

## **NATO in the mid-1960s: The View of Secretary-General Manlio Brosio**

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At the meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 3 April 1964, NATO Secretary-General Dirk Stikker officially announced his intention to resign. US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, previously informed by Stikker of his decision, had sent a message to Norwegian Foreign Minister Halvard Lange, British Foreign Secretary Richard A. Butler, and Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson on 23 March expressing his hope that the European members of the alliance could agree on a successor, thus avoiding the delicate situation that had arisen in 1961 when Stikker had been selected. On 4 April, Italian Ambassador to Washington Sergio Fenoaltea informed US Assistant Secretary of State William Tyler that Italy was asserting a claim to the position. On 21 April, the Italian government officially proposed Manlio Brosio, who had been a candidate for the post three years earlier, before Stikker was selected. Two days later, Britain proposed Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Sir Harold Caccia. But following further discussions with Italy, the British withdrew their candidacy, and Brosio was elected NATO secretary-general in August 1964. He remained in this office until the end of his diplomatic career in 1971, when he was elected to the Italian parliament's upper house, the Senate, for the Liberal Party.

When Brosio started his new job at the NATO headquarters, he could boast of a long and bright diplomatic career that had led him to Moscow, London, Washington, and Paris. When he took up his new post in Paris at age 67 in 1964, at the end of his diplomatic career, Brosio was flattered by the appointment and fully aware of the crucial importance of the events at the time for the future of the alliance. He often seemed preoccupied with the notion of being inadequate for the tasks and requirements of his

office, and his diary reveals frequent expressions of this fear.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, the years under consideration in this chapter were crucial for the life of NATO, and it would not have been easy at all for any secretary-general of the alliance to manage the changes, to foresee the outcome of processes that in many cases were only in their initial phase at the time and, on these basis, to establish a program and a plan for action.

The international situation was in flux from the beginning of the 1960s. In the aftermath of the Cuban and Berlin crises, relations between the US and the Soviet Union appeared to be entering a new phase characterized by a less direct confrontation. French particular interests, as expressed by President Charles de Gaulle, and Germany's evolving role in the Atlantic framework threatened the cohesion of the alliance. Brosio was aware that he was ushering in a new phase in the life of NATO and thought that his record as secretary-general might depend upon his ability to adapt NATO to a new set of political requirements in a rapidly changing world. His role was that of an honest broker, Brosio declared during his visit to Washington in September 1964 – his first after being designated NATO secretary-general, and essentially an introductory call. He favored close political consultation within NATO on all issues, and stressed that he wanted to see NATO arrive at coordinated policies on world issues.<sup>2</sup>

In the mid-1960s, Brosio regarded NATO as an organization that had to face up to many challenges of internal and external nature. He was personally convinced that the most dangerous threats to the continuity of the alliance came from the inside of the Atlantic body and were constituted by the French policy on the one hand and by the US policy of *détente* on the other, both of which were leading to the split of the alliance. For the NATO secretary-general, these two dangers were facets of the same problem and had to be analyzed together.

This chapter will focus on Brosio's perception of these dangers and will be essentially based on his diaries. Brosio kept a regular journal from 1947 to 1972. This journal – bequeathed after his death to the archives of the

1 See e.g. Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, Torino (TFE), Manlio Brosio Collection (MB), diary XX, 12 February 1966 – 30 June 1966 (XX), notes for 21 April 1966.

2 *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1964–68, Vol. XIII, no. 39, "Circular Airgram from the Department of State to Certain Missions", Washington, 4 October 1964.

Luigi Einaudi Foundation in Turin – represents a source of great academic interest, as it provides historians with a record of the author’s most private opinions<sup>3</sup> – those that he could not or did not want to express aloud – and sometimes tasty tidbits of information from behind the scenes.<sup>4</sup>

## The French Danger

Brosio’s principal preoccupation during the first months of his charge as secretary-general of the alliance was with the French attitude toward NATO. On 5 September 1964, during a 50-minute “relaxed, courteous and calm discussion” with Brosio, de Gaulle laid out his views: NATO needed sufficient forces to fight the Soviet Union in case the Warsaw Pact decided to attack in Europe; France opposed NATO as an organization, since its object was the integration of national efforts, which France opposed; and NATO was no longer necessary because the US was not the only Western power with nuclear capability. Brosio asked de Gaulle how the NATO treaty might be revised, but de Gaulle replied that such suggestions would be useless, since the US would be “diabolically opposed to his ideas” and nothing would come of the discussion. De Gaulle asserted that the US was no longer interested in Europe, as its main focus had shifted to the Pacific, and that the US would not come to the assistance of Europe if attacked by Soviets. Although de Gaulle did not say so specifically, Brosio got the impression that France would withdraw from the treaty in 1969.<sup>5</sup>

In the opinion of the US Ambassador to France Charles Bohlen – who wrote William Tyler a letter on this subject – Brosio was wrong in his impression that de Gaulle was seriously thinking of renegeing on the NATO treaty, as the latter had always made a very definite distinction between the treaty establishing the alliance and the structure of the organization itself. Nevertheless, Bohlen began “to wonder how long we should remain

3 I should like to express my gratitude to the trustees and the secretary of the Einaudi Foundation. Without their invaluable help, my work would not have been possible.

4 The journal is unpublished. Fausto Bacchetti, a close collaborator of Brosio’s, has edited the journal covering Brosio’s time at the Italian embassy in Moscow (Manlio Brosio, *Diari di Mosca 1947–1951*, ed. Fausto Bacchetti, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986), but the transcription is incomplete. I intend to edit an English version of the journal covering the period when Brosio was NATO secretary-general.

