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DISENGAGEMENT

Hans Speier

P-1400 ✓

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Approved for OTS release

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The crisis of Western security has political as well as military aspects. Disengagement is a term now frequently used to designate certain proposals for change in American foreign policy, so that we can overcome the crisis. At the risk of being pedantic let us be clear what disengagement means.

You can disengage yourself from a friend or ally by unilateral action. You withdraw. Perhaps you do so because your ally does not perform well enough and you can afford to live without him. Or you are simply better off without him. In any event, you can free him by disengagement so that he can live not in coalition with you, but alone or in coalition with somebody else, who may possibly be an enemy of yours.

Disengagement from an enemy is a different matter. To begin with, you may be forced to disengage yourself from him -- or in his interest from your friend -- because you lack the strength to do otherwise. In this case, the enemy must be satisfied with the gain he makes in consequence of your disengagement or else you remain engaged. You may believe that you have lost contact with him, but he pursues you. You may avoid encounters with him in Europe but meet him in the Middle East, in the Pacific, or elsewhere.

Disengagement from an enemy requires bilateral action.

Now, the current political proposals for disengagement are not -- or not yet -- based on the premise that the West is forced to retreat. Instead, they are predicated on certain

estimates of present and future Soviet intentions and on the fear of accidental war.

1. If one believes that the Soviet Union does not consider military power as the main instrument for our undoing, it appears unnecessary, wasteful and possibly dangerous to indulge in what George Kennan has called the "over-militarization of thinking in the West."¹

2. If one believes that the Soviet Government has aggressive intentions but will abandon them, once its current demands are met, it appears reasonable to explore whether we can sagely meet them.

3. If one believes that central nuclear war may result from miscalculation and that the likelihood of miscalculation can be substantially reduced by negotiating about specific political issues, such as Berlin or Formosa or Israel, then negotiations toward that end might be worthwhile.

Many people advocating disengagement hold these beliefs. It is possible that they are partly right, at least on either one of the first two premises mentioned. The real issue, however, is not whether they are right but whether we can afford to heed their advice, if there is a chance, however slight, that they are wrong now or that they may cease to be right later, possibly in consequence of an act of disengagement.

¹George F. Kennan, Russia, The Atom and The West, New York, 1957, p. 18.

For if they are wrong, the effects of action based upon their advice would be considerably worse than those of current policy, especially if the results of such action are irreversible.

As to the third belief, the effect of disengagement upon miscalculation, it appears that the fatal consequences of misjudging an opponent arise from the conflict of interests with him. This danger cannot be eliminated by negotiation on specific issues and the penalty for making a mistake in assessing the opponent's intention remains a function of the military balance of power, regardless of whether or not these negotiations are successful.

Now, disengagement is sometimes advocated on entirely different grounds, as a form of indirect rollback. Forces might be set into motion through disengagement that will lead to a loosening of bonds between the satellite regimes and the Soviet Union. Again, this belief is possibly correct. Is it likely, however, that the Soviet leaders, who support many of the Western proposals for disengagement, should have overlooked these possibilities? From their point of view they are serious risks. Perhaps the Soviet Government plans to harden when negotiations begin, and as negotiations proceed, to bargain for more than it cares to indicate now. Perhaps, it believes that it will be able to deal with any possible future attempt at defection. Indeed, why should it be more

difficult to suppress revolution in the satellite countries after the withdrawal of American troops from the Continent than it was in East Germany or Hungary, when they were nearby?

Withdrawal of Western and Soviet troops from Europe has been proposed often and in various forms. The proposals go back in time beyond Eden's plan for a demilitarized zone in Europe, which he advanced at the time of the Geneva Conference of July 1955. In 1953 Karl Georg Pfleiderer advocated a demilitarized zone in the middle of Germany. In 1957, George Kennan revived his old proposal that American forces be withdrawn from the Continent of Europe, and "in the course of time" from Britain as well.² Khrushchev, in his TV interview last summer, intimated that Soviet forces would be withdrawn behind the Iron Curtain in that event, and Bulganin in fact underwrote Kennan's plan formally in his letter to Adenauer of December 10, last year. This plan is more far-reaching than the proposal made by Denis Healey, according to which American and British troops would remain at least in Holland, Belgium and France.

