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PROBLEMS FACING NATO

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
on 12 December 1967 by
Professor Edgar S. Furniss, Jr.

I don't feel that people have done me any great favor in scheduling a talk just before the NATO Council meets in Paris. In fact, I came up here believing that a slight bit of optimism mingled with a lot of pessimism was probably going to be a true calculation as to the results of the Council meeting. However, there has been so much gloom in the press that I am beginning to revise my position, because the press usually is wrong on what happens at NATO. NATO problems have been so much in the news of late that I would propose this morning, instead, to try to discuss what seems to me to be some of the underlying factors which have produced these specific problems.

Maybe some of you have read the long and excellent book by James Gould Cozzens, *By Love Possessed*, and remember the story that runs through that book as a sort of a motif about the man who falls off the roof of a high building. As he passes the view of the horrified people on the sixteenth floor he waves at them, and says, "Don't worry! All right so far."

It seems to me that some of the problems of NATO are like that: everything is all right *so far*. I believe that one of the things that can also be said about NATO is that, unlike other areas of policy, there is no dearth of ideas. The difficulty is to generate the determination, the unity, and the will to put some of the ideas into effect. The NATO Powers are split; they are not united on any particular policy. Therefore, it is always easier to decide to do nothing rather than to decide to push ahead with one particular decision, recognizing the costs and recognizing that a minority — and what may be a very strong minority — is going to oppose the decision.

What I want to try to do, then, in this brief period is to try to discuss, as I said, the specific problems — such as German unification, French weakness, British military strategy, nuclear armament in Europe, and so on — within the context of what seems to me to be some of the basic underlying factors that have been with the Alliance from the beginning and which have produced this fairly complete stalemate of the Organization.

The first factor which I believe to be important in this context is that NATO is an attempt to create and operate a military command in peacetime. From this obviously stem some of the difficulties that trouble the Alliance. The absence of conflict — the fact that this is peacetime of a sort — creates problems in allocating scarce resources. There is no clear, compelling priority, such as would exist if war should break out. Therefore, there is the problem of NATO *versus* other military demands as in the case of France, and there is military *versus* other foreign policy demands as in the case of Britain and the United States. Then there is another type of problem in the decision as to whether to allocate these scarce resources to foreign policy needs at all as against internal requirements of the nation.

One solution which is implicit in this problem of allocating scarce resources in peacetime is for the United States to bridge the gap between what is needed and what others are prepared to do. This solution has always been inherent in the NATO system. The United States would define the nature of the threat and would assume command to bridge this gap between the Soviet threat and European capabilities with its own resources. However, as you all know, at least since 1953 the United States has not been prepared to do this; also, at least since 1953, the other countries have not been prepared to accept the American definition of “the threat.” Therefore, in some instances they are no more anxious than the United States to permit us to bridge this gap between what we Americans feel to be “the threat” and what the other countries are prepared to do to meet it.

A second problem that seems to me to be allied with the first is that North Atlantic Treaty or the Alliance itself, on which NATO rests, is that of equality among the member nations. That is contrasted with the obvious necessity of a military hierarchy in the assignment of power and responsibility, for one cannot run the Organization on an equinational basis. On the other hand, it is obviously not possible to assign responsibility entirely on the basis of power and military authority. Therefore, some of the NATO organizational problems within the military field seem to me to stem directly from this factor: a way of reconciling the juridical equality of all members of the alliance with the need for disparity in military responsibilities.

Some organizational compromises, as you all know, have been made as a bow toward equality. Once these compromises have been made, they are difficult to change; hence, the Organization itself is difficult to change. Military decisions really have to take place within this political context — and the political context is in very delicate balance, if it is in balance at all.

Hence, the final problem under this general heading is that the issues within the Alliance tend to be batted eternally back and forth. What the French would call a “navette” is set up, or a badminton game, if you will, between political and military authorities. These are batted back and forth because problems are theoretically soluble on different levels, and one solution is not necessarily applicable at a different level. Therefore, I would say that the third category of problems, or the third underlying cause of NATO problems, is that NATO rests on a multinational basis. Yet, the Organization in some respects obviously is designed — and indeed has — supranational or supernational aspects.

The control powers and responsibilities of the supreme Command over subordinate commanders and over national contingents take on some of these supernational features. Therefore, the Organization is in some degree over and beyond the multinational

Alliance which forms its foundation. But, the question is: In what degree? Here, the element of vagueness and mistiness enters the NATO concept. Surely, one of the problems with the European Defense Community (this is perhaps not the *most* important, but it is at least one of the problems) was that it proposed to create a true international army, with an international command. At the same time, it proposed to put it in a subordinate position to a North Atlantic Treaty Organization which has fewer supernatural characteristics.