5 FRUS, 1964–68, Vol. XIII, doc. 33, fn. 2.

quiescent in the face of de Gaulle's gratuitous interpretation of American policy".<sup>6</sup> In his response to Bohlen's letter, Tyler, who had just heard the same argument from people at the NATO Parliamentarians conference in Washington, pointed out the opportunity to work out some plan to reassure Europeans about the US commitment to the continent, but without making specific reference to de Gaulle.<sup>7</sup>

In Brosio's view, the major points of de Gaulle's position were the following: De Gaulle thought that although the threat had diminished, the alliance was still necessary; he remained adamantly opposed to the alliance, while refusing to suggest changes to the treaty or the organization; furthermore, he stressed European unity as a key factor; he persisted in his opposition to any change in NATO strategy, doubting that the US would use nuclear weapons in defense of Europe; and finally, he continued to be concerned about the effect of political events in the rest of the world on the alliance. In Brosio's opinion, de Gaulle would not do anything for the time being, but in 1969 might well denounce the treaty. This suggested an urgent necessity for the alliance members to act in advance if they wanted to forestall events in 1969. It was necessary to get the French to say what they wanted through an initial proposal that would prompt the French side to express their views. There was no point in making proposals to change the organization until after the German elections in 1965, but Brosio suggestions should be fielded from 1966 on.<sup>8</sup>

In a conversation on 13 May 1965 with US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Brosio, referring to Ball's suggestions for more intensive study of the state of the alliance, asked how urgently the US viewed the French problem. Rusk explained that in December 1964 de Gaulle had said that France would make a proposal for a reorganization of the alliance, probably in 1967, but he now had the impression that the French might progress more quickly. The question, in Rusk's opinion, was whether it was preferable to wait and see what de Gaulle suggested, or try to establish what the

6 Ibid., doc. 33, Letter from the Ambassador to France (Bohlen) to the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Tyler), Paris, 14 September 1964.

7 Ibid., fn. 3, p. 73.

8 Ibid., doc. 39, Circular Airgram from the Department of State to Certain Missions, Washington, 4 October 1964: NATO Secretary-General Brosio's Visit, September 28–29.

remaining members wanted. In the meantime, Rusk stressed that the US had to be prepared for “serious” French surprises: the US did not want to push for far-reaching, reckless, or fundamental discussions, but did want to begin preparations where possible. Brosio declared that he and Rusk had the same approach, and agreed that it was desirable to prepare the ground in order to cope with de Gaulle’s demarches.<sup>9</sup>

Relations between France and NATO were an important issue in the discussions Brosio had in October 1965 during the second visit to Washington. In contrast to the previous visit in October 1964, this was a “working” visit. Brosio met with the secretaries of state and defense, and he also met with other administration officials, including Under Secretary Ball and Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs John Leddy. He also stopped briefly at the president’s office to exchange greetings after a talk with National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. As far as French-NATO relations were concerned, Brosio said he felt the French attitude had changed recently. It had been generally known that the French were ready to stay in the alliance, although they were dissatisfied with the organization. His impression was that France had now turned towards the Soviets. The secretary-general declared that he was uncertain as to whether the French overtures towards the Soviets were meant to put pressure on the Germans, or actually constituted the first step towards uniting Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals”. Brosio said the alliance could not wait for France, but had to move forward where possible.

In conversations with Leddy and Ball, Brosio appeared worried that the French would try to restrict discussions on US-French differences over NATO to the bilateral channel. It was made clear to him that the US considered this to be a problem between France and the other NATO members, and not solely a bilateral issue. When the French made their proposals, the US government would want to consult other NATO members at an early stage and work out with them how to handle the problem. Brosio was assured there would have to be intensive consultation between the US government and the allies before any moves could be undertaken. He was

9 Ibid., doc. 85, telegram from Secretary of State Rusk to the Department of State, London, 14 May 1965.

glad to note that the US position remained that Washington would try not to provoke a confrontation with the French, but was planning for all contingencies. Brosio was told that Washington was ready to wait until the French wished to make suggestions, and would continue to press the French to come forward with their ideas.<sup>10</sup> What mattered most to Brosio was that the France–NATO problem was regarded as a problem of the whole alliance, and not as a US–French one. In a conversation with Rusk, he emphasized the need for close study regarding procedural aspects of the question, in order to avoid an approach that might isolate France<sup>11</sup>.

On 7 March 1966, President de Gaulle made his long awaited demarche to NATO.<sup>12</sup> He informed President Johnson that France was removing its forces from the NATO integrated command and that all foreign forces and installations in France would be placed under French command.<sup>13</sup> A March 11 aide-mémoire filled in the specifics of the French proposal.<sup>14</sup> De Gaulle's political motivation was elusive, but it was clear that the French president was aiming for a fundamental change in France's relationship with NATO. Nevertheless, the fact that the US had decided to reply to

