Address at the Commemorative Session of the North Atlantic Council.

April 10, 1969
Mr. Secretary, Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Your Excellencies, and our distinguished guests:

As we gather here today, we celebrate a momentous anniversary.

We celebrate one of the great successes of the postwar world.

Twenty years ago, as has already been mentioned, a few dedicated men gathered in Washington to cement an Atlantic partnership between the older nations of Europe and their offspring in the New World--and in this very room the North Atlantic Treaty was signed. Some of the men who were here then are here today-and I would like to suggest that those who were here then and who are here today stand for a moment. [Applause]

Gentlemen, with our hindsight, we now have saluted your foresight at that time. In referring to that event, I thought I should share with you the conversation that I had with some of the founders in the room prior to coming to this meeting.

Secretary Acheson[1] recalled that before the signing of the treaty the Marine Band played "We've Got Plenty of Nothing" and "It Ain't Necessarily So."

[1]Dean Acheson, Secretary of State 1949-1953.

Certainly what has happened in those 20 years proved that as far as the music was concerned, it was not prophetic.

As we sit here today we also look back on those 20 years, what has happened, and we think, as the previous speakers have indicated, of all of those who have contributed to the Alliance and particularly to the one who commanded the armies that liberated Europe, the first Supreme Commander of the forces of NATO, the American President who did so much to bring NATO to its strength and to give life to its principles--to Dwight David Eisenhower.

His life demonstrated that there is a moral force in the world which can move men and nations. There is a spiritual force lodged in the very roots of man's being.

As for NATO, it is precisely because it has always been more than a military alliance that its strength has been greater than the strength of arms. This Alliance represents a moral force which, if we marshal it, will ennoble our efforts.

Dwight Eisenhower was a great humanist. He was also a great realist. If he were with us today, he would have recognized that together, as men of the Old World and of the New World, we must find ways of living in the real world.

As we know too well, that real world today includes men driven by suspicion, men who would take advantage of their neighbors, men who confuse the pursuit of happiness with the pursuit of power.

It also is peopled with men of good will, with men of peace and with men of hope and with men of vision.

No nation, and no community of nations, is made up entirely of one group of men or another. No part of the world has a monopoly on wisdom or virtue.

Those who think simply in terms of "good" nations and "bad" nations--of a world of staunch allies and sworn enemies-live in a world of their own. Imprisoned by stereotypes, they do not live in the real world.

On the other hand, those who believe that all it takes to submerge national self-interest is a little better communication, those who think that all that stands in the way of international brotherhood is stubborn leadership--they, too, live in a world of their own. Misled by wishful thinking, they do not live in the real world.

Two decades ago, the men who founded NATO faced the truth of their times; as a result, the Western world prospers today in freedom. We must follow their example by once again facing the truth--not of earlier times, but of our own times.

Living in the real world of today means recognizing the sometimes differing interests of the Western nations, while never losing sight of our great common purposes.

Living in the real world of today means understanding old concepts of East versus West, understanding and unfreezing those concepts, but never losing sight of great ideological differences that still remain.

We can afford neither to blind our eyes with hatred nor to distort our vision with rose-colored glasses. The real world is too much with us to permit either stereotyped reacting or wishful thinking to lay waste our powers.

Let us then count ourselves today among the hopeful realists.

In this same spirit of hopeful realism, let us look at NATO today.

We find it strong but we find it challenged. We find disputes about its structure, political divisions among its members, and reluctance to meet prescribed force quotas. Many people on both sides of the Atlantic today find NATO anachronistic, something quaint and familiar and even a bit old-fashioned.

As the Alliance begins its third decade, therefore, there are certain fundamentals to be reaffirmed:

First, NATO is needed; and the American commitment to NATO will remain in force and it will remain strong. We in America continue to consider Europe's security to be our own.

Second, having succeeded in its original purpose, the Alliance must adapt to the conditions of success. With less of the original cement of fear, we must forge new bonds to maintain our unity.

