

# The United States and European Security\*

*John Sheehan*

*General, United States Marine Corp.*

---

\* Comunicação apresentada ao Seminário sobre *O alargamento da NATO e o futuro da Europa*, organizado pelo Instituto da Defesa Nacional e pelo Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, em 9 e 10 de Outubro de 1997.

Let me begin the discussion by explaining what I think NATO's core characteristics or enduring values are. First, it is trans-Atlantic. NATO is the dean of the institutional bridges between Europe and North America. It is in this institutional setting where most of the great political and military debates of the past fifty years have taken place. This tradition of consultations and deliberation is essential if we are going to deal with the transnational problems of the future.

Second, it is a maritime alliance. I do not mean Maritime solely in a naval context, but also maritime in a context of the great explorer Vasco da Gama. An Alliance that understands that commercial and intellectual trade across oceans, especially the Atlantic, is its life blood, because without strong economic and the intellectual trade that is based on a tradition of shared values then other forms of security relationships have no corner stone. General Marshall understood this in 1945.

I would argue that while our parliaments and citizens debate the subject of this conference, "NATO enlargement and the future of Europe", the true challenge facing the NATO Alliance in the years ahead is not just its internal adaptation to a dramatically changed security environment, or its external adaptation by adding three, six, nine or more new members to a political and military alliance.

Instead, the question we need to ask as NATO expands eastward to include primarily land-locked nations, is how will this change the focus of the Alliance and how will this eastern focus affect the core characteristics of the NATO I mentioned earlier.

Change and adaptation are natural phenomena for all successful organizations and biological organisms. Security institutions, like biological organisms, must either adapt to their new environment or face extinction. To date, NATO's proposed streamlining of its command structure, implementation of its Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept, and efforts to enhance its 3-year old Partnership for Peace program, demonstrate that the Alliance is responding – and perhaps evolving in response – to a dramatically altered security and economic landscape.

Since its creation almost a half-century ago, NATO has added new members three times (Greece and Turkey in 1952; West Germany in 1955; and Spain in 1982). In 1966, it survived France's withdrawal from the Alliance's integrated military structure. And over four decades, it has weathered many political and military crises, including the Suez Canal, Cuban Missile and Cypriot crises of 1956, 1962 and 1974 respectively.

World Report, refers to the pace of change we see today as “the acceleration of history”. He states: “Today, it is difficult to grasp the sheer magnitude of human population growth. Those of us born before 1950 have seen more population growth during our lifetimes than occurred during the preceding 4 million years, or since our early ancestors first stood upright.”<sup>1</sup> And in a chilling preview of what our world will look like in the early 21st century, journalist Robert Kaplan writes:

The industrialized countries, which accounted for 40 percent of the world’s population after World War II, now account for only 20 percent, though they earn 85 percent of the world’s income.

In coming decades, the industrialized world is expected to make up only 12 to 15 percent of the global population, as 90 to 95 percent of all births take place in the poorest countries. The fact that this is happening at a time when income and life expectancy rates worldwide are moving up illustrates just how uneven the material distribution has been, and how what is really growing is the disparity between rich and poor.

Never before – not even at a time of various democratic revolutions in Central Europe in 1848 or at the conclusion of World War I – has wealth disparity been so great as after the Cold War. And never before, because of the global communications revolution, has this disparity been so visible. The human race is like an awkward adolescent whose political and social mechanisms are not keeping up with his physical growth.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than looking for a new division between East and West, we should realize that the fault line between North and South demonstrates how much the political, social and economic tectonic plates between our cultures are shifting, and if ignored, can threaten our security.

What do these changes mean for Portugal, the United States and the other industrially developed nations participating in this conference? Obviously, with an increasing number of people in the world scrambling for fewer and fewer basic resources – water, food and energy – there will be a

---

1 Brown, Lester R., *State of the World: 1996*, W.W. New York, Norton & Company, NY, 1996, p. 1.

2 Kaplan, Robert D., *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, New York, NY, Random House, 1996, pp. 434-435.

extraordinary increase in civil strife, regional conflict, and mass migration in the developing world. But where exactly? Will these conflicts remain confined to remote nations like Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan or Tajikistan? Let us see where most of humanity is concentrated.

- More than half of the world's population – over 2.7 billion people – live within 60 miles (100 km) of a coastline.
- Rapid urbanization, especially in developing countries, is creating more coastal megacities – cities with 10 million or more people.
- By the year 2.000, 13 out of 15 of the world's largest cities will be on or near coasts.

