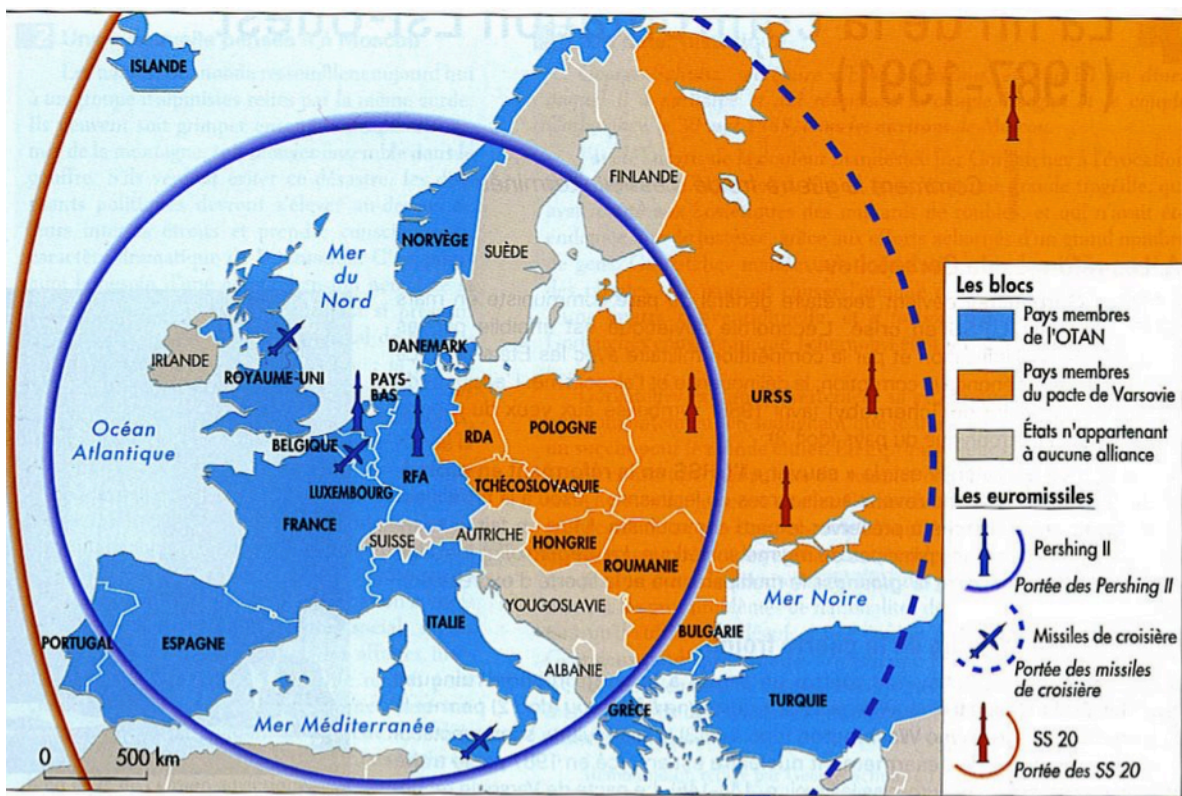




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40 Years after the NATO Double Track Decision

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On 3rd and 4th December, NATO Leaders will gather in London to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Atlantic Alliance. It will be eight months late and, probably, will be hosted in a not very convenient place, because of the ongoing local Brexit paranoia.

It will be good, nevertheless, to have a candid and comprehensive discussion on the future of the Euro-Atlantic security community, at the highest political level. So far, the prologue is quite scary: on one side, the US President seems always eager to blame any initiative taken by the EU and its Member States; on the other side, the French President responds, announcing NATO's "brain death".

It is appropriate to quote Mark Twain ("Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated") and it is fair recalling that, in its history, the Atlantic Alliance has already weathered many severe storms.

But now the challenge is becoming rather existential: in a quickly changing world, the only way to stand firmly together is to have truly converging values and interests. I hope our leaders will remain farsighted enough to look beyond their personal agenda and, instead, to keep focusing on a common vision.

In order to help the updating of NATO's common vision, I would suggest that, in preparation of the London Summit, due attention is given to another anniversary, forty years after the Dual Track Decision adopted by a Special Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council on the 12th of December 1979.

It was probably NATO's best moment, with the US responding positively to a European request to match the Soviet SS-20 deployment, while at the same time paving the way to a successful disarmament and arms control initiative (INF Treaty in December 1987).

It was indeed the best response to the fear of decoupling in Europe, because of the SALT negotiations between Washington and Moscow, which might have resuscitated isolationism on the other side of the Ocean. If the two superpowers are going to relax in their MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) syndrome, why should the Americans take further risks and costs, just to protect those "lazy Europeans", who do not want to foot their appropriate defense bills? This was the fear in Europe, to which the American leadership reacted in a balanced and farsighted way.

The US accepted to listen carefully to European concerns, expressed by Helmut Schmidt in his famous London IISS speech on the 28th October 1977, denouncing the new Soviet threat to

“European NATO only”, with the deployment of Intermediate Nuclear Missiles unable to reach the American soil. The offer by Washington of the deployment in Europe of new missiles was the appropriate reassurance needed by the Europeans and, incidentally, it matched the US military objective to modernise its theatre nuclear arsenal. Solidarity in defense of Europe, coupled with the unprecedented offer to the Soviet Union of a Zero Option negotiation, leading to the complete elimination of an entire category of nuclear weapons. It was not “either or”, it was both START and INF Treaties to be pursued at the same time.