Third, when NATO was founded, the mere fact of cooperation among the Western nations was of tremendous significance, both symbolically and substantively. Now the symbol is not enough; we need substance. The Alliance today will be judged by the content of its cooperation, not merely by its form.

Fourth, the allies have learned to harmonize their military forces; now, in the light of the vast military, economic, and political changes of two decades, we must devise better means of harmonizing our policies.

Fifth, by its nature, ours is more than a military alliance; and the time has come to turn a part of our attention to those nonmilitary areas in which we all could benefit from increased collaboration.

Now, what does all this mean for the future of the Western Alliance?

To deal with the real world, we cannot respond to changing conditions merely by changing our words. We have to adapt our actions.

It is not enough to talk of flexible response, if at the same time we reduce our flexibility by cutting back on conventional forces.

It is not enough to talk of relaxing tension, unless we keep in mind the fact that 20 years of tension were not caused by superficial misunderstandings. A change of mood is useful only if it reflects some change of mind about political purpose.

It is not enough to talk of European security in the abstract. We must know the elements of insecurity and how to remove them. Conferences are useful if they deal with concrete issues which means they must, of course, be carefully prepared.

It is not enough to talk of detente, unless at the same time we anticipate the need for giving it the genuine political content that would prevent detente from becoming delusion.

To take one example, a number of America's Western partners have actively supported the idea of strategic arms control talks with the Soviet Union. I support that idea. When such talks are held, we shall work diligently for their success.

But within our Alliance we must recognize that this would imply a military relationship far different from the one that existed when NATO was founded. Let's put it in plain words. The West does not today have the massive nuclear predominance that it once had, and any sort of broad-based arms agreement with the Soviets would codify the present balance.

How would progress towards arms control affect the nature of consultation within our Alliance?

Up to now, our discussions have mainly had to do with tactics--ways and means of carrying out the provisions of a treaty drawn a generation ago. We have discussed clauses in proposed treaties; in the negotiations to come, we must go beyond these to the processes which these future treaties will set in motion. We must shake off our preoccupation with formal structure to bring into focus a common world view.

Of course, there is a diversity of policies and interests among the Western nations; and, of course, those differences must be respected. But in shaping the strategies of peace, these differences need not block the way--not if we break through to a new and deeper form of political consultation.

To be specific, the forthcoming arms talks will be a test of the ability of the Western nations to shape a common strategy.

The United States fully intends to undertake deep and genuine consultation with its allies, both before and during any negotiations directly affecting their interests. That is a pledge I shall honor-and I expect to consult at length on the implications of anything that might affect the pattern of East-West relations.

In passing that test together, this Alliance will give new meaning to the principle of mutual consultation.

To seize the moment that this opportunity presents, we would do well to create new machinery for Western political consultation, as well as to make greater use of the machinery that we have.

First, I suggest that deputy foreign ministers meet periodically for a high-level review of major, long-range problems before the Alliance.

Second, I suggest creation of a special political planning group, not to duplicate the work now being done by the Council or by the senior political advisers, but to address itself specifically and continually to the longer-range problems we face.

This would by no means preclude efforts to develop a fuller European cooperation. On the contrary, we in the United States would welcome that cooperation. What ties us to Europe is not weakness or division among our partners but community of interest with them.

Third, I strongly urge that we create a committee on the challenges of modern society, responsible to the deputy ministers, to explore ways in which the experience and resources of the Western nations could most effectively be marshaled toward improving the quality of life of our peoples.

That new goal is provided for in Article II of our treaty, but it has never been the center of our concerns. Let me put my proposal in concrete terms and in personal terms. On my recent trip to Europe I met with world leaders and private citizens alike. I was struck by the fact that our discussions were not limited to military or political matters. More often than not our talks turned to those matters deeply relevant to our societies--the legitimate unrest of young people, the frustration of the gap between generations, the need for a new sense of idealism and purpose in coping with an automating world.

