Naval War College Review

Volume 37
Number 6 *November-December*

Article 7

1984

Crisis and Consensus in the West: The Boundaries of Shared Interests

Kenneth Hunt

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review

Recommended Citation

Hunt, Kenneth (1984) "Crisis and Consensus in the West: The Boundaries of Shared Interests," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 37 : No. 6 , Article 7.
Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol37/iss6/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Crisis and Consensus in the West
The Boundaries of Shared Interests

Kenneth Hunt

The West has faced and will surely face in the future crises which call for rapid political or military responses. Some of these may have been anticipated and prepared for by allied consultation and coordinated planning. Some may arise for which responses are less well prepared, perhaps because there was insufficient agreement about them, even a reluctance to consider them in detail beforehand for one reason or another. Some, of course, may take an unexpected shape or come out of the blue. Examples of all of these come readily to mind.

There have been crises that have affecred the entire international community, such as the events in Czechoslovakia or Poland. Others have been regarded as more in the nature of national problems, or were the result of national policies that did not command an allied cousensus. The actions of France in Algeria or Portugal in Africa divided allies, as more recently did those of Britain in the Falklands or of the United States in Grenada and Central America.

Nations are unlikely to see crises from quite the same perspectives: their histories, geography and, above all, their interests may also be different. But the concept of interests is a very broad one and rather rubbery. It can encompass anything from the preservation of a political system or way of life to the smallest of economic stakes. Clearly, interests must be important to provoke crisis and vital, or something approaching it, to provoke war; but in both cases their degree of importance ought to be plain to the adversary too, if there is not to be miscalculation or if crises are to be properly managed. In passing, it might be noted that the description vital may be used somewhat indiscriminately: it was, for example, said not long ago that Lebanon was a vital interest for the United States; important for American foreign policy it may have been but that it was vital, is open to argument.

Security interests will obviously figure prominently in defining crises or deciding on responses to them. But even here, leaving aside the threat of direct attack or of broad concerns like the freedom of the seas, the action of an

Brigadier Kenneth Hunt (Ret.) is a leading British scholar in security studies, tactics, and world affairs; he was formerly deputy director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

opponent can vary from the undesirable to the unacceptable. For the West, a Soviet presence in the Arabian Sea or in Ethiopia is undesirable but a Soviet interdiction of Gulf oil would be unacceptable. And while all may agree that Soviet expansion ought to be contained, it may be much less easy to agree on where and how the line should be drawn.

Perhaps even more difficult is the concept of political interests. National interests may be defined in political, even ideological terms according to the view of the government in office. A left or liberal leaning administration can look at international relations or crises from a particular viewpoint, maybe making moral judgments where the activities of socialist or authoritarian regimes are involved, while more conservative leaders may show opposing tendencies or be more "realistic." So while all may share the unexceptionable wish to support friendly governments, particularly those important in various parts of the world, there might not be ready agreement on which these are. There can be reservations even about the governments of allies: some Nato countries have gone through marked, almost extreme shifts of political color. The inconsistencies of policy that democratic changes may bring can mean that national interests and purposes are suddenly redefined, an upsetting process for an alliance, particularly if the changes are in Washington.

So it will not suffice merely to talk of interests in a general way even where they concern security; it is necessary to be more specific both as regards countries and political circumstances. Accordingly this paper will look at a range of possible crisis areas to see where interests may or may not be shared, what those interests might be and the value that nations might place upon them. This detailed approach may provide a better vehicle for the consideration of responses.

For ease of analysis, crises will be discussed under three broad headings:

- those arising within the Nato boundaries,
- those falling outside it but which concern the West as a whole or in part,
- and those which may be regarded as primarily national problems, even if the nation at the center of them feels that others should be concerned too.

These categories are not used to press problems into a particular mold but only for purposes of examination.

Alliance Contingencies

All the Nato countries share a common interest in deterring war and in defending Nato territory if deterrence should fail. Strategies are in force, military preparations made, physical commitments visibly exist. Yet, within this broad consensus on the vital issue of security, there are national concerns which may govern the approach towards crises—certainly those where the danger of major war may not be the immediate fear or the issue.