Some of the states which resent recurrently the supernatural features of NATO are inclined to retreat from the Organization to the Alliance; or, to belong to the Alliance and really not to the Organization at all. The two must be kept separate, then. I think if you would consider Denmark for a moment, you might find there at least a partial illustration of a country that is a member of an Alliance much more than it is a member of an Organization, and there are some other national instances that might be mentioned.

Other states look at the problem the other way: they want to get away from national status; they want to emphasize the trend to supernatural features of the Organization; they want to develop a political counterpart to the military organization, which would likewise be supernatural. These counterpressures tend to keep the features of the Organization rather blurred and at times to reduce its operating effectiveness.

The next problem which I want to mention is that the Organization appears at the same time to be too restrictive and not restrictive enough in relation to the trigger mechanism, or the *casus foederis* of the Alliance. Article V of the Alliance says that if something happens, then the allies agree to do something about it. That is the trigger mechanism. Yet, if you have read Article V lately you will know that it is really quite vague as to what the "something" is that happens — the kind of armed attack. And it is even vaguer as to what should be done about it.

In fact, Dean Acheson, when he was trying to get the Treaty before the Senate to have it ratified, made quite a fetish out of its vagueness. Senators and members of the press kept asking him, "What is it that we are supposed to do? What are we committed to do under this Alliance? Acheson's answer was always, "Stick to the terms of the Treaty itself. We are committed to maintain — and, if necessary, to restore — the security of the North Atlantic area." But this does not really mean very much in actual practice, or it can mean many different things. So, in answer to the question, "What activates the *Alliance* ?" — everything really activates the Alliance; yet, in a real sense, nothing activates it.

If you ask the question, "What activates the *Organization*?" the answer is "military attack by a particular country in a particular area." But that does not get you very far if you want to say, "Activates it how?" This trigger mechanism which I am talking about is military; the area of decision is military. Yet, real decision may effectively elude the Alliance itself. Surely, this is one of the most serious specific problems that NATO now confronts.

The pre-activation posture of the Organization obviously goes far toward determining the manner in which the Alliance will respond if it is tested. Therefore, there are recurrent and very deep-rooted disputes over the fundamentals of that pre-activation posture — whether it has to do with military bases, missile bases, or with the extent and nature of German rearmament, and so on.

But this is not all there is to the story. Lately, Secretary Dulles has made explicit what many people had already realized — that the nature of the response, if it were to take place, would be partly local and partly automatic. If this is true (and I think it is obviously in the cards that it is true), then it means that effective decision may well really escape both the political apparatus of the Alliance and, indeed, the military hierarchy of the Organization itself. In the event of a crisis, both the political

system and the military organization may be reduced to the *ex post facto* role of making legitimate what has already taken place.

The war in Korea shows that this can happen. In the tactics phase the local response is made in military terms, and the nature of that local response goes far toward determining what can be done and what will be done from then on out. Moreover, the manner of the American entry into the Korean War shows that there can be great confusion and argument over just what an "automatic response" is, and where the shadowy dividing line rests between an automatic response (a reflex action) and a calculated, determined policy decision.

The nature of the response, moreover, is partly national and thus escapes the Alliance — resting in large part with the United States and to a far less extent with a couple of other countries. Therefore, the *real* authority of the political and military command under various circumstances must be questionable.

Another set of problems has to do with the contrary demands of others inside the Alliance. Greater and greater NATO control over the nature of the military response is one demand which is set up by some States in the Alliance. There are others, not so vocal, who sort of like things the way they are — and who pressure for less rather than more NATO control.

I said a couple of minutes ago that *everything* activates the Alliance, not the military organization. Of course, I believe this to be true. Articles I and II of the Treaty place economic and political problems within the purview of NATO. As they are all within the purview of NATO, NATO can look out and see all of these problems. But the essential purpose of NATO is military. Therefore, another broad category of problems may be stated as, "What do you do about these political and economic implications and features of the Alliance? What do you do to get beyond the 'talkie-talkie' stage in discussing them, in looking at them — and

in looking at them again and again?" Diplomatic discussion takes place now inside and outside of the Alliance. In fact, I have been told (and am prepared to believe) that there is hardly a problem inside and outside NATO that is not batted back and forth inside the Organization in the discussion stage. It is not that these problems are undiscussed, but that they are talked to death. There is so much talk that talk became a substitute for action. The reason why there is talk and not action, quite obviously, is that any action may weaken the Organization and the Alliance, without necessarily solving the problems which confront the Organization.

