BILDERBERG MEETINGS

SALTSJÖBADEN, 11-13 May 1973

Confidential

REFLECTIONS ON THE EUROPEAN SECURITY CONFERENCE

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Historically, a conference on European security is a durable Soviet proposal, dating to the upper 1950's and periodically bobbing up in one form or another whenever it suited Moscow's purpose. The purpose was to gain general acceptance of Europe's division and Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe. With much of that already achieved by other instruments -- notably the West German treaties with the U.S.S.R. and Poland, the agreements between the two Germanies and the irreversible thrust of Bonn's Ost-Politik -- the utility of CSCE from Moscow's point of view is substantially less than before.

For this and other reasons, relatively little of importance is at stake in CSCE. (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe). The Soviet interest now lies in creating the impression of movement, of the absence of tension and of a European political environment emptied of the threat of intimidation and coercion from the East. Other than urging expanded economic contacts, tourism and formal cultural exchanges, Moscow can be relied upon to resist initiatives aimed at actually altering political life in Europe by means that might escape official sanction and control.

Briefly, CSCE's value for the Soviet Union is primarily symbolic. Little more than four years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, all the European states, plus Canada and the United States, are meeting with the Russians and Czechs, not to mention the East Germans. Thus, CSCE's importance lies first in the fact that it is being held; second, in its potential for contributing to a political environment that could weaken the Atlantic Alliance and the European Community; third, to the degree that it responds to a mood in Western Europe that strongly favors reconciliation with the Soviet bloc, CSCE may strengthen the hand of some governments. It appeals to many Europeans, who draw from it a sense of participation in East-West affairs and hope of a full restoration of amenities between Western and Eastern countries. Among the latter, Rumania finds the conference a useful platform for chivvying the Russians and, however indirectly, for tilting against the so-called Brezhnev doctrine. Certain neutral and NATO member states have also pursued this line.

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A case can be made for CSCE as an instrument to focus attention on -- possibly even weaken -- the Brezhnev Doctrine and generally embarrass the Soviet Union. The agenda, it appears, will permit discussion of "the principles governing the relationships between states" plus human contacts, including a freer flow of information and ideas. Agreement on agenda items, however, is one thing, agreement on concrete steps to liberalize political life in Europe quite another. We are unlikely to see in CSCE a vigorous and broadly backed challenge to Mr. Brezhnev's claim to the right to intervene in the internal affairs of any lapsed, or lapsing, Soviet client state in Eastern Europe. Probably the language of any such challenge will be diluted before proceeding very far; the challenge itself may be sidetracked, or, conceivably, the U.S.S.R. will accept some broad rhetoric acknowledging the rights of all states to manage their own affairs without fear of external threat or intervention.

Western and neutral governments have low expectations with regard to freer movement of ideas and information. Such issues will be pressed in order to establish Soviet resistance to change, but since the West is in no position to offer the Soviets any incentive to agree to forbear jamming radio broadcasts, for example, little if any real progress in this area is likely to be achieved. Moscow professes to regard the freer information issue as a Western plot aimed at subverting the Socialist bloc. Although the Soviet Union and the satellite states failed to keep the issue off the agenda, they can almost certainly be relied upon to block agreement on anything in this area that goes beyond officially approved cultural exchanges.

The irony of CSCE is that it creates the illusion of movement, perhaps even of novel departures, yet seems fated chiefly to help formalize the status quo, or what Moscow sometimes calls the "recognition of existing realities." What becomes of CSCE after the initial working round, due to start in June, will depend on how its utility is measured by various governments, especially the Soviet Union's. The U.S.S.R. would like to use CSCE to blur the absence of fundamental change and to weaken the rationale for collective political and security institutions in the West.

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The major NATO governments will doubtless block any effort by the Soviet bloc to create a large, highly visible and permanent CSCE structure, or to take other moves designed to confuse the image of an enterprise that amounts to less than meets the casual eye. Some non-aligned countries, together with members of both blocs, will seek to promote the bro[illegible] economic contacts and cooperation on environmental matters on which agreement is likely.

