



DER ÜBERSEE-CLUB e.V.

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NATO IN 1987: THE PROSPECTS

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DONNERSTAG, 5. MÄRZ 1987



It really is a great pleasure to be here in Hamburg once again, and to be given the privilege of addressing this prestigious audience. When your President invited me, I was flattered to be given this second opportunity to speak to the Übersee-Club. And I thought of three possible explanations for being asked back. The first was that, after an interval of something like six years, your sporting instincts had simply decided to give me another chance. The second was that in inviting the Secretary General of NATO, you had perhaps not realised that he was the same person who had spoken to you as British Foreign Secretary in 1980. And the third was that in a year when major security issues and developments in East-West relations are once again high on the political agenda, you had decided that you really did want to listen to my views on the prospects for NATO in 1987. Or perhaps all three. In any event I am greatly honoured to be here.

I was fortified in that view by an awareness that a Hamburg audience is one which is likely to have a profound concern for the subject before us. A glance at the map explains why. However much the reality of a threat from the East may seem to have diminished to many people living in some of the other member states of this Alliance, nobody living here in Hamburg can forget that only some 50 km from here runs a frontier dividing two different Europes, divided not by history, culture or even language, but by ideology and by politics. And you need no reminding that the frontier on its Eastern side has been fortified so as to prevent those living behind it being able to leave, and to prevent free access by those living on this side.

The leadership of the Soviet Union may change. The internal policies of Soviet society may be undergoing a minor or perhaps a major reform, but the threat of Soviet military power is still very much with us. Let me start then by speaking of recent events in the Soviet Union and the direction that Soviet policies appear to be taking under the leadership of Mr. Gorbachev.

Already by the time of the Reykjavik summit, about which I shall speak later, we were aware that Mr. Gorbachev was a new kind of Soviet leader. This was evident both before he took office, and in his first months as General Secretary, including when he had his first summit with President Reagan at Geneva. We knew that, unlike his predecessors, he had not participated at first hand either in the October Revolution or in what the Russians describe as the Great Patriotic War, and that his relative youth might give him a different perspective on the world. At Reykjavik, he showed a certain boldness and breadth of vision. And he had clearly used his first two years to consolidate his position as a Soviet leader who leads from the front, rather than from a comfortable consensus in the centre, like Mr. Brezhnev. Even so, there can be few in the West who have not been taken by surprise by the accelerating series of changes he has put forward in recent months.

Every week, almost every day, seems to bring news of another fresh development. He has proposed changes which could substantially alter the Soviet economy, making it more demand led and less command led. He has made some modest moves to lift the heavy curtain of censorship, allowing the publication of hitherto banned books and films, and stopping the jamming of some Western broadcasts. He has released a number of political prisoners, including a number of dissidents well-known in the West. He has allowed Soviet newspapers to print stories about official corruption and malpractice, not only in the government, but even in the Communist Party and in the KGB. He has proposed tentative first steps towards what we might call an almost democratic process, re-establishing the elective principle in the Soviet Union's single candidate elections. And although far short of what is required, he has opened the door a further chink towards an acceptable verification process, at the Disarmament Conference discussions on chemical warfare.

And, Mr. Gorbachev now appears to have discarded the linkage which he himself sought to impose at Reykjavik, tying the negotiations on reducing intermediate-range forces to SDI, and that is a welcome development.

It may be that Mr. Gorbachev wants to bring about some fairly fundamental changes in Soviet society. This does not mean that he intends to transform the Soviet Union into a parliamentary democracy or anything like it. Those who expect Mr. Gorbachev to introduce what we in the West regard as basic democratic rights – free speech, freedom of movement, the economic freedom of a market economy and so on – those who expect that delude themselves. There may be some loosening of the controls at the top, as we have already seen. But this will be carefully regulated and not allowed to challenge the leadership of the party in all walks of life. Mr. Gorbachev is neither a revolutionary nor a counter-revolutionary. He is a Communist leader and he is a Russian. It would be a mistake to forget either point.

Still, there can be no certainty about what his real objectives are. So far at least his avowed aim is to make the Soviet Union a more efficient and more modern society, without questioning the viability of its political and economic system. That may be good news for us, or it may not. If he really means to discard the inherited ideological and political commitments to work by all means for the victory of „socialism“ world-wide, then it may be good news, for none of us can complain about ideological or political competition, when it is no longer backed up by overwhelming military superiority. If on the other hand he seeks greater efficiency, not only to improve the Soviet Union's competitiveness as a world power but to enhance still further its capacity for aggressive military action, this may be bad news. Either way, the process of seeking to adapt the Soviet system to modern conditions is bound to produce an unusual degree of turbulence within the Soviet Union and new kinds of tension in Eastern Europe. It is clearly in all our interests to pay close attention to what is happening now.

