

## Alliances Are Not Eternal

By John T. Correll, EDITOR IN CHIEF

**O**LD NATO hands remind us that the great Atlantic Alliance has lived through troubles before. For one reason or another, it has been declared "in disarray" on the average of once every fourteen months since its founding in 1949. It stood firm against formidable pressure in the mid-1980s and countered the deployment of Soviet SS-20s with American cruise missiles and Pershing IIs. In the end, allied solidarity brought the Soviet Union to a serious position on arms control. Looking ahead, NATO's new Secretary General, Manfred Wörner, says that he sees more opportunities than risks.

Let us hope that Mr. Wörner and the old hands are correct in their optimism. Other forecasts are less positive. There is reason to believe that NATO will shortly encounter all the problems it can straddle.

There are four major elements in play. The old dispute about burden sharing within the Alliance and concern about international trade balances are now exacerbated by the prospect of a twelve-nation cartel that the West Europeans plan to establish by 1992. And underlying it all is the phenomenon that one diplomat calls "Gorbymania," the unbridled enthusiasm for Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that seems to be sweeping through many parts of Europe.

A House Armed Services Committee panel last year delved into the burden-sharing problem—the longstanding accusation that the United States spends more than its increasingly wealthy allies do on the common defense. The panel warned that Europeans "are not sufficiently aware of the strong pressure in this country to reduce our defense commitment to our allies unless they are willing to shoulder more of the burden."

This line of discontent intersects with a slightly newer one about the balance of trade. The United States still sells more defense products in Europe than it buys there, but between FY '83 and FY '86, the ratio dropped from 8:1 to 2:1. Moreover, the House panel said, the US is behind by \$171.2 billion a year in the overall merchandise trade balance with Europe. The trade balance—like burden sharing—is a complex issue, affected by factors that the public does not understand. What is apparent to the public is that the United States is losing jobs and business. The clamor for protectionist legislation is a powerful influence on Congress.

Then, into the middle of this, the Europeans tossed "Project 1992." Some see this venture as a first step toward unification on a grand scale, but the twelve nations involved are not fully agreed among themselves on ultimate goals. The immediate target, however, is to establish by December 31, 1992, an integrated market with free movement of capital, goods, and labor. That would be enough to create an economic powerhouse—and perhaps, say worried Americans, a near-monopoly market that excludes the United States.

As the Europeans prepare for 1992, they are feeling the oats of their independence a little more than usual. Unfortunately, this occurs in parallel with Gorbymania.

The West Europeans, the Germans in particular, are unmistakably more cordial in their attitudes toward the Soviet Union. When that leads them to a divergence of policy with the United States, they almost flaunt it as a matter of pride.

Strong feelings and intemperate words are setting the stage for a rift. The House panel was blunt in its commentary: "The Panel states in the strongest possible terms that Europeans had better be prepared to defend their own territory without a large-scale US ground commitment, because that commitment cannot be guaranteed forever." Such language is matched in equally inflammatory tones by Europeans who say it's time for the Americans to go home.

The House panel observed that "the US and its allies do not agree on the immediacy or level of the threat, even though they face the same adversary," but that Europeans would like the United States to maintain its commitment to NATO defense anyway as "a no-cost insurance policy if our threat assessment turns out to be right and their assessment wrong."

We are drifting in a dangerous direction. Does Europe really want to dump the Alliance that has seen us through forty years of peace and prosperity? Does the United States actually want to retreat into isolationism? Do the Europeans believe that they could replace the US contribution to NATO without wrecking their economies? Do the Americans who want to bring the troops home for financial reasons realize that it would cost \$5 billion to rebase them and another \$40 billion for airlift and other preparations to redeploy them in the event of crisis or war? Are we prepared to concede to the Soviet Union one of its fondest hopes by splitting up the defense of the West?

It's difficult to believe that reasonable statesmen on either side of the Atlantic are ready to let NATO go under. Some of them, however, may fail to realize how much cumulative strain the present turmoil is putting on NATO, or they may misestimate the amount of strain that the Alliance can bear.

Alliances are not eternal. In our own time, we have seen yesterday's ally, the Soviet Union, become our great adversary while Germany and Japan, our enemies in World War II, are now friends. It is easy for us to forget that alliances tend to shift and change, though, because our relationships with friendly nations have been remarkably stable for the past forty years. The current arrangement has been with the United States and Western Europe so long that we sometimes assume it to be a sure thing, going on forever.

NATO will most probably survive the current troubles, but it would be a mistake to assume that transatlantic difficulties will simply sort themselves out. If we persist in emphasizing our differences and keep putting more pressure on the Alliance that has served us so well, we may do more damage than we ever thought was possible. ■