How is Europe to be defended after the withdrawal of American forces from the Continent? Kennan has proposed that the European powers build up their own national defenses cheaply. Their forces, he says, "need not, and should not,

²He did so not in his book cited above, but in a subsequent panel discussion broadcast by the BBC.

be burdened with heavy equipment or elaborate supply requirements."³ He envisages "para-military" units that would meet the aggressor at every village cross-road. The military naivete of this idea is patent; it has been recognized by such admirers of Kennan as The Manchester Guardian and the German Social Democrats.

Alternatively it has often been said that the nuclear deterrent would remain effective whether American forces are in Europe or not. If this is so, then at least let's have no more complaints from the advocates of disengagement about the military fixation of U.S. policy and its reliance on that deterrent. And let there be only moderate confidence that strategic miscalculations and minor wars can be avoided by disengagement.

Perhaps, American withdrawal from Europe would not, as some critics fear, be followed by unilateral return of the Red forces upon some pretext or by aggression by proxy. But perhaps this would not happen merely because the European countries would feel obliged to accommodate themselves to the new balance of power on the Continent before aggression occurs. The Communist sphere of influence might be extended by means short of war. NATO might disintegrate in the course of negotiations about the withdrawal of troops, especially since such negotiations may last for many years, as Kennan

³Kennan, op. cit., p. 63.

and others have pointed out. It is difficult to imagine that in that period the lesser NATO powers would become more enthusiastic about NATO than they are now. Instead, they would probably weigh the political consequences, as well as the military effects, to them of a retreat of American forces to the vulnerable nuclear fortress America.

But what about the denuclearization of parts of Central and Eastern Europe? It has been proposed by the Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki in several versions, first in August 1957. No nuclear weapons were to be stationed in West Germany, the Benelux countries, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The Russians vetoed the inclusion of Hungary in this plan, so that it was published originally only in a Polish newspaper without receiving much attention. Rapacki then modified his proposal by excluding Hungary and Holland from it, and presented it to the United Nations in October 1957. The plan was then officially endorsed by the Russian and other communist governments. It was viewed with favor by European socialists. It appealed strongly to West German popular resistance to stationing nuclear weapons in the Federal Republic; at the eve of the NATO meeting last December, a substantial majority of the West Germans opposed the location of IRBM launching sites in the Federal Republic.⁴

⁴In February 1958, 66 per cent of all persons polled by Divo held this view; among socialist sympathizers this percentage was 76. See Divo Pressedienst, March 1, 1958, p. 2.

The ideas of the plan were supported also by George Kennan, a long standing critic of U.S. NATO policy. Kennan averred that by relying on nuclear weapons for defense the United States had prejudiced its ability to solve the political problems of Europe, and by sharing nuclear weapons with European countries it would incapacitate them as well for constructive political action.

The German Government rejected the Rapacki Plan. Brentano said that its acceptance would be tantamount to imposing restrictions upon the armament to be used by the U.S. forces that are stationed in Europe for common defense purposes. The acceptance of the Plan would destroy NATO.

It transpired that Inspector General Heusinger, who advised Adenauer on military grounds to reject the Rapacki Plan might have favored a withdrawal of Western and Soviet forces from Germany only if the remaining conventional forces in Western Europe and the satellite area would be balanced in strength. Unfortunately, no such balance exists. The United States has permitted and enabled the European NATO powers to reduce their manpower contribution to the common defense by introducing the nuclear equalizer into the military equation in 1954. U.S. policy has created the paradox of NATO, from which much of the current interest in disengagement has grown. American nuclear protection is

needed and yet feared by our allies.⁵ The Russians try their best to magnify the fear and deny the need. Since 1945 the Russian objective in this regard has remained constant, more constant than Russian relative military strength to back up their political measures -- threats, warnings and talk about coexistence -- by means of which they hope to attain their objective; it is the liquidation of American overseas bases and the reversal of U.S. foreign policy to its pre-war orientation of isolationism.