The Soviets may decide that the returns on CSCE are insufficient when measured against the harassment to which the conference exposes some of their policies. Thus, they may elect to let CSCE wind down, a decision that the United States and its major allies would be unlikely to dispute. The Americans, especially, have little if any interest in keeping CSCE on center stage, or even alive. So far, it hasn't gone badly from Washington's point of view. By and large, the NATO governments have been able to work out agreement on the broad issues of CSCE. (The nine European Community members have achieved an even greater harmony of viewpoint.) The signs are that neither bloc will take any clear profit from the substantive talks at the foreign ministers level. Thus, from the point of view of the great powers, CSCE's initial round is likely to end inconclusively-- in a draw, or some near equivalent.

Yet while the conference seems to pose no special threat to [illegible] interests in its current phase, a continuing and institutionalized CSCE might exaccerbate some difficulties, possibly create others. Washington worries, for example, that some West European governments, feeling themselves incapable of influencing more meaningful East-West negotiations such as SALT and possibly even MBFR (Mutual Balanced Force Reductions), may work all the harder to give CSCE a life of its own and an importance exceeding its compass. Fears of a de facto U.S.-U.S.S.R. condominium settling issues of European security with minimal reference to Europeans themselves could bolster the tendency to fit CSCE more closely to Soviet purposes. Equally, the Americans are concerned that CSCE, however deprived of substance, over time might serve the Soviet purpose of persuading many West Europeans that everyone is so busy waging peace there is no need to spend as much on defense, still less to worry about NATO's future or to set about molding the Common Market

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countries into some sort of political community with defense attributes.

Because it means different things to different governments, CSCE is an elusive enterprise. It has seemed akin to a baloon which, if put in the air, would be useful to its sponsors only so long as it didn't come down. Although speculation on the eve of the working round may be premature, it is still worth remarking that Moscow and Washington, for the quite different reasons noted, might both be content to let this baloon start its descent.

As good a way as any to gain perspective on CSCE is to relate it to other processes that also bear -- in some cases more directly -- on European security. Some of these processes, like SALT, MBFR and the West German _ost-politik_, also involve the blocs. Those that do not -- organizing the European Community and the trans-Atlantic talks on trade and money, to cite two examples -- nonetheless will affect the system which for two decades has anchored Western Europe's security and guaranteed its political integrity. Put differently, all of these processes will affect Western European-American relations, and each will influence the former's ability to establish, as well as improve, modes of internal cooperation.

Briefly, the course of CSCE and that of these other processes are mutually influencing and, indeed, overlap. Many governments may find themselves asking whether the North Atlantic system is still the cornerstone of national policy or whether it has been overtaken by time and a changing political context. Nine West European governments may confront the question of whether a more closely organized European Community should take a higher or lower priority than the politically more congenial interest of promoting détente.

Inevitably, these various processes -- both East-West and intra-Western -- proceed on separate tracks and at different rhythms. They are, in short, disjunctive. While the East-West process, in general, has acquired a relatively steady rhythm, trans-Atlantic talks on trade and money are both fitful and more urgent, yet lacking visible or immediate gain; indeed, the contrary appears to be the case.

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Equally, efforts by Western Europeans to move toward economic integration, let alone political union, are bedeviled by differences, no less intractable really than before, between member governments, especially the key governments-- Britain, France and West Germany.

The absence of political cohesion in turn means that Western Europe's political course is influenced as much or more by what the great powers do separately and together than by what Britain, France, West Germany and their partners are doing independently or within the Community. A part of Western Europe's problem flows from an American dilemma, which all of these processes tend to establish more clearly than ever: Can the United States deploy equally effective European and global policies? Can it pursue triangular politics while keeping intact the web of special, though fragile, relationships with Western Europe and Japan? Must Washington choose? Many Europeans believe that the dynamic process of accomodation between the nuclear super powers is leading America away from Europe.

Some things are perceived differently by Western European capitals and Washington. Washington may see triangular politics as the agent of stability. Europeans see in triangular politics America acquiring a taste for the old conventions of _Realpolitik._ Rightly or wrongly, many West Europeans feel that Washington is telling them, in effect: we will maintain a high military posture in Europe and meet our NATO commitments, but in return Europe must forbear rocking America's boat on commercial and monetary matters. In short, these Europeans feel that Washington is using security to gain an advantage in its dealings with them on pressing problems of trade and money. The old American support for the European Community, they think, is giving way to a mistrust of Europe that finds expression in what they further regard as America's nascent economic chauvinism.

