



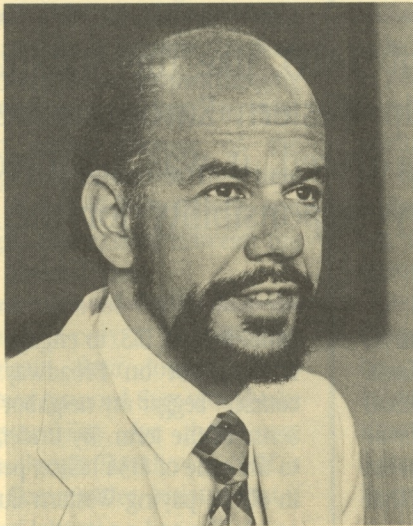
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“Seven Myths About NATO”

By **Melvyn Krauss**



**Presented at the Shavano Institute Seminar
“The Morality of Defense: Why Stay in NATO?”
January 14, 1988
Seattle, Washington**

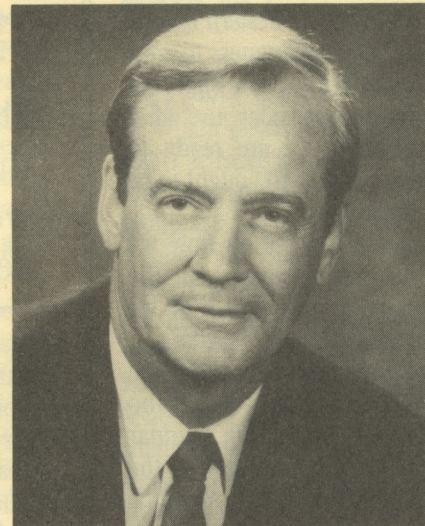
In January of 1988, *The New York Times* carried an article entitled “Navy Secretary Suggests Forces in Europe be Cut,” quoting the then Secretary James Webb. According to the article, Webb called “for a thorough review of United States commitments to foreign nations and a re-examination of the deployment of American forces around the world, especially in Europe.” The Navy Secretary noted that “national resources, changes in the world economic structure, recent political changes and the improved capabilities of many of our allies dictate that we must, perhaps for the first time since the late 1940s, seriously debate the posture of U.S. military forces around the world.”

Webb went on to suggest that a national debate over this issue would be in order. The United States, he argued, has commitments to sixty nations through treaties or other arrangements which require extensive military involvement. As a result, we have become “set in static defensive positions that have drained both our economic and military resources.” In the Secretary’s own

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“NATO: The Essential Treaty”

By **Jack Forrest**



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My perspective on the NATO issue springs from personal experience as well as commitment to a nearly forty-year-old alliance which has played a major role in the postwar era.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is not merely a piece of history; it is essential to our future and undergirds much of our national strategy. It is within this context that we must consider our options. One, obviously, is to scrap the whole alliance: pack up our bags and go home. Another is to withdraw from any meaningful participation or to so scale down our financial and military contributions that other members are called upon to take over the leadership responsibility which is currently ours. The best option is to use the debate over NATO’s viability to our advantage to reform rather than repudiate NATO.

A recent incident may be illustrative of my argument in favor of the last of these three options. Two generals, one French, one American, were engaged in a recent discussion. The American was

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Editor's Note: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a collective defense alliance created in 1949 in response to alarming Soviet expansionism in Central and Eastern Europe. Its guiding principle is security through mutual aid and self-help, yet the United States has borne a larger share of the financial and military burden than any of the 16 other member nations, accounting for 50 to 65 percent of our annual defense budget. The call to "get out of NATO" is being heard more and more often today.

Melvyn Krauss, the author of *How NATO Weakens the West* (1986), contends that the NATO nations have the money and the manpower to defend themselves, but that "they have been able to keep the welfare state, keep U.S. support and feel safe from the Soviets."

Jack Forrest, former deputy commander in chief of the U.S. Army in Western Europe warns, however, "Our willingness to consider abandoning NATO is a sure sign that we ought to stop and consider just what kind of commitments we are ready to uphold." He argues that NATO ought to be reformed, not repudiated.

Much attention is focused on how we should respond to our enemies, but the NATO debate makes it clear that how we respond to our allies is just as vital.

