No Exit

David C. Hendrickson

THOUGH DISAFFECTION with the Atlantic Alliance has long existed in American opinion, the number of voices now calling for far-reaching change is unprecedented and does not correspond to the usual fault-lines of political rivalry. Global unilateralists, military reformers, maritime strategists, neo-conservatives, and old-fashioned isolationists unite in thinking that fundamental changes in the relationship between Western Europe and the United States are long overdue. Their reasons for doing so often differ, but the extent of their disaffection remains remarkable. Were it not for the Alliance's demonstrated ability to confound the prophets of doom, one would be tempted to go along with the judgment that its decomposition seems only a matter of time.

In *Beyond American Hegemony*, David Calleo reviews the evolution of the Alliance from its inception in 1949 and argues that the old arrangements have become increasingly untenable.[1] NATO remains what it was at the outset—an American military protectorate of Europe—while the conditions that once made that role necessary have long since changed. For Calleo, this is cause for both celebration and alarm—celebration, because American policy did succeed in rebuilding the ravaged economies and polities of Western Europe and thus is a victim of its own success; alarm, because the global economic system is fated to endure ever more violent storms unless the United States puts its own economic house in order and Europe assumes the military and political role commensurate with its economic power. "Our greatness occasioned our fall," Frederick von Gentz once wrote; "our insatiable desire of advancing was the cause of our enervation; our meritorious ambition led to our present humiliation." The story is a familiar one to students of the rise and fall of empire; for Calleo, as for Paul Kennedy, the American Century has come and gone. The task of policy is to adjust to that decline as gracefully as possible.

The origins of the current crisis are skillfully examined by Calleo in a series of chapters treating the three cycles through which NATO has passed in the postwar era, each of which has pushed American policy "back and forth between hard and soft lines." The previous two rearmament cycles (under Truman and the Kennedy-Johnson administrations)

David C. Hendrickson is assistant professor of political science at Colorado College. He is the author of *Reforming Defense: The State of American Civil-Military Relations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

[1] *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance* (New York: Basic Books, Inc./A Twentieth Century Fund Book, 1987). 288 pp. $20.95.

were each followed by periods of retrenchment (along with a renewed interest in detente and arms control) under Eisenhower and Nixon. President Reagan's turn to comparable strategies in the final years of his administration thus resembles the traditional pattern, which Calleo calls "hegemony on the cheap." That policy is distinguished by its unwillingness to surrender any of the geopolitical commitments the United States has undertaken while nevertheless maintaining those commitments at lesser economic and political cost. For Eisenhower, the answer was found in America's nuclear superiority; for Nixon and Kissinger, in hyper-active diplomacy. In Calleo's view, the example of neither administration is of much relevance today. What is needed is not another instance of "hegemony on the cheap" but of a devolution of America's postwar responsibilities.

Two dominant problems confront the Alliance: economic and military. America's extended nuclear deterrent—the essence of the American military protectorate—"has become less reliable and therefore more dangerous as the Soviets have reached strategic parity." So, at least, it has long appeared to Americans, who have urged greater European efforts at conventional defense. The Europeans, by contrast, cling to the remnants of a strategy overtaken by time, unwilling to abandon American nuclear protection or to provide more robust conventional defense. Their answer to the lost bloom of youth is . . . more make-up! Hence the Alliance's fundamental dilemma: The solution preferred by most Americans—a conventional deterrent that would reduce nuclear risk—cannot be provided by the United States, since the requisite forces are too expensive. Meanwhile, "the solution the Europeans should logically prefer—an indigenous nuclear deterrent—they cannot or will not provide, at least not for Germany, where it is most needed." The traditional structure of the Alliance, in sum, has produced neither robust conventional defenses nor a satisfactory resolution of the nuclear predicament. It is, in all likelihood, incapable of doing so. "Europeanization," Calleo asserts, "is probably the only way to reach a convincing conventional balance, should one eventually be desired. And given the intractable problems of extended nuclear protection, Europeanization may prove the only way to sustain nuclear deterrence as well."

Though Calleo devotes a good deal of attention to NATO's military problem, his analysis lacks a certain conviction. NATO's military arrangements, though deemed in part "frivolous" and "difficult to take seriously," are apparently good enough to accomplish their main purpose: the deterrence of Soviet attack. "For American devolution to succeed militarily," he argues, "a Europeanized NATO would not have to constitute a military improvement: it would need only to be adequate or, in any event, no worse militarily than what is now in place." Whether that objective can be met in the aftermath of his proposed devaluation of the American nuclear guarantee and a 50 percent cut in American ground forces committed to Europe is the main question raised by his analysis; in any event, it indicates that his disgruntlement with NATO is founded largely on economics. "America's endemic economic disorder," he believes, "is a more serious threat to the postwar international liberal order than is any plausible Soviet aggression. For whereas Soviet expansionism is reasonably contained, American fiscal and monetary disorder is not. So long as America continues its present geopolitical role, containing Soviet military power and maintaining a viable world economy seem increasingly incompatible."