Quite possibly, the U. S. will continue to deploy substantial military forces in Europe, while trimming or diluting its political involvement there. In a sense, this is already happening. A break in the continuity of America's political priorities probably began some years ago.

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Other than rhetorically, Western Europe no longer has a reliably preeminent claim to Washington's attention. And it has been some years since anyone could spell out in precise terms America's goals in Europe. Triangular politics and its related goals are seen by Europeans and Japanese as moving closer to the center of Washington's thinking.

America wants, for example, a period of stability in Southeast Asia, a goal that relies on cooperation from both China and the Soviet Union. Any settlement in the Middle East will require active Soviet support. America seeks further progress in SALT, another precise goal and one which demands hard bargaining with the Soviet Union, which has entered SALT's second phase holding the better bargaining cards. Moscow got from the Phase One agreements the limit on ABM's (anti-ballistic missiles) that seems to have relieved its major strategic anxiety vis-a-vis the United States. The Americans have little to bargain with in the second phase; they can threaten to withdraw from the five year interim agreement if further progress on limiting offensive missiles is not achieved. And they can probably extract some gains in return for concessions on issues that for Europeans are closer to home than those covered in Phase One. These include America's forward-based nuclear-capable aircraft on which West Europeans rely to offset Soviet missiles targeted on their cities. The Soviets may try to link Phase-Two progress with concessions from the Americans on the so-called FBS (forward-based systems) issue, plus agreement by the U. S. to deny to any of its allies assistance in the area of nuclear weapons. Within NATO, these are sensitive issues, which could easily become contentious, a prospect to which Moscow must be alert. The Phase-One SALT agreements formalize a 3 to 2 Soviet advantage in numbers of land-based ICBM's and a Soviet right to nearly half again as many strategic nuclear submarines as the United States. The American Administration which negotiated the agreement feels itself under pressure to narrow these disparities, especially in land-based missiles.

In agreeing to CSCE, the NATO governments exacted a price which the Soviet paid in full. The larger part of the price was MBFR, a proceeding with a far richer and gaudier potential than CSCE and possibly a longer life expectancy.

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MBFR, although unlikely to move quickly, could bear more heavily on European security than any of the other processes. MBFR could become a rival even to SALT as a process capable of affecting the East-West military balance and perhaps bloc to bloc relationships as well. Or, like CSCE, it could become an arena for fencing with the present security system without altering it. It is still too soon to say which of these alternatives will prove most tempting to the parties most concerned-- the United States, the Soviet Union and the major capitals of Europe.

The idea, as conceived by NATO, would be to arrange balanced reductions of the forces deployed along the heavily guarded frontier in Central Europe. This contact line, stretching 800 miles from the Baltic Sea to Czechoslovakia and festooned with minefields and automatic firing devices, separates West Germany from the Eastern bloc. The forces confronting one another on either side of the line total about 1.5 million men, 20 ,000 tanks, more than 5,000 aircraft and 10,000 so-called tactical nuclear warheads.

The irony of MBFR is that the initiative was NATO's, yet the Soviet Union enters this negotiation, too, holding higher cards. It has, after all, considerably more troops in Central Europe than the United States and the furter advantage of proximity. Departing Soviet units, unless dispatched to the Eastern frontier, could be swiftly returned to East Germany, Poland or Czechoslovakia. The political advantage also lies with Moscow, which is under no internal pressure to thin out its European deployments. NATO governments, on the other hand, first conceived of MBFR as a means of neutralizing pressure from Senator Mansfield and his Congressional allies to reduce America's European commitments, or at least to buy time. Probably few people in Washington or Western Europe believed that Moscow would ever permit its European forces, which after all have the crucial role of guaranteeing bloc security, to become the subject of a negotiation with NATO governments.

Quite possibly, MBFR will buy time. The negotiations, if they go forward into a working round, should be more protracted and arduous than SALT. The issues are even more complex. How to assess the different

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capabilities of American and Soviet forces, as well as others, in terms of numbers, equipment, readiness, logistical support, etc.?

