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F.J. West Jr.

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The Persian Gulf presents the most critical war-threatening conditions to the nations of Western Europe. The linkage between the Gulf and NATO is real but continues to be officially ignored. A mere extension of NATO boundaries would provide more exacerbation than solution to the difficult issue. A more coherent option, with changes structural and strategic, is suggested here.

NATO II: COMMON BOUNDARIES FOR COMMON INTERESTS

by

F.J. West, Jr.

NATO I. For 30 years, NATO has served the West remarkably well. Now it is time for a marked strategic change, especially as regards NATO naval forces. Although NATO has deep cultural, political and economic roots, in essence it is a military coalition designed to prevent Soviet aggression. NATO transformed a basic principle of American national security: prior to 1949, the military world view of the United States was to avoid European entanglements, to rely upon large oceans and a powerful Navy and to assist endangered European democracies only after war had begun; through NATO, the United States entered a permanent European "entanglement" in order to deter a third world war on the continent. Consequently, today most U.S. conventional forces are committed to NATO and the command relationships of SACEUR and SACLANC are Euro-American. Through NATO, Western Europe is able to influence American military and foreign policy

behavior. The rifts and antagonisms that develop are the exceptions that prove the rule: as a matter of right as well as common sense, Europe today expects to be consulted and included in major American security issues and decisions. This is owing to the success of NATO. Only three decades ago, European statesmen would not have held such expectations.

The Paradigm and its Problems.

The geographic focus of NATO, based on the actions of the Soviet Union immediately after WWII, has been Western Europe, particularly the Central Region in the Federal Republic of Germany. However, NATO is an *Atlantic* alliance, not just a *continental* pact. So we have SACLANC as well as SACEUR. The reason is that the father of NATO—British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin—was determined in 1948 to checkmate Soviet diplomatic-military pressures against Norway. Clearly the continent could not be held if the Soviet

Union could outflank the allies and sever the sea lines. The original strategic concept for NATO's naval forces, then, was the same as for its land forces: the direct containment of Soviet military power as near as possible to national borders directly touching Western Europe. Let us call this NATO I.

Over the years and decades, this strategic principle has guided NATO. It has governed thought processes and force structure decisions, much like the Copernican views of the heavens shaped the work of generations of astronomers.

Today, the issue—particularly for NATO's maritime forces—is whether geopolitics are demanding that NATO be revised; and if so, whether top military leaders should play as active a role in guiding and shaping that change as did their predecessors when NATO I was created.

The NATO I paradigm for maritime forces is clear. It is articulated in any one of the past 16 annual posture statements signed by different American Secretaries of Defense: the Soviet Navy is to be hotted up near its ports, while allied convoys for the Central Front are protected. Resupply of the European land battle is the main purpose of allied navies. Civilian officials and admirals alike agree NATO naval power is sufficient for this purpose. On land, however, the conventional balance favors the Soviets/Warsaw Pact and the U.S./Allied threat to nuclear escalation has become much less credible. Therefore, of late, more policy attention and more resources have been devoted to the land balance. Consequently, the evolution of NATO I has come to view the allied maritime strategy as defensive ("containing") in nature and as ancillary to the balance of the Central Front.

There are three problems with the paradigm. First, there is no plan truly to rectify the perceived imbalance in land forces. The resource gap is growing.

NATO's overall rate of real military growth is, at best, perhaps 2 percent, compared to about 4 percent by the Pact. Second, NATO theoretically relies on a first use of nuclear weapons to redress this imbalance in land forces. Yet there is no program to develop a nuclear force that would provide such nuclear superiority. Third, the evolution in world geopolitics/economics has shifted the focal point of a real military threat from NATO's Central Front to the Middle East/Persian Gulf. Militarily speaking, Western Europe is stable. On the one hand, it is clear that NATO will not interfere by military force in the political/economic upheavals in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, any Pact aggression against a West European nation would result in a third world war, with an extremely high chance of nuclear war. Given that chance, it is doubtful whether the Soviet Union, through military force, could achieve meaningful objectives against Western Europe. Hence, deterrence in Western Europe is strong, despite the weaknesses in NATO.