*If we could at this time shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 with all existing human ratios remaining the same, there would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere (North and South America), and 8 Africans. Seventy would be non-White. Seventy would be non-Christian, 30 Christian. Fifty percent of the entire world wealth would be in the hands of only 6 people. Seventy would be unable to read, 50 would suffer from malnutrition, and 80 would live in sub-standard housing. Only 1 would have a college education.*

How does this dramatic concentration of wealth in the northern industrialized nations, and population in southern nations affect our security interests? What interest will our governments have in the increasing number of failed states located in the littoral areas of the developing world?

Let me share with you just a few of the United States' recent experiences dealing with post-Cold War security challenges:

- In 1994, south Florida was inundated with thousands of Cuban and Haitian migrants fleeing political oppression and economic hardship. In response, the United States was forced to build massive tent cities to temporarily house the migrants at the U.S. Navy Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. By September of 1994, the camps reached a peak population of 48.000. The camps were finally closed in January 1996 after processing 55.000 migrants. The total cost of the operation to the Department of Defense alone was estimated at \$480 million. Over 17.000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines were assigned to this humanitarian mission.

- Over the past few years, the United States has conducted dozens of no-notice evacuations of non-combatant personnel from strife-torn nations in Africa and the Middle East. While these operations are initiated primarily to protect the lives of American citizens, many third-country nationals also want to take advantage of the chance to leave these war-torn nations. In April of 1996, the U.S. military evacuated over 2,300 non-combatants from Monrovia, Liberia after a tenuous peace settlement broke down and intense fighting erupted in the capital. Of the 2,331 total evacuees, only 471 were American citizens. The remainder came from over 40 different countries.
- While the United State's dependence on Persian Gulf oil has grown from 7.1 to 19.8 percent from 1985 to 1995, it now spends an estimated \$60 billion-a-year to defend what amounts to only \$30 billion worth of oil it imports from the region. Japan remains the most dependent nation on Persian Gulf oil (70%), and Europe's net oil imports from the region has grown from 35 to 46 percent over the past decade. Yet, since over 64% of all the known crude oil reserves remain in the Gulf region, and 40% of the world's oil supply is currently shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, the long-term economic security interests of the entire industrialized world are clearly tied to the uninterrupted flow of Persian Gulf oil.

## **GLOBAL TRADE**

U.S. and European security interests are increasingly linked to unrestricted global trade which represents a growing percentage of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), rising from only 2% in 1970 to over 15% in 1995. Since 1970, global trade has increased in value from \$298 billion to well over \$5 trillion today. Multinational corporations have quickly expanded into new areas to invest in emerging markets, often ahead of government initiatives in those same areas. We must recognize that the new global economy will play a decisive role in determining our nations' future security interests around the globe, and that our security organizations must conform to this development. More than any EU or U.S. government subsidies, trade will increasingly determine our nations' continued prosperity and development in the global economy.

Some analysts estimate the total value of global maritime trade alone at almost \$4 trillion. For maritime nations like Portugal, the United States, the United Kingdom and Greece, the interrupted flow of maritime trade is an economic security issue of paramount importance.

## **ADAPTING TO CHANGE**

My purpose in briefly highlighting how much the security landscape has changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall is not to lessen the importance of the NATO Alliance to European security. Rather, it is to demonstrate that we can no longer use “correlation of forces” or “balance of power” models to measure European or North American security in today’s environment.

As I stated earlier, NATO has already started down the painful, yet necessary path toward reform. The key question remaining is, can NATO maintain the momentum while retaining its identity, cohesion and the Alliance’s unique source of strength: its trans-Atlantic link.

As a nation with a great maritime heritage and Europe’s most western pillar in the trans-Atlantic bridge, Portugal understands that a “Eurocentric” view of the world will not guarantee either Lisbon’s or Europe’s long-term security interests. Over a half-century after Europe emerged the most destructive war in its history, our challenge is to maintain and strengthen the trans-Atlantic link. This is not an easy task. Fewer and fewer North Americans and Europeans remember, let alone understand, the sacrifices of their countrymen in both World Wars, or even the Cold War. The Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift and even the Berlin Wall are quickly becoming ancient history for a majority of our citizens.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP**

The North American-European relationship is based on 18th and 19th century cultural and economic ties that endured and strengthened during the 20th century. For most of that time, Americans believed that their best interests were served by limiting their new nation’s involvement in Old World quarrels. Many today still quote the farewell address of America’s first president, General George Washington, when he warned his

countrymen on September 17, 1796, *"Is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world"*.