The next underlying, fundamental, bedrock problem which I want to mention is the question of the Community within the fifteen-nation Alliance. There has been a lot of loose talk, as you all know, about the North Atlantic Community, or just the Atlantic Community. What does it mean? The most significant thing is that it means a lot of different things to different countries and it means practically nothing to a number of countries. If you ask, "What, really, is this form of Community, and on what does it rest?" — the answer obviously has to be that it is negative; that it rests upon a negative agreement; that we do not like the Soviet Union, and intend to oppose it. With the subtlety and maneuver that post-Stalinist Russia has introduced into international diplomacy, this negative agreement has faltered and has weakened. Therefore, there has been a search for a greater sense of Community upon which to rest an Alliance which faces different problems in 1957 than it did in 1949.

Some people base this sense of Community on the heritage of the North Atlantic Treaty area from Greco-Roman culture. This is fine until you begin to spell it out. What do you mean by "Greco-Roman culture?" It is impossible to spell it out in geographic terms, in economic terms, or in political terms. These foundations of Community are all incomplete and leave the only form of accepted cooperation, then, the basic one of military cooperation against the Soviet Union. Therefore, there are many

people inside the Organization who feel that this historical community base is not enough; that this negative military agreement is not enough; that the Organization must deepen the Community between the member States. In other words, they must cooperate more.

The trouble with this is that once they begin to try to cooperate more, there are very grave fears that disagreements rather than agreements might be uncovered — disagreements so basic that they will further weaken the rather tenuous negative agreement which now exists. There are equally great fears that this cooperation might succeed — and might succeed along lines which are hostile to national development. What I am saying here is that in this search for greater cooperation there are some who fear that it won't work; there are others who fear that it will work and that they will lose out in the process of having the North Atlantic Community rather than their national institutions decide national policy.

The next problem which I want to get to is the problem of the political alliance as the culmination or capstone of allied relations. The top of the alliance structure is political; inside of this is a core area in Western Europe. The basic trouble with the political system can be seen by looking at the core area, where the relationships among the partners are complicated, are overlapping, and, at the same time, are incomplete.

Take Scandinavia as an example. The leader of the Scandinavian group, Sweden, is out. Another member, Finland, is close to being involved on the other side. Or, take Britain and Western Europe. Britain is keeping one foot in the door of Western Europe so that the Western European countries won't slam the door in her face. There have been recurrent statements by the French that the greatest enemy of European unification is the British, the reason being that they don't want to get involved in European unity; nor do they want European unity to proceed without Britain. So they pursue a policy of now encouraging and now giving

the back of their hand to European unity. The reasons are very easily understood. Even in this core area there is one country which certainly belongs in every respect except the military, which is determining, and that is Switzerland.

Yet, behind this political alliance structure you see that essentially it is a bilateral system, with particular countries on the one hand and the United States on the other. There are some problems which arise because of the essentially bilateral pattern. One of the problems is the great scramble before the door of the American Treasury to see who is first in line for the hand-out. This scramble, which takes place perhaps not as much now as it did seven years ago, is a recognition and a tribute to the essentially bilateral nature of NATO. Another feature of the same scramble is that the countries which are not first at the door of the American Treasury, or first in the hearts of the American people, resent this fact. The resentment is particularly located in France. The French resent the fact that Britain enjoys a special bilateral relationship to the United States. The French, therefore, do three things: they try to outscramble the British for a position at the door of the American Treasury or the American State Department (and they usually fail in this); or, they make overtures to the British, trying to work out a bilateral Anglo-French position so that the two of them can go as a team to the United States and get a better deal than France could get by itself (and this also usually fails); or else they make overtures (as they have done quite recently) to the West German government, such as: "How about you and me forming a little team and readjusting the balance — again, on a bilateral basis with the United States and also with Great Britain?" Of course the West Germans turn this down. Why shouldn't they turn it down? They have been at least second in line with the United States for some time now, if not first.

What I am saying here is that there is a lack of mutuality in the relationship between the United States and its so-called

“partners.” Sometimes this lack of mutuality is such that the system almost resembles that of a planet, with satellites revolving around it in different and rather confusing orbits. In this respect, the system is different, but not different in kind, from the Eastern European system of a planet Russia with some Communist satellites revolving around it. In effect, this is the “cold war” pattern — built by, maintained by, and dependent upon the existence of a “cold war,” that is at times not so “cold,” with the Soviet Union.