- 10 Ibid., doc. 105, Circular Airgram from the Department of State to the Posts in the NATO Capitals, NATO Secretary-General Brosio's Visit, 5–6 October 1965, Washington, 26 October 1965.
- 11 Ibid., doc. 116, telegram from Secretary of State Rusk to the Department of State, Paris, 14 December 1965.
- 12 On the French decision, see Maurice Vaïsse, *La grandeur: Politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle, 1958–1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Frédéric Bozo, *La France et l'OTAN: de la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen* (Paris: Masson, 1991); id., *Deux Stratégies pour l'Europe: de Gaulle, les États-Unis et l'Alliance atlantique (1958–1969)* (Paris: Plon, 1996); Maurice Vaïsse, Pierre Mélandri and Frédéric Bozo (eds.), *La France et l'OTAN 1949–1996*, (Paris: Complexe, 1996); Robert Paxton and Nicholas Wahl (eds.), *De Gaulle and the United States* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); Frédéric Bozo, "De Gaulle, l'Amérique et l'Alliance atlantique: une relecture de la crise de 1966", *Vingtième siècle* no. 43 (1994), pp. 55–68; Samuel F. Wells Jr., "Charles de Gaulle and the French Withdrawal from NATO's Integrated Command", in *American Historians and the Atlantic Alliance*, ed. Lawrence S. Kaplan (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1991), pp. 81–94; Georges-Henri Soutou, "La décision française de quitter le commandement intégré de l'OTAN", in *Von Truman bis Harmel: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von NATO und europäischer Integration*, ed. Hans-Joachim Harder (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000), pp. 185–208.
- 13 FRUS, 1964–68, Vol. XIII, Western Europe Region, Letter from de Gaulle to Johnson, doc. 137, 7 March 1966.
- 14 Ibid., doc. 142, Aide-mémoire from the French government to the US government, 11 March 1966.

the French demarche with a personal letter from Johnson to de Gaulle<sup>15</sup> made Brosio “furious”: evidently, contrary to the assurances Brosio had received, Washington was dealing with the French problem on a bilateral basis and intended to “act unilaterally”.<sup>16</sup>

Brosio believed that the US and the British policy of détente was weakening NATO and was partially responsible for the French policy toward the alliance. In the spring of 1966, only days before the French announced their withdrawal from the integrated military structure of the alliance, he noted that “it was necessary to recognize that France had a special status in the alliance and that Great Britain and the US had no right to be intransigent with de Gaulle and to accuse France of weakening the alliance, as they, too, by their policy of détente, were working for its weakening”.<sup>17</sup> In Brosio’s views, de Gaulle’s decision was extremely dangerous, since it gave Washington and London the opportunity to take advantage of the French departure from the NATO military command structure to strengthen their control over the alliance. For the secretary-general of NATO, the “mortal sin” of the French government lay in this inevitable consequence.<sup>18</sup>

On the same day that the French withdrawal from NATO’s military structure was officially announced, Brosio noted that “it was necessary not to push France to withdraw from the political framework of the alliance”.<sup>19</sup> His first concern was always to avoid any actions or statements that could be perceived as urging France to leave the alliance. If the question was to adopt a strong attitude and to prepare a showdown with France, he noted, it was not up to him to take the responsibility of this decision and of its foreseeable consequences. As a matter of fact, he was strongly convinced that a brutal confrontation with Paris could not be taken, and, above all, that it would not be productive. For the secretary-general, the only viable alternative to “the showdown and the refusal to negotiate” was “a negotiation to be started immediately, but to be pursued with a post-de Gaulle France” in the hope that de Gaulle’s successor would prove more amenable. Brosio was convinced that the first option was impracticable and that the

15 Ibid., doc. 146.

16 TFE, MB, XX, 12 February 1966 – 30 June 1966, note for 23 March 1966.

17 TFE, MB, XX, note for 1 March 1966.

18 Ibid., 8 March 1966.

19 Ibid., 10 March 1966.

second option offered a great opportunity “to gain time”, the only problem with it being “to set up the negotiation and prepare it well”.<sup>20</sup>

Brosio was also forced to consider the practical consequences of the French departure from the NATO military command structure: the organization had to make arrangements to move NATO headquarters out of France; to reach an agreement on the compensation that member states would receive for removing their forces and transferring their installations out of the country; to find a solution to the future of French troops stationed in West Germany under NATO auspices: in other words, NATO had to be rebuilt outside of France, and without the participation of France, as quickly as possible.<sup>21</sup>

When Brosio visited Washington for informal discussions in November 1966, he commented in general terms on French policy. He expressed his personal view that French policy was incompatible with the spirit of the alliance on two fundamental points. These were the French interpretation of Article V of the Treaty, and de Gaulle’s concept of Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals”, which implied an inclusion of the USSR in Europe and an exclusion of the US from European affairs. He nevertheless stressed the view that it would be unwise and dangerous to force a showdown on this point, and that the wiser course was a pragmatic approach.<sup>22</sup>

## The US Danger

For the safety of the alliance, Brosio regarded the US policy of *détente*, with its attempts to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union to stop nuclear proliferation, as even more dangerous than the French initiative. He thought that “in this way, the Americans revealed their aim to reduce NATO to a simple instrument of their own policy of *détente*, which would finally lead to a bilateral dialog between the superpowers behind the back of the European countries”.<sup>23</sup>

20 Ibid., 21 April 1966.

21 Ibid., 28 April 1966.

22 FRUS, 1964–68, XIII, doc. 217, Circular Telegram From the Department of State to the Posts in the NATO Capitals, “Brosio Visit to Washington”, 18 November 1966.

23 TFE, MB, XX, 15 April 1966.

According to Brosio's perception of the events, therefore, the Atlantic alliance was being disrupted by both the French and the US policies, which were simultaneously identical and opposite in nature.<sup>24</sup> This pessimistic view was reinforced by Brosio's acknowledgement of his narrow room for maneuver as secretary-general of the alliance. "I can do nothing", he wrote. "In the very moment of crisis", he bitterly added, "my function is that of a walk-on, with no authority and no power".<sup>25</sup> In an alliance where US and British influence was increasing thanks to the French withdrawal from its military structures, Brosio had to recognize that on vital issues, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the development of US policies towards the Soviet Union and Germany, his views diverged widely from those of the US.<sup>26</sup>