In the Scandinavian countries there is the well-known view that the special nature of the Nordic balance—Denmark, Iceland and Norway within Nato, Sweden in traditional neutrality and Finland in an aligned neo-neutrality[1]—should be taken into account. This means that the management of any crisis in the North should, as far as possible, rest firmly in Scandinavian hands. These Nordic sensitivities are well understood in the Alliance, as is their political value, yet the connected fact that there are no allied troops on Norwegian or Danish soil does place constraints on allied operations, and reinforcement in the North and in the East Atlantic. In major crisis some clash of allied interests and priorities cannot be entirely ruled out.

In the South there is the bitter dispute between Greece and Turkey. This handicaps allied defense and could complicate crisis responses for which joint agreement by Greece and Turkey to desirable allied steps is by no means guaranteed. The dispute spills over into the American domestic debate and so into Congress, which has made it harder still to keep the fabric of allied defense intact and strong.

In the Center the French view of the national interest puts independence of policy foremost and so places some political reservations on France's military commitment to the Alliance. West Germany has a national concern to improve relations with East Germany and with Central Europe, and so feels a need for reasonable relations with Moscow. Throughout Western Europe the view is held that the Alliance sorely needs a political strategy for living with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The United States is not of quite the same mind, seeming to see its own interests in a somewhat different approach towards Moscow. The absence of allied agreement makes it harder to coordinate responses to events such as those in Poland and has led to disputes over issues like the gas pipeline and grain deals. The special position of West Germany may be at the center of the problem but be this as it may, all the European allies have seen benefits from détente and wish to see it restored under the right conditions. The United States seems more conscious of the Soviet challenge worldwide and so of confrontation. Interests are thus perceived differently and responses to crises may not be the same.

But this should not be seen out of proportion. The Alliance commands deep support and the security link with the United States is regarded by all European governments as an overriding need, not least in West Germany. The point to be made is that in crises which do not appear to threaten war, there are differences of national perspective, probably inseparable from geographical location, that can stimulate transatlantic frictions or hesitations. Therefore, there is need for sensitive consultation if common policies are to be forged.

Out of Area Contingencies

There is a consensus within the Alliance that contingencies outside its boundaries should formally be handled outside its framework, though

consultations about them can go on within it or between members bilaterally. Any responses taken will be by allies, not the Alliance, though what responses and by which allies is another matter. There is a regrettable tendency in Europe—with honorable exceptions—to leave things to the Americans, despite the fact that some possible threats such as a denial of Gulf oil could affect Europe more than the United States.

The crises with the most serious implications for Nato allies seem likely to occur in the Middle East. There are threats to the West in parts of Africa that could have unwelcome political and strategic effects and an impact on economic interests. Further away, Soviet-supported activities by Vietnam in Indochina are recognized as hostile to local and Western interests in Southeast Asia and as such to be opposed or contained. Similarly, stability in the Korean Peninsula is seen as important but, from Europe, it is a problem largely to be faced by nations in the Western Pacific. European horizons are now more limited, as is European power, so crises nearer home have priority. For the United States, both interests and responsibilities are wider.

The Middle East. The problems in the Middle East are many but the most urgent are in the Gulf. The Arab-Israeli dispute, to which the Lebanon issue, despite its own complexities and causes has become linked, does not only produce tensions that surface throughout the Arab world, it also leads to some division of views between the United States and its allies. The reason is that the ties between the United States and Israel are much closer than those between Israel and Europe, and policies are accordingly affected.

