The Western Alliance and NATO's Dual-Track Decision (December 14, 1979)

Abstract

This article in the conservative daily *Die Welt* defends NATO's Dual-Track Decision, emphasizing America's important role as the leader of the Western world and underscoring the solidarity of the Western alliance, which had been put to a difficult test.

Source

The Sign from Brussels

NATO managed to push through its decision by the skin of its teeth. The solidarity of the alliance has thus been preserved on the outside to some extent, but there are internal cracks that had to be covered up through an arduous finessing of words. That should give the enemy hope that he might still be able to attain the nuclear split of the alliance through a drumfire of propaganda. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether and how the first step into the gray zone, which consists merely of approving the program, will be followed in three to four years by the second step that will make its realization possible. But after [U.S. President Jimmy] Carter signaled that very same day in Washington that he was willing to lead, one need not be pessimistic about current developments.

To be sure, the Soviet Union has enough Trojan donkeys that can be put to use in its interests, and not only in Belgium or especially in the Netherlands—where the NATO resolution was accepted only with all kinds of "ifs" and "buts"—but throughout much of the Western camp. The governments of the alliance need strength and wisdom to resist the storms that still endanger the course of their security policies.

[Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich] Genscher put it in very hopeful terms: "Now the Soviet Union can no longer influence our decision." But it will try, because knowledge of the extent of the Soviet arms build-up is by no means widespread. On the one hand, German chancellor [Helmut] Schmidt can rejoice that Carter is finally prepared to take on the leadership that Schmidt often found so regretfully lacking. On the other hand, however, Schmidt has to consider that his own leadership role within the SPD will not become any easier if America adopts a policy that in many ways represents a *de facto*, if not verbal, departure from the previous concept of détente.

But what is the reality? According to the security white paper of the Federal Republic, which is based on a cautious estimate, the Soviet Union possesses 1,370 weapons systems of the kind that threaten Europe, but so far only a total of 386 nuclear weapons of the type that the United States, Britain, and France have deployed in Europe. However, sweeping figures do not adequately establish the relative strength of the weapons, because they do not reflect the qualitative or quantitative changes that have occurred in the potential firepower of the East with the introduction of the SS-20 missiles and the Backfire bombers.

The West's efforts to reestablish the balance is thus rather late in coming but probably still soon enough. If, starting in 1983, the Americans want to introduce a total of 572 intermediate-range nuclear weapons—namely, 464 Tomahawk Cruise missiles and 108 Pershing II XR ballistic missiles—into the alliance, then, in view of the Soviet arsenal, they are executing a rather modest plan, which will be linked, moreover, to the removal of 1,000 nuclear warheads.

If the European members of NATO had withheld their consent, then the American partners in the pact

would have been more or less relieved of all responsibility for deterrence, and the Soviet adversaries would have had a chance to successfully intimidate NATO states. America's nuclear guarantee for Europe presumes that the leading power can deploy nuclear weapons that satisfy the strategy of "flexible response." In case of emergency, the community cannot expect that the United States will take giant steps toward escalation, which would lead to a premature total [nuclear] exchange with the Soviet Union in the battle for our continent. In its own interest, this community must ensure that its strongest member has developed an ability to escalate in small steps that correspond with the requirements of the strategy. Militarily and politically, this will broaden and deepen its ties with our continent, and consequently increase the credibility of its guarantee of protection.

This insight comes thanks to energetic planning in London and Bonn; Rome joined in with an encouragingly firm stance. Washington intends to increase considerably its commitment to the security of the West in order to meet the challenge of the East. Of course, it is making its contribution to the alliance dependent on what the NATO partners do to defy nuclear and conventional pressure from Moscow. Will the Allies comply with the package deal and increase their respective military budgets; and will it not happen again that, as in the German budget, the increase of three percent in real terms is subsequently relativized?

All in all, U.S. Secretary of State [Cyrus] Vance does not seem to have left the NATO meeting with a bad impression. He indicated that the Dutch go-it-alone approach could be dealt with, and he seemed to regard Belgium's conditional approval as a "oui," as did the Belgian press the next day.

President Carter's speech demonstrates that words are being backed by action The Soviet arms build-up under the banner of "détente" convinced him. His program provides for an annual increase in the military budget of a real 4.5 percent for five years. Washington has changed its tune. NATO should understand the signs of the times, prove its solidarity, and seal the cracks in the ranks of the Allies as soon as possible. The Soviets have influence, but so does America—thank God—to an incomparably greater extent.

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