Such a situation left Brosio very little room for a personal strategy in a moment where the existence of the alliance seemed to be at stake. He sharply condemned the US policy of *détente*. It was clear to him that the price that Washington was ready to pay for a compromise with Moscow was to deprive West Germany of any access to nuclear weapons: it meant that the US was giving up the idea of changing the European situation and was in favor of what Brosio called "a return to Potsdam".<sup>27</sup> In this perspective, the battle for *détente* was dangerous: it might arouse West German suspicions towards Atlantic policy as a whole, and, by leaving Bonn aside,

24 On the European policy of the Johnson administration, see Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Massimiliano Guderzo, *Interesse nazionale e responsabilità globale: Gli Stati Uniti, l'alleanza atlantica e l'integrazione europea negli anni di Johnson 1963–1969* (Florence: Il Maestrale, 2000). More generally, on the foreign policy of the Johnson administration, see Diane B. Kunz (ed.), *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations During the 1960's* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); H.W. Brands (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam* (College Station: Texas University Press, 1999); Robert A. Divine (ed.), *The Johnson Years*, in particular vol. III, *LBJ at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (eds.), *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy 1963–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giants: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

25 TFE, MB, XX, 15 April 1966.

26 Ibid., 29 April 1966.

27 Ibid.

it would finally give the Soviets victory in the struggle over Germany that had begun in 1945.<sup>28</sup>

Brosio did not oppose the principle of *détente* per se: he opposed the form and the content that the US was giving it and did not trust the Soviet willingness to reach an agreement with the Western bloc as a whole. In Brosio's opinion, *détente* had to be one of the instruments in the Western political arsenal to promote a progressive liberation of Eastern Europe from Soviet control. He thought it was important for NATO to have an active role in shaping the course of East-West relations. Otherwise, individual members would tend to follow their own path vis-à-vis the Soviets. In his opinion, the only protection against Soviet attempts to exploit differences among the members lay in a growing role for NATO as a center for consultation, for the exchange of information, and for coordination of positions.<sup>29</sup> As far as the German question was concerned, Brosio thought that no one could seriously believe that a compromise with Moscow was the best way to resolve the division of the country:<sup>30</sup> Any meaningful rapprochement with the Soviet Union had to be achieved in the context of the German problem.<sup>31</sup> In this perspective, "while NATO powers should do what was possible to improve the atmosphere in relations with Eastern Europe and USSR, NATO work on matters of interest of Germany should parallel further progress on *détente*": Brosio considered this "absolutely essential for stability of Europe and Atlantic area".<sup>32</sup>

Brosio interpreted Washington's eagerness to reach an agreement with Moscow on nuclear matters as being due to the growing involvement of the US in Vietnam and the need to reach an honorable settlement of the conflict.<sup>33</sup> In his diary, Brosio was extremely clear on this point. He

28 TFE, MB, XXI – 1 July 1966 – 28 May 1967, note 13 October 1966.

29 FRUS, 1964–68, XIII, doc. n. 39, NATO Secretary General Brosio's Visit, September 28-29, 1965.

30 TFE, MB, XXI, 8 November 1966.

31 FRUS, 1964–68, XIII, doc. n. 39, NATO Secretary General Brosio's Visit, September 28-29, 1965.

32 Ibid., doc. n. 217, Brosio Visit to Washington, 18 November 1966.

33 On the role the Vietnam war played in the Atlantic relationships see Lawrence S. Kaplan, "The Vietnam War and Europe: The view from NATO", in *La guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963–1973*, ed. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse (Bruxelles-Paris: Bruylant – LGDJ, 2003), pp. 89–102.

regarded the NPT negotiations as heralding the end of a long historical phase when cooperation between the Western allies and the creation and the strengthening of the Atlantic structures had been the top priorities of US foreign policy. Now the US wanted the Soviets to convince North Vietnam to enter negotiations for a settlement of the Asian conflict<sup>34</sup> and, in order to secure the help of the Soviet Union, Washington was ready to abandon the tenets of its previous European policy and to sacrifice its Atlantic allies. In other words, Brosio regarded *détente* as a game between two players that started with a classical *do ut des*: the Soviets would commit themselves to bringing Hanoi to the negotiation table, and Washington would repay the Soviet cooperation with a – not so “agonizing” – reappraisal of its European and Atlantic policy.

Brosio repeatedly tried to warn Washington about the dangers of such a strategy. In February 1966, he told Rusk that the Soviet Union had no real intention to help the US to find a settlement to the conflict in Vietnam; Moscow wanted the NPT in order to weaken Germany.<sup>35</sup> In November 1966, during a conversation with Leddy, he went so far as to state that an “indiscriminate policy of *détente*” was incompatible with Germany remaining in the Atlantic alliance.<sup>36</sup> In his interpretation of the interconnections between the Vietnam war, *détente*, the NPT, and a settlement for the European continent, Brosio was not alone. He agreed with the Italian ambassador in Washington, Sergio Fenoaltea, who thought that “the real danger was that the Soviets would concede a honorable peace in Asia that would be paid in Europe”<sup>37</sup> and with those who, in Italy, were denouncing the risk that the US would abandon Europe in favor of Asia.<sup>38</sup> In Brosio’s words, the NPT was “the counterpart of the exchange”.

As a matter of fact, a compromise on nuclear matters that would impose a freeze on the arms race in Europe would be perceived by the Soviet Union as “an American concession against Germany and against

34 On the Soviet Policy in Vietnam see Ilia V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

35 TFE, ME, XX, 19 February 1966.

36 TFE, ME, XXI, 16 November 1966.

37 *Ibid.*, 18 November 1966.