In the Middle East as a whole, but particularly in the Gulf, Washington has tended to focus on a Soviet threat while Europeans see regional tensions as the more dangerons. One result is that American responses since the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine[2] have emphasized military measures to deter Soviet military expansion, while the Europeans see this as running the risk of neglecting, even endangering political and diplomatic attention to indigenous issues such as the Palestinian problem. This they regard as an important one, since it colors all thinking throughout the region and cannot be divorced from potential threats, internal or external. The United States, on the other hand, has appeared to regard the security of the Gulf as somehow separable from the wider problem of Middle East security. To some extent this is a valid view: for example, the threat by Iran to close the Straits of Hormuz is a discrete one, which could be met by military measures for which there is allied agreement and some support from Gulf states, but only in the right circumstances. But wider strategic threats to the region may be affected by alignments on which Arab-Israeli tensions have an impact. Put more simply, the Soviet Union and Iran can exploit the American identification with Israel in their relations with the Arab world or in subversive actions against Gulf regimes.

So what community of interests do the allies share? There is certainly a broad Western strategic interest in the region and a more narrowly economic one of access to oil. This is one which weighs more heavily for Europe, since it draws around 25 percent of its oil from the Gulf as compared with some 5 percent for the United States. The Japanese figure is even higher, at about 60 to 65 percent. American willingness to protect oil supplies would largely benefit its allies, but, also serves an American interest by protecting allied strength. It would simply not be in the strategic interests of the United States to see the economies of major allies threatened with strangulation. Not unreasonably, Washington might look for some contribution to Gulf defense or something else instead.

There could, of course, be more than one threat to oil supplies: closure of the Gulf to tankers through Iranian or Iraqi activities, Soviet military action, and instability in the producing states. The most immediate threat arises from continued fighting between Iraq and Iran. There is a general wish to see the war ended. It is seen as brutal and pointless, as wars are apt to be by states not engaged in them. But no Western or Gulf state, or indeed the Soviet Union, wants Iran to win, since its military victory or predominance would bring heightened tension to the region and further attempts at exporting the revolutiou or militant Islam. Allied interests might best be served by a speedy ending to the war with neither side dominant. Most Western countries are keeping a political distance from the belligerents but France is supplying weapons to Iraq.

Since the mid-1970s France has taken the view that some Western influence in Iraq was important, complementing that of the United States in Iran at that time. That particular initiative, which also served France's commercial interests, was probably welcome to the United States but the recent supply of Etendard aircraft and Exocet missiles may not have been. Yet containment of Iran does seem to be a common interest, so while the French means of assisting Iraq may have been frowned upon, the ends of France and the United States are the same.[3] Many allies are of course supplying weapons and advisors to Gulf states, recognizing that the first line of security is that these states should be able to deal with regional threats, such as from Iran, and deal with internal problems too—though specialized help from outside, such as France gave at Mecca and Britain in Oman may be invaluable, perhaps essential.

There would surely be broad allied agreement that if Gulf states cannot defend themselves or their interests there should be military power ready to help them, if they want it. In the extreme case, and it is regarded in the region as the extreme, a threat of Soviet military action would call for the counterweight of the United States; no regional balance will alter this. Even to meet regional threats there may be no substitute for external assistance, given the very limited manpower of the Gulf states. Over time there will be virtue in trying to build a link between the Gulf and wider Arab security; the

states themselves would prefer this politically but it would be quite impractical at the moment with the Arab world divided as it is. For the time being, one element of Gulf security is underpinned by the implicit (and so acceptable) Western guarantee to the Gulf Cooperation Council, just as British assistance to Oman averted similar threats to neighboring regimes—quite apart from preventing the installation of a hostile presence on one shore of the Straits of Hormuz. More specifically, the US military presence in the Arabian Sea is there to deter other external threats to stability.

American preparations for possible military intervention are, however, on a scale designed to meet a Soviet threat rather than just regionally inspired contingencies, as shown by the forces that could be available to CentCom. Such a threat would not merely be to oil, serious enough, but to the whole strategic position in the South Asian region. Europeans have tended to regard Soviet military expansion as having a low probability, as have the regional states, seeing Soviet political expansion as much more likely, notably if events in Iran or Iraq offered opportunities. They are content that any Soviet military threat should be deterred by American readiness to act and raise the stakes, provided that military preparations for this are not of a kind that would aggravate regional and internal instabilities, because this would work against Western interests.