Were an East-West crisis to occur in Europe, however, the NATO deterrent would appear less sound. It is a deterrent that too much relies upon an uncontrollable nuclear Armageddon to relieve a modest peacetime investment in conventional military insurance. In a crisis, the Soviets might well doubt the nuclear resolve of a Western alliance unable to make such modest sacrifices.

More pertinent to the immediate international conditions, outside the immediate confines of Western Europe, NATO today faces genuine military threats where deterrence is weak and where the consequences are grave. NATO I simply does not cope with present-day geopolitical realities that require an offensive NATO maritime strategy beyond NATO's boundaries.

Reasons Against Change. The realities of the Persian Gulf require no

exhaustive explanation. The area is vital, unstable and vulnerable. The industrialized West cannot sustain its current economies without oil from the Gulf. This dependency will increase; indeed, demand may exceed oil supplies by 1990. The region is beset by war, wracked with religious, political and cultural enmities, void of either a strong regional leader or any consensus about a code of acceptable national or international behavior. No state has a truly powerful military force; no state can sustain combat without assistance and logistic resupply by some large external nation. Most states are as worried about subversion as invasion. In the current international environment, Soviet control of the Gulf would mean Soviet control of Western Europe.

NATO Europe as an alliance persists in ignoring this linkage, although NATO has supported by silence the withdrawal, for Persian Gulf reassignment, of many U.S. ships from the 6th Fleet. Militarily as well as other ways, however, the nations of NATO are individually active in the Gulf. While informal military liaison among the allied naval forces in the region has been excellent, it has also been secretive. The NATO allies do not wish to be seen as cooperating as allies. In their policy approaches to the region, the nations of the industrialized West resemble the Balkans in 1910. Consequently, there is concern that any effort to extend NATO's boundaries to include the Gulf would fail and would leave the alliance weaker than before. It is probable that left-leaning parties in Western Europe would raise a political storm about such an effort. (Technically, there are no boundaries to NATO naval operating areas. The famous boundary line of the Tropic of Cancer was established decades ago as a convenient dodge. At that time, several NATO nations were supporting colonies and NATO as a whole had no wish to be drawn into colonial wars.)

Explanations of why NATO has resisted an allied approach to the Gulf are as numerous as are the conflicting policies of the Western nations. Two unfortunate reasons dominate. First, West European states downplay the gravity of the Soviet-related threat. *Détente* and *ostpolitik* have ushered in significant cultural and trade relationships with Eastern Europe as well as with the Soviet Union. The socialist parties in Western Europe have influenced NATO defense budgets and plans. For instance, Norway has decided not to position U.S. Marine equipment near its exposed northern flank; the FRG has substantially reduced its defense budgetary pledge; the Benelux countries acceptance of cruise missiles has again been temporized. There is the view that the Soviet threat has been overdramatized in its military dimension, because the Soviets have no incentive to attack either in Europe or in the Gulf. According to this view, Soviet meddling in the Gulf is best checked by nationalistic spirit, by clever European moves behind the scene and by Soviet incompetence. Even the worse case—Soviet troops in Iran—would not be without rationalization by apologists in the West. After all, it could be argued—as it was about Afghanistan—that the Soviet Union was only trying in its paranoid way to secure its southern border. Soviet forces in Iran would not challenge the transit of oil tankers through the Gulf. In this view, U.S. concern about Soviet military imperialism threatens the supposed economic and social fruits of *détente* and urges a resumption of the cold war to save an American ego bruised by the Iranian hostage-taking.