These essays were originally presented in January of 1988 in Seattle at a Shavano Institute for National Leadership seminar for two hundred leaders from around the country. Our thanks to the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust for making this program possible.

About the Authors

Melvyn Krauss is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace and a professor of economics at New York University. He is a regular contributor to the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and many other publications. His books include *The New Protectionism*, *Development Without Aid*, and *How NATO Weakens the West*.

Jack Forrest, an executive with Ford Aerospace and Communications Corporation, retired from the Army in 1983 as a lieutenant general after service stretching from the closing days of World War II. His last assignment was as deputy commander in chief of the U.S. Army in Europe, and from 1981 to 1983 he directed the Army's European counterterrorism efforts.

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words:

It can fairly be argued that the economic recovery of other nations has not uniformly been met with the complete resumption of their obligation to join us in protecting the way of life and the values that we share. While American allies in NATO should do more for their own defense, another element must be the responsibility of the Japanese as a friend, ally and world power, to assume a greater portion of the regional military responsibility in Asia.

Now, we must remember that Secretary Webb was speaking on his own behalf and not that of the Navy Department or the

Middle East, Africa, Asia or even in Europe? Our Western European allies become alarmed at such "American imperialism." The Soviets have no need to launch a military invasion of Europe—the status quo works just fine for them. We've had peace for forty years, but it has come at a very high price. Ironically, the Soviet enemy has benefited substantially—too much in my view—from the collective security arrangements the West has devised for itself.

Myth #2

Myth number two is that NATO ensures the U.S. of a "forward defense" in Europe against the Soviets. The reasoning goes that, in the event of a conventional Soviet attack, it is

"... the intention of NATO, like the Marshall Plan, was only to help Western Europeans regain their footing. Once recovered, it was assumed they would assume primary responsibility for their own defense affairs."

Reagan administration. But the Secretary's remarks were significant, for here was a senior military official, a highly-respected expert on defense, speaking out in favor of reassessing our strategic commitments to our allies. It is within this context that I wish to discuss some of the prevalent myths about NATO.

Myth #1

Time and time again, one hears that NATO "has kept the peace for forty years." But this is not an argument, for correlation doesn't prove cause and effect. Simply because U.S. troops have been stationed in Western Europe for the past forty years, and there has been peace for forty years, does not mean the former has caused the latter. Many other factors have played a role. In particular, the Western Europeans have chosen a policy of appeasement when it comes to facing down their greatest enemy—the Soviet Union. They offer subsidized trade, easy credit and political support to the very nation which threatens them most.

For example, what happens when the United States attempts to contain communist aggression in Central America, the

better for the U.S. to engage the enemy in Europe, not on Broadway. That is, of course, "beggar my neighbor" in the worst sense of the term. By underwriting NATO to the tune of \$134 billion per year, we are, in effect, paying Western Europe to serve as a buffer and a potential battleground for the U.S. and U.S.S.R. That's what the pro-NATO crowd believes and, one must admit, there is some truth to this argument.

But most experts concede that any conventional attack launched by the Warsaw Pact nations would quickly escalate to a nuclear confrontation. This is the problem of the so-called "low-nuclear threshold," acknowledged by such NATO officials as former Supreme Commander Bernard Rogers and by Senator Sam Nunn. Let's imagine a ground attack in Western Europe. Within hours or days, we would have to make the decision whether to go nuclear and launch a first strike against the Soviets (after all, no one, not even NATO's staunchest supporters, claim that NATO can fight a conventional war longer than a week or two with any hope of success)—or whether we would simply throw up our hands and say "Okay, Europe is yours." Where then, may I ask, is our forward defense? The truth is that there is none!

Myth #3

We may like to think that NATO provides a conventional deterrent to war in Western Europe, but, like forward defense, this is another myth. We do have a system of conventional defense, but what is its deterrent value when our defense is so inadequate? The reason for this inadequacy is that while the Russians and the Americans have steadily built up their conventional armed forces in the past few decades, the Western Europeans have built up their welfare states.