So far we have witnessed nothing which suggests a radical change in Soviet foreign policy, though it may be too early to tell. We have seen a greater activism and a new style in Soviet diplomacy, heard much talk about a multi-polar Soviet approach to an increasingly interdependent world and so forth, but there have been almost no concrete actions to match these words. We can only suspend judgement about a shift in foreign policy until we see real evidence of a new and constructive approach towards regional problems. Soviet troop withdrawals from Afghanistan and Mongolia were political tokens and insignificant in military terms. In Afghanistan, Mr. Gorbachev may well want to renounce a major blunder of the Brezhnev era which provokes constant condemnation by almost the entire world. It is just possible that the Soviet Union has had enough, and will agree to a withdrawal on something very much less than its own terms. This, in my view, is an acid test for Soviet foreign policy, for it would involve something like a repudiation of the Brezhnev doctrine of the limited sovereignty of „socialist states“. Other major tests of Soviet policies will come over Kampuchea, the Middle East, in Africa and possibly in Latin America too. If the Soviet Union really is interested in living in a more stable international environment, as Mr. Gorbachev keeps saying it does, it has plenty of opportunity to help bring this about.

Insofar as arms control is concerned Reykjavik may now seem already part of history, but it had effects that are both stimulating and sobering, and it opened up perspectives that were so large that it has already affected all our thinking about the major security issues we confront. That meeting was expected to be a summit to prepare for a summit. Instead, the leaders of the two superpowers sat down and talked seriously about the zero-zero option in Europe and looked at the possibility of halving the number of strategic ballistic missiles over five years, with a view to abolition over ten years. The Soviet side even raised the prospect of the abolition of all nuclear weapons by the year 2,000 or so.

These were extraordinarily ambitious proposals and at best only outline agreements could have been reached. The problem of verification for example could in the time available hardly be touched on. And I don't suppose that I need to remind you how in the event it turned out. No outline agreements were possible almost wholly because of Soviet insistence on linkage of the whole package to SDI, which in the last week Mr. Gorbachev has decided to drop. The immediate reaction was one of disappointment, of failure, of opportunity missed. But on reflection, and with the opportunity to digest the implications more calmly, it became clear that in reality Reykjavik did change the landscape. Whether or not the major proposals are likely or possible of achievement, some of them are firmly in the minds of those who are involved in security matters, and will inevitably in future affect their perception of strategy and actions. The events of Reykjavik provide a clear agenda.

I shall come back to the work which is already in progress on that agenda, but I ought to say something about SDI, if only because the complex questions of SDI and the ABM treaty have been much in the news in recent weeks, and some of the things that have been said on the subject have produced more heat than light. The SDI was launched by President Reagan as offering a dramatic new way to provide for a more stable and secure world. So far as I know, the research done over the past three years has been directed at establishing whether strategic defence can indeed contribute to our future security. We are still in the process of finding out.

I am no scientist, and I cannot and will not make any judgement about what technological advances will be achieved or when. It is clear however that the Soviet leadership is extremely worried about SDI, and is deeply opposed to its testing and deployment. From what we know of the Reykjavik talks, it seems clear that Mr. Gorbachev was as much concerned to stop the SDI programme as he was to get major agreements on the reduction or abolition of ballistic weapons systems. His insistence on the linkage between an agreement on strategic systems and the abandonment of SDI is clear evidence of this.

Of course we cannot know for certain why Mr. Gorbachev is so concerned. My guess is that he had, and has, a mixture of motives. I suspect that he fears that the enormous technological capabilities of the American economy – the „can do“ spirit

exemplified by President Kennedy's programme to put man on the moon – will come up with new defence systems which could alter today's strategic balance. He must also have anxieties about the spin-off in both the civilian and military fields which this sort of intense basic research always brings. And he must also be concerned that for the Soviet Government to attempt to match or respond to the SDI programme would mean an even greater allocation of resources – especially scarce, high technology resources – to the military budget, with all that would imply for his plans to modernise the civilian sector of the Soviet economy.

I understand those concerns. But consider what Mr. Gorbachev was offered by the Americans. Subject to Soviet agreement to deep cuts in nuclear arsenals, the US offered a 10 year guarantee against a withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, which at present provides for only a six month notice. Furthermore, President Reagan has offered to discuss any deployment with the Soviet Union and has even offered to share the technology with them. If the Soviet Union does not consider these assurances adequate, then there are other ways of safeguarding their position. For example, provision in any treaty negotiated to take account of an American break-out. And even if Soviet fears about the strategic position are comprehensible, there can really be no excuse for making an agreement on INF conditional on American abandonment of the SDI. I therefore welcome the recent recognition of this by Mr. Gorbachev.