Doubts in the reliability of America as an ally in case of war had been mounting in Europe during the last two years, even before the Russians acquired an ICBM capability and before Khrushchev made his wild claim that the manned bomber had become obsolete. Partly for this reason the British have shaped their own nuclear defense policy in preference for deterrence by possession to deterrents by association. NATO lives today with a mixture of contradictory beliefs, such as the fear of Russian nuclear strength and the hope that this strength somehow insures Europe against devastation by the nuclear bombs of Western Europe's most powerful ally; or fear of nuclear war and weapons in Europe mixed with the hope that such weapons will render it unnecessary for the European countries to put more effort into their conventional armaments.

⁵For a fuller discussion of this paradox, see Hans Speier, German Rearmament and Atomic War, Evanston, Illinois, 1957, pp. 95-110.

The West has been negotiating with the Soviet Government ever since Hitler invaded Russia. The West must continue to do so, but without the expectation that such negotiations can provide a panacea for the military or political troubles of the West. Negotiations with the Russians are as desirable as it is difficult to find an issue on which agreement can be reached without incurring a loss in the bargain. Failing such agreements it is desirable to put the onus of failure unto the Russians more frequently than the West has managed to do in the past. It is undesirable, however, and dangerous to search for agreements for the sake of agreement.

U.S. foreign policy has been criticized for its inflexibility, its adamant moralism, and its lack of spectacular success. In the dangerous situation in which the West finds itself, such criticism appeals to the American belief that if free men only apply themselves they can get out of all trouble perhaps by a new international deal, if not by a return to the past. All this is likely to be a delusion. Nor should it be overlooked that many of the same people abroad and at home who complain today about the inflexibility of U.S. foreign policy, deplored only yesterday its fickleness. It is the fate of great powers to be criticized by lesser powers and it is salutary in democracy to voice political misgivings. But foreign policy can not be conducted as though it were a national or international popularity contest.

Moreover, many of the political needs abroad which the United States is asked to satisfy, are the needs of minority groups, which are politically myopic and inadequately informed about military affairs. Even if this were not so, the United States would still have to ask itself whether these needs can be met without harming larger security interests.

This question is not always faced squarely. Take the problem of German unification which is so closely associated with plans of disengagement in Europe. Usually it is not discussed in a sober spirit. Instead, the Western discussion of this subject has been highly emotional, full of recriminations and sometimes disingenuous on both sides of the issue. In the United States, many participants in the discussion seem to have been pressed by the remembrance of things past -- the Versailles Treaty, or the American Civil War or yesterday's efforts to put the stigma of collective guilt on people two thirds of whom now are free allies of the Western security system. In this mood, it has been difficult to inquire into the issue of German unification dispassionately. For example, no sober inquiry has ever been made, for what it would be worth, into the historical experience with the partitioning of smaller countries: has it been harmful or not to the bigger ones, to peace, or to progress? Of course, we prefer Germany to be unified if this were to mean that the whole of Germany were free rather than partly or wholly

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enslaved. But can it be taken for granted that unification on the basis of a compromise with the Russians and a possibly lower measure of collective security are preferable to the current state of affairs?

Let us assume that Germany had been neutralized as a confederation at the end of the second World War, and not turned communist; that American troops had been withdrawn from Europe by 1947, as President Roosevelt intimated to Stalin at Yalta; that communist governments existed in Eastern Europe, though without the presence of Soviet troops; and, most importantly that the balance of nuclear power were what it is today. Can we be honestly sure that then the present imperfect NATO arrangements and the present division of Germany, with West Germany improperly armed on our side, would not appear as a desirable, though unobtainable state of affairs?