

**ALLIANCES, THE BALANCE OF POWER,
AND AMERICAN NATIONAL INTERESTS***

by

Clinton H. Whitehurst, Jr.*

Emeritus Professor of Management and Economics

**Clemson University,
Clemson, South Carolina**

1998

**THE
STROM THURMOND
INSTITUTE**



ALLIANCES, THE BALANCE OF POWER, AND AMERICAN NATIONAL INTERESTS*

**By Professor Clinton H. Whitehurst, Jr.
1998**

It has been a good and successful partnership-but it's now time for the United States to leave NATO. The Cold War is over. There is now only one military and economic superpower-the United States, a nation with global interests. The security and economic viability of Western Europe is one of those interests-but only one.

The 1995 debate over sending a large American force into Bosnia-Herzegovina (as part of a NATO peacekeeping force) has come and gone, yet the question of what role NATO should play in the affairs of Europe, and what role the United States should play in NATO, is far from settled. If anything, the issue is more obscure than ever.(1)

While granting that 20,000 U.S. troops were deployed to Bosnia in an expeditious manner and that five months into their planned year long stay, American casualties have been minimal, this exercise in the use of military force has still not convinced a majority of Americans that United States involvement was necessary and that the \$2 billion plus cost of the deployment was a prudent use of taxpayer dollars.

Stripped of all subtleties, the question for most Americans is: How did the United States get involved in what is perceived as an essentially European conflict, one not contemplated or planned for when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created in 1949? The follow-on questions, however, are even more important. Is the Bosnia deployment a precedent for future commitments of American military power? Is it in the best interest of the United States to be tightly bound to a regional alliance, howbeit a very powerful one, in a world where America's national interests are global and generally changing? In a world where balance of power diplomacy is probably the best alternative to the United States becoming the world's policeman?

NATO

By 1949, the United States and the countries of Western Europe realized that rebuilding Europe economically would not in itself be sufficient to deter Soviet expansion westward. Thus was born a military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, whose chief purpose was to deter a Soviet attack on Western Europe. The operative clause in the agreement was that an attack on one member was an attack on all. On April 4, 1949, 12 nations signed on: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. France formally withdrew from the alliance in 1965; Greece and Turkey were added in 1952, West Germany in 1954 and Spain in 1982.(2) American steadfastness to the alliance concept, together with its nuclear arsenal, kept the peace in Europe until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

With the end of the Soviet threat, NATO became an organization in search of a mission. If NATO was to continue, its mission had to be redefined. But redefined to do what? To prevent what? The American interest in keeping NATO was straightforward-to maintain a major presence in Europe at a time when the 12 nation European Community was increasingly taking positions at odds with American political and economic objectives.

The European view of the role of the United States in Europe (and the world) was that as long as the United States continued to proclaim it was the only remaining military and economic superpower, then let it act out the part, a view which quickly led to the perception that unless the United States acted (in one crisis or another) nothing would happen. This, of course, begs the question of what should happen .

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a newly created country that was once part of the former Yugoslavia. Between 1993-95, its two main ethnic groups-Serbs and Muslims-fought a bitter and ruthless civil war, a war which spilled over into neighboring Croatia, and one that could easily involve several other countries.(3)

The conflict, however, went far beyond the accepted bounds of warfare. Serb forces were accused of atrocities that rivaled those of Hitler's Germany. And as more atrocities were documented, scores of Serb leaders were indicted for war crimes by an international tribunal. Casualties on all sides, both civilian and military, numbered in the hundreds of thousands. And like the Viet Nam War of a generation ago, it was a conflict where the suffering (in color) was there for all to see on worldwide television. The word from Western capitals was-the conflict must end.(4)

Into this boiling pool of hate and rage stepped the United Nations, the world agency charged with promoting peace, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the world's strongest military alliance. While world opinion expected and supported UN efforts to mediate the conflict, the role of NATO and the United States as NATO's leader, was contentious from the beginning.

The first two and one half years of fighting was heavily in favor of the Bosnian Serbs. Over half of Bosnia-Herzegovina was controlled by Serb forces as well as parts of Croatia. In the latter half of 1995, however, the war turned against the Serbs with the result that diplomats saw an opportunity for a negotiated peace. The agreement that was reached called for a NATO ground force of 60,000 troops to act as peacekeepers. President Clinton pledged that 20,000 heavily armed American combat units would be part of this contingent, and in December of 1995 delivered on that commitment.

BEYOND BOSNIA

The immediate question is: Can the United States continue to guarantee the security of Western Europe, which is in its own interest, but not become involved in local European conflicts?