The parallel debate about the ABM Treaty also seems to me to be one where the basic issues have been obscured by the sound and fury of the commentators. In the first place, the Treaty was negotiated and agreed between the two superpowers, and only they know precisely what was or what was not intended. When they argue that a word or phrase has a specific intention, the rest of us who do not have access to the negotiating record are not well placed to make weighty judgements. The most we can do, and in this case by we I mean the United States' Alliance partners, is to ask that we should be kept in the picture and enabled to make our views known. And this the US has done. A senior American official, Ambassador Paul Nitze, came to NATO Headquarters last week for just that purpose. And perhaps I may add, for the record, that despite what some of the critics say, the United States goes out of its way to consult and to brief us on what is happening in all the various negotiations in which it is engaged with the Soviet Union.

As a result of our exchanges with Mr. Nitze, and of course he also had direct contacts with a number of Alliance governments, it seems clear that the US has not yet taken any final decision on whether to move from the narrow to the broad interpretation of the ABM Treaty, and that there will be further consultations after the present round and other developments have been properly digested.

I have referred already to the Geneva negotiations: perhaps I ought to say more about them, for it is there that Reykjavik has to be translated into concrete agreements. Since the appointment of a new Soviet head negotiator, work has intensified. Even if there have been no dramatic breakthroughs, there has been Soviet agreement – at last – to chart areas of agreement and disagreement. This in itself identifies the extent of common ground and focuses on those areas which are still unresolved and on the outstanding issues still to be solved. It would be neither controversial nor original if I were to suggest to you that there are two promising areas in which agreements can be reached.

The first area in which progress is possible is in the INF negotiations. The zero-zero option for these intermediate range missiles in Europe was almost agreed at Reykjavik. In pursuing agreement on this category, we will need to bear in mind the importance of ensuring that reductions in one area do not increase the problems posed by existing disparities in other areas or categories of forces. Let me be more specific. Negotiations which may lead to the removal of INF capable of striking back at Soviet territory from Western Europe must take into account the very substantial imbalance in the numbers of Short Range Missiles – SRINF – where in the central front the numbers of Soviet missiles are 7 or 8 times greater than those of the Alliance.

This is a problem of which our American friends are well aware. They have proposed that negotiations for reductions in short-range ballistic missiles begin within six months of an agreement on LRINF. And Mr. Gorbachev seems also to have accepted that there will inevitably have to be progress in this area too. Here then is a promising negotiation.

The second area is the acceptance of the principle of 50 % reduction in strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, the intercontinental land-based missiles, the submarine launched missiles, cruise missiles and heavy bombers, where combined destructive capability lies at the heart of the mutual unease shared by East and West.

The proposal to reduce substantially the numbers of ballistic missiles is another step in the right direction. Such a reduction in this category would do much to demonstrate the genuine intentions of the Soviet Union. And it should not be thought that even a reduction by 50 % would leave either side without sufficient nuclear capacity.

Agreement on these lines is possible, yet we must always remember the complex problems of verification. Adequate verification is essential to any arms control agreement, and at the same time it is the key to the gradual build up of trust and confidence on both sides. We should always beware of wanting accommodation and agreement so badly that we accept less than rigorous verification standards, an agreement that does not provide adequate verification could well, in the long run, lead to misunderstanding and distrust and thus be worse than no agreement at all.

The proposals at Reykjavik for drastic reduction in nuclear weapons highlighted yet another problem – the considerable imbalance between NATO and Warsaw Pact conventional force. We realised that, if major reductions in ballistic missile systems were to be achieved, then the conventional component of our defences would become more important. There are those who question the Warsaw Pact superiority in numbers. Of course statistics can be made to prove anything and in this instance much depends on what you count and when you count it. But there are few serious analysts who do not agree that the Warsaw Pact disposes of more men, more artillery and more tanks than the NATO forces we have available to defend us in Europe. These considerations have led us inevitably to focus more closely on the problem of what to do about the conventional imbalance.

Simple logic suggests that there are two ways of attacking the problem. Either we can increase our own forces substantially or we can negotiate reductions with the Warsaw Pact which will remove the critical disparities and lead to stability and enhanced security at lower levels of forces. One thing is clear: NATO is a defensive Alliance whose primary purpose is to prevent war, so we do not seek and do not need superiority. We do not have to match the Warsaw Pact tank for tank, gun for gun, or man for man.

The first course is very difficult. NATO is a voluntary alliance of democratic countries, and all our governments have to make hard decisions about what should take priority when it comes to drawing up their expenditure programmes. The requirements to pay for social security, health, education, environment and all the rest have to be met, and spending on defence is not always much of a vote winner. After the long years of freedom from war in Europe, a generation has grown up who find it difficult to believe that there really is a threat, and they question the need for their elected governments to spend on what may seem to them an unproductive item. These of course are explanations, and not excuses, for inadequate defence funding.

