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THE NIXON DOCTRINE AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

by

DENIS HEALEYThe Reasons for the Nixon Doctrine

In presenting "A New Strategy for Peace" in his first report on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970s President Nixon based his new posture primarily on the radical transformation in world politics since President Truman first committed the U.S.A. to an active role overseas. He pointed out that the Cold War was no longer the decisive factor in international relations. Western Europe and Japan had fully recovered from the political, economic and psychological ravages of the Second World War. The Third World had proved unexpectedly immune to Communist penetration and the Marxist dream of international Communist unity had disintegrated. America and Russia had recognised a vital mutual interest in halting the dangerous momentum of the nuclear arms race. The 1970s were to be an era of negotiation.

His second report, "Building for Peace" in 1971 reaffirms this analysis of the outside world but is more candid about the internal factors which have made inevitable some revision in America's foreign and defence policies. "To continue our predominant contribution might not have been beyond our physical resources", he explains, " - though our own domestic problems summoned them. But it would certainly have exceeded our psychological resources." So "we will look to others for a greater share in the definition of policy as well as in bearing the costs of programs. This psychological reorientation is more fundamental than the material redistribution; when countries feel responsible for the formulation of plans they are more apt to furnish the assets needed to make them work." On the other hand "we only compound insecurity if we modify our protective or development responsibilities without giving our friends the time and the means to adjust, materially and psychologically, to a new form of

American participation in the world."

None of America's allies can complain about the redistribution of material and psychological burdens which the President proposes in such balanced terms. None can contest the validity of the arguments he adduces. Indeed the domestic pressures for change are much more powerful than he admits. At a time when America's internal problems, particularly in the cities, risk becoming insoluble for lack of resources and the absence of policies devoted to them, the pressure of military expenditure on the economy had become intolerable. It is not wholly an accident that in the last decade economic growth in the developed non-Communist world was in inverse proportion to the percentage of G.N.P. devoted to defence; the United States' G.N.P. rose only 59% as against 68% for the Common Market countries and 208% for Japan.

Meanwhile public support for American military action overseas has shown a startling decline. In May 1969 a Time-Louis Harris Poll showed only 26% of Americans willing to see United States troops used to resist overt Communist aggression in Berlin. In December 1970 only 14% thought America should send troops if Israel seemed in danger of being defeated by Arab armies. In May 1970 56% thought America had made a mistake by sending troops to fight in Vietnam. Although the steep decline in American military casualties had reduced the temperature of the opposition to the Vietnam war there is little evidence that it has reduced its size. The postwar commercial and political entanglements of the United States with the outside world may forbid a return to the isolationism of the Thirties, but the role of world policeman is no longer acceptable and the domestic retreat to the suburbs has its counterpart in a revulsion against foreign responsibilities. Yet, whatever the immediate risks to their own security, America's allies can only welcome this shift in American priorities if it leads to a greater concentration of effort on social and environmental problems which have been dangerously neglected since the New Deal. The stability of American society itself must be the precondition of any useful American role in the world.

The Consequences

The Nixon Doctrine has already had a dramatic effect on

American military spending and deployment overseas. The defence budget had declined from 9% of the G.N.P. to under 7%. 400,000 men have been brought home, nearly all from Vietnam and other Asian countries. It is the President's intention to cut the armed forces from the 3.5 million of 1968 to 2.5 million by 1973, and if possible to dispense with the draft altogether. So long as America retains the capacity for assured destruction of an aggressor after absorbing a surprise attack, she no longer demands a superiority in strategic nuclear weapons; in SALT she is seeking agreement with the Soviet Union to maintain the balance of mutual deterrence at a lower level of forces on both sides, and if possible to control the development of new strategic systems.

It has been clear ever since the seminal speech in Guam that Asia would bear the brunt of this planned reduction in American capabilities. The main criticism here is that there has been no comparable reduction in the treaty commitments which the President has pledged America to keep; thus it is unclear whether in a crisis America would choose to interpret those commitments differently from what has till now been expected, or whether in the absence of adequate conventional forces she would be prepared drastically to lower the nuclear threshold. Moreover it is the President's current intention to keep fifty thousand men in Vietnam for an indefinite period after 1972 to protect the formidable American air power which is to remain there; this is pregnant with the risks of a new entanglement which would be incompatible with the main thrust of the Nixon Doctrine and might compel major withdrawals from Europe.

The Implications for N.A.T.O.