38 *Ibid.*, 22 January 1967.

the possibility of a strong Europe”<sup>39</sup> as well as a demonstration of the real US commitment to work for an improvement of its relations with Moscow and disengage from Europe. For these reasons, the NPT would mark a turning point from several points of view: as far as the US policy towards Western Europe was concerned, it would represent a watershed between two eras. The first of these phases, according to Brosio, was characterized by the perception that the status quo had to be modified sooner or later; the second phase, inaugurated by the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, was marked by the fundamental acknowledgment of this perception. As far as the form and the structure of East–West relations were concerned, the NPT would represent the definite end of the period when confrontation pitted the two blocs against each other and the beginning of a new phase dominated by dialog between the superpowers over the interests of the junior partners of the respective alliances.<sup>40</sup>

### The Harmel Exercise: Wishful Thinking?

In November 1966, Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel, recalling the initiative taken by Canada in December 1964, proposed a study on the future of the alliance. At the December 1966 Ministerial Meeting, this proposal was accepted.<sup>41</sup> In US opinion, the aim of the study had to be “to articulate up-to-date role for the alliance; to assure its continued relevance to improved East–West relations and, against background of French withdrawal and approach of 1969, to assure continued governmental and public

39 Ibid.

40 TFE, MB, XXI, 18 November 1966.

41 In a “scope paper” prepared for the 14–16 December 1966 NATO Ministerial meeting, the Department of State stressed that the US objectives at the meeting would be: “a) to present the picture of an Organization and of an alliance which has surmounted its crisis with France but which will continue to accept French cooperation to the extent this does not damage essential NATO interests; b) to demonstrate that the fourteen are going ahead in a business-like manner, modernizing NATO to meet their need – in the defence structure, in the nuclear field and in the area of communications and crisis consultations as well as in the non-military fields; c) to demonstrate that, in spite of a reduced probability of war in Europe, the nature of the Soviet threat calls for an effective NATO; d) to evidence that a strong alliance is an essential prerequisite to the attainment of a genuine détente and an equitable settlement in Europe; e) to support European efforts to study the future organization and activities of NATO”, FRUS, 1964–68, vol. XIII, doc. 223, Scope Paper, Washington, 7 December 1966.

understanding and support for goals of Western cohesion and deterrent strength of Alliance".<sup>42</sup>

When Harmel's ideas began to circulate in November, Brosio considered such a proposal an "illusion" because, he noted, there was no agreement about its ultimate political aims.<sup>43</sup> Harmel presented his proposal as an instrument to react to the French decision, and the US thought it was a good idea, as it would mark the distance between France and the rest of the alliance. Brosio, however, was convinced that the whole initiative could be used first of all as a means to prevent West Germany from exploring the possibility of a direct agreement with the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> In his opinion, the US and French policies of détente were creating a sense of isolation and abandonment in Bonn that was pushing West Germany to seek a bilateral dialog with Moscow. This process represented, for Brosio, a major risk for the alliance.

Only after a crucial meeting with the permanent representative of the US to NATO, Harlan Cleveland, and the Belgian representative, André de Staercke, on 8 December 1966 did Brosio realize that the Belgian initiative was much more important than he had initially thought. Brosio and Cleveland agreed that the study on East–West relations would save time and, consequently, could help avoid an immediate crisis with France and

42 Ibid., doc. 221, Telegram from the Department of State to the US embassy in Belgium, Washington, 26 November 1966. The proposal was in line with the opinion expressed by US President Johnson some weeks before. On 7 October 1966, Johnson addressed the National Conference of Editorial Writers in New York. In commenting the European situation, Johnson stressed that the US and its European allies had to move ahead on three fronts: "First, to modernize NATO and strengthen other Atlantic alliances; second, to further the integration of the Western community; third, to quicken progress in East–West relations". Ibid., doc. 211.

43 On the Harmel Exercise, see the NATO documentation in Anna Locher and Christian Nuenlist (eds.), *The Future Tasks of the Alliance: NATO's Harmel Report, 1966/67*, at [http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/collections/coll\\_Harmel.htm](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/collections/coll_Harmel.htm). Cf. Andreas Wenger, "Crisis and Opportunity: NATO's Transformation and the Multilateralization of Détente, 1966–1968", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 6, no. 1 (2004), pp. 22–74; Helga Haftendorn, "Entstehung und Bedeutung des Harmel-Berichts der NATO von 1967", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 40, no.2 (April 1992), pp. 169–220; ead., "The Adaptation of the NATO Alliance for a Period of Détente: The 1967 Harmel Report", in *Crises and Compromises: The European Project, 1963–1969*, ed. Winfried Loth (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001). On the French attitude, see Frédéric Bozo, "Détente vs. Alliance: France, the United States and the Politics of the Harmel Report 1964–1968", *Contemporary European History* 7, no. 3 (November 1998), pp. 343–60.

44 TFE, MB, XXI, 17 December 1966.

Germany.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Brosio was bitterly sarcastic when de Staercke explained to him that the idea was to promote “an institutional and functional discussion on the status of the alliance” and that the crucial questions concerned East-West relations and “what mission was to be found for NATO”. The NATO secretary-general commented in his journal: “As if it needed to be found.”<sup>46</sup>

In Brosio’s opinion, the success of the initiative depended upon the policy that France and Germany would adopt towards the Soviet Union and towards Europe as a whole. But de Gaulle, after his visit to Moscow from 20 June to 1 July 1966, had openly spoken of a “pan-Europe” and called for a Franco-Soviet agreement over Europe: this was, for Brosio, “the most anti-European, anti-Atlantic, anti-liberal, and authoritarian language” that France could speak. Therefore, as far as France was concerned, “Harmel’s dream” had no perspective. As for West Germany, nothing could be said, since the chance of a German policy of direct agreement with Moscow remained, at that time, “a political unknown”.<sup>47</sup>