A United States role in a redefined NATO has not been without proposed options and attendant rationalizations. One widely discussed option is for the United States to remain in NATO, but with a clear understanding of when American forces will and will not be used. The option anticipates U.S. forces remaining in Europe with NATO forces under an American commander as in the present case.(5)

A second option, and the one suggested in this paper, is for the United States to withdraw from NATO after giving the required one year notice. During the one year grace period, NATO's European members would form a NATO-like military alliance, one with which the United States would conclude a mutual security pact. Canada and Iceland, and perhaps Turkey, might opt to reach mutual security arrangements with the United States on a bilateral basis. It would be their choice to make.

There are a number of advantages to such an arrangement.

- A continuing guarantee by the United States to come to Western Europe's assistance should an outside threat to its security arise;
- Expanding membership in a European security organization, minus the United States, would be viewed by Russia as less threatening to its territorial integrity;
- More freedom of action for the United States to negotiate mutual security agreements with non-Western European nations, including Russia;
- Providing humanitarian assistance when called upon would be politically much easier when there was little possibility of being involved in local conflicts, not only in Europe but worldwide; and
- Development of a model for guaranteeing the security of regional groups of friendly countries without the risk of becoming the world's policeman.

Of the advantages cited should the United States formally withdraw from NATO, the one with the most far reaching global implications is greater American flexibility to conclude mutually beneficial security arrangements with other nations, particularly to enter into balance of power arrangements.

BEYOND EUROPE: THE BALANCE OF POWER CONCEPT

Briefly stated, the United States simply does not have the capability (within foreseeable defense budgets) to maintain a 100,000 man presence in every area of the world where it has paramount national interests.(6) And even should it be willing to make such a commitment, the presence of American forces in friendly countries is always contentious and will likely become more so.(7)

If large scale deployment of U.S. forces is ruled out-what strategies exist to insure American interests worldwide are not only given due consideration, but also backed up by military force?

The balance of power concept implies the existence of at least three players (nations or alliances) of approximately equal military strength. There must be actual or potential conflict (competitive) situations wherein the nations or alliances have conflicting objectives, long or short term, that is, objectives that are contrary to the national interest(s) of the other players. The nation or alliance exercising the balance of power achieves its ends by diplomatically and/or militarily supporting the weaker of the two remaining players in a conflict situation. Its weight, together with that of the weaker player, is sufficient to deter the strong player from any course of action inimical to the balance of power nation. The last requirement in the practice of balance of power politics is a nation's willingness to change sides as the situation dictates. As it has been said before-"nations do not have perpetual allies, but only perpetual interests." The classic example of the successful application of the balance of power concept was that of Great Britain in the 19th century. British policy was to insure that there was no dominant power on the European continent. The policy was, by and large, a success. The result of the policy became generally known as Pax Britannica.

In the early years of the Cold War (1947-91), the People's Republic of China (PRC) was allied with the Soviet Union and its East European allies. It was logical, if not mandatory. Both the PRC and the Soviet Union actively supported North Korea in the Korean War. Moreover, in the early 1950s the nuclear power

advantage lay with the United States. Having the PRC in its corner mandated that the United States divide its attention and resources between Asia and Western Europe. In the 1970s the PRC was courted by the United States to offset an imbalance of conventional forces in Europe. In both cases, while the PRC was the weaker third party, at a given point in time its military capability tended to even out the balance of power between the two major alliances-NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

In 1996, there are three, stand alone, first rank military powers in the world-the United States, Russia and the People's Republic of China. The PRC can no longer be considered the weaker of the three nations. Each has the capability to inflict unacceptable damage on the other by use of intercontinental ballistic missiles carrying atomic or chemical/biological warheads.(8)

In Europe, the trend is toward a rough military balance between Western European nations on one side and Russia on the other. Both sides have adequate or more than adequate atomic arsenals. And although Russia still has a significant preponderance of nuclear and conventional forces when contrasted with Western Europe, the loss of its Eastern European allies as jumping off points for a surprise attack on the West, makes such an attack highly problematic. In short, a strictly West European alliance has the potential to stand toe to toe with Russia should a major dispute between the two sides ever arise.(9) And with the United States as a third party guarantor of Western European security, the likelihood of such a dispute developing into a conflict situation is quite remote.

AMERICAN INTERESTS IN EAST ASIA

If it is granted that a rough balance of power can exist in Europe without the presence of 100,000+ American troops, can the same be said in East Asia?