Apart from European perceptions of any possible Soviet threat, there is a second reason for the confusion among NATO nations. It is doubted whether the United States shares common objectives in the Gulf with Western Europe and whether the United States

can provide the leadership for the alliance. The United States does have a special relationship with Israel. Granting that, however, still leaves questions about American steadfastness and vision. For a decade, the United States has negotiated, outside any alliance context, with the Soviet Union and with China. The shell game about real U.S. defense growth and the neutron bomb debacle raised questions about American seriousness. The Soviet combat troops in Cuba received only a rhetorical challenge; the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan resulted not in increased American military strength but in an Olympic and a slight grain boycott. Although fully a third of available U.S. naval carrier task forces have been rushed to the Persian Gulf, President Carter also vetoed a defense bill in order to prevent the construction of another carrier. Losing the Vietnam War lowered the American image in the world; the manner in which Vietnam and later Iran fell was not consonant with fidelity toward allies. The rate of economic inflation, the lack of oil reserves and chaotic energy policies were not indicative of American self-discipline and consensus. The hostages held by Iran for over a year symbolized American impotency. The terms of the release of the hostages and the effect upon U.S.-Arab relations are still unknown. From a West European perspective, there are sound reasons not to extend NATO under American leadership to the Persian Gulf.

Benefits of a NATO II. Such reasons, however, for a fragmented Western strategy toward the Gulf may be good but not sufficient. In the absence of an allied military approach, the United States created the RDF, or Rapid Deployment Force, from already existing U.S. forces. This was a pump-priming exercise, designed to signal U.S. seriousness of purpose. For the foreseeable future, the only credible

military strategy of the RDF is preemption. If American forces can be landed somewhere in the Gulf before a predicted Soviet move, then perhaps the Soviets will not move. There is both risk and merit to the concept. The risk is twofold. First, because it requires preemption, it increases the chances of hasty decisionmaking and overreaction. It is a force that cannot react successfully if the opponent strikes first. Second, from a deterrent, a military and a geopolitical, perspective, it encourages just such a first strike by the Soviet Union. By moving first, the United States intends to deter an anticipated Soviet move. Conversely, by moving first, the Soviets deter a U.S. move, because the United States has no credible second move. Militarily, neither side is evidencing any finesse. Victory will belong to whomever deploys a sustainable land force. Only the United States must transit 7,000 ocean miles; and the Soviets 1,000 land miles. As regards geopolitics, the fundamental Soviet rationale for a move into Iran, or perhaps another area of the Gulf, may well be defensive: to secure their southern border from American intervention (RDF) forces equipped with nuclear as well as conventional weapons.

Despite those risks, the merit implicit in the RDF force is obvious: the United States is at last getting serious. Alone among our Services and several commands, only the RDF is genuinely concentrating upon the tiny details and specific requirements of land combat in desert and south temperate zones. The RDF as a force is serious about fighting. That, in turn, is the primary job of the military.

To the extent, however, that the RDF must preempt to dissuade Soviet intervention, it is a theory of deterrence, not a military strategy. The military is required to plan responsibly for what happens if deterrence fails. For strategic purposes, additional questions must be

answered; to wit: what is the U.S. plan if the Soviets preempt before the RDF; or if the Soviets attack the RDF?

In response to these questions, there has been some elliptical talk about U.S. escalation to theater nuclear war. That escalation seems to have more drawbacks than strengths. The purpose, after all, is not to destroy the oilfields in order to save them. A small, concentrated RDF is a vulnerable target, as are U.S. naval task forces near the Gulf. Faced with disaster in a theater nuclear war, the United States would have to consider higher nuclear escalation. How the nuclear option, then, would work to the advantage of the West is not clear.

Alternatively, the United States can plan to sustain a toehold somewhere in the Gulf, analogous to the Pusan Perimeter in 1950. With thousands of Americans dying, the United States would declare and enforce a worldwide blockade of Soviet overseas air and ocean transport. The chances are probably about even that the Soviet surface navy would be given a few days to withdraw to home ports or to neutral ports. The United States would mobilize and SACEUR would demand full NATO reinforcement. U.S. submarines and perhaps other naval forces holding large technological advantages would attack Soviet forces worldwide. The Soviets well might prefer to limit the war to the Gulf region, because the odds for a local victory favor them. But there's no reason for the United States to deny itself the fruits of its mastery in underwater warfare.