In mid-December 1966, on the eve of the NATO ministerial meeting, Brosio, accompanied by Fausto Bacchetti (of NATO International Staff), met with Secretary of State Rusk. Rusk made some suggestions concerning the Harmel proposal, but Brosio did not reply. Perhaps he did not want to be insincere or express his perplexity. At the very moment when the Harmel proposal was discussed in the NATO Council, Brosio was in fact very severe in his comments on the whole initiative. “This proposal is crackbrained,” he sarcastically noted. “It aims to solve the crisis of the alliance, but in fact it will end up worsening it,” Brosio believed, since the starting point of the study was a reflection on the necessity of the alliance, and this, a contrario, seemed to implicitly legitimate potential doubts in this respect.<sup>48</sup> If its purpose was to indicate the present and the future tasks of the alliance in a spirit of *détente*, in order to find a solution for the German question, Brosio believed that *détente* would win “no compensation from the enemy”, and that no solution could be foreseen for

45 Ibid., 8 December 1966.

46 Ibid., 9 December 1966.

47 Ibid., 9 December 1966.

48 Ibid., 15 December 1966.

West Germany, at least for the present.<sup>49</sup> In this perspective, the Harmel proposal risked bringing about a renovation of NATO where the alliance would maintain its “shell”, but would lose its “essence”.<sup>50</sup>

At the December 1966 ministerial meeting, the Council “resolved to undertake a broad analysis of international developments since the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. Its purpose would be to determine the influence of such developments on the alliance and to identify the tasks that lie before it, in order to strengthen the alliance as a factor for a durable peace”.<sup>51</sup> A few days later, at the end of the year, when he tried to take stock of the turbulent events of 1966, Brosio was confused: “We were able to save the life of NATO this year, but did we really rescue its mission and its functions? I don’t know. The maintenance of a balance of power in Europe is necessary and in order to keep it, the participation of the US is necessary, since the idea of a French–Soviet agreement on the control of Europe is sheer madness.”<sup>52</sup> Would the Harmel Exercise help in the solution of NATO’s crisis? Brosio was pessimistic. The only advantages of “the sea of papers and reports” in which the Harmel proposal was condemned to drown were, on the one hand, the possibility of “saving time” in view of the final showdown with France, and on the other, on a more personal note, the fact that it would allow him “not to lose ground” in view of the growing US control of the alliance.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, as far as the core problems of the alliance were concerned, “no one believes in the present mission of NATO, and no one can say what the nature of the new mission will be,”<sup>54</sup> as the roots of the political meaning of the alliance were themselves under discussion.<sup>55</sup>

Agreement was quickly reached on the procedure for the Harmel Exercise but, for Brosio, this in itself could not justify optimistic expectations for the future: on 13 January 1967, in a meeting with Cleveland and de

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 *The Harmel Report: Full Reports by the Rapporteurs on the Future Tasks of the Alliance* at <http://www.nato.int/archives/harmel/harmel.htm>.

52 TFE, MB, XXI, 22–31 December 1966.

53 Ibid., 16 December 1966.

54 Ibid., 3 January 1967.

55 Ibid., 25 February 1967.

Staercke, Brosio reaffirmed that the first priority was to know “what we want.”<sup>56</sup> His sharply critical attitude was probably perceived by his collaborators: he noted that de Staercke wanted to leave him out of the study as – Brosio argued – “he evidently feared I could torpedo the initiative.”<sup>57</sup>

At the December 1966 ministerial meeting, it had been decided that a preliminary report would be examined at the ministerial meeting in the spring of 1967. Then the ministerial Council, at its meeting in December 1967, would draw the appropriate conclusions from the enquiry. It had also been decided that a special group of representatives designated by the member governments would be established under the chairmanship of the secretary-general. This Special Group was set up on 22 February 1967 by the permanent Council.

In view of the preliminary discussion scheduled for 6 March, Brosio met Cleveland and de Staercke on 3 March for an exchange of opinions about the procedure and the content of the study. They agreed that it would not make sense to go on with the creation of the sub-groups and the designation of the rapporteurs unless the political purpose of the study had previously been determined. “Obviously,” Brosio noted, “this raises great questions” about Soviet foreign policy, the significance of détente and the objectives of the East–West contacts as well as about the principle of consultation and its constraints.<sup>58</sup> These were difficult problems, Brosio remarked, but if these questions could not be answered, the whole process might turn out to be only “a technical exercise”.<sup>59</sup>

After the meetings of 6 and 14 March 1967, he had the impression that this danger was becoming real: no one seemed to be willing to face a serious discussion about the political problems of the alliance<sup>60</sup> and about the coordination of the policy of détente.<sup>61</sup> In Brosio’s opinion, détente remained a “political mirage”: it was no more than “a word, a smoke”, he noted, but it was the only compensation that Washington would receive from the Soviets in exchange for the NPT, which would lead to the break-up

56 *Ibid.*, 13 January 1967.

57 *Ibid.*, 1 March 1967.

58 *Ibid.*, 3 March 1967.

59 *Ibid.*, 15 February 1967.

60 *Ibid.*, 14 March 1967.

61 *Ibid.*, 2 April 1967.

of the alliance.<sup>62</sup> He noted that the context was marked by the interconnection of several elements: the change of priorities in US foreign policy; the wish to avoid an immediate showdown with France; the agony of the alliance itself because of the French and US policies towards Moscow, both pursued behind the back of Germans and both aiming to establish a new framework to control Germany;<sup>63</sup> the concern to reassure Bonn and prevent an unilateral German policy of détente: in this context, the Harmel exercise was, in Brosio's opinion, no more than "an exercise in futility"<sup>64</sup> amid growing pressure to show Western public opinion that NATO was still alive and necessary.

