

SOCIALIST RENEWAL

Europe and NATO Expansion

FRANK BLACKABY

Pamphlet
No 9

EUROPEAN
LABOUR
FORUM

£1.50

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Frank Blackaby

Frank Blackaby was Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute from 1981 to 1986.

Introduction

If you say ‘Europe’ to anyone in Britain these days, it triggers comments on beef, fish, the Conservative Party, and, just possibly, the Inter-Governmental Conference. These are ephemerae. The big issue is – as it has always been – how do we make sure that we never again have a great war in Europe? We failed twice this century. It would be wicked to fail again. Could it happen? The way things are going, the answer is – Yes.

Five years ago, peace over the whole of Europe was there for the taking. Western Europe was already a ‘security enclave’, in this sense: that it was absurd to think that the three old contenders – France, Britain and Germany – would ever again resort to military force to settle disputes between them. Germany had been brought into the Western comity of states: it was no longer an expansionist power. Then from 1985 on, Gorbachev set about removing for good the idea of Soviet expansionism.

It is easy to forget the enormity, and the totality, of that change. Indeed it was not one change: it was about nine changes. The Berlin wall came down. All Soviet troops left Eastern Germany, and all other Warsaw Pact states as well. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved. The USSR broke up, and two new states were created – Belarus and the Ukraine – which stood between Russia and Poland. So Russian troops, withdrawn to their new border, were over 1,000 kilometres away from the new German border. The USSR accepted the reunification of Germany.

There was more. In the five years before its dissolution, the

USSR assented to a whole series of Western arms control proposals. It accepted a total zero for all ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges from 500km to 5,500km – a proposal the US had put forward in the certainty that the USSR would turn it down. The USSR signed a Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe which meant far more dismantling and destruction of weapon systems on the Eastern than on the Western side. It agreed to a START Treaty reducing Soviet nuclear weapons much more than those of the US.

Finally, any idea of furthering the worldwide spread of Communism was abandoned. What else could the USSR (and later Russia) have done, to convince the world that it was not an aggressive expansionist power?

A chance

Here then was a chance. For the first time in recorded history there was a chance to create a Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals where the risk of inter-state (not intra-state) war could be reduced down towards zero. This had already happened in Western Europe. Within the region of the European Union security was no longer a military matter. In any dispute between EU members, their relative military capability was irrelevant. Even the fiercest British Eurosceptic, angry at the ban on British beef exports, does not suggest calling the chiefs of staff into Cabinet meetings. The idea of settling disputes within the EU by military means is off the map of political possibility.

This 'security enclave' could have been extended to Eastern Europe. Two things were needed. One was to bring Russia into the comity of nations as an equal partner – as had already been done with the Second World War enemy, Germany. The other was to avoid at all costs the creation of a new dividing line in Europe. There should be no going back to the old pattern – an alliance of selected European states against the threat from a European enemy outside the group.

The opportunity was lost. It is not going to be easy to salvage things now.

NATO was clearly not the right body for the new Europe. The North Atlantic Treaty, the Washington Treaty, is a simple, monochrome Treaty. Security organisations fall into two classic categories. There are collective security treaties, which are concerned primarily with conflicts between their members; and there are collective defence treaties, which are created to deal with an enemy or enemies outside the group. The Washington Treaty is a collective defence treaty, addressed to an outside threat. It is not – repeat not – a collective security treaty. It has no provisions for dealing with conflicts between its own members. That is one reason why it is so short: it can be printed out on one sheet of A4 paper.

Further, NATO was a single-enemy treaty. It had one purpose and one purpose only – to deter the USSR from an attack on Western Europe. It was a military treaty, and nothing else. It had no concern with human rights – there was no question of suspending Greece or Turkey when they were under military dictatorships. It had nothing to do with economic issues. Its purpose was to confront an enemy, the Soviet Union, with military power.

How has it been possible to promote NATO as the dominant security organisation in Europe, when the Soviet Union was no longer the enemy? There has been no revision to the Washington Treaty of 1949. It is still for collective defence, and that presumes some enemy. These are some answers to that question.

The promotion of NATO

It soon became clear that, in spite of the loss of the enemy, NATO would remain the United States' chosen instrument of influence in Europe. The US had no intention of allowing the Pan-European Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the CSCE, later the OSCE) to take its place. In NATO, the United States had

an undisputed position of leadership. It dominated NATO's decision-making process – for the threat, spoken or unspoken, of US withdrawal from Europe was always there. The CSCE was much too European for American tastes. The USA had (in its view) won the Cold War. Russia was in a chaotic state, so that there was no need to pay much attention to Russian views on any security issue. The general US attitude was: 'We are the masters now'.