Several weeks would slip by, inasmuch as land combat at the end of long LOCs lacks a blitzkrieg character and as U.S. tactical airpower would slow Soviet movement. During this time, in its SLOC protection role, NATO would be drawn into the naval combat.

This scenario points toward a global position unacceptable to the Soviet Union—featuring catastrophic Soviet

naval losses, a full NATO buildup, a mobilized United States/Europe and a hair-trigger nuclear balance.

Viewed in this context, the U.S. response to Soviet action in the Gulf should be one of horizontal escalation. In the global balance, the Soviet gain in the Gulf is overshadowed by the mobilization of the West and by the naval campaign. NATO reinforcement requires movement at sea. Unlike land and tacair forces, the oceans are a medium without boundaries for separating antagonists. NATO agreement to reinforcement is an agreement to naval combat. NATO cannot stay out of a U.S.-Soviet war because the naval threads are too intertwined.

Yet NATO—Europe and the United States—has ignored this military reality. U.S. priorities view the Gulf as a land theater where U.S. success rests on the acquisition of land bases and the buildup of land-based forces. Scant, if any, public statements have mentioned the roles of SACLANT and SACEUR, the simultaneous reinforcement of Europe or the global employment of the superior American naval force. On the other hand, NATO Europe has shown no enthusiasm for extending NATO's area of interest and no acknowledgement that, in a real crisis, the evolution of combat would mean that NATO and the United States are indivisible.

The strategy for NATO II would extend the boundaries of NATO as a military alliance. Japan's military forces should also be drawn into the coalition. NATO naval forces would be especially critical, both for the peacetime presence in the Gulf and for an offensive worldwide naval campaign in a war. Crucial would be a workable sharing plan, as Gulf oil was curtailed. Adequate oil reserves for at least 90 days would be required. In this regard, the United States is the worst offender in the industrialized West, with less than 14 days' reserves on hand.

To deal with a common problem NATO II would provide for a coordinated allied approach, with spillovers into political and economic policies. NATO II would strengthen the peace by insuring against a Soviet misperception of divide and conquer. Because it would show higher Western resolve, NATO II would enhance the chances of access to land bases in the Gulf.

Strategic Implications. The problems with the concept are numerous. Some are organizational. The U.S. naval forces for the Gulf are under the operational command of CINCPAC. This is partially because of their basing. It is more particularly because of the freedom of action of the Pacific 7th Fleet., freedom derived precisely because it, unlike the NATO-earmarked 6th Fleet, is not subject to NATO consultations and commitments. This relatively greater freedom of diplomatic and operational maneuver enables U.S. naval forces in the Gulf to coordinate, without formal commitment or containment by any party, with a large variety of Western and non-Western naval forces. This is a benefit that would be lessened by the presence of a multilateral NATO command.

The 6th Fleet, however, also maintains a variety of contacts, despite its NATO focus. More to the point, U.S. decisionmakers feel compelled to deploy in the Indian Ocean a U.S. naval force large enough in itself (i.e., two or three carrier battle groups) to deter Soviet adventurism or exploitation of instability in the region. The deployments are sustainable only at high cost in terms of U.S. commitments elsewhere and of reenlistment of U.S. naval personnel. A NATO naval force, because it linked the Atlantic alliance to the Gulf, would raise the deterrent threshold and would permit a reduction in the U.S. naval operating tempo. Because of naval geography, the NATO connection would be unavoidable in a

conflict. If the NATO connection is formalized, then SACLANT would be the commander, because the region is a maritime theater for allied forces and because the only credible allied trump/deterrent card is superior naval power.