As an operational matter, MBFR is full of traps. The process need not go very far before NATO's war-fighting capability would be degraded. This in turn might reduce the so-called non-nuclear pause to an unacceptable level. Washington would again be asking itself why nuclear arms should be treated as the weapon of last resort in all parts of the world except Central Europe. Or European governments may come to regard MBFR as the Americans' chosen instrument for their military withdrawal. Britain and France are both hostile to MBFR; for the moment, France is boycotting MBFR, while Britain is playing an active role, mainly in order to try to head off or minimize any possibly damaging consequences. West Germany's attitude is still evolving and rather more complicated. As long as MBFR remained in the conversational and model-building stage, West Germans, like the Americans, looked upon it as a useful hedge against the Mansfield sentiment in Washington; they also tended -- and in some measure perhaps still do -- to see it as another instrument for reinforcing their *Ost-Politik*. But as MBFR moved toward the negotiating table, the German attitude has shifted toward the Anglo-French position. Much the same can be said of the attitude of the Benelux countries.

These Europeans worry that Washington, whatever its own doubts and anxieties about MBFR, may at some point give the affair a push that will be self-sustaining. West European governments would then be swept up in the momentum of what they might well regard as a first long step toward American disengagement, a process in which they and the East Europeans, although present, were really following in the wake of the super powers. In this dark view, the issue of the size and character of American forces in Europe would be no longer primarily the business of the Atlantic Alliance, but the business of America and the Soviet Union.

Much depends on how MBFR is handled within NATO. If MBFR is to remain a gimmick -- a device for buying time from restive American Congressmen-- then European governments should understand that. If, on the other hand, MBFR is to become serious business, they should know that.

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Or if MBFR is to be handled like the prime interest rate -- its urgency rising as Congressional pressure rises and falling as the pressure falls-- then Europeans should know that, too. At the moment, trans-Atlantic signals on MBFR range from unclear to faint, depending on the moment.

If MBFR is to be treated seriously, it will mean the United States and its allies establishing in concert what they want from the conference, what they are prepared to do and what they will insist upon from the other side. More specifically, this will mean getting away from the ambiguities of the present; it will also mean moving on from NATO's past absorption with dynamic analysis and model-building.

Treating MBFR as serious business of the Alliance will mean working out an initial proposal, the means of verifying any agreement arising out of the proposal and the political conditions attaching to an agreement on force reductions. It will also mean working out a kind of critical minimum, a level of forces deemed essential to stability and the European balance of power, a level essential to a non-nuclear option in Europe. If and as MBFR goes forward, there will be a number of critical decision points. European governments involved in the talks worry, whether justifiably or not, that they will have little to say about these decisions. Thus, what they require above all is not a welter of computer print outs but solid assurances that the Alliance remains a supreme American interest.

The assumption that the security of the North Atlantic countries continues to rest on the system they have created is still held to be valid by their governments. Nonetheless, these same governments are watching Western Europe and the United States drift apart. The sense of community, or indentity of interest, between the two is yielding to a sense of fatigue, a weariness with the old orthodoxy. Yet no satisfactory alternative to the present system has emerged.

The absence of policy is a policy of sorts, but one that can produce undesirable -- certainly unpredictable -- consequences.None of the Western governments is thinking in terms of a broad policy linking the various elements of European security, whether military forces, trade

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or money. On every side, we find instead attitudes, and these are probably not well understood if only because even they are not fully formed. America tends to regard Western Europe as an assortment of states which, lacking unity, can not pull their weight politically, but which have combined to harass American commerce and complicate everyone's monetary difficulties. Western Europe sees America losing sight of primary interests while exaggerating the gains to be made in triangular politics. In a way, each side -- America and Western Europe -- feels taken for granted by the other.

Perhaps the immediate importance of CSCE is that it has obliged Americans and West Europeans to work together on an operational political matter involving the Soviet bloc. An optimist might conclude that this experience of NATO governments in coordinating positions in CSCE could be usefully applied to their dealings with the Soviet Union in other forums and in their dealings with each other on more immediate and contentious problems of trade and money. On present form, any such optimism seems unlikely to be borne out.

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