For most of the 19th century, isolationism remained America's foreign policy. Rather than potential allies, the United States historically viewed non-Western Hemispheric powers – Britain, France, Spain, Germany or even the Soviet Union – as potential or actual adversaries threatening its adjacent waters, especially the Caribbean. That paradigm remained true since the early days of the Monroe Doctrine, the Spanish-American War, the German U-boat campaigns in both world wars, and finally the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

## FORGING THE TRANS-ATLANTIC LINK

America's isolationist tendencies remained strong until the Great War of 1914. During the first three years of the conflict, America fought only to maintain its neutrality. It took Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, and the disclosure of the German Foreign Ministry's infamous Zimmermann Telegram<sup>3</sup>, to push the American public, and President Woodrow Wilson, to declare war on Germany on April 6, 1917. The United States entered the conflict with what appeared inexhaustible manpower and industrial might, thus becoming a defacto European power. Yet the price of admission for America was high – over 50,000 American battle deaths, 55,000 non-battle deaths and almost 200,000 wounded.

America's revulsion at the costs of victory soon followed its disappointment with the outcome of Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles. Americans dislike and distrust of European power politics of the era led the Senate to reject ratification of the Treaty, and America retreated back into its isolationist shell. This deep isolationism, reinforced by a global wave of pacifism, would cause America to again pay a high price for

---

3 British intelligence intercepts a wireless message January 17 from the German foreign secretary Arthur von Zimmermann to the German ambassador Count Johann von Bernstorff at Washington. Decoded, the Zimmermann note says, "We intend to begin unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor to keep the United States neutral. In the event of this not succeeding we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: Make war together, make peace together, generous financial support, and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to recover the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona."

peace. This time for its absence in European affairs during those fateful years of the mid-1930s. In the Second World War, 300,000 American servicemen would lose their lives and over a half-million would be wounded fighting to liberate Europe and Asia. Many of the American and political leaders of that horrendous conflict – Truman, Eisenhower, Marshall – were also veterans of the First World War, and were determined not to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors. They forged a workable strategy to keep America engaged in post-World War Europe, with the creation of the Marshall Plan and NATO serving to link the new world to the old. For well over 50 years, European security has depended on the trans-Atlantic security structure. We now take it for granted. Whenever we discuss this trans-Atlantic link in fora such as this conference, we speak of it as if it were a tangible structure made of steel and concrete – sort of a *Ponte 25 De Abril* across the Atlantic Ocean. Yet the trans-Atlantic link is nothing more than a 20th century conceptual entity, built entirely of intangibles like shared culture, values, economic interests, and history. While the trans-Atlantic link's security dimension was forged in response to specific crises – the two World Wars and the Cold War, it has survived over the years thanks to the will and vision of political and military leaders on both sides of the Atlantic who clearly understand that American and European security interests are inextricably linked.

Continuing with the virtual bridge metaphor, we must also remember that there are two pillars on the western end of this bridge – Canada and the United States. While America's vast wealth and superpower military status sometimes tends to overshadow Canada's role and contribution, Canada has throughout its history proven itself a consistent and valued ally in NATO and earlier Western efforts during the global wars of this century. Canada also paid a terrible price of admission to become a European power. In this century alone, over 60,000 Canadians died fighting in the Great War, and another 42,000 perished in the Second World War. Thousands of Canadian troops have served in Western Europe during the Cold War, and continue to promote NATO interests as part of IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia.

## **WHITHER NATO?**

While NATO today retains widespread support in our nations, without the fear of Soviet invasion or nuclear conflagration to focus our attention,

it no longer commands center stage in our parliaments or public opinion. As a result, the trans-Atlantic bridge is showing increasing signs of strain. This tension between North Americans and Europeans manifests itself in trade issues between NAFTA and the EU, European demands for a greater leadership role in NATO, specifically command positions, and the U.S. debate on burden-sharing. Without a major crisis to convince our citizens and parliamentarians of the Alliance's importance over lesser squabbles, those of us who value the North American-European security relationship, and want to see it endure well into the next century, will have an increasingly difficult time making the argument at home.

Unlike a concrete structure, it is much more challenging to know when and where the conceptual trans-Atlantic relationship needs repair. Where are present or future stress points? Where are our interests converging or diverging? Are competing demands for finite resources weakening the relationship? These questions become even more important as NATO embarks on extending its complex structure and commitments eastward. To date, the NATO enlargement debate has been reduced to arguments for and against enlarging the existing Alliance to take in new members in Central and Eastern Europe. I contend that the debate should instead focus on what are North America and Europe's collective security interests in the next century, and how will existing North American-European security alliances (NATO, OSCE, etc.) protect and promote those security interests. We must determine where we want to go before we can discuss how to get there.