Non-NATO nations constitute another problem. Allies such as Japan, New Zealand and Australia could be inhibited by the NATO connection. NATO could be seen as tied to the Arab-Israeli issue; Soviet pressures and propaganda would be severe; Arab resentment is a possibility. The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Baghdad Pact, for example, provoked an angry Egypt into accepting Soviet presence and aid. Clearly, an acceptable alliance arrangement for the Gulf would stretch the talents of our statesmen. But so did NATO in its creation, when the goal of the United States was simultaneously to avoid a resumption of war and to stop Soviet advances in Europe, when the goal of the United Kingdom was to harness American power to European statecraft, and when the goal of France was to prevent the nationalist rearmament of Germany. What now looks easy and obvious took 3 years of compromise and planning.

NATO II challenges a U.S. diplomatic axiom of the last 30 years: regional alliances and issues are resolved within the geographic boundaries of the region. The regional pacts inspired by John Foster Dulles, while global as a whole, were compartmented by region and cemented by the pledge of American military insurance. Under Richard Nixon, the idea was encouraged of strong local powers in different regions—without the pledge of the commitment of American manpower. The Carter Doctrine reinstated that pledge in the Persian Gulf region. U.S. statesmen have tended to assume that only the United States must be militarily active on behalf of the West in more than one region. For

many of our allies, this has been a convenient political and resource assumption. For instance, Japan expects American protection in a NATO war, but offers no assistance to NATO.

NATO II demands more of those who have more. The world simply is more intertwined than it was in 1949. Communications are instantaneous; transport is rapid; economies are interdependent; instabilities in one region affect prices in another, etc. Yet the United States has not reshaped the regional premise of its alliances. Nor have the allies of the United States been willing to share fairly the burdens of military, diplomatic and economic responsibilities. The solution is neither to beggar one's neighbor nor to espouse national isolationism. But there should be a diplomatic adjustment to account for the rate of growth in global interdependencies. The most obvious place to start is in regard to the relationships among the American, European and indigenous actors in the Persian Gulf. It would be anachronistic in the world of the 1980s to presume that NATO II, or any other inter-regional alliance, will be unworkable because it involves different cultures.

NATO II proposes both linking NATO directly to a U.S.-Soviet conflict in the Gulf and using allied superior naval power as a discrete warfare category separate from (and less than) a land war in NATO. To dissuade NATO Europe, the Soviets will publicly declare such a naval doctrine to be infeasible, although history shows that it is feasible. There have been many foreign policies and naval campaigns based upon the maritime balance. Because naval warfare is the one military balance in which the West claims superiority, it is obviously in the Soviet interest to deny vigorously that such superiority can have either deterrent or defense applicability.

The major problem with NATO II is whether NATO—Europe and the

United States—has the will and resolve. NATO II will cost money. More than that, it will test the vision and the persuasiveness of our statesmen. But there should be no mistaking the gravity of the issue. A crisis in the Gulf will not affect just the United States; it will involve, even more directly, the future of Western Europe. That Europe believes it is better off approaching the Gulf without the United States is a sad commentary upon American leadership. That belief, however, is fraught with risk, for it ignores the Soviet threat to the Gulf.

The Suez crisis not only froze the borders of NATO; it also turned the allies—temporarily—against one another. That cannot be allowed to happen in the Gulf. Thirty years ago NATO I, confronting Soviet armies and war-threatening conditions, led to "containment" by direct defense of the West European borders. The Atlantic Basin was then the centerpiece in world strategy. So NATO's naval strategy was ancillary and defensive: organized to contain Soviet naval thrusts that otherwise might outflank armies and cut Western supply lines.

Today, the most critical war-threatening conditions for Western Europe are seen in the Persian Gulf region. There, too, Soviet aggression must be contained. This means:

- extending NATO's area of coalition command.

- deploying NATO naval and mobile forces.

- linking NATO mobilization to events in the Gulf.

- fashioning an offensive maritime strategy to destroy Soviet naval assets.

