandon Western Europe is shocking both to Europeans and to Americans. The ties that have bound the great industrial democracies throughout the postwar era have become so ingrained in the minds of many people on both sides of the Atlantic that they simply cannot conceive that the United States could just pick up and leave. It would be a mistake, however, to believe that NATO can survive any strains in Atlantic relations; in particular, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the importance of Western Europe to the security of the United States. Unfortunately, some Europeans have come to believe that the United States will defend them no matter what. As a Dutch politician told an American journalist in explaining his (and presumably others') unwillingness to accept basing of American cruise missiles in Holland: 'You need Rotterdam as badly as we do, so you'll help if we need it, cruise missiles or not'.⁹

But is it true that the United States, because of such mercenary calculations, is compelled to defend Western Europe? To be sure, the United States values its trade relations with Western Europe, but that is not the reason it puts its own territory at risk for the sake of its allies. Although a Soviet military conquest of Western

8. *Washington Post*, 23 Feb. 1983, p. A12.

9. *New York Times*, 28 May 1981, p. A5.

Europe might deprive the United States of European markets (which, incidentally, is not certain, since every country in the Soviet bloc is anxious to trade with America), the damage this would cause the United States is nothing compared to the suffering it would endure by participating in Europe's defence in the event of war.

Nor does Western Europe make an indispensable contribution to US security, a widely misunderstood point. The threat to the United States stems from Soviet strategic nuclear capabilities, and to a lesser extent from the Soviet navy. However, Western Europe adds nothing to America's nuclear deterrent, and its navies are much too limited in size and capability to provide more than modest assistance to the United States in patrolling the sea lanes outside the NATO area (for example, in the Persian Gulf). Indeed, since America's membership of NATO forces it to spend more on the army than would otherwise be necessary (for even in the most extreme scenarios, one cannot imagine Soviet troops landing on American shores, and the United States does not need sixteen divisions for a Rapid Deployment Force), it might even be argued that NATO has weakened the US ability to deal with direct threats to its own national security.

Still, if Western Europe fell under Soviet domination, would not the addition of its industrial and scientific capabilities to the Soviet Union's already formidable might shift the balance of power against the United States? The traditional answer to this question is that it would, but the traditional answer may well be wrong. For all its industrial might, Western Europe would add little to the USSR's strategic nuclear capabilities, which are far more advanced than the British or French forces. Nor would the addition of West European armies add to the Soviet Union's conventional military strength, for it is doubtful whether it could use them elsewhere, just as it has been unable to use East European forces to any meaningful extent on the Chinese border or in Afghanistan. To be sure, Western Europe's industry could facilitate the production of Soviet weaponry, just as Polish shipbuilding frees Soviet shipbuilding to produce more warships, but this poses no threat to the territorial integrity or national survival of the United States (whereas, to repeat the essential point, a war fought for the defence of Europe to prevent such an eventuality does).

In short, Soviet domination of Western Europe does *not* mean that Western Europe's wealth and might will be added to the USSR's the way one would transfer money from one person's account to another's. On the contrary, if historical experience is any guide, it is more likely that the addition of Western Europe to the Soviet empire would be a liability rather than an asset for the Kremlin. Although American foreign policy has followed a policy of containment since the late 1940s, it is important to recognize that virtually every country that has entered the Soviet bloc in the postwar era has become either an economic liability (for example, Eastern Europe, Cuba) or a bitter political adversary (the PRC, Albania).¹⁰ Why should Western Europe be any different in this respect? Is it unreasonable to presume that the people of France would be as resistant to Soviet domination as the people of Poland, or that the Soviet Union might end up subsidizing West Germany

10. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'in 1981 the Soviet Union was having to meet costs per day of \$12m to support Cuba, \$3-5m each for Vietnam and Ethiopia and \$55m or more for subsidies to Eastern Europe—to which must be added the undoubtedly heavy cost of supporting the Soviet forces in Afghanistan and the Kabul regime'. *Strategic Survey 1981-1982* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1982), p. 47.

just as it now has to subsidize East Germany? In short, if Soviet difficulties in Eastern Europe are any indication, the accumulation of sullen and unwilling 'allies' may not be advantageous to the USSR in the long run.

Why, then, has the United States extended its protection to Western Europe, and why should it continue to do so? Because it does not wish to see free peoples, with whom it shares long historical ties and enduring political and cultural values, fall under the domination of a foreign and oppressive power—and because the peoples of Western Europe have asked it to participate in their own defence. It is this last point, however, that has now come into question. Even though the Euromissiles were a response to European concerns and not an American initiative (indeed, the United States initially resisted the idea), by accommodating the demands of one set of Europeans, the United States now finds itself accused of monstrous designs by another group of Europeans. To some degree, of course, this reflects the natural give and take of democratic politics. What disturbs many Americans, however, is that the most vocal Europeans are those who believe the US military presence in Europe is a threat to, rather than a guarantee of, their security.