In the early period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, some of the Eastern European states, former members of the Warsaw Pact, initially favoured the idea of a pan-European security body. They changed their minds when they understood the US position. Their long period of subjection to Soviet hegemony had left them with one main security obsession: to stay out of any Russian sphere of influence. They wanted a guarantee from the United States that this would not be permitted. The only way they saw of obtaining that guarantee was by becoming members of NATO. For them, NATO was still an organisation for deterring Russia. As one Polish diplomat put it – though not on a diplomatic occasion: 'We are not interested in the fun and games. [He was referring to Partnership for Peace manoeuvres, discussed below]. We just want to make sure that, if there is trouble with Russia, the US marines will be there'.

NATO moved in a somewhat crab-like way to its present position, of accepting the idea that states which were previously members of the Warsaw Pact should be enrolled as full members of NATO. The first move, in 1991, was to establish the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, open to all Central and East European states and later to all the successor states of the old USSR. Virtually all the eligible states joined. The Council's function was to provide consultation on defence planning and other military matters. Whether in fact Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have benefited much from such consultations is perhaps doubtful.

The next step was to develop with some of these states Partnership for Peace (PfP) programmes. It is always as well to be

wary when military organisations adopt the word ‘Peace’. The US Strategic Air Command had as its motto ‘Peace is our Profession’ at a time when it was sending B52s with nuclear bombs to loiter near the Soviet border. President Reagan decided to christen the MX Intercontinental Ballistic Missile the ‘Peacekeeper’ – though most of those writing about US nuclear weapons seem to have jibbed at using this designation.

‘Partnership for Peace’ programmes might suggest such items as educational programmes in schools designed to encourage children not to hate other nationalities, or the financing of films which show the appalling consequences of modern war. In fact the NATO Partnership for Peace programmes are concerned exclusively with the military: peace was a military matter, to be obtained by military means. So PfP programmes involve such items as joint military exercises, force planning and the development of interoperability. Russia accepted the idea of PfP programmes because it assumed that they were a relatively innocuous substitute for full NATO membership.

Then in January 1994 NATO, at US instigation, decided in principle to admit former Warsaw Pact states as full members of NATO. This epoch-making decision was taken with little public debate in Europe – Europeans were preoccupied with Maastricht and all that. So PfP programmes, instead of being substitutes for NATO membership, were billed as part of the necessary preparations for full membership. The promise of full NATO membership has perhaps been made most explicitly to Poland. In July 1994 President Clinton, no doubt with Polish-American votes in mind, stated before the Polish Parliament: ‘Bringing new members into NATO, as I have said many times, is no longer a question of whether, but when and how’.

NATO eventually published a study on enlargement in September 1995. It conveys the message that this enlargement will improve security and stability for all states: the phrase ‘security and stability’, sometimes varied to read ‘stability and security’,

appears thirty times in the first 11 pages of the paper. The early part of the paper accepts that things have changed, and that there is virtually no risk of 'a re-emergent large-scale military threat'. It then refers to 'risks to European security which are multi-faceted and multi-directional' – the facets or directions are not specified.

However, the later sections which deal with the modalities of expansion imply that nothing has changed. The conditions of membership are the same. There should be no change in the Treaty – it stays a collective defence Treaty. It is strongly suggested that it would be a good idea for new members to accept the stationing of other allied forces on their territory: '. . . the stationing of allied forces offers specific military advantages in relation to collective defence'. However, this should be 'neither a condition of membership nor foreclosed as an option'.

On nuclear weapons, 'there is no a priori requirement for the stationing of nuclear weapons on the territory of new members': however, this also is not foreclosed. New members must accept NATO's nuclear weapon doctrine, which still includes possible first use. President Havel of the Czech Republic recently changed the view he previously held, and now allows for the possibility of nuclear weapons on Czech soil. The document states: 'New members should concentrate, in the first instance, on interoperability'. That means that new weapon systems should be bought from manufacturers in NATO countries, not any longer from Russia.

Consequences

This decision – the Eastwards expansion of NATO – seems to have been taken without asking what would happen next. Here three questions are asked. What would happen to relations between Russia and the West? What about the new dividing line, between those states which are in NATO and those which are not? If Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic join NATO, will they be more secure?