On the other hand President Nixon has promised to make no cuts in America's combat strength in Europe during his present term of office, and the national review of N.A.T.O. strategy he commissioned seems to have confirmed the desirability of maintaining the so-called strategy of flexible response as agreed by N.A.T.O. in 1967 and developed through the Nuclear Planning Group in later years. This strategy rejects alike the "tripwire" concept of immediate and automatic nuclear response which had become unacceptable to the United States, and the alternative of a wholly

conventional response even to an all-out Soviet attack, which has never been acceptable to the Europeans. Instead, N.A.T.O. aims to hold anything but a major deliberate invasion without recourse to nuclear weapons, and in the case of a major attack to introduce nuclear weapons into the battlefield in such a way as to enable and encourage the enemy to stop the fighting if he does not want to risk an all-out strategic exchange.

It is not certain that the present strategy of flexible response would remain acceptable to both America and Europe if there were a unilateral reduction in N.A.T.O.'s overall conventional capability. America's agreement to maintain existing force levels for the time being followed on Europe's agreement to make a slightly greater conventional contribution to N.A.T.O. and to spend a billion dollars on new infrastructure - the first concrete example of a European defence identity in practice. But America's longer term intentions are unknown, and there is significant Congressional pressure for cuts in her N.A.T.O. forces. None of the European countries is finding it easy either to maintain existing levels of defence expenditure or to provide adequately trained soldiers in sufficient numbers.

If a fall in N.A.T.O. force levels made the present strategy appear invalid, a dangerous and divisive argument might open between America and Europe; Europe would try to commit America to a more automatic nuclear response, and if rebuffed would probably be torn between the desire for an independent strategic nuclear deterrent of its own, despite the risk of provoking the Russians and the difficulty of accommodating the Germans, and the desire for a reconciliation with Russia at any cost. Such a prospect is of course a powerful incentive for maintaining existing force levels - but it should also focus attention on the prospects of negotiating mutual and balanced force reductions with the Warsaw powers, as the foundation for a new European security system based on co-operation rather than confrontation between the blocs.

It is at this point that the Nixon Doctrine undergoes its most severe test so far as Europe is concerned. If its fundamental analysis of the new world situation is not just rhetoric devised to cover a retreat from responsibility imposed by domestic pressures, if the era of negotiation is to be taken seriously, and the European partners are to play their promised share in the

formulation of allied policy, then America must be prepared to see Europe take the initiative in some areas of discussion with the Communist states, just as America has already taken the initiative in others, notably SALT and the Arab-Israel conflict.

So far President Nixon's style has been immensely welcome to Europeans who had been irritated by the tendency of the previous Administration to present them with unilateral decisions on major issues of allied policy and then to reverse those decisions with the same indifference to their views - witness the tragicomedy of the M.L.F. and the somersaults on N.A.T.O. strategy and on ABMs. None would contest the wisdom of his general approach towards multilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union as presented in the European chapter of "Building for Peace".

The confrontation with the Warsaw powers is now passing from static trench warfare to a war of movement; the problem is to exploit the need for independent initiatives by individual countries on both sides without losing control of the campaign as a whole. Yet this analogy is imperfect; for the aim of the battle is not victory but reconciliation, and the construction of a new security system which will permit Russia to come to terms with the colonial revolution in Eastern Europe without fears for her defence. It is not easy for individuals weaned on a vision of the Cold War as a zero-sum game, in which one side could gain only if the other lost, to readjust their thinking to the new world situation as President Nixon describes it; for an alliance like N.A.T.O. the readjustment is more difficult still.

The Ostpolitik

At present the problem is best illustrated by the differing attitudes to Chancellor Brandt's Ostpolitik; given an agreement on Berlin the preparation of a European Security Conference will raise similar issues even more acutely. Opposition to the Ostpolitik is confined so far to individuals and groups who do not hold Government power in their own countries - notably a large part of the CDU/CSU in Germany (though not Dr. Schroeder, at present its most popular leader) and certain retired officials in the United States.

Some distinguished American dinosaurs from the Occupation Age clearly find it difficult to come to terms with a world so

different from that in which they were able to determine the policies not only of the U.S.A. but of Germany too. More significant is the attitude of Mr. George Ball, who in his recent article in "Affari Esteri" probably speaks for many on both sides of the Atlantic whose doubts about the Ostpolitik stem primarily from fears that it may prevent closer unity in Western Europe. In his view the Ostpolitik is engendering complacency and wishful thinking about the prospects of restoring the unity of Germany and Europe as a whole; this is distracting the West Germans from the urgent need to enlarge the European Economic Community by including Britain and the other applicants, and to strengthen it by giving its central organs supranational powers.

Of course it would be idle to deny that such dangers do exist. But no one with a real concern for Europe's future can afford to ignore as totally as Mr. Ball the real popular demand for reconciliation between Eastern and Western Europe and the explosive pressures inside the Communist states for greater individual freedom and national independence.