It is this perception that gives rise to a growing unease in the United States concerning the American military presence in Europe. Although Americans are reassured by their government that those condemning the United States are a minority, these assurances lose credibility when they are unaccompanied by vocal European support of the US presence. If the Europeans want continued American protection, they must say so—publicly. Similarly, if European governments think the Euromissiles are necessary for their security, it is they, and not the US government, that must explain the reasons to their peoples. Although the US government has an obligation not to complicate their task, it cannot, and should not, decide the defence needs of Europe. This is a task for the Europeans. The United States, for its part, should stand ready to assist them so long as they are willing to share fully the expense and risk of defending their territory.

This, however, leads to an additional objectionable aspect of the Dutch politician's statement, and indeed of the entire opposition to the Euromissiles, that must be addressed: namely, the question of sharing the risks and benefits of the American nuclear umbrella. The opposition to the deployment of the Euromissiles has been based on the belief that in the event of war, these weapons would be the object of Soviet nuclear strikes. As the Dutch politician's statement makes clear, some Europeans believe there is no reason for Western Europe to assume this risk, that the United States will assume all the risk of nuclear war because it has to, allowing the European NATO members to enjoy only the benefits of the American nuclear umbrella.

The point must be made bluntly: if this is an accurate assessment of the European interest in NATO, there is nothing in the alliance for the United States. It is all the more necessary to make this point firmly because many Europeans have accused the United States, quite unfairly, of planning to sacrifice Europe in a limited nuclear war while American territory remains untouched. The major evidence for this calumny is President Reagan's remark on 16 October 1981 to a gathering of newspaper editors:

Q: I guess I think that some of the people in Europe who are opposed to some of our policies are afraid that they may wind up as kind of proxy victims in a war between us and the Soviet Union which—a fear that may be a little more,

seem a little more plausible because of all the conversation about integrated battlefields and limited use of nuclear weapons. And I wonder—we must think about this—*do you believe that there could be a limited exchange of nuclear weapons between us and the Soviet Union or that it would simply escalate inevitably?*

A: I don't honestly know. I think, again, until someplace—all over the world this is being, research going on, to try and find the defensive weapon. There never has been a weapon that someone hasn't come up with a defense. But it could—and the only defense is, well, you shoot yours and we'll shoot ours. And if you still had that kind of stalemate, *I could see where you could have the exchange of tactical weapons against troops in the field without it bringing either one of the major powers to pushing the button.*¹¹

It should be obvious that there is nothing in this statement that can reasonably be construed as an American intent to fight a total nuclear war limited to Europe. Moreover, the President's reply says nothing that is new: even under the doctrine of massive retaliation, no American official ever suggested that the United States would automatically unleash strategic forces in response to any Soviet use of tactical weapons, no matter how limited. Indeed, one wonders what the President could have said that would have been more sensible. Would anyone really have preferred him to respond by saying that if the Soviet Union uses any nuclear weapon, he would automatically order the USSR's (and thus Europe's) complete destruction? Could anyone have found that kind of reply saner and more reassuring? (To be sure, President Brezhnev did state his view that no nuclear war could be limited, but if he truly believed this, one wonders why the Soviet Union recently deployed over 300 SS-20 missiles, which cannot reach the United States.)

In short, just as the Europeans were understandably upset by the US administration's initial insensitivity to their interest in arms control, Americans can be forgiven if they are offended by European accusations that they are planning to sacrifice Europe to save their own skins in the event of a conflict with the Soviet Union. The United States, after all, is the country that rescued Western Europe financially with the Marshall Plan and protected it during the Berlin crises. There are hundreds of thousands of American troops in Europe, many with their dependants, to assure Europeans that the United States cannot stand aside in the event of Soviet aggression. These facts should count for something, and Americans are justifiably angered when they are completely overlooked, and the United States instead is accused of the most base and selfish motivations in its policy towards Europe.

Redefining the alliance

In summary, it is clear that if NATO is to endure, both the United States and its European allies must make a better effort to understand each other. The Americans should recognize that beating the drums about the Soviet military threat is counterproductive: it certainly alarms the Europeans, but about the United States, not the Soviet Union. Instead, Mr Reagan should follow the advice of one of his Republican predecessors, Teddy Roosevelt, and speak softly while rebuilding the American big stick.

11. *New York Times*, 21 Oct. 1981, p. A5. Emphasis added.

For their part, the Europeans should understand that allegations about American designs to sacrifice Europe in a limited nuclear war are not only unfounded, but deeply offensive to Americans. More importantly, however, Europeans (and American Atlanticists) should not believe that the American commitment to the defence of Europe is absolute. Too often, the opinion is put forward that the United States would not dare to withdraw its troops from Europe because that would be against its own best interests. As we have seen, however, American participation in NATO is not indispensable to the national security of the United States. *Even if one does not agree with this argument*, one must recognize that such sentiments will gain increasing force in the United States if Americans come to feel that the Europeans want to reap the benefits of the American nuclear guarantee without taking any of the risks. Atlanticists should not be deluded by a belief that American decision-makers will behave 'rationally' simply because they always have in the past. The 'rational actor' model of decision-making is simply not applicable in this case, for the values that carried the day before are simply not as widely shared today. In the words of Howard Baker, the Senate Majority Leader:

I've thought about taking up the cudgels of the Mansfield amendment [which called for halving the number of US troops in Europe], but the situation is too serious for that. When Mansfield was doing it [in 1971], there was virtually no support for that position in the Senate. Were I to do it, I'm afraid it would start a fire I couldn't put out.¹²

In line with this, it is worth repeating that NATO was founded on a shared perception of a Soviet threat. Both sides must recognize that the consensus on which the alliance was founded has changed over time. Although some evolutionary change probably would have occurred in any event, the process was accelerated by Brezhnev's adoption of a policy of detente, which has had far more impact in Western Europe than in the United States. Not only has detente been more successful in Europe in improving the Soviet Union's image, it has also provided the Europeans with more tangible benefits that they do not want to relinquish. Nowhere is this more evident than in West Germany. Although the Bonn government has been exemplary in meeting its military obligations under NATO (at least until recently), and although the West Germans joined the United States in boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics, West Germany simply feels too dependent on the benefits of detente—both in terms of trade and improved contacts with East Germany—to do anything that would threaten the improved relationship with the East except under the most extreme provocation.

Recognizing that the consensus on which NATO was founded has changed, the leaders of the alliance should attempt to find a new consensus for a period of detente. The first order of business should be the achievement of a common interpretation of the nature of the Soviet threat. NATO was originally designed to counter the threat of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. This threat may have appeared reasonable at the time of the Berlin blockade and the Korean War, when the US nuclear stockpile was small and the countries of Western Europe had not recovered from the Second World War. At the present time, however, such a possibility must be considered extremely remote. Even if one attributes the most malevolent intentions to the Soviet leadership, the fact nevertheless remains that the

12. *New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1981, p. A22.

countries of NATO possess many thousands of nuclear weapons. Nobody but a madman would initiate hostilities willingly in the face of such firepower.

Thus, although it is still necessary for NATO to be concerned about the highly implausible possibility of a massive Soviet attack against Western Europe, it is more important at this time for the alliance to reach an understanding on how it should deal with less drastic Soviet threats that do not involve direct aggression against a NATO member. The necessity for such an understanding is highlighted by different perceptions of recent events in Afghanistan and Poland. Whereas the United States has viewed Soviet actions as evidence of the fundamental emptiness of detente, the Europeans have generally been unwilling to interpret Soviet behaviour in this way. The result is that each side increasingly views the other's motives with suspicion. More precisely, the Europeans view the Americans as hypocritical because the United States is more critical of Soviet repression than it is of repression by right-wing regimes, and because it justifies its own trade with the USSR while condemning Western Europe's. Complicating matters further is a growing European tendency to view any American efforts at leadership as more evidence of an overbearing arrogance that Europeans, out of respect for their own interests, have an obligation to resist as proof of their independence and equality. The United States, for its part, views the Europeans as selfish because they take it for granted that the United States should risk nuclear annihilation and expend tens of billions of dollars annually for the security of Europe, but are unwilling to join the United States in foregoing some of the benefits of detente when the Soviet Union suppresses the freedom of some of its neighbours that do not happen to be members of NATO.¹³

The question, therefore, is whether NATO can deal effectively with the Soviet threat in the 1980s. If its members view the threat solely in terms of a massive Soviet attack against Western Europe, the alliance will appear increasingly irrelevant by its concentration on the most implausible scenario. On the other hand, if they view the threat more broadly, they must reach an agreement on what that threat is and how it should be resisted; otherwise, the alliance will collapse in recrimination and bitterness. Events in Poland and Afghanistan have demonstrated that this is not an issue that can be resolved by *ad hoc* consultation during a crisis. Rather, it is a fundamental problem that goes to the heart of the continuing viability of NATO. The questions must be put bluntly: has the Soviet policy of detente, with its more ambiguous challenges to Western security, succeeded in undermining the foundations of the alliance? For if the allies cannot agree on the nature of the Soviet threat and their response to it, what can they agree on?

NATO has been around so long that it is difficult to contemplate the possibility that it could disintegrate. Indeed, the Atlanticist bias of political leaders in both Europe and the United States is so strong that they doubtless will make every effort to preserve the alliance, no matter what the strain. At the same time, however, it should be recognized that this bias is not so widely shared by their publics, which may constrain their freedom of action. In addition, the next generation of leaders cannot be assumed to share this Atlanticist bias, since it does not have the historical memory of the Marshall Plan and the cold war. Instead, its formative experiences are occurring now, and consequently the manner in which the present strains in the alliance are handled will have an impact transcending their immediate importance.

13. Admittedly, however, Washington's objections on this point ring very hollow given the extension of the grain agreement.

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It is this consideration, perhaps more than any other, that makes it necessary to redefine the nature of the threat and the purpose of the alliance, instead of assuming that the momentum of history that has carried the alliance forward so far will carry it indefinitely into the future. For NATO, the wolf may not yet be at the door, but it is coming pretty close.