The NATO document on enlargement has a section on

relations with Russia. It leaves a vague impression of Russian cooperation, although it does concede that 'Russia has raised concerns with respect to the enlargement process of the Alliance'. This is a massive understatement. The document offers this anodyne reply to those concerns: '... The Alliance has made it clear that the enlargement process ... will threaten no-one and contribute to a developing broad European architecture based on true cooperation throughout the whole of Europe, enhancing security and stability for all'.

How does the idea of NATO extension play in Petrozavodsk? Not well. In Russia, unlike Western Europe, the expansion of NATO has been extensively discussed. There is a consensus: it is negative. In 1993 Yevgeniy Primakov, now Foreign Minister, said that if 'the biggest military grouping in the world with colossal offensive potential' moved closer to Russia's borders, then this would call for 'a substantial reassessment of the Russian defence concept and a redeployment of armed forces, a change in operative plans'. More recently we have had the speech of the Russian Deputy Defence Minister, Andrei Kokoshin, who in the 1988-92 period had been one of the more prominent advocates of Soviet accommodation with the West. In February this year he reminded a Munich audience that the 1990 Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany prohibited the stationing of foreign troops in Germany's eastern Lander: the point of the prohibition had been precisely to prevent any Eastward move for NATO. Now NATO was proposing an extension which leap-frogged east Germany and which could bring possibly nuclear weapons and very probably foreign troops even further to the East. Kokoshin said that it would usher in a new era of 'dangerous confrontation'.

In Russia the condemnation of the NATO decision seems universal – in articles, think-tank reports, reactions of political parties and collective statements from the Russian equivalent of the 'great and good'. Opinions differ about what Russia should do if it happens. These are three of the more moderate proposals

(the extremists want a military reoccupation of the Baltic republics):

- (a) Russia should move to build up a military-political alliance to counter NATO expansion. Belarus would certainly join, and Russia would put great pressure on the Ukraine to join as well. President Kuchma of the Ukraine has already spoken in Moscow, opposing NATO expansion. So a new, hostile border would be created, between Poland and the states to the East.
- (b) Russia should then reintroduce ground-based tactical nuclear weapons to protect the border. Since NATO would then have a formidable superiority in conventional forces, Russia would have to rely much more on nuclear warheads. The decision to withdraw ground-based tactical nuclear weapons was a kind of gentlemen's agreement between Bush, Gorbachev and later Yeltsin. There is no Treaty to prevent their reintroduction. Agreement would be sought to put them on the Belarus-Polish border.
- (c) Russia should not ratify either the START II Treaty or the Open Skies Treaty until the idea of an Eastward expansion of NATO is jettisoned.

For the moment Western politicians have put the idea of NATO expansion on the back burner. They hope, by their temporary silence, to be of some help to President Yeltsin's campaign. No doubt President Zyuganov would react more fiercely if the expansion does happen. However, in Russia the hostility to the idea is so widespread that any President would be bound to take some action of some kind – military as well as political – if the expansion goes ahead.

Which states?

The leading candidates for joining NATO are Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic; Slovakia is more doubtful. The states at the bottom of the list are the Baltic Republics. This is in some ways a rather odd ranking. In spite of disclaimers, the applicant

states are interested in NATO membership for one reason and one reason only – as protection against a resurgent Russia. The Baltic states could claim to be in the greatest need, because of their problems with substantial Russian minorities. However, NATO Governments recognise that if these states joined NATO all hell would break loose in Russia: so the Baltic states are at the end of the queue.

So what would happen if Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic became full members of NATO? There would be a clear new dividing line in Europe. Further, there would be a *de facto* declaration of spheres of influence. The Western powers would be saying to Russia, in effect: ‘We will take those three states into the Western sphere of influence. You can have the rest’. There is no way in which this decision could fail to make a new dividing line in Europe – and a hostile one at that. As a consequence Russia might well put pressure on the Baltic states, on Belarus and on the Ukraine to accept the stationing of Russian forces on their territory.

If Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO, would they in fact be more secure? One argument used a good deal is that these three states are in a ‘security vacuum’. This metaphor was extensively used in the debates on NATO expansion in the US Congress. Representative Christopher Smith, for example, described central Europe as a ‘no-man’s land . . . between Germany and Russia’. He cited US political, economic, and security interests on the continent, and argued that NATO could fill a vacuum that would sustain progress made towards democracy and free-market economies in the region.