As has been said, they hold the view that Washington has been laying too much stress on military means and on the Soviet Union, at the expense of political action. To be sure, Moscow will exploit regional tensions where it can do so without too much risk, but it is not the source of them; the active threats are largely indigenous, multiple, often interactive, and perhaps internal and ambiguous. Many of the problems of the Gulf states are with each other, Iran being an obvious case in point. The Iranian revolution threatened Gulf stability at many levels. It led to the Iran-Iraq war, which was of course, in no way deterred by Western military preparations directed at Soviet threats, even though these preparations can help with connected or spillover contingencies such as ensuring that the Straits of Hormuz are kept open.

None of the above is to suggest that Europeans do not have a general interest in underpinning diplomacy by military force, though not all of them would see it as in their national interest to be directly involved. Many European Nato nations have very limited military resources, which they see as best employed at home; it is probably sensible for the Alliance, militarily and politically, to accept this. West Germany is closely committed to the Center and is best able to replace any military resources that might have to be diverted by other allies to areas outside Europe; there are also constitutional and so political problems involved in any deployment of German forces abroad. Scandinavian countries have shown a preference, and readiness, to work within United Nations auspices. But Britain and France and perhaps Italy accept that military force may have to play a part and have done so for a

long time in the Middle East, pre-dating any American concern and even interest in the Gulf. France's military presence in the Arabian Sea, often larger than that of the Soviet Union, is evidence of this, as has been the historical British presence in the Gulf and continued support for Oman. Both have been ready to take part in measures needed to deter a closure of the Straits or needed to reopen them.

Europeans make clear that any action, military or political, must be sensitive to local needs and feelings and be acceptable to the rulers. Though any military action would be in defense of Western interests it must also be seen to be in local interests too, or it will be unwelcome and handicapped. Loose talk of "seizing the oil" is positively harmful, as may be an insistence on East-West considerations to the exclusion of others. Above all, there should be no attempt to persuade regimes to bear more political weight than is good for them through overt links with outside powers, notably with the United States. The very diversity of the allies can be a strength here.

Europe may not add a great deal to the military component of security (and Japan none) but allied contribution to the political and economic elements of it, by reason of standpoints and interests that can be discernibly different from those of the United States, can be a help rather than the hindrance that it may sometimes appear in Washington. Allies do have some comparative advantage with individual Gulf states and their diplomacy can be more sensitive to Arab considerations than that of the United States, tied as it is so closely with Israel. They may thus be able to provide some political reassurance to complement the military strength which only the United States has in quantity. All, however, have to recognize that regional problems are deep-seated and not susceptible to quick solutions; Western strategy and diplomacy have to be for the *long haul* and must possess continuity, something that is not easy when administrations oscillate in their policies.

These policies cannot neglect the Arab-Israeli issue and here the close US links with Israel help define American interests just as the looser ones condition those of European states. The Soviet Union takes full advantage of the US alignment to further its relations with Arab states and the Western interest as a whole suffer.

It is undeniable that certain Western allies place weight on their ties with Arab countries. Italy, both as a Mediterranean country and one with traditional links with Libya is one, and Greece is another. Turkey's geographical position and Islamic background, together with its strong trading links with a number of Arab countries, is bound to be affected. Though attention has been drawn to the strategic value of Turkish airfields by reason of their proximity to the head of the Gulf,[4] their use by Western forces in non-Nato contingencies would depend on Ankara's view of its own interests at the time; they would obviously be heavily influenced by Arab views towards military action.

Many European countries depend on Arab oil and their policies must take these interests into account. Japan is similarly affected. The allies have, however, little ability to affect the outcome of the Arab-Israeli dispute, such influence as there is over Israel being in the hands of the United States. They ought to do what they can to see that Washington continues to search for some resolution of the issue, taking any initiatives themselves that may provide momentum or help with a concerted approach. But they have to work, in their own interests, to persuade the Arabs as well, who must put their own house in order if negotiations are ever to have any chance of success, however limited.