In April 1967, the Special Group established four sub-groups, each working on a broad subject of interest to the alliance: East-West Relations; interallied relations; general defense policy; and relations with other countries. The rapporteurs for the respective member states were the Englishman J.H.A. Watson and the German Klaus Schütz for the first sub-group; the Belgian Paul-Henri Spaak for the second one; US representative Foy Kohler for the third one, and Dutchman C.L. Patijn for the fourth sub-group.<sup>65</sup> Their work started on 17 April 1967.

Brosio's original skepticism about the relevance of the initiative was confirmed as the work of the four sub-groups progressed. As the chairman of the Special Group, he had been regularly reading their documents and considered them "indefinite and vague": "they pointed out the most difficult problems," he noted, "but no one has any ideas about the means to solve them."<sup>66</sup>

The Six-Day War in June 1967 opened new divergences between NATO's official pro-Israeli line and the pro-Arab policy expressed by France. This rift added a new element to Brosio's pessimism, confirming his doubts about the Soviet interpretation of détente and about the solidity of the Atlantic alliance. First of all, it made clear that the NATO partners were far from being unanimous as to the strategy to be adopted in the Middle

62 Ibid., 28 March 1967.

63 TFE, MB, XXII, 28 May 1967 – 21 March 1968, note for 11 July 1967.

64 TFE, MB, XXI, 19 April 1967.

65 *The Future Tasks of the Alliance*, Press release, 13 April 1967, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1967/p67-003e.htm>.

66 TFE, MB, XXI, 15 May 1967 and XXII, 3 August 1967.

East: the French and the US, he noted, “are more or less in favor of the Arabs, but the French aim to precede the Americans in order to play a role as peace-makers together with the Soviets, leaving the Americans aside.”<sup>67</sup> It also showed that clarification was required as to the form and content of “détente” and, last but not least, that the Atlantic alliance was unable to play any major role in the international system.<sup>68</sup> On this occasion, Brosio wrote, the only concern of the NATO Council was to show that it was active and that the alliance was still alive, but, as bitterly remarked, it was nothing more than an action “going nowhere”.<sup>69</sup>

The centrality of the French question became apparent at the very beginning of the Harmel Exercise. In Brosio’s opinion, if the study was meant to be of any significance, it should establish the parameters of a common policy “be it of détente, of negotiation or of firmness” towards Moscow. The problem was that France was opposed to even the principle of an Atlantic common policy. If this was true – and it was – all the dangers that Brosio had foreseen since the launching of the Belgian proposal seemed certain to be confirmed: either the reports would omit to mention the French position, and the exercise as a whole would be considered a failure; or they would increase the risk of a showdown with France. Brosio wondered whether it was convenient to give France this opportunity. Would France exploit the situation to mark its distance from the fourteen other members and leave the alliance? Was this the opportunity France had been looking for to justify the decision to abandon the Atlantic framework?<sup>70</sup> As 1969 was approaching, the risk of a French repudiation of the treaty grew: it was impossible to exclude the possibility that France would take advantage of the mistakes of its allies and precipitate its decision. In September, French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville told Brosio that if the allies intended to use the Harmel Exercise to provoke a French reaction, the French government would accept the challenge. He added that he couldn’t guarantee his participation in the ministerial meeting in December, and stressed that his government had accepted the

67 TFE, MB, XXII, 14 June 1967.

68 Ibid., notes of 14 June, 21 June, 5 July, 12 July 1967.

69 Ibid., 21 June 1967.

70 Ibid., 21 August 1967; 5 September 1967.

Harmel Exercise “in a spirit of tolerance”, but that the results of the report were now being interpreted “in an inadmissible way”. Couve de Murville declared that NATO was a military and defensive alliance: “the quieter we stay, the better”. Brosio tried to convince him that Harmel harbored no anti-French sentiments; that his proposal had been aimed mainly at strengthening the alliance in the eyes of Western public opinion; that the purpose of the Exercise had been to reaffirm and develop the principles of consultation and coordination that were already included in the 1956 document of the Three Wise Men. But Couve was not at all persuaded by these arguments.<sup>71</sup>

When Cleveland was informed by Brosio of Couve’s declarations, he reacted very sharply. He said that nobody in the US regarded the French as allies any longer, and that it would not matter at all if they left the alliance, since the remaining fourteen states agreed on the principle of the development of *détente*. Brosio replied that the French, too, wanted to pursue a policy of *détente* and that, from this point of view, the choice of *détente* in itself did not constitute an element of division: the divergence related to the conditions of *détente*, and namely its effects on the German question. As for the danger of a German unilateral policy of *détente*, Brosio stressed that the US policy of *détente* was pushing the German government towards Moscow, and risked driving Germany out of the alliance.<sup>72</sup>

At the end of September 1967, the NATO secretary-general registered in his journal the attempts to postpone the conclusion of the Harmel Exercise in order to prevent a clash with Paris. He pointed out that the Germans might react, at the very least, with suspicion.<sup>73</sup> After his mission to Bonn at the beginning of October 1967, Brosio was perfectly aware that the Germans did not want a showdown with the French. Bonn agreed that the final report should emphasize the rapprochement between East and West, the policy of *détente*, and the monitoring of this process by the alliance, but requested that the document not specify the instruments by

71 Ibid., 19 September 1967.

72 Ibid., 22 September 1967. On this aspect, see Helga Haftendorn, “Entstehung und Bedeutung”; ead., *Kernwaffen und die Glaubwürdigkeit der Allianz: Die NATO-Krise von 1966–1967* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1994).

