
A Time of Decision For the NATO Alliance

By

President George Bush

[The following are comments by the President which were presented at the NATO Summit in Rome, Italy, on 7 November 1991.]

The [North Atlantic] Council meets at a turning point in history for the second time. The first was the day this alliance was born.

Then the world was divided—one half suppressed, the other fearful. [Former Secretary of State] Dean Acheson said then our task was to create a world half free.

My friends, we did more than keep half the world free. We helped create a new world. We must now confront the forces of change that have been liberated by our success—forces that are powerful, exciting, unfamiliar, and ripe with both danger and opportunity.

The challenges of this world are as daunting as Stalin's army was menacing 40 years ago.

Like then, this is a time for decision for the alliance. We should decide wisely, for we have awesome and inescapable responsibilities, not only for our peoples but for the future. To decide wisely, we must speak directly. I will not talk of bridges, pillars, or cornerstones. We are not here as engineers but as political leaders and trustees of democracy.

[In] North America, in Western Europe, and even in the East, the alliance is rightly viewed as the core of European—indeed, world—stability. As its stewards, it is up to us to give the alliance direction and to employ its towering strengths toward noble ends. To do this, we must provide answers to four defining questions.

First, in this uncertain world, how can we be sure that every ally can be safe from any threat of any sort?

Second, how should we answer the calls of Europe's new democracies to join us?

Third, how should we respond to the disintegration of Soviet power?

And lastly, how should we relate to each other as Europe travels toward union?

We must answer these questions now, but we must answer them right.

A NEW STRATEGIC DOCTRINE

Talk of military strategy is sometimes awkward for politicians who pride themselves as men of peace. But our first responsibility is to remove any doubt that our peoples, their homes, and their vital interests are secure. Our history teaches us that adequate military strength is a prerequisite for political confidence and the pursuit of cooperation.

Today, we should approve a fundamentally new strategic doctrine. Our forces will be lean, agile, and unmatched in human and technological quality. No corner of the alliance will be

unprotected. And we will, let us be clear, maintain a credible—though radically reduced—nuclear deterrent. Thus, whoever might contemplate aggression against any ally will face the power of a united alliance with a full range of options. Without doubt, the withdrawal of Soviet power from the heart of Europe has improved our general security. But this is still a dangerous world, and the first principle of this alliance still stands: a threat to any single ally is a threat to all.

As we look to the East, the unwilling allies of our former enemy now want to be our allies. Their aspiration should neither surprise nor alarm us. I submit that the liaison program that has been suggested is not the most we should do but the least we can do. We must clasp the outstretched hand of the peoples whose freedom has at last been won by a combination of their courage and our resolve.

If we, at this table, are concerned about instability in the Soviet Union, consider how the world must look to our fellow Europeans who live on the edge. Look back to a time when we lived on that edge. Forty years ago, the names were Ernest Bevin, Robert Schuman, Paul Henri Spaak. Today the names are Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, Jozsef Antall.

Security for those nations lives not in new legal undertakings but in helping them transform their countries. It is our duty—and in our interest—to help them change their military apparatus from a weapon of the state into a guardian of a free people. The liaison program will play an indispensable part in a much larger strategy, involving all of our institutions. We cannot welcome these nations to our world of values and yet hold them at arms length from our affairs. For 40 years we said: Even though your voices are silenced by tyranny, we hear you. Now that these voices are free, can we turn a deaf ear?

CHANGE IN THE USSR

We and the Europeans to our east are riveted on developments to their east, in that space once home to a power that threatened our interests and our values—a power whose armies have more than once marched through Europe. While we cannot exclude that one day, despite our every wish and effort, a threat will rise again in that space, for the foreseeable future we see other powerful revolutionary forces at work:

- A brave struggle to create a legitimate government, and
- A rapid devolution of authority from what had been an immensely powerful central state.

Men of principle—Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Nazarbayev, and others—are attempting to navigate through this perilous transition, and they deserve our understanding and support.

Europe and America cannot respond to this situation separately. We must share our assessments, harmonize on strategies, and act in concert. The alliance has, since its birth, been indispensable in forging common policies toward the USSR and so it is now. This is why we have proposed to intensify consultations in the North Atlantic Council. We should be clear at this moment about our principles, and we should use the alliance to promote them in practice.

PARTNERS IN THE ALLIANCE

I come now to the fourth question: How do we deal with each other? Let me offer the American perspective:

First, the United States will not—because it cannot—abandon its responsibilities, its interests, and its place in Europe. We have learned one of this bloody century's most painful lessons.

Second, while some suggest that the United States wants followers in the alliance, what we want are partners. The Alliance is not an American enterprise nor a vehicle of American power. We never sought preponderance, and we certainly do not seek to keep it. Nor do we claim a monopoly on ideas for the alliance. If we did, none of us would be sitting here today, for the idea of the Washington treaty [establishing NATO] was Europe's.

Third, the United States has been, is, and will remain an unhesitating proponent of the aim and process of European integration. This strong American support extends to the prospect of a political union—as well as the goal of a defense identity.

Fourth, even the attainment of European union, however, will not diminish the need for NATO—as far as we are concerned and as far as we can see. We do not see how there can be a substitute for the alliance as the provider of our defense and Europe's security. We support the development of the WEU [Western European Union] because it can complement the alliance and strengthen the European role in it. It can help Europe and North America face together threats to shared vital interests outside of Europe. But we do not see the WEU as a European alternative to the alliance. Our premise is that the American role in the defense and the affairs of Europe will not be made superfluous by European union.

And lastly, at a time when our societies clamor for a peace dividend, redundant capabilities can be built only at the expense of those that exist. If we can depend on each other—and I have no doubt that we can—then our interdependence should be satisfactory to one and all, and redundant capabilities are unnecessary.

I will close with this thought. This alliance has been more successful than any of us dared to dream. It was designed to defend our freedom, but, in fact, it triumphed over totalitarianism. What we have built is not some military pact but a community of values and trust—unique in history, perpetual, and vital for the new order. There is no roadmap for the new world, no way to know what the next year, let alone the next century, will bring. But our ability to cope with the future—indeed, to shape it—will be immeasurably greater if we walk out of here tomorrow with an alliance renewed.