THIS IS INDEED the nub of the matter. Though the ultimate consequences of America's budgetary and trade deficits remain today a matter of uncertainty, it is unquestionably true that they have placed increasing strains on the world financial system. A perpetuation of either of the twin deficits on anything like their current scale will certainly cause serious long-term damage to the future economic prospects of the United States, and may, as Calleo argues, constitute a formula for the progressive derangement of

international monetary order. Even under the best of circumstances, there is much that could go wrong in effecting the remedy—economic expansion abroad and a contraction of the federal deficit at home—that most economists believe is necessary. The crash of equity values in 1987, the growing spectre of protectionism, and the likely turn of the credit cycle toward deflation all suggest an economic climate of increasing danger over the next few years. And they suggest that Calleo is right in thinking that "American policy-makers can no longer give military commitments automatic priority over fiscal balance." The real question concerns whether the coming period of famine in defense expenditures—and the economic storms that may lurk on the horizon—will also require a general alteration of American policy toward Europe.

On this critical question, Calleo is by no means as radical as one might at first suspect. He is at pains to distinguish "devolution" from "disengagement." He concedes that the United States continues to have a vital interest in the preservation of Western Europe's internal freedom and external security. His remedy thus falls well short of a divorce: it is the geopolitical equivalent of that rare (and inherently unstable) arrangement, the "open marriage." Though Calleo would cut half of the ten U.S. divisions earmarked for European defense, two or three would remain in Western Europe. American nuclear forces would remain "in reserve" (a tidy arrangement whose meaning, however, is not entirely clear). This falls well short of the "shock treatment" that many critics have called for; nevertheless, Calleo believes that it would be sufficient to produce far greater efforts among the Europeans themselves.

It is one of the curiosities of this argument that the devolution of America's postwar responsibilities would produce, in Calleo's view, no real sacrifice of American interests. Despite his scorn for past attempts to achieve "hegemony on the cheap," it would appear that his own policy seeks something not too dissimilar, though at a cost far less than the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations were prepared to pay. The difference, presumably, is that the Atlantic relationship would no longer be "hegemonic," meaning that the United States would no longer take the initiative in structuring and managing the Alliance. But the fundamental interest the United States has in ensuring the peace and prosperity of the old continent would, Calleo assures us, be better satisfied under the proposed new arrangements than under the old ones, and at greatly reduced cost.

THAT THIS PROMISE is false is one of the principal themes of Josef Joffe's excellent recent work, *The Limited Partnership.*[2] Though Joffe does not analyze the "middle solution" proposed by Calleo, he does devote a great deal of attention to the multitude of proposals that arose in the 1980s to recast NATO's military strategy. Joffe's core conviction is that the American nuclear guarantee has been the key ingredient in creating the extraordinary stability of post-1945 Europe. No replacement for this guarantee, he argues, exists on the horizon. None of the alternatives that have been proposed—the creation of a European superstate, the extension of the French and British deterrents, or the acquisition by West Germany (and perhaps others) of an independent power of nuclear decision—offers a resolution of the intractable problems of extended deterrence. An American withdrawal, he argues, would more likely lead to a Western Europe incapable of "managing either its internal order or the military balance on the Eurasian continent."

In this conclusion, Joffe goes further than most observers, who have traditionally seen the containment of Soviet power as the sole function of the Alliance. Joffe thinks the presence of the United States has helped dissolve intra-Alliance rivalries as well. That presence is one of the reasons for the emergence of what cooperation has emerged in Europe since World War II; remove it, and the precarious

[2] *The Limited Partnership: Europe, the United States, and the Burdens of Alliance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1987). 225 pp. $29.95.

unity that advocates of reconstruction hope to build upon will suffer as well.

Joffe's dark vision need not be accepted in toto; it is sufficiently persuasive, however, to cast doubt on Calleo's optimistic assumption that the Europeans would coalesce around a common defense strategy equal in deterrent weight to what exists now. At the nuclear level, Calleo too rejects the idea of a European superstate and considers a nuclear Germany to be a "second best" solution. His strategy, therefore, amounts to shifting the dilemmas of extended deterrence from our shoulders onto those of the British and the French. Calleo never satisfactorily explains why dilemmas that are unbearable for us would prove manageable for Europe's existing nuclear powers, whose forces, though growing, will remain quite small in comparison to those of the Soviet Union. Even on fairly optimistic assumptions, it seems apparent that the uncertain nuclear protection afforded to Germany today (as well as to the other non-nuclear European states) would be seriously impaired by such an arrangement.