Stability in Lebanon is a shared aim, as shown by the way that French, Italian and British forces were deployed alongside those of the United States. The issues are bedeviled nor only by community strife and complexities, but by Syrian-Israeli tensions and the all-pervading Palestinian problem. The overt strategic link between the United States and Israel now inhibits the formation of an allied policy, as may traditional French interests. New crises may accentuare the differences but depending on the nature and gravity of the threat, could act ro submerge them.

Africa. There are again traditional European links with Africa which have led to economic and political interests: France in Francophone West Africa and in the Horn; Portugal in its former territories; Britain in West, Southern and East Africa. The United States has interests too, and much economic involvement. Virtually all allies are dependent to some extent on strategic raw materials from Africa.

On rhe whole, allied interests in Africa are shared. Soviet attempts at replacing Western influence or gaining strategic positions are a clear threat, as are the activities of Soviet proxies or Libya. Apartheid is universally condemned. Various allies take the lead in different parts of the Continent—examples are France in Chad and Britain in Zimbabwe, and each have generally received support for their policies. There has been a joint effort over Namibia. Policies towards South Africa could produce divergence, with the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries markedly more hostile to Pretoria than are some of the larger countries. This is nor entirely a matter of economic interests but more of political attitudes, which responses in a crisis would have to take into account.

If black African states concert their policies effectively they could exert leverage on those countries that have trade and other links with them. Black voting strength in the United States may prove an important influence over time. There is, however, likely to be continuing turbulence within black African states as they try to find the forms of government that best suit them, or as factions compete for power. Given this situation it will be a Western interest not to become involved, but crises may bring the risk of external

manipulation, as for example by Libya. A formula for dealing with such situations may be to try to concert responses among those allies most immediately affected, and not look for wider agreement or associate others with them where this is not essential. In other words, a temporary grouping for a specific purpose may be sensible.

South Asia. When the invasion of Afghanistan took place the American reaction was prompt and strong but Washington had to work hard to get some of its allies to lend full support for its policies. One underlying issue was whether tensions in that part of the world should be allowed to affect relations with the Soviet Union elsewhere, in West Germany for example. It was argued by some that Afghanistan had long been a Soviet sphere of influence, with which the West had shown no particular concern; while the invasion was to be condemned (as were the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia) it should not be allowed to result in the West hurting its own interests as well, which it did not long do in the case of Czechoslovakia. The clash of interest was thus not about the invasion but about the impact of sanctions against the Soviet Union as a result of it. The strategic threat to the West represented by the new Soviet bases in Afghanistan was recognized clearly by the United States and perhaps by Britain and France, but given less importance by some other allies.

This example of Afghanistan is quoted to highlight the different interests that allies may have where political and economic links with the Soviet Union are concerned. These are seen as more important or desirable in Europe and Japan than they are in the United States. Where proposed responses to future crises take similar shape like frictions may recur, depending of course on the nature of other stakes. Afghanistan was "a far-away country" whose fate did not weigh too heavily, it seems, in some national considerations. Crises nearer home might have different patterns.

A crisis in Pakistan caused by iuternal upheaval would seem unlikely to produce divergent allied views, given the general Western interest in the strategic position of that country. But some allies might not want to be actively involved in measures to provide support for an authoritarian regime, or possibly for other reasons. Obviously it would be very difficult to do much about internal instabilities in a country going through such a critical period, except for support to an established government. If Soviet manipulation were in evidence there would most likely be a consensus on the need for some action, which is best left to those allies willing and able to take it, with others assenting or not dissenting. However, there will always be the problem that any assistance given to Pakistan may be looked on with disfavor by India, with which relations are also important. Europeans have paid more attention to this concern than has the United States. It may be in the common interest that they should continue to do so.