These were not subjects apart from the concerns of NATO; indeed they went to the very heart of the real world we live in. We are not allies because we are bound by treaty; we bind ourselves by treaty because we are allied in meeting common purposes and common concerns.

For 20 years, our nations have provided for the military defense of Western Europe. For 20 years we have held political consultations.

Now the alliance of the West needs a third dimension. It needs not only a strong military dimension to provide for the common defense, and not only a more profound political dimension to shape a strategy of peace, but it also needs a social dimension to deal with our concern for the quality of life in this last third of the 20th century.

This concern is manifested in many ways, culturally and technologically, through the humanities and the sciences.

The Western nations share common ideals and a common heritage. We are all advanced societies, sharing the benefits and the gathering torments of a rapidly advancing industrial technology. The industrial nations share no challenge more urgent than that of bringing 20th century man and his environment to terms with one another--of making the world fit for man, and helping man to learn how to remain in harmony with the rapidly changing world.

We in the United States have much to learn from the experiences of our Atlantic allies in their handling of internal matters: for example, the care of infant children in West Germany, the "new towns" policy of Great Britain, the development of depressed areas programs in Italy, the great skill of the Dutch in dealing with high density areas, the effectiveness of urban planning by local governments in Norway, the experience of the French in metropolitan planning.

Having forged a working partnership, we all have a unique opportunity to pool our skills, our intellects, and our inventiveness in finding new ways to use technology to enhance our environments, and not to destroy them.

The work of this committee would not be competitive with any now being carried on by other international agencies. Neither would it be our purpose to limit this cooperation and the benefits that flow from it to our own countries. Quite the opposite; our purpose would be to share both ideas and benefits, recognizing that these problems have no national or regional boundaries. This could become the most positive dimension of the Alliance, opening creative new channels to all the rest of the world.

When I visited the North Atlantic Council in Brussels I posed the question: "In today's world, what kind of an alliance shall we strive to build?"

Today I have sketched out some of the approaches that I believe the Alliance should take.

I believe we must build an Alliance strong enough to deter those who might threaten war, close enough to provide for continuous and far-reaching consultation, trusting enough to accept the diversity of views, realistic enough to deal with the world as it is, and flexible enough to explore new channels of constructive cooperation.

Ten years ago, addressing the North Atlantic Council in this same room, President Eisenhower spoke of the need for unity. Listen to his words: There is not much strength in the finger of one hand, he said, but when five fingers are balled into a fist, you have a considerable instrument of defense.

We need such an instrument of defense and the United States will bear its fair share in keeping NATO strong.

All of us are also ready, as conditions change, to turn that fist into a hand of friendship.

NATO means more than arms, troop levels, consultative bodies, and treaty commitments. All of these are necessary. But what makes them relevant to the future is what the Alliance stands for. To discover what this Western Alliance means today, we have to reach back, not across two decades, but through the centuries to the very roots of the Western experience.

When we do, we find that we touch a set of elemental ideals, eloquent in their simplicity, majestic in their humanity, ideals of decency and justice and liberty and respect for the rights of

our fellow men. Simple, yes; and to us they seem obvious. But our forebears struggled for centuries to win them and in our own lifetimes we have had to fight to defend them.

These ideals are what NATO was created to protect. It is to these ideals, on this proud anniversary, that we are privileged to consecrate the Alliance anew. These ideals--and the firmness of our dedication to them--give NATO's concept its nobility, and NATO's backbone its steel.

Note: The President spoke at 2:26 p.m. in the Departmental Auditorium in Washington. In his opening words he referred to Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Honorary President of the North Atlantic Council Vice Chancellor Willy Brandt of the Federal Republic of Germany, and Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Manlio Brosio.

Richard Nixon, Address at the Commemorative Session of the North Atlantic Council. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project
https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/238803