## **NEW ROLE FOR NATO MILITAIRES**

In the aftermath of the Cold War, many are asking, what is the role of NATO militaries without the Warsaw Pact? Are they sufficiently mobile and trained to operate out-of-area to support peace operations in the Balkans, rescue our citizens abroad, or protect our interests in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere? Can NATO even conduct such multi-national operations out-of-area?

In Bosnia, NATO and non-NATO nations alike have proven they can work together for a common good in a crises. While NATO and our many non-NATO nations should be justifiably proud of the IFOR/SFOR successes in Bosnia, a glance at any world map, and the daily newspaper, will

convince any concerned citizen that there are bodies of water much wider than the Sava River between our forces and our interests. Fixed defensive positions will no longer protect our nations' global interests.

Over the past few years, North American and European militaries have been increasingly busy protecting their citizens and interests abroad, despite a significant decline in defense budgets, overseas bases and troops. In addition to IFOR and SFOR operations in Bosnia, NATO and PfP nations have participated in U.N. – sanctioned embargo operations against Serbia and Montenegro in the Adriatic, Iraq in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, and even drug-interdiction operations in the Caribbean. The key factor in these contingency operations is that they all took place well outside of NATO's traditional area of operations and responsibility.

The Adriatic embargo operations and multiple African contingencies demonstrate that we must strengthen our ability to assemble, train and deploy Combined Joint Task Forces to operate in areas well outside of the Alliance's traditional area of responsibility. We must recognize and take advantage of the flexibility that maritime and other highly mobile forces provide in projecting power and thus protecting our security interests around the world. For NATO to be relevant and successful in the future, we must be able to work with PfP and non-PfP nations wherever and whenever our interests dictate.

By removing our Cold War-blinders, and working closely with our former Warsaw Pact adversaries, especially Russia, we will turn the end of the Cold War into an historic opportunity to develop a common vision of security that supports our mutual interests.

## **CHALLENGES AHEAD**

The United States, Canada and Europe are all experiencing rapid demographic changes. These demographic changes will place additional pressure on the trans-Atlantic link. First, as the average age of our citizens continues to climb (by 2005, the median age in Europe will be 43 years old compared to less than 18 in North Africa), it will place greater demands on our medical system and social programs at the same time that the number of taxpayers in the overall work force decreases. Defense spending, including for NATO, is an obvious bill payer.

Second, the change in North America's ethnic demographic make up is also weakening the trans-Atlantic link. Currently, one-third of the American people do not trace their roots back to Europe, and the percentage is increasing. In 1910, nearly 90 percent of the immigrants to America came from Europe. In the 1980s more than 80 percent came from Asia and Latin America.

I recently read an article in the Washington Post on the question of who is a Canadian. It stated there are now 5 million foreign-born Canadians compared to 24 million native-born. As in the United States, most of those foreign-born Canadians do not trace their heritage to Europe.

Economically, our strong trade ties are also being overshadowed by the lure of more lucrative markets in the Pacific Rim. Our defense industries do not work together as they compete in a global marketplace. However, we must be careful and not allow let these demographic and trade issues weaken the trans-Atlantic link.

Recently, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan, and will soon do likewise for the NATO Alliance itself. Few realize today the difficulties those great leaders encountered over a half-century ago in order to gain and maintain the American public's support for their unprecedented and costly efforts to bring peace and prosperity to Europe. If the trans-Atlantic link breaks down, for whatever reason, it will be impossible to resurrect short of another major war on the European continent.

For fifty years, Europe and the world has benefited from the vision, leadership, and sacrifice of NATO's early leaders. It remains to be seen if we are up to the challenge of continuing their great work.

In conclusion, this conference is about exchanging ideas from different viewpoints to help us seize this historic opportunity for global cooperation. Such an intellectual exchange is essential if we are to make sense of this emerging world, and more important, sow the seeds for future multinational cooperative ventures. Since we are entering uncharted waters, all of us can contribute to developing new strategies and innovative programs that will allow us to wisely use our limited resources in the emerging global security environment.

In a sense, we are facing a challenge similar to the one facing General Marshall in 1945. *Looking back at the carnage and destruction of two world wars, and ahead toward a new trans-Atlantic institutional bridge between Europe and North America. A maritime bridge with pillars that support all aspects of security – political, military and economic.*

Hopefully, this conference will help us to develop a vision that will reorient and rejuvenate the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance. A vision of where we want to be in the future, one that is not tied to where we happen to be at this moment in time, and definitely not where we were in the past. With such a vision, our nations and our partners will be able to pool our limited resources to accomplish collective security tasks well into the next century.