Before getting into that, there is one more basic, bedrock problem which I want to mention: NATO poses as a regional arrangement within the meaning of the United Nations’ Charter, yet it really is nothing of the kind. “Collective security” (which is what NATO is supposed to exemplify) means institutionalized procedures, including the use of force, for the settlement of disputes — *internal* disputes. The Inter-American system is an example of a true regional collective security arrangement. However, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization does not qualify. Disputes are not even brought formally to the Organization, let alone settled. Arms for Tunisia and Cyprus, and the Saar question are all examples of internal disputes which fall within the geographic framework of the Organization but which effectively escape its political control.

Furthermore, there is no internalized focus or consistency of concern with political and economic problems. Of course the reason is that these political and economic problems do not concern all members of the Alliance to the same degree. As I have mentioned, there are those which are outside, such as Sweden and Switzerland, but which, on an economic level, are more inside Western Europe than some of those which are in the so-called “North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” such as Iceland and Turkey. It seems to me that it is axiomatic that before a bloc can be formed on extra-NATO problems — problems lying outside of the NATO area — there must be some effort to come to grips with the

internal problems which beset the Alliance. Only after the Alliance can make some claim to being an internal problem-solving operation can it really lay claim to being a united expression of policy outside the NATO area.

The final point which I want to make here (and a culmination of the others) is that NATO is vulnerable to penetration and to ossification by reason of these bedrock problems which I have been mentioning. I hardly need to remind you that the purpose of NATO is to deter Soviet attack by building and maintaining automatic, overwhelming retaliatory power — plus ready, mobile delaying forces — to raise the stakes risked by a potential attacker. Yet, there has been an existing undercurrent of disbelief in this basic purpose of the Organization. This disbelief is a triple one.

In the first place, there is disbelief that the retaliatory and delaying forces do, or will in fact, exist and will be recognized by both the allies and the enemy as in existence. You can say, and prove in fact, with high-level secret information, that these forces do or do not exist for this purpose. What I am saying is that far more important even than this is the *belief* on the part of other allies — and of the Soviet Union — that these forces do or will exist. The element of disbelief says, “Regardless of the facts — we do not know the facts and we have to disregard them — so, disregarding the facts, we do not believe that these forces do or will exist.”

There is another type of disbelief, and that is that these forces of one or of both types are in fact needed. This has to do with a view of Soviet behavior and Soviet motivation in both the pre-Stalin and post-Stalin periods. I submit that you cannot prove this proposition one way or another. Therefore, in the light of Soviet behavior, there is always going to be an undercurrent of disbelief that such forces are needed. The danger lies in the fact that the Soviet Union has not always been so stupid as

to limit the area of disbelief by making direct threatening gestures at the West. Indeed, at fairly periodic intervals in post-Stalinist Russia there has been a deliberate effort to lull the West to sleep; to encourage the interpretation in the West that these forces of one type or another, or both types, are not needed.

The third element of disbelief here is that these forces — especially the retaliatory forces — would be used in the most likely contingencies. I need not spend very much time on this because I am sure that this question is familiar to all of you. It involves, primarily, Western European (although some American) military sources putting in a row, in descending order of probability, the kind of attack which might be expected from the Soviet area; next, putting in another row the kind of response which NATO is prepared and able to make; and then showing — or purporting to show — that there is no meeting of these two rank orders of probability, and that the most probable forms of Soviet threat are the ones that we are least able to meet. Now, this can be argued both ways, but all I am saying here is that there is also a fairly substantial level of disbelief on this score.

Hence, once countries in the Alliance make their formal acknowledgement of the cruciality of NATO, they get on with what they regard as the business at hand, and the business is domestic, European, and non-NATO problems: the viability of their national economies, the unification of Germany, the unity of Europe. As they go about their day-to-day business with these very serious and crucial problems, having made a polite bow in the direction of saying, "Well, NATO is crucial; NATO is fundamental," and so on, they begin to ask themselves, "Does the existence of NATO really help to solve our problems or does it, in fact, hinder their solution?" So far as German unification is concerned, the answer appears to be that there are many people who feel that NATO is a hindrance.

Therefore, it is just one step from here to saying that the Alliance is vulnerable to penetration and exclusion. There

are other devices and areas open to the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union has been exploiting them in the Near East, and so on. It is an unsolvable question and, therefore, it is not really worth discussing as to whether this shift has been occasioned by the success of NATO or whether the area outside NATO is more vulnerable to Soviet penetration because NATO exists. What we are confronted with is the attempt by the Soviet Union to encircle and enfeeble the Organization by concentrating on other areas.