After World War II, Western Europe was devastated and its people demoralized. If we hadn't stepped in to render assistance, Western Europe surely would have shared the fate of Eastern Europe and fallen within the communist orbit. Our newly developed nuclear power could extend a guarantee of safety to our allies abroad, and our greater financial resources could help the European economic recovery without shortchanging our own economic progress. NATO, in 1949, made perfect sense, because of the economic gap that existed at that time between the U.S. and Western Europe, and the nuclear gap that existed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

But the intention of NATO, like the Marshall Plan, was only to help Western Europeans regain their footing. Once recovered, it was assumed they would take primary responsibility for their own defense affairs. Dwight Eisenhower, NATO's first Supreme Commander, insisted that if

“ . . . Only a morally correct defense policy can help our allies—and subsidization through NATO is not the answer.”

U.S. troops were still in Europe ten years after its founding, “the whole enterprise will have failed.” Forty years later, Eisenhower's worst fears have indeed come true. The Western Europeans are no longer poor, but they have successfully resisted building up their own military forces. “After all,” the shrewd Europeans will say, “Why spend on our defense when we have the Americans to defend us? What we need to do is concentrate all our efforts upon our education, our health, our environment, our economy. . . .” Thus, liberalism alone is not responsible for the rise of the welfare state in Western Europe. Had it not been

for the willingness of the U.S. to pay for the defense of those who could then plow billions of dollars into their social welfare states, liberalism would have been a vain—and unfinanced—aspiration in Western Europe.

The INF Treaty: An Aside

Unfortunately for the West, while Europe ignored its defense needs, the U.S.S.R. was busy building its conventional and nuclear forces. We are now at a crossroads when the Soviets' conventional superiority may be especially critical, because of the pending denuclearization of Europe as a consequence of the INF treaty. The function of our Pershing II missiles in Europe was not only to cancel out Soviet SS20s but to neutralize the conventional superiority that the Soviets enjoy.

Suddenly this vital strategy is supposed to be less important, we are told. According to INF proponents, including Ronald Reagan and George Schultz, who have become surprisingly unsuspecting of our enemies as of late, the Soviets are committed to withdrawing even more missiles than we are, and we are assured this is a great victory.

An example illustrates how wrong even the best of leaders can be. Suppose a very big, powerful man and a short, scrawny fellow live in the same house. In such a situation, we wouldn't find it surprising if the bigger of the two began to dominate. He might intimidate the little guy and get

him to do a lot of favors for him. He wouldn't even have to ask after awhile; the little guy knows the situation. The big guy says, “Gee, it's cold in here” and the other jumps up to close the window.

But one day, the little guy gets fed up. He buys a revolver, which suddenly changes the pair's whole relationship. Now the big guy closes the window himself. But what if the big guy decides to buy two guns? With the escalation of the “arms race” who dominates whom does not depend on physical strength. It depends on: Who's quicker on the draw? Who's got more nerve? Who's got more firepower?

And who's got more money to spend on arms?

Then along comes a do-gooder who says “Look, gentlemen, guns are dangerous. We can't have guns in the world because guns kill people. Let's disarm. Let's have peace.” The little guy has only to give up one gun, but the big guy has to hand over two. If George Schultz were there to comment, he'd claim it was a great deal for the little guy, forgetting all about his initial dilemma.

The de-nuclearization of Europe, begun with the INF treaty, makes the imbalance between conventional forces a critical factor. The big guy—the Soviet Union—has only to say, “Gee, it's cold outside,” and the little guy—Western Europe—will leap to do his bidding.

Myth #4

Myth number four is that anyone who approves of withdrawing from NATO is isolationist. It is true, of course, that there are isolationists within this broad group, but the majority believes that reality dictates an internationalist position—namely that America cannot survive without strong allies. That is precisely why they oppose the current state of affairs. NATO has created and encouraged weak allies. When you subsidize someone, you make them dependent and corrupt their own sense of responsibility. Ronald Reagan should understand this better than most.

The new internationalism represented by the anti-NATO advocates is an internationalism based on a strong network of allies, not relying upon the United States as the sole policeman of the world. We are spending \$134 billion a year on NATO. Is that creating or encouraging strong allies? Is NATO the best defense we can get for that kind of money?

Myth #5

Leaving NATO, according to its supporters, would be deserting our friends. We ought to be loyal and stick by Western Europe. We should honor our commitments. This is undeniably the strongest argument the pro-NATO ranks can advance. Most Americans have been brought up to revere loyalty, honor, commitment. NATO was one of the first bastions against communism, making this argument even more potent.