What some forget is that defence is the most basic social service of all. The second course I suggested was to seek to negotiate conventional arms control agreements with the Warsaw countries. If achievable, this is a much more sensible, much more rational, course of action. But it is going to be very difficult, and we would be very foolish if we expected quick and easy results.

It is relatively easy for those who are negotiating in Geneva to identify and agree on what they are talking about. It is possible to equate numbers of missiles, numbers of warheads, range and so on, so that like is compared to like.

The complications of conventional disarmament are of quite a different order. The problems faced in the MBFR negotiations in Vienna illustrate the point well. Those negotiations are limited in scope to reductions in military manpower on the Central Front. Yet after nearly 14 years, the sides have not yet been able to reach agreement even on the basic data on Warsaw Pact forces.

I wonder how many of you remember being taught as children about the medieval schoolmen who passed their lives disputing the then crucial issue of how many angels could stand on the head of a pin? They were simply disarmament delegates born ahead of their time. The possibilities for argument are almost infinite.

It would be easy to be pessimistic in the light of that experience. But we cannot afford to stop trying. The Warsaw Pact have claimed repeatedly that they want to talk seriously about achieving reductions. We have responded. At last years' Halifax meeting of NATO foreign ministers, we decided to set up a High Level Task Force. That body, under the Chairmanship of NATO's Deputy Secretary General, reported back to the ministers in December, and the Brussels declaration was made, pointing the way forward. We hope that, in the not too distant future, there will be substantive negotiations to discuss specific measures to enhance stability and to reduce force levels from the Atlantic to the Urals.

I repeat my warning not to expect quick results. When the negotiators begin to tackle specifics, they really do have a very difficult task. How do they take into account the geographic disparity, the problems of reinforcement which result from NATO stretching from Norway to Turkey, and with its largest member nation across the Atlantic, while the Warsaw Pact has easy internal lines for moving men and supplies? How do they take account of the forces of those members of the Alliance who are not part of the integrated military structure? And how can they balance up the wide differences in training, equipment and availability of the different national forces? Hard questions to answer, but somehow answers must be found.

But we certainly cannot simply afford to wait for the negotiators to produce results, and in the meantime to do nothing to upgrade our conventional forces.

And so we have been working hard on Conventional Defence Improvements within the alliance. Our determination was signalled in May 1985 when the Alliance endorsed the Conventional Defence Improvements (CDI) initiative. Its aim is to make best use of existing resources, and ensure that our money is spent in the most appropriate and efficient way. We must exploit our technological strengths wherever this is militarily and politically sensible, feasible and above all cost-effective. And we must continue to concentrate our efforts on remedying our most critical deficiencies, and strengthening areas where the return is greatest in the widest interests of the Alliance.

There is still much to be done. But if we do these things, then there is no reason why we should not go a long way towards our objective of a more credible and acceptable strategy. We should not forget that as a result of sensible and sustained investment in the past we have a good foundation to work on. Our existing conventional capabilities are by no means as insubstantial or insignificant as frequently portrayed – quite the contrary. The question is to preserve, and where necessary, to improve them.

In choosing a title for this speech, I committed myself to look at the prospects. Any attempt at looking ahead, at trying to forecast what will happen, is necessarily speculative, more so than it has been for some time, because Mr. Gorbachev has given the kaleidoscope a number of shakes. There is no doubt that changes are taking place, but in the nature of things, changes can be reversed, particularly in a society which is still fundamentally totalitarian. We are in a sense being asked to form judgements based on our estimate of Mr. Gorbachev's intentions, and in international affairs it is not prudent to base all ones hopes on expressed intentions.

Perhaps what I am saying is simply that, however much we may believe that there are now hopes that significant arms control agreements can be reached, and that we can come to a more positive and suitable modus vivendi with the Soviet Union, we would be foolish to lower our guard too hastily. When I am asked what is the point

of NATO, I have often used an analogy with a householder, who has taken prudent measures to avoid burglars. He has put bars at the windows, fitted an alarm system, and taken out insurance. And for many years he has had no burglary. If that householder were to say to himself suddenly, „Well, I have not been burgled, so I will remove the bars and alarms, and I will stop spending money on my insurance premiums“, I think that none of us would have much sympathy for him if he was then burgled. In just the same way, I suggest to you that the members of the Alliance should equally be cautious about reducing their levels of protection until they have some clear evidence that the world is safer. And evidence is not the same as intention.

But I would not wish to finish on a note of pessimism. It is clearly right that we should do everything possible to work for a world which is more secure and less dangerous. The advent of Mr. Gorbachev does appear to have brought with it new possibilities of serious negotiation with the Soviet Union. We must not be guilty of failing to try to take advantage of that possibility.

NATO has kept the peace for nearly 40 years. We must now be ready to seize a new peace, provided we are satisfied that it is genuine and realistic.