I submit that the Alliance is vulnerable in another sense (this is controversial, and maybe you will want to take me to task for it). I am saying here that there is greater *common* interest on some issues between East and West than there is within the Western Bloc itself.

As an example, I would cite Suez, where there was a greater meeting of specific interests between the United States and the Soviet Union than there was between Britain and France on the one hand and the United States on the other.

On German disunification, there is greater specific interest between the United States and the Soviet Union than there is between the United States and some of our allies in Western Europe.

In the regulation and control of armaments, there appears to be (at least on some specific points) a greater feeling of interest at times between the United States and the Soviet Union than between the United States and Britain and France. Hence, the fear which has been periodically expressed, and which arose almost to a level of hysteria on the part of France, that the United States would, in the disarmament negotiations, conclude a deal with the Soviet Union behind the backs of our NATO allies. Surely one reason why Dulles temporarily recalled Stassen and then himself went to London was to reassure the Western European countries that we would not in fact do this.

Indo-China, Algeria and Cyprus are other examples of greater meeting of the minds between East and West than within the West itself.

All in all, I submit an imposing array of special problems exist which are not soluble within the NATO framework, and, furthermore, in which there is a positive incentive to get outside NATO itself.

In conclusion, I think one must agree with Secretary of State Dulles on the inexorable imperative of NATO: that it has got to move forward or backward; that by standing still, it does in fact move backward — and backward toward a formal, ceremonial role for the Organization. There is even some doubt on the degree of formality and ceremony which now exists. So much doubt, in fact, that I would take it that one of the prime purposes of President Eisenhower's trip to Paris was purely ceremonial and formalistic in order to assure the other NATO countries that we love them "in December as we did in May"; to assure them that we intend to be friends, pals and buddies with them from henceforth and forever more. This does not say what we will be pals with them about; neither does it say what problems we propose to solve with them. In fact, it is rumored that the final communique' of the Conference is already drawn up. It is furthered rumored that Paul-Henri Spaak who drew it up and sent it to Washington, saw the words re-written there in order to take most of the sting and, in effect, the substance out of them.

The Organization has to move, then, either forward or backward. This is the final dilemma which I will leave with you here: to move toward tighter bonds of Community. But, as I said, these bonds are difficult to forge. Furthermore, they depend upon a situation of bipolarity in the international environment which created NATO in the first place. Hence, there is great emphasis — among American military circles, in particular — on viewing international politics within a bipolar framework. This makes problem-solving easier. If we have one big problem, or one big enemy, then we may know what to do.

But I question whether bipolarity really describes the international environment or whether action, on the basis of pre-

sumed bipolarity, in all instances increases national and international security. It seems to me that not only in the rise of neutral states but in such instances as Hungary, Suez, and the Near East, that bipolarity — as an operating premise — did not work. In fact, Hungary appears to me to reveal that the Organization is prepared to act only in one type of bipolar situation and bipolar conflict and maybe not necessarily in the most important type of bipolar tension. Hence, we are confronted with recurrent proposals to ease the bipolar situation; to make some gesture toward what is stated to be the reality of the new and contemporary international setting.

These proposals range all the way in the European framework (which is the only one I will talk about now) from a very limited proposal that we do not set up missile bases within "X" miles of the dividing line in Germany to Fritz Erler's suggestion that it is in the Western interest to promote German unification, even at the expense of seeing this united Germany outside NATO altogether.

I return in the last minute, then, to where I started. I don't think the question is a lack of proposals; I think the question is a lack of unity, a lack of determination and desire to carry one or another of these difficult choices through to decision and implementation.

Maybe some of you read in *The New York Times* the wonderful story of a reporter who called up the Pentagon after the satellite misfired. A breathless colonel came on the 'phone and said, "I'm sorry — I can't talk to you now. The Emergency Plan has gone into effect."

The reporter was very interested, and asked, "Oh, really? What emergency plan?"

And the colonel replied, "The emergency plan to let all Pentagon employees off early in the snowstorm. Goodbye!"

This kind of emergency we are prepared to cope with, but whether we are prepared — and, indeed, anxious — to do anything about the other type of emergency remains to be seen.

Thank you!

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Professor Edgar S. Furniss, Jr.

Professor Furniss received his A. B. degree from Yale University in 1940, where he was a Social Science Resident Council Fellow during 1946 and 1947. The following year, he received his Ph.D. degree from the same institution.

He was appointed Assistant Professor of Political Science at Princeton University in 1947, serving in that capacity until 1955, when he became Associate Professor there — a position which he presently holds.

Professor Furniss was coauthor of *American Foreign Policy*.