But to withdraw from NATO would not put an end to our commitment. Only a morally correct defense policy can help our allies—and subsidization through NATO is not the answer. Making Europeans face up to their own responsibilities, making them self-reliant and ready to defend their own nations is a better one. To argue that we would be honoring our commitment by doing any less simply is not correct.

Myth #6

We are told by various media pundits, intellectuals and foreign policy experts that the Soviet Union wants us out of NATO. Of course, this triggers a conditioned response: We can't leave because, if we left, the Soviets



would be delighted. But the Soviets have made no concerted effort to get the troops out of Europe, comparable, for example, to their effort to get the U.S. Pershing missiles out or to short-circuit the Strategic Defense Initiative. The reason is that the NATO link, by making the allies weak, has worked very much to the Soviet advantage. Adam B. Ulam of Harvard University, one of our leading Sovietologists, has written:

Although the Soviets want to encourage tensions between Western Europe and the United States, they may not want to see the United States withdraw or greatly reduce its land forces in Europe. Such a shock might make Western European leaders decide they have no choice but to

unite politically. Or it might cause West Germany to reconsider its decision not to acquire nuclear weapons. Moreover, the present uneasy state of U.S.-Western European relations provides certain benefits to the U.S.S.R. America's European allies usually act as a moderating influence on Washington's anti-Soviet attitudes and initiatives.

Myth #7

Impressive though the foregoing arguments may be, they may not add up to much in the world of domestic politics. Whether or not our troops are withdrawn from Western Europe depends on whether we can break free of one last myth: That America can afford the status quo.

Let's look at "affording" it in the literal sense. Without even taking our enormous federal deficit into account, we ought to be alarmed that we are annually spending \$134 billion on NATO. That alarm should be magnified by the dramatic decline in the value of our currency. Most of our NATO troops are stationed in Germany, where in the last two years the dollar has depreciated by fifty percent.

Now that has a devastating impact on the U.S. federal budget, and one part of the devastation is being visited upon our service personnel because they are being paid in dollars. Of course, they can buy some items from the PX, but what we have done to the men and women who are protecting our country and Western Europe is a disgrace.

Our soldiers in Europe are indeed hostages to prove that the U.S. will fight to save Western Europe. The tripwire strategy goes something like this: No American president could sit idly by and watch American soldiers being killed in an attack on Western Europe. This guarantees U.S. engagement in Europe's defense. But to force our soldiers to live in jeopardy, and to be so miserly about compensating them for their service, is certainly outrageous. Is it any wonder that fewer and fewer qualified people enlist under such conditions?

Notwithstanding our soldiers' plight and the huge financial drain on our resources created by NATO, we can't afford the status quo in another sense. NATO prevents us from facing up to the very real dangers we face. We blithely sign agreements with our enemies, hoping that NATO will still protect us. Nothing could be further from the truth. **A**

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criticizing the French government for its refusal to uphold the military arm of NATO. (Under de Gaulle, France had withdrawn from military membership in 1966.)

"You've made it very awkward for us to properly plan and prepare the defense of Europe," the American said.

The French general replied, "Well, we do wonder if you're going to treat us as a true ally."

"Of course, we're going to treat you as an ally!

"That's precisely why we fear to come back [to military membership]. We remember how you treated your allies, the Nationalist Chinese, and how you treated your allies in Cuba, and how it appears you're going to treat your allies in Nicaragua and Afghanistan."

How important NATO is is a part of a larger question: How important is America's pledge of loyalty? We have reneged on enough commitments already, usually piecemeal, in a series of gradual backward steps. If we choose to withdraw from NATO, we must be prepared to pay a heavy price in terms of our international reputation and our internal morale. It will also make it nearly impossible to attract loyal and friendly allies in the future.

A Real Threat

In 1947, as a cadet at West Point, I learned a great deal about the Marshall Plan. Today, people often forget what a monumental strategic achievement it was. But, then and now, it is clear that the Marshall Plan alone could not secure America's interests. It was no guarantee against Soviet expansionism and, furthermore, it was no guarantee for democracy and a free economic system. (If entrepreneurs are not safe and free to make secure investments, capitalism simply won't work.)