73 TFE, MB, XXII, 26 September 1967.

which such a control would be exercised.<sup>74</sup> As for the French position, de Gaulle did not want a political strengthening of the alliance.

The contradiction between these attitudes and the progress of the Harmel Exercise was evident. The Harmel proposal, Brosio argued, compelled the allies to prove that NATO, in spite of its internal divisions, still retained its intimate *raison d'être*, and to show that the Atlantic community, which had been established less than 20 years before, would survive the end of the Cold War and accept the challenge of *détente* without losing its essence. This was the message that the Atlantic governments wanted to send to their public constituencies. In Brosio's opinion, the "original sin" of the Harmel proposal lay precisely in the fact that it aimed at bringing together actual facts and wishful thinking. On the one hand, the Harmel report had to show public opinion that NATO was a vital international forum where the reasons for unity prevailed over the elements of divergence; on the other hand, in the absence of a common strategy, the alliance member's individual policies of *détente* and compromise with the Soviets provoked dangerous shocks, since every country based its attitude towards Moscow on its peculiar national interests. From this point of view, the French case was the most important and dangerous, but not the only one.

In order to prevent a crisis between the fourteen remaining NATO members, who wanted the alliance to promote and control the whole process of *détente*, and France, which did not intend to give up its absolute freedom of movement in relations towards the Soviet Union, Brosio envisaged only two alternatives: the first was to try to concentrate the collective engagement on a "few well-determined issues"; the second was a commitment to consultations on all issues, which, however, would not involve any real commitment to a common policy.<sup>75</sup> In November 1967, French Permanent Representative to NATO Roger Seydoux was firm on this point: he told Brosio that NATO was not an appropriate framework for the new policy of *détente*, and that the only problem was that the partner governments didn't have the nerve to tell their citizens this unpleasant truth.<sup>76</sup>

74 *Ibid.*, 9 October 1967.

75 *Ibid.*, 21–22 October 1967.

76 *Ibid.*, 10 November 1967

At this point, the work of the four sub-groups was over. The conclusions of the four written reports had been reviewed and compared during a last meeting of the rapporteurs at Ditchley Park in October 1967. Based on the work of the sub-groups,<sup>77</sup> a draft summary report was prepared by the International Staff of the Secretariat in November. This report, presented to the foreign ministers in December, was approved on 14 December 1967 and issued as an annex to the final communiqué.<sup>78</sup> Brosio confided to his journal that he distrusted the “insipid, reduced” text. But he also admitted that it offered a twofold advantage: preventing a showdown with France and allowing the alliance to survive with a program that was “more or less illusory, but more or less decorous”.<sup>79</sup> From this point of view, Brosio was forced to recognize that the outcome of the study was “modest, but less disastrous than [he] had foreseen”.<sup>80</sup> In any case, if the Harmel Exercise was over, the task of the alliance had only just begun: in the years ahead, the fifteen NATO members would have to demonstrate through their actions that “the alliance was a dynamic and vigorous organization,” that “the cohesion and solidarity of interest of its members” was not only a slogan for their public opinions and, last but not least, that it would play a major role in the promotion of détente. In other words, the time was coming to transform wishes into reality.

77 The full reports are available at <http://www.nato.int/archives/harmel/harmel.htm>.

78 The Council's report “The Future Tasks of the Alliance” is available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c671213b.htm>.

79 TFE, MB, XXII, 23 November 1967

80 *Ibid.*, 24 November 1967

## Conclusion

In Brosio's opinion, a policy of détente was dangerous, for a number of reasons, both to the Atlantic alliance and to Europe. He thought that the US viewed the Atlantic alliance mostly as an instrument for controlling Europe. The US search for an agreement with Moscow on a bilateral base was changing the nature of this arrangement. Would the Soviets accept it, in order to keep Europe weak and harmless? Brosio didn't think so. He believed that Moscow wanted a divided and weak Europe, but under its own control, and that in the Soviet policy of détente, any agreement with Washington would represent only one stage in the process towards the "Soviet rule" over the continent.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to the dangers represented by the US and Soviet policies of détente, the perils of French foreign policy had to be taken into consideration. De Gaulle did not want Great Britain to join the EEC, and he did not want the US to control Europe. He wanted Europe to reach an agreement with Moscow in order to control Germany. But the Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals" that de Gaulle was building would be, in Brosio's words, a continent "in Soviet hands". Both France and the US were working on an agreement with Moscow at the expense of Germany, but the Soviets thought that only Washington could meet their requirements by ensuring that Germany remained harmless and under control. The alliance, Brosio wrote, faced with these dangers, was slowly losing its original features.<sup>82</sup>

Brosio pointed out in no uncertain terms that both the US and France intended to use the demagogic impact of détente on public opinion in order to pursue a policy of compromise with the Soviets dictated by their own strategic interests, the purpose of which was an agreement with Moscow behind the back of the allies.

Brosio's skepticism about the Harmel proposal was due to the demagogic character of the operation, which was mainly motivated by the necessity to demonstrate to Western public opinion that the alliance was "a dynamic and vigorous organization", in spite of the difficulties it was

81 TFE, MB, XXI, 20 February 1967.

82 Ibid., 11 July 1967.

facing; and by the fact that the relevance of the alliance and its *raison d'être* were themselves becoming subjects of discussion. There was a risk that the whole experience would be reduced to a technical exercise, as it had not been made clear whether its aim was to precipitate a showdown with de Gaulle and to push France to leave the alliance, or to prevent Germany from searching a direct compromise with Moscow, or to establish Atlantic control over the policy of *détente* as a whole. In his concern about the French attitude, Brosio considered the Harmel Report a document of “wishful thinking” that would nevertheless allow the alliance to survive.