The postwar division of Europe is seen increasingly, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as an unnatural mutilation and impoverishment. No one now believes that Russia can be rolled back by military force, as many pretended they did twenty years ago. If the necessary climate of mutual trust is to be created for a voluntary loosening of Russia's grip, it must start with the exorcising of the German demon in Eastern Europe and continue with a mutual exploration of the security problem. Mr. Ball can offer no alternative to those Germans - a growing number - who cannot renounce the ideal, however distant, of reunification. He obviously still believes, as so many did in the Fifties, that the West Germans would be prepared to lose their national identity in a West European federation. The evidence is against him.

Whether it was President de Gaulle who killed this possibility, or whether it was always too ambitious a dream, it is clear that the European Economic Community will not assume significant supranational powers in the near future whether Britain is allowed to join or not. The idea that economic co-operation will in itself force political unity is now seen to be mistaken. If political unity is to be achieved on any major issue of foreign policy it will be round the general approach to Eastern Europe which is embodied in the Ostpolitik. Unless the concept of West European unity is open to the East it will be unacceptable to most West

Europeans.

It is equally true, as Chancellor Brandt has so often insisted, that the Ostpolitik is less likely to attain its long-term objectives unless the Community is enlarged so as to achieve a better internal balance and greater overall strength. In fact his Ostpolitik and his Westpolitik are two sides of the same coin. As he often points out his first important diplomatic initiative was directed not Eastward but Westward - to develop Common Market unity on Britain.

In Germany itself however, the onslaught against the Ostpolitik from Opposition politicians is based primarily on national rather than European grounds. Herr Birrenbach, for example, argued in the Bundestag foreign affairs debate: "The interests of quite a few other countries are not identical with those of the Germans. If the nation itself does not pursue its own interests with the necessary vigour, we cannot expect foreign governments to protect them on our behalf."

Yet the view that the Ostpolitik is selling West German interests down the river does not stand up to examination. Chancellor Brandt's strongest opponent among the Communists is Herr Ulbricht; in general he arouses misgivings even more among the "hawks" of the Warsaw Pact than among the "hawks" of N.A.T.O., and in the immediate aftermath of the Polish riots Soviet diplomatists tried to undermine him by leaks in Washington and Bonn.

Western criticism of the Ostpolitik comes from men who are out of power, and who in the case of Germany may have party political motives for their attacks. The nearest thing to criticism which the Ostpolitik has encountered from Governments in the West is the reference in "Building for Peace" to the dangers of what is described with uncharacteristic opacity as "a differentiated detente". Yet oddly enough the same document takes exactly the opposite view on the same issue when it says: "In the era of Communist solidarity we pursued an undifferentiated negotiating approach towards Communist countries. In the new era we see a multipolar Communism marked by a variety of attitudes toward the rest of the world. Failure to respond to this diversity would have ignored new opportunities for improving relations. Negotiation with different Communist countries on specific issues carries more promise."

These are wise words. But if a differentiated negotiating approach is successful, it can only lead to a differentiated detente. Of course the Western countries must conduct their policies in harmony and with mutual consultation - as they do. But a failure to make progress in one area cannot be treated as a reason for not making what progress is possible in others. Deadlock in the Paris talks on Vietnam is not regarded by the United States as an argument against America trying to get agreement in SALT or in the Middle East talks. It should not be allowed to obstruct her allies' efforts either.

If the Nixon Doctrine means what it says, it must not only permit but even encourage America's allies to make progress in negotiations with Communist powers where progress is possible without damage to the Western community as a whole. The Russians have often in the past used negotiations with the West not in order to reach agreement but solely to divide and confuse their adversaries. They may often seek to do so again. But I believe that the West is now sufficiently mature to resist this type of deception, while the new tensions between Russia and her allies expose the Communist camp to greater risks in multilateral negotiation. The outstanding success of the December 1970 meeting of the N.A.T.O. Council compared with the confusion at recent meetings of the Warsaw Pact illustrates this point. But the N.A.T.O. Council could not have displayed such unity and strength except in the context of its prior agreement to press towards a European Security Conference on sensible terms.

The critical test of the prospects for the new wave of Western policy represented by the Nixon Doctrine, the Ostpolitik and the movement for a European Security Conference will be, as so often in the past, Berlin. If a satisfactory improvement in the Berlin situation is reached through the Four Power talks and the simultaneous contacts between Bonn and Pankow, confidence in seeking further progress will be immensely strengthened. We are of course entering unfamiliar territory. The United States will remain uneasy about losing that central control of Western policy which was the first commandment of its postwar theology. Some of the allies will find it painful to have to think for themselves. As the old landmarks crumble away many on both sides of

the Atlantic will long for the comfortable pseudo-certainties of the Cold War. But the real test of the achievement of those remarkable men who shaped American policy in the heroic decade after the defeat of Hitler will be the ability of Europe and America to live on equal terms in a world in which external pressures no longer shape and guarantee their unity.

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