East Asia. Allied interests in Southeast Asia—both political and economic—are long-established and widespread, with the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand having some treaty commitments there. Vietnamese actions in the region and Soviet support for them are seen as both destabilizing and antagonistic and there is a shared interest in countering them. There will be shades of opinion as how best to do this, but the views of the ASEAN states on appropriate responses will carry great weight. The policies and actions of China will certainly have to be taken into account as well. A crisis could arise through the Soviet Union responding to Chinese actions against Vietnam, though it has refrained so far. This would not be a direct Western problem if it happened, but it could call for precautionary moves by the United States, in which case consultation with ASEAN and Japan would be highly desirable. There is among all the Pacific basin states a shared interest in regional stability, even if they carry no responsibility for preserving it.

In Northeast Asia, the Korean Peninsula is the most likely arena for crisis. The United States would be immediately and directly drawn in through its ties with and military presence in the South, but Japan would also be intimately concerned since US forces in Korea would have to be supported from US bases in Japan. The circumstances of the crisis, as for example whether or not it resulted from unambiguous actions by the North, would clearly affect allied reactions to it, but political support for the integrity of the South should be readily forthcoming.

The United States would have to attempt crisis management with China and the Soviet Union, depending on their attitude to events, and would have to consult with Japan. While the Japanese government will not want to talk any more than it has to about Korean contingencies, there is official understanding of rhe need of the United Stares to use the bases. Japanese public support for this would seem more likely than not if the crisis were plainly the result of actions by the North. If the circumstances were not so clear, such support might be more conditional, but it has always appeared probable that the shock of actual hostilities in the Peninsula would blow away some of the mists that can surround Japanese domestic attitudes towards national security issues.

National Problems

Membership of an alliance concluded for one shared purpose has never prevented allies from differing on others. Few countries gave much support to the United States over Vietnam or Grenada; Britain had problems with some allies over Argentina; the United Stares hardly helped Britain and France over Suez or indeed Britain over the Gulf. That is not to say that such support should have been forthcoming, but only that some foreign policy issues found allies on different sides.

Some problems and their attendant crisis may result from the policies of one country that have no particular significance for any other. Attitudes towards them can therefore be decided upon on their merits or, if nothing else is at stake, according to any patterns of alliance or friendship that may exist. If, for example, there were to be a crisis between Spain and Morocco over the Spanish North African enclaves, it is far from evident that all Nato allies would support the Spanish case. If Spain's claim to Gibraltar rests on ir being part of the Spanish mainland, the ownership of Ceuta and Melilla, in Morocco, would seem to be indifferently grounded. But there could be other considerations. If a transfer of Ceuta from Spanish ownership risked it falling into hands hostile to the allies, their stance might be affected; the United States has military links with Spain that it might not wish to prejudice by a lack of support; Spain might put its attitude towards Nato membership at stake; Britain would be mindful of the Gibraltar problem. So interests are not only varied but could also vary with circumstances. The only consensus available might be on attempts to defuse the issue.

The invasion of the Falklands by Argentina found Spain and Britain on opposite sides politically and some other Western nations lukewarm on the issue. Britain certainly looked to its allies to give support and received it in full measure from Commonwealth countries and from the United States, despite the political costs in Latin America that Washington risked. But London could not rally everyone behind the principle that nations should not be given support when attempting to settle political disputes by force, others weighed their political, economic or cultural ties with Latin America more heavily or maybe saw the sovereignty issue much as Argentina saw it. So there was no overwhelming perception of shared interest among all Western nations. The East-West dimension was virtually absent apart from some early talk of Soviet help for Argentina, and the strategic importance of the islands did not provide a compelling case.

Events in Central America represent a problem on an altogether different scale and one which might not seem to fall necessarily under the heading of a national problem. Grenada and Belize provide interesting footnotes to it.