The Marshall Plan was never intended to be a complete strategy. Two years later, in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was organized to stop the advance of communism in Western Europe as part of a larger containment policy. Both the Marshall Plan and NATO came at a critical time. The Germans referred to 1945 as Year Zero. Behind them lay unmitigated disaster; ahead, lay who knows what? But certainly there was hope that great things could be accomplished.

In a larger sense, 1945 was Year Zero for the world. Of the nations which dominated international relations before the war, Great Britain and the United States were in the strongest position along with a new force, the Soviet Union. These three nations had the power to shape the postwar world.

The United States could reward, punish or sanction actions around the planet. It chose to help establish the United Nations, which was to be an improved version of the ill-fated League of Nations. Naively,

This notion did not last long. We were not going to be allowed to stack our arms and return to a generally isolationist stance. We were, in fact, the major world power. Russia's brief alliance with our cause was over. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, North Korea, and China either fell or came under the sway of communist domination in rapid succession in the postwar era.

The United States protested vigorously, of course. There was much talk of direct

value was incalculable. If the Soviet Union were to capture the Western European or the Japanese industrial base, they would rival and likely outstrip the United States. Such power, wielded by a brutal totalitarian state, was a frightening prospect.

Russian ground expansion was not the only threat, however. The marriage of American nuclear weapons with German-developed missiles created an entirely new danger: nuclear destruction by international missiles. A third threat was the denial, by extortion, by force, or by economic means, of access to raw materials in the Third World and elsewhere.

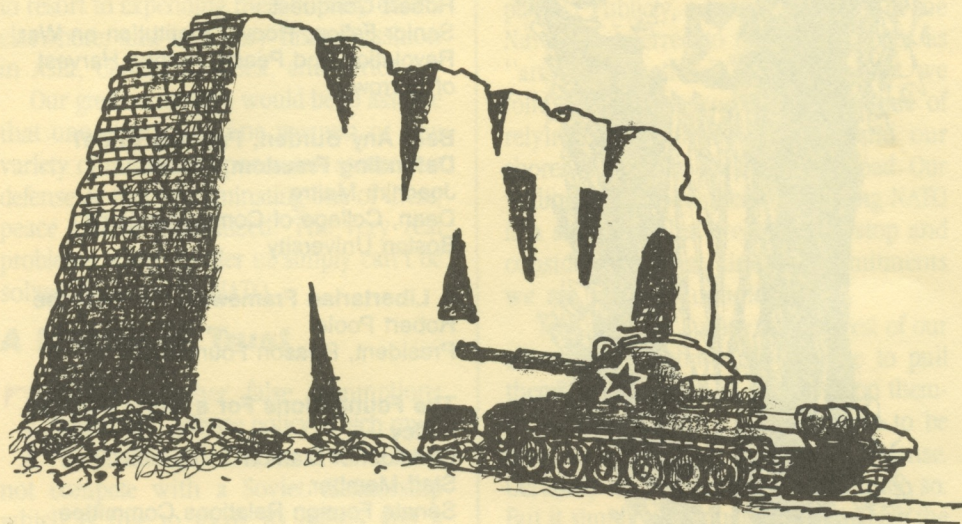
NATO's Success

NATO had a role to play in protecting against all three of these complex dangers. Yet, revisionist historians are fond of dismissing the Cold War, containment, NATO, and the whole of American military strategy as a paranoid response to an imagined monolithic communist threat. The benefit of the doubt, ironically enough, goes not to democrats but to despots. Could the revisionists be right? Imagine for a moment, that NATO had not been organized in 1949. Imagine depending on the UN to keep the peace of the world, to maintain and strengthen alliances, to defend our national and international interests.

NATO has been a success not only because it has deterred war, but because it has promoted prosperity around the world. But NATO, like our entire defense strategy, has serious problems. Much of the criticism directed towards NATO is based on the fact that other member nations have not fulfilled their financial obligations. True, the United States shoulders the greatest burden and this ought to be remedied. I do not, however, think it is cause for abandoning the alliance.