First, who are the players, that is, the major powers with national interests in the region? By any definition, they are the People's Republic of China, Russia, Japan and the United States. In terms of economic strength, the United States and Japan are in a class of their own. In terms of military power, absent nuclear weapons, it is another matter. The People's Republic of China stands alone.

The second question is: what are the intentions of the PRC? And equally important-have its long term goals, and methods of achieving these goals, changed over time. Is there a consistent pattern? If a track record means anything, the answer is an emphatic "yes." The PRC was, and still is, the bully of East Asia, not unlike Hitler's Germany of the mid and late 1930s. Witness its provoked border wars with India, Vietnam, and the former Soviet Union. Its entry in the Korean War on the side of North Korea, an aggressor nation by any standard. The ruthless suppression of Tibet, the PRC's unilateral claims to the Spratley Islands, the Tiananmen Square massacre, and its overall human rights record. Add to this the death and destruction as a result of Communist Party policies in the 1950s and 1960s-The Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the Hundred Flowers Campaign, and the well documented atrocities of the Red Guards. No less an apologist for PRC actions than former President Richard Nixon estimated the slaughter to be in the millions.(10) Other sources put the figure in the tens of millions.

In 1996, the government is the same, only the rulers are different. Rulers which authorized one of the world's largest nuclear tests in 1993 and had no hesitation in attempting to intimidate the Republic of China on Taiwan by massive military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in March of 1996. Those driving PRC policy in 1996 are the hard liners in the Communist Party and the country's military leadership. Neither group is an advocate of peaceful co-existence with its East Asia neighbors or a willingness to arbitrate disputes. In 1996, there is no way the United States and its nominal allies in East Asia can match PRC conventional land forces. And not to be neglected is the PRC drive to create a blue water navy.

Given the above, what option does the United States have to insure its national interests in the region? Two are feasible. The first is to encourage Japan to rebuild its military-not in incremental stages as is now the case, but a declared buildup of the first order. However, given the assured hostile reaction to such a buildup, not only by the PRC but most of the nations in East Asia, together with a significant domestic opposition, such an option coming to fruition is no better than a ten to one wager.

The second option is a mutual security treaty between Russia, Japan and the United States. The salient portion of such an agreement would be a guarantee of the political and territorial integrity of the nations of East Asia. Plain and simple it is a balance of power option but one that would be "dead on arrival" if the United States remains NATO's leader.

What are the odds for this option coming about? Long indeed until Japan and Russia settle the Kuril Islands dispute.(11) Unless the American State Department is conducting a deep cover diplomatic operation, the Kuril Islands issue is being treated with a benign neglect. Initial hostility to a tripartite Japan, Russia, United States agreement could also be expected from Western European nations, a hostility, however, that could be overcome by a firm and unequivocal American commitment to its achievement.

Given a Kuril Islands settlement Japan's benefit from a mutual security pact is self evident. Two benefits are important. First, the passion surrounding the issue of accelerating a military buildup would be dampened. Second, its security would not be tied to a single military superpower-but rather two. A secondary benefit would be a friendlier climate for Japanese investment in Russia East Asia.

What benefit would Russia derive from such a pact? The major, and perhaps only benefit, would be a guarantee of its Asian (Russia East Asia) territorial integrity. It is of only passing interest that Russia is selling high tech weapons to the PRC, financing nuclear reactors, and exchanging high level visits between heads of state. At best, such actions provide for only a short term détente. In the not so long run, Russia must come to grips with the reality that Russia East Asia is a prize within reach of the People's Republic of China. The growing population of China (and where to put them), even with its rigid birth control policies, will be a major problem for PRC leaders in the early part of the 21st century. In 1996, there are no more than three million Russians on its side of the present border. They face upward of 150 million Chinese living in northern China. Equally important is the fact that Siberia is a veritable "treasure house" of natural resources; resources that the PRC would be more than willing to risk a conflict to obtain.

CONCLUSION

The United States cannot and should not be responsible for keeping world order. However, that it remain a major player in world events goes without saying. One approach is to maintain a military capability that would be superior to any likely combination of challengers, together with a willingness to use such a force when necessary. While such an option has its appeal, the cost in dollars makes it prohibitive. And not to mention the opposition of a large and vocal segment of the American electorate. The second option is to exercise American influence by entering into regional security agreements, such as those proposed for Europe and East Asia. Others could be negotiated as circumstances warranted.