The vacuum metaphor is not helpful. Vacuums have to be filled by something. The implication is clear: if NATO doesn’t move in, Russia will. Why would Russia ‘move in’, whatever that might mean? It has no common border with the three states any longer. Which would be more profitable for Russia – good relations with these three states, or bad relations? Again, the parallel with

Western Europe is useful. Belgium and the Netherlands have common borders with militarily powerful states. They are in a 'security vacuum': NATO does not fill it, since it has no provision for dealing with disputes between Treaty members. For Belgium and the Netherlands the concept of a security vacuum is meaningless: their relations with France and Germany are such that the overwhelming military power of those two states is not relevant.

The sensible course for the three applicant states is to work on developing good relations with Russia, which should not be difficult. If they join NATO, that will simply help to bring about the very thing they fear – a Russia which stops the decline in military spending, starts to build up more powerful military forces, and moves back to military confrontation with the West.

The applicant states should note that the 'NATO guarantee' in Article V of the Washington Treaty is not unequivocal. It does begin by saying that 'an armed attack against one or more [allies] shall be considered an attack against them all'. However, it then goes on to say that each party to the Treaty will assist the ally under attack with 'such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force.' There is no unequivocal military commitment. In the US Congressional debate opponents of NATO expansion said that, due to US conventional force reductions in Europe, such expansion would 'create a dangerous gulf between our commitments in Europe and the resources required to meet them'. Representative Hamilton said that 'these conventional force reductions would leave too great a reliance on US strategic nuclear forces to meet the US commitment'. Would the US really threaten a nuclear war in defence of Poland?

However, in spite of this questioning, NATO's military establishment in Brussels has probably already started military contingency planning for three new entrants. It is hard to think of any realistic contingencies – a Russian incursion into Poland through Belarus? – but no doubt military imagination will think

of something. There has already been discussion about Poland's flat terrain: does it give more advantage to the invader or the defender? It clearly suggests the use of heavy armour, and that in turn suggests prepositioning. The next stage would be military exercises, which would provoke counter-exercises on the other side. No doubt some of those on the military side in NATO would find it in some ways comforting to be back to business as usual.

For Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the cost of joining NATO, and obtaining such guarantees as Article V provides, is likely to be a much more hostile border to the East. This is a doubtful bargain.

How to get out of this mess

It will not be easy to find a way out of this foolish and unnecessary confrontation with Russia, because neither side will want to lose face. The Americans – fully conscious of their position as the one remaining superpower – have promised NATO membership particularly to Poland. They seem determined to take no notice of anything the Russians say. The Russians, increasingly angry at being treated as some kind of basket case whose views can be totally ignored, would have to do something if this Eastward expansion went ahead. The NATO decision in principle, and the US refusal to accept any modifications which might make the decision more palatable, has already served to increase Russian hostility to the West.

Once it is accepted that NATO's present policy will build up great trouble for the future, it should be possible to find a proposal less provocative to the Russians. For example, NATO and Russia could jointly agree to guarantee existing borders in Central and Eastern Europe. There is the Ukrainian proposal, for a nuclear-weapon-free zone from Sweden in the North to Bulgaria in the South, taking in all the Central and East European states. The range of non-provocative possibilities is wide. The dominant requirements for European security remain – that Russia should

be within the structure and not outside it, and that there should be no new dividing line in Europe.

According to Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, any invitation to a new state to join NATO has to have the unanimous agreement of all the existing members. In the debates in the US Congress, the representatives seem not to have noticed this particular clause. They clearly regarded NATO expansion as a matter for the United States alone to decide. Perhaps one or other of the European members of NATO might be prepared to incur US displeasure, and indicate that it might be better to wait for a more comprehensive European security agreement.

Envoi

It is silly to keep repeating that NATO's Eastwards expansion will not create a new dividing line in Europe. Of course it will. It is silly to revert to the old 'fallacy of the last move' – that once NATO moves Eastwards, it is the end of the game. It is not. The Russian Government – any Russian Government – will react, militarily as well as politically. Those who draft NATO documents seem to believe that, if they intone the mantra 'security and stability' thirty times, all problems will disappear. They will not. The course is being set for Europe to drift gradually downwards towards Cold War II – 'that stale imposture played on us once again'.

Printed by the Russell Press Ltd. Tel: (0115) 9784505.

Published in July 1996 by Spokesman for European Labour Forum, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham, NG7 4ET. Tel: (0115) 9708318. Fax: (0115) 9420433.

Publications list/subscription details available on request.

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