Another objection has been that NATO's ground forces are not a major deterrent in the event of war. But they have always been considered as one component in a larger plan. As such, they should not be dismissed lightly either. The Soviet Union's masterful maneuvering has pushed us just to the edge of reaction and no more in many situations. It takes small bites out of a country, landing troops and "military advisors" a few thousand at a time. It prefers to work through puppets and "indigenous" Marxist revolutionary movements and popular fronts. The United States

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“Our willingness to consider abandoning NATO is a sure sign that we ought to stop and consider just what kind of commitments we are ready to uphold.”

many Americans assumed that the mere establishment of the UN would guarantee peace and eliminate our national obligations. Disarmament and the withdrawal of troops began immediately. Domestic economic issues turned Americans' attention inward. When international concerns did intrude, the general feeling was that if we helped the war-devastated nations back on their feet, politically and economically, everyone's troubles would be over.

confrontations, but to no avail. Winston Churchill came to America and delivered his famous warning that an "iron curtain" was coming down all over Europe; our response was not action, but discussion and frustration.

It was true that Europe and much of Asia were in terrible shape after World War II. Some people couldn't understand why the Russians would bother to take on such liabilities, but it was apparent to our best strategists that these regions' future

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can hardly start a nuclear war over that. Meanwhile, Soviet conventional forces are improving all the time. Once we could boast of our superior technological advantage, but anyone who has seen a Russian tank lately knows that the technological gap has narrowed and even closed in some instances.

NATO's nuclear forces are another component of NATO's strategy and that is why the current talk of denuclearization is so fraught with danger. Without nuclear weapons, as one keen observer has noted, war is once again thinkable. For four decades, NATO's nuclear deterrent has worked superbly. The Russians have had to resort to expending their military efforts elsewhere, and in a very limited fashion in Asia, Central America, and Africa.

Our greatest mistake would be to assume that one alliance or one weapon or one variety of military response can secure our defense or that by eliminating one of these, peace can be guaranteed. The very real problems which hinder us simply can't be solved by blaming NATO.

A Matter of Trust

There are other false assumptions about our defense policy which must be challenged. One is that we cannot compete with a Soviet dictatorship which is free to focus its efforts and a

disproportionate share of its GNP on creating an unbeatable war machine. Another is that somehow our economic superiority will win out; that if we can dominate international trade, we can bend other nations to our will.

The worse mistake of all is to assume that we Americans are too self-absorbed, too weak, too materialistic to defend ourselves.

Some ask if it is indeed moral for the U.S. to belong to NATO? Our current political leaders certainly think so, but what about the next generation which has grown up in a culture that stresses rapprochement with our enemies at any cost? What about the neo-isolationist sentiment which has gained so much force in our political parties? Publicly, a former Secretary of the Navy has referred to the United States as "an island nation," suggesting that we follow 18th-century Britain's example of relying on a super-fleet to defend our shores and protect our interests abroad. Our willingness to consider abandoning NATO is a sure sign that we ought to stop and consider just what kind of commitments we are ready to uphold.

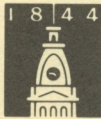
True, Western Europe and the rest of our allies ought to have the courage to pull themselves together, to depend upon themselves rather than us. They ought to be able to coordinate their own defense. Certainly they have the potential to do so. But it simply won't happen. They lack the

raw materials, the up-to-date industrial base, and, most of all, the necessary mutual trust. Can you imagine the French government saying, "Okay, the Germans can be in command." Or vice versa?

Whatever quarrels various nations may have with us, however often one hears "Yankee Go Home," our allies trust the United States to a far greater degree than any other nation. Ought we betray that trust?

When everything is said and done—when the Left has expressed its genuine fear that a trigger-happy America will make Europe the first casualty in a nuclear war, and when the Right has wondered about the times we have backed away from direct confrontations with the Soviets in Eastern Europe, Afghanistan and Central America—that trust still survives.

Unquestionably, we ought to take a good hard look at NATO; we ought to press for substantial and meaningful reforms, and not just because it makes good strategic sense: We are an ethical people with a moral vision which shapes our entire way of life, including our foreign policy and our defense. We know that peacemaking is blessed and that "if good men fail to act, evil will succeed." We have paid a great price in human lives over the years in order to live up to that demanding vision, and we must do everything in our power to make sure those lives were not lost in vain.



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