US policies in Central America are not easy for its allies or perhaps for many Americans to understand. Nor is there any ready acceptance that the problems there directly affect them in any important way; US interests and stakes are clearly very much larger. Soviet expansion into that region would, of course, be unwelcome; the Cuban missile crisis dramatized this in terms that the Nato allies could see and accept with no difficulty. But the problems of the region now tend to be seen by Europeans and others not as Soviet-inspired but as the result of long-standing political, social and economic inequities that need political and economic rather than military remedies. Only if these are taken will the ground become less fertile than it is for communist exploitation.[5]

This view, simplified for purposes of argument, does not address the problem of what should be done about local regimes determined to spread their political views to neighboring states, by violent means if necessary. It does not allow for the position of Britain, which has for some years kept military forces in Belize to defend that former colony, now independent, from the claims of Guatemala, a defense still judged to be necessary. It would be conceded that state-sponsored subversion is a problem, but probably not one for which the solution is outside military intervention, from whatever quarter; rather should it be left to regional auspices, such as those of the Contadora Group, to try to promote peaceful change and encourage some form of moving equilibrium.

Thus far the United States has certainly not managed to persuade its allies, or even Congress for that matter, that the policies it has been following are the right ones or likely to succeed. The mining of Nicaraguan ports has not helped, indeed it has brought France openly into opposition—though it should be noted that this is also useful for domestic reasons, enabling the French government to proclaim its socialist credentials while under criticism for pursuing somewhat conservative economic policies. There is feeling that the Soviet and Cuban threats are being exaggerated and that, as with the Middle East, problems are being pressed into an East-West mold when their causes lie elsewhere. Not everyone would agree with this; some who were opposed in principle to US action in Grenada were less so in practice, on the grounds that there were certainly some Cubans there, who could in time have established an unwelcome presence. On the other hand, the inference that Grenada fell within an American sphere of influence made allies living on the Soviet borders nervous of that principle. The successful action in Grenada was welcomed by the American public; yet it aroused mixed feelings in Europe.

So consensus on how to deal with crises in Central America and the Caribbean is probably not easily attainable and it will also be hard to demonstrate that it is or should be an allied problem. The Monroe Doctrine may be recollected. It would seem better that the United States should accept this as an American problem and not try to make the Alliance bear this particular weight, for which it was not designed. The Western Alliance should certainly be one for all seasons, including adversity, but not be expected to be for all purposes.

When Europeans and other allies of the United States do not find themselves able to share American views in various parts of the world, they may be pressed to do so as a test of alliance cohesion or wisdom or both. To rally round under such circumstances may be good alliance politics but if it is not also based on the politics of the issue concerned, it may do more harm than good in the end.

Yet if allies do not give assent they may feel they will put at risk, over time, the American support on which they rely for their security. This feeling may

not be well-grounded. It is a demonstrable American interest to help maintain the security of Europe and Japan even if allies do not appear as grateful for this as they should be, or do not pull their proper weight. One has to only conjure a world in which the United States no longer had a position in Europe or Japan to appreciate that the balance between the United States and the Soviet Union would have changed markedly for the worse. However, allies do get fearful and such fears can concentrate minds wonderfully. Thus interests elsewhere will have to be very important if disagreements about them are to be allowed to put the central security interest in jeopardy.

Allies must respect each other's interests and be ready to seek compromises where these are on less than vital issues. This may not be immediately helpful in times of crisis, but a search for compromise should follow when a quieter period is reached. Some such process went on after the events in the Middle East in 1978–1979, and is in train now over East-West policy. It is part of the problem of forging a consensus in a coalition. Of course, if there were full consultation and readiness to compromise before a crisis, difficulties might not arise and responses could command assent and be swift. But such is probably not in the nature of coalitions in crises.

Notes

1. See Erling Bjøl, *Nordic Security* (Adelphi Paper No. 181, London, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1983), p. 2.
2. State of the Union Address, 1980; *Department of State Bulletin 80*, no. 2035, February 1980, special section, pp. A-B.
3. I am indebted for this point to Dominique Moisi of the Institute Francais des Relations Internationales.
4. See Albert Wohlstetter, *Meeting the Threat in the Persian Gulf* (European American Institute for Security Research, Reprint Series RS-11-1, April 1981).
5. The article by Haynes Johnson, quoting Lyndon B. Johnson's testimony on the problems of Southeast Asia before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1961 and applying the remarks to Central America, mirrors this view (*International Herald Tribune*, 27 April 1984).