It was one of the few moments when the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome was defeated, with Italy accepting basing roles and responsibilities that matched the German request not to be left alone in continental Europe in shouldering such burden. Other countries were reluctant and there was a serious risk of Bonn giving up, because of its potential isolation. I am extremely proud of the courageous Italian contribution and I will come back to it later on, along with an invitation to read the excellent literature now existing on the theme (books by Leopoldo Nuti and Lello Lagorio, as well as an article by Antonio Ciarrapico). A small group of Italian diplomats (among them, Amedeo de Franchis, afterwards NATO Deputy Secretary General and Italian PermRep to NATO) persuaded two successive Governments in Rome that the Italian availability for basing arrangements was the best way to relaunch our position in NATO and on the international scene, after the unfair exclusion from the Guadalupe Summit called in early 1978 by French President Giscard d’Estaing, inviting US, UK and the Federal Republic of Germany only. No real progress was achieved in such restricted format. Thanks to its timely offer, Italy became, instead, the *deus ex machina* of the successful preparation of NATO’s Double Track Decision.

It is worth recalling that it was a decision taken, notwithstanding the poor personal chemistry between Chancellor Schmidt and President Carter, with both leaders accepting not to overlay such aspect, in the superior interest of a common cause. May such wisdom always prevail in similar circumstances!

It was the best way to implement the NATO doctrines of “Defense and Détente” (Three Wise Men’s Report in 1956 and Harmel Report in 1967) with “binary approaches” that truly embodied the “political nature” of an Alliance, which is wrongly considered too often only a military tool.

It was the beginning of the end of the Cold War, with just a single decade lasting from the Double Track Decision to the fall of the Berlin Wall, with less than two years to the opening of the INF

negotiations and less than eight years to the adoption of the Treaty. It was a decisive test of firmness and political vision with the “Euromissiles” deployment and the Zero Option’s offer, which – notwithstanding the Soviet propaganda and some coward Western slogans (“Better Red Than Dead / Better Dead than Red”) - definitely contributed to accelerate, immediately afterwards, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and of the Soviet Union.

Such magic events were not unfortunately the “end of history” but they definitely remain a positive, turning moment that nobody is regretting, thirty years after. What lessons can we therefore learn today from the Double Track Decision?

I would suggest the following four points:

- Firstly, it should always be kept in mind that, if the Atlantic Alliance has to remain a bridge between the two shores of the Ocean, such bridge needs two pillars. On the European side, it is now abundantly clear that our pillar cannot but be a collective one, with a progressive pooling of resources in a single European defense consortium, where it will be necessary to avoid duplications and waste, while promoting standardization and enhancing the final, quantitative and qualitative, military output. To ask only for the increase of national defense budgets, without encouraging at same time - and with the same emphasis - more cooperative efforts under the EU/EDA/OCCAR or other similar European Defense umbrellas, is a very narrow-minded NATO policy, which – unless rapidly rectified - will definitively backfire on Western cohesion. I have great nostalgia for the vision of the first Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, Gen. Eisenhower, who, in July 1951, after having met the European Federal Movement leaders, said in a speech: “A solid, healthy, confident Europe would be the great possible boon to the functioning and objectives of the Atlantic Pact”;
- Secondly, it remains extremely crucial to combine long term defense planning and budgets with timely political and strategic decisions, giving concrete evidence to the usual pledges of solidarity in sharing risks, roles and responsibilities. The Italian availability in 1979 to host the future deployment of Cruise missiles was a case in point, not only for its substantive contribution but also for the political “snowball” effect it had on the German, Dutch and Belgian decision making processes, and definitively on the adoption of the Double Track Decision itself. It would be fair, in any future burden sharing, to ponder adequately the importance of such critical, bold postures.

- Thirdly, given the present difficult moment in the US-Russian Arms Control Agenda, with a worrisome sliding back from the achievements of a rather recent past, what could be, from the NATO perspective, the building blocks of a new Double Track Decision, in order to reverse such negative trend and create the conditions for another “win-win” scenario? I hope NATO leaders will, at the London Summit, devote some time to such question. It will not have easy answers but, at least, you may expect initial reflections and taskings to the relevant Alliance bodies, in order to present options for future, ambitious proposals. Probably, the most difficult element will be to move from a “one-to-one” scenario to a global landscape, where many more, greatly different actors (China but also others, including unfortunately also the risk of non State entities) will play a role and the level of interactions to be considered will exponentially increase. I am told that the same difficulty applies, when Artificial Intelligence (AI) developments are tested, moving from the already sophisticated chessboard to other even more complex games (like, for instance, the Chinese “Go”). I understood that it is now rather common for AI devices to defeat chess champions, while the human resilience is higher for the Go games. To apply the same methodology to the disarmament, arms control and nonproliferation agenda, we need, for the new, global landscape, a totally new, multidimensional and fast-moving “Peace and Security Algorithm” which is not yet available. I do hope it might be developed if there is enough political will in sharing sensitive “big data” and experimenting the common benefits of a solid “Trust and Verify” approach, which is another, lasting legacy of the Cold War arms control negotiations.

- Finally, on a more general note, I think our Governments need to appreciate the real complexity of decisions, with all their ramifications, thus to allow for thorough and well thought preparatory processes (HLG/SG at that time). It is essential to resist “gut feelings” (especially now that “tweeting” makes it impossible to re-adjust early comments) and to fully exploit all possibilities offered by multilateral fora (including NATO) to combine leadership and inclusiveness. Can we really do this with some inadequate, almost “lame duck” or outgoing leaders? We will probably need a “breathing space” before embarking into ambitious deals. Hoping for better leaders in certain Capitals.



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