NATO I was not the creation only of statesmen like Bevin, Acheson, Achilles and Lovett; NATO I owed as much to the military such as Gruenther, Clay, Montgomery and Eisenhower. If NATO II is to succeed, it must be the military who persuade the statesmen of the seriousness of the threat and of the

military logic that links NATO—regardless of wishful thinking to the contrary—to the United States-Soviet contest in the Gulf.

For a host of political reasons, NATO II may never be formally ratified. Nevertheless, the deterrence of Soviet adventurism in the Gulf would be strengthened if military facts of life were better understood. Four facts—or extremely high probabilities—stand out. First, in a United States-Soviet conflict in the Gulf, U.S. naval forces would participate. The naval campaign, especially underwater warfare, could be confined to one region only through the most strenuous efforts and understandings of both sides. The Soviet Union, stronger on land and weaker at sea (especially in underwater warfare), would prefer a limited naval conflict. Conversely, the United States should not so prefer, unless the goal is to maximize the reinforcement of NATO, because conflict in Europe seems inevitable.

Second, the odds favor the eventual prosecution of naval campaigns worldwide, either because of U.S. design or of the nature of conflict. It is difficult to imagine thousands of American marines dying while Aeroflot flies into Dulles Airport, Soviet surveillance "trawlers" hold station off Charleston, Soviet merchant ships unload at New York harbor, Soviet cruisers sail alongside American carriers in the Mediterranean and U.S. submarines and aircraft worldwide placidly report the comings and goings of Soviet submarines. On land, national borders provide the neutral zones of demarcation across which land forces can glare at one another. On the oceans, there are no neutral zones.

Third, NATO would reinforce heavily. The longer the conflicts in the Gulf raged without resolution, the stronger would be NATO's defenses and the less certain would be the Soviets about the outcome of a Pact attack.

NATO as a defensive force structure poses no aggressive threat to the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe. But a strong NATO deprives the Soviet Union of a credible invasion threat to force the United States to cease a global naval campaign.

Fourth, the United States would mobilize as it did in the summer of 1950, when the Defense budget was tripled in one congressional session. The major Soviet geopolitical fear is the industrial and political might of America applied on a wartime basis. The leaders of the Soviet Union were the beneficiaries during WWII of massive U.S. military supplies. Given that memory, it requires little acquaintance with the details of economics or industrialization to imagine the military balance—nuclear as well as conventional—if the United States abruptly dedicated \$600 billion to defense and declared it was in a struggle for its national existence. Faced with that specter, Soviet leadership would have to hope that either the will or the economy of the United States crumbled—hopes that the Soviet leadership could do little to influence directly. It would be rash to base critical military plans on hope.

Hence the United States and Western Europe are not without impressive

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Francis J. (Bing) West, Jr. is Dean of The Center for Advanced Research, Naval War College. He was educated at Georgetown University and the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University. Professor

West has served as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, as a Project Director in the RAND Corporation, as Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense, and consultant to the Secretary of the Navy. His publications include *The Village* and *Small Unit Actions—Vietnam*.

leverage to curb Soviet adventurism in the Gulf. The leverage, however, depends upon linking a conflict in the Gulf to events worldwide. The links are: the global nature of naval warfare; U.S./NATO naval superiority; NATO reinforcement/war preparation; and U.S. industrial mobilization. It is incumbent upon military planners to think through the strategic implications of these links and to translate those implications into orderly, standard operational procedures. If this is not done and a conflict does occur, the RDF

commander, CINCPAC, SACLANT and SACEUR will implement regional, compartmented plans with no relation to an overarching, global strategy. As regards peacetime deterrence rather than war plans, the military facts of life, which link a Gulf conflict to NATO and to the global balance, should be publicly explained. This should be done whether NATO II is or is not formally endorsed, because no nation should miscalculate through military ignorance the strategic implications of a U.S.-Soviet conflict in the Gulf.

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