NOTES

1. Almost from the beginning NATO's mission in Bosnia was controversial. Human rights groups wanted NATO military forces to assist in investigating alleged war crimes. The original mission statement precluded such activity but was later expanded to include this type of assistance. However, NATO forces are not tasked with seeking out and/or "arresting" alleged war criminals. Discussions have also taken place with respect to extending the present one year limit for keeping NATO (U.S.) forces in Bosnia.
2. France is a major contributor to the 60,000 man international peacekeeping force in Bosnia-Herzegovina. While France is not technically a member of NATO, its foreign policy historically has generally supported NATO objectives. Militarily there is also close cooperation between France and NATO.
3. In the first two years of the conflict, Serbia actively supported the Bosnia Serbs. In 1995, Iran was identified as a nation providing military training and supplies to Bosnian Muslim forces.
4. Several Croat and Muslim military commanders have also been indicted for war crimes. By far, however, the great majority of atrocities (war crimes) are attributed to Bosnia-Serb military and para-military forces.
5. A February 7, 1996 Heritage Foundation publication "Getting NATO Back to Basics," cited three guidelines to achieve this goal

(1) America's principal military role would be to serve NATO's core mission-to protect NATO member states from a major power threat.

(2) The United States would make a unique contribution to any military operation-not duplicate the capabilities of European NATO members.

(3) the United States forces contribution would be decisive (in terms of numbers of American combat forces) with respect to the core mission of the alliance.

One argument of those favoring a continued 100,000 man U.S. military presence in Europe (NATO) cite the possibility that a hard line Russian government at some time in the future might attempt to bring eastern European nations back into its sphere of influence, peaceably or otherwise.

As a possibility this cannot be denied. The question, however, is "how long" must the United States commit its forces in Europe in anticipation of a possible Russian aggressive move against Western Europe? Till the year 2000, 2025, 2050 . . .? As argued in this paper, the greatest threat to Russian territorial integrity is not in Europe but Asia. Accepting this, it is hardly likely that Russia would confront the West in Europe and thus "invite" the People's Republic of China to annex large chunks of Russian Asia.

6. The United States has approximately 30,000+ military personnel in South Korea and some 47,000 in Japan.
7. Vehement protests by local citizens arising from the rape of an Okinawa girl by three U.S. servicemen in 1995 is a case in point. The protests and subsequent trial of the defendants received worldwide publicity.
8. Whether People's Republic of China missiles have the range and accuracy to hit U.S. West coast targets is an open question. What is not in dispute is that such a capability is inevitable.
9. In evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of a stand-alone West European military alliance vs. Russia, the economic strength of Western Europe is a high card indeed, i.e., Western Europe's ability to make large investments in Russia and to influence international credits and guarantees to Russia, e.g., the World Bank.

10. See Richard Nixon's *In the Arena* (p. 329) and *The Real War* (pp. 134 and 142).

11. The dispute is over the Kuril Islands (four islands located north of Hokkaido, one of Japan's home islands) which were occupied by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. The total disputed area is less than 2,000 square miles. Unfortunately, territory is a secondary consideration when contrasted with national pride and prestige.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clinton H. Whitehurst, Jr., received his B.Sc. in International Affairs and M.A. in Economics from the Florida State University in 1957 and 1958 respectively. His Ph. D. was from the University of Virginia in 1962. Post doctoral study (1970) was in Defense and Strategic Studies at Edinburgh University (Scotland). In 1972 he received a certificate in National Security Management from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and in 1976 was awarded the U. S. General Accounting Office's Certificate of Merit for "Identifying and reporting very serious shortcomings in the sealift readiness posture of the United States." In 1981, he was a member of the Reagan administration's Federal Maritime Commission transition team. And in 1991 received the National Defense Transportation Association's Educators Distinguished Service Award.

Professor Whitehurst joined the U.S. Maritime Service in August of 1944. In 1950 he received his commission in the U.S. Maritime Service. And in 1957 received a commission in the U.S. Naval Reserve where he served in the Ready Reserve until 1972.

Following his retirement from Clemson University as Professor of Management and Economics, he was a Visiting Research Scholar at the National Chiao Tung University in Taiwan, 1988-89 and 1991-92. While in the Republic of China on Taiwan, he lectured at the Chinese Naval Academy and the National Defense University. In 1994 he was a Visiting Professor at the Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Australia. His task at Curtin was to develop an academic program in the area of transportation and logistics.

At present, Professor Whitehurst is an Adjunct Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C. and a Senior Fellow at the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina.

*Several of the concepts/positions put forward in this working paper were included in "U.S. should withdraw from NATO" an op-ed published by the Anderson (SC) Independent-Mail on November 5, 1995. The newspaper makes no claim of copyright over articles appearing on its editorial or op-ed pages.