At the conventional level, "Europeanization" would also raise a host of problems. The withdrawal of five American divisions would create substantial gaps in the NATO forward defense line that indigenous forces are unlikely to fill adequately. Given Germany's manpower crisis, it will be a significant accomplishment merely to maintain fighting strength at present levels over the next decade. Nor might one expect much help from the British and the French, especially given their greatly expanded nuclear tasks and their continuing need to maintain modest interventionary forces for non-European contingencies. Whether the resulting force structure would be "adequate" to deter Soviet aggression is an open question; there is little doubt, however, that it would be much worse than the military arrangement now in place.

There is, admittedly, much uncertainty about the European response to such an American initiative, if only because of the ambiguous message Calleo wants to send to them. Roughly translated, it is: "We will no longer protect you, but we will not abandon you. The maintenance of your security is too dangerous for us (because of the nuclear and financial risks it entails), but it continues to be a vital American interest. We want out, but we will stay in." This peculiar message is apparently intended to weaken deterrence sufficiently so that the Europeans will discover the political will that has eluded them in the past, yet not so much as to afford an opportunity for Soviet meddling. It might produce something quite different: a greater willingness on the part of the Europeans, not to spend more on defense, but to accommodate themselves (in small but cumulatively significant ways) to the needs and prerogatives of the dominant military power on the continent.

NONE OF THIS is to dismiss the possibility of a partial withdrawal of American military forces from Europe. If that objective seems less chimerical today than it did only a few years ago, it is largely because of the "Moscow Spring" and the possibility of a genuine change in the Soviet military threat toward Europe. The cul-de-sac in which Gorbachev found the Soviet economy—and the pressing need for a reduction in military expenditures if his economic reforms are to have a chance of succeeding—suggests the possibility of a general relaxation of conventional armaments in Europe to parallel the agreement on intermediate range forces ratified in 1988. The obstacles to a formal agreement are of course quite formidable; nevertheless, it is an area where Soviet and American interests may well coincide.

With or without formal agreements, the new detente may simply take the form of a breathing spell, during which both societies turn inward, to renew the contest at some later date. Surely it is then reasonable to insist that our own retrenchment continue to have a Soviet equivalent—a linkage that Calleo would have us break. His reconstruction of NATO would proceed quite apart from the general tone and tenor of East-West relations and risks squandering NATO's genuine accom-

plishment in creating a balance of power in Europe over the last generation.

THERE REMAIN the nuclear and financial risks entailed by the American commitment. Neither, in truth, is unbearable. Europeans demand a greater degree of coupling and of shared risk than most Americans feel comfortable with; Americans search for ways of reducing nuclear risk through strategies of graduated conflict that provoke in Europe the spectre of a limited nuclear war. Nevertheless, the parameters of this debate remain such as to instill great caution in Soviet leaders contemplating an attack against NATO. As Joffe argues, the very clarity of the American commitment reduces the chances of a Soviet miscalculation to almost zero. "Not all bonds," he writes, "breed existential risks—only loose ones." In a fashion typical of European elites, Joffe insists upon a bond so tight as to preclude the possibility of sanctuaries, reassuring the Europeans (and depressing us). Americans retain the mental reservation that this commitment does not in fact deprive us of our freedom to limit conflict in an actual war (thus reassuring ourselves, though alarming the Europeans). The two sides in this intractable debate are unlikely to ever reach a true meeting of the minds. Their failure to do so, however, need not result in the end of alliance or the breakdown of deterrence. In either case, the Soviet Union is left with the knowledge that in launching a war it would face possibilities ranging from the merely horrendous to the utterly fatal—a prospect that is likely to preserve the peace in Europe for a long time to come.

Nor are the financial risks of maintaining the American commitment to Europe insuperable. The road to economic solvency will doubtless prove to be a difficult one, and cuts in defense expenditures (alongside tax increases and the continuing limitation of social expenditures) will have to be part of the bargain. There is, however, a range of defense cuts that can be made that do not require the United States to abandon the principal—and still indispensable—role it has played in containing Soviet power in Europe. A program of selective cuts—including less expensive solutions to the problem of strategic nuclear vulnerability, a reduction in planning requirements for American ground force interventions in the Third World (with corresponding savings in strategic mobility forces), and partial reductions in force structure in both the Navy and the Air Force—would also save a lot of money, and could be undertaken without remaking the postwar European order.

This order has persisted for over a generation, during which time the states of Western Europe have enjoyed a political stability and economic prosperity beyond the imagination of those who witnessed the preceding years of depression, war, and genocide. The hope that this order might evolve in a fashion yet more benign should not be simply dismissed. If this change comes, however, we should look for it in the mellowing of the East, not in the reconstruction of the West. And we should also have the consolation of knowing that, whatever happens in the Soviet Union, we have not in the interim dismantled the structure of security that continues to provide the best guarantee against another European war.