

# Remarks to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels.

February 24, 1969

Mr. Chairman and members of the North Atlantic Council:

I thank you for your very thoughtful and generous words of welcome to this Council and it is indeed a very great pleasure for me to be here.

This Council is both symbol and substance of the tie that has joined us as an Atlantic Alliance for nearly 20 years.

On this first trip abroad as President of the United States I find myself thinking back to my first trip to Europe. That was in 1947, in my first year in Congress--my first year, in fact, in public life. I came here then as a member of the Herter committee, which studied Europe's postwar economic needs in order to help lay the foundations for the Marshall Plan. Although I have been back many times, those first impressions remain valid, for 1947 was the starting point of our journey together. What we have built in the past 22 years is a testimony to what can be achieved through common will and a spirit of partnership.

The years since I first visited Western Europe have further confirmed my commitment to the concept of Atlantic partnership.

I should like to take a few minutes today to share with you some of my thoughts about that partnership.

First, as all of us in this room know, partners are not expected always to agree. But they are expected to consult.

I know there have been rumblings of discontent in Europe---feeling that too often the United States talked at its partners instead of talking with them, or merely informed them of decisions after they were made instead of consulting with them before deciding.

The United States is determined to listen with a new attentiveness to its NATO partners--not only because they have a right to be heard, but because we want their ideas. I believe we have a right to expect that consultation shall be a two-way street.

This point is at the heart of one of the vital problems facing the Alliance. Consultation, simply as a means of getting agreement for unilateral action, is demoralizing. What we need is genuine consultation, a new spirit of cooperation before the fact.

In the course of my campaign last fall, I said: "If our ideals of Atlantic interdependence are to mean anything in practice, it's time we began lecturing our European partners less and listening to them more. What we need is not more proclamations and declarations, but a greater attention to what our allies think." This I deeply believe.

That is why I am here. My visits to some of your capitals--and I wish it could be all of them--and to this Council, are in the nature of a search. I have come for work, not for ceremony; to inquire, not to insist; to consult, not to convince; to listen and learn, and to begin what I hope will be a continuing interchange of ideas and insights.

After 20 years, the Atlantic Alliance must adapt to the conditions brought on by its success. It must replace the unity of a common fear with the community of shared purpose. It must pool not only its arms but also its brains.

One of the greatest values of having an alliance is the chance it provides to share ideas--to broaden the horizons of our thinking, to multiply the resources of experience and perspective we can bring to our problems, not only in our own immediate areas but throughout the world.

Surely one thing we have learned from these difficult years is that no nation has a monopoly on wisdom.

We also have learned that no great nation, and no great group of nations, can view the problems of its own community in isolation.

We are all "riders on the earth together"--fellow citizens of a world community.

In today's world, what kind of an alliance shall we strive to build?

As I see it, an alliance is not the temporary pooling of selfish interests; it is a continuing process of cooperation: "a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete."

The purpose of this trip is to help encourage that process, to seek ways to keep the relationship between America and Europe in tune with the times.

A modern alliance must be a living thing, capable of growth, able to adapt to changing circumstances.

To keep the Alliance abreast of the times, we must, I believe, today, ask ourselves some hard questions.

NATO was brought into being by the threat from the Soviet Union. What is the nature of that threat today?

When NATO was founded, Europe's economies were still shattered by war. Now they are flourishing. How should this be reflected by changed relationships among the NATO partners?

We are all grappling with problems of a modern environment, which are the byproducts of our advanced technologies--problems such as the pollution of air and water, and the congestion in our cities. Together, we can dramatically advance our mastery of these problems. By what means can we best cooperate to bring this about?

And most fundamental of all--the one thing certain about the next 20 years is that they will be different from the last 20. What do we expect from our alliance in these next 20 years? How shall we adapt our structure to advance our purpose?

The answers to these great questions will not be decided in a week. They deal with the vast sweep of history, they need the most thorough deliberation. But the questions are with us; we cannot evade them; and the fact that we have begun this process of soul-searching is a good augury.

I have said before that we are ending a period of confrontation and entering an era of negotiation. In due course, and with proper preparation, the United States will enter into negotiations with the Soviet Union on a wide range of issues, some of which will affect our European allies. We will do so on the basis of full consultation and cooperation with our allies, because we recognize that the chances for successful negotiations depend on our unity.

I realize that this course has not always been followed adequately in the past. But I pledge to you today, that in any negotiations affecting the interests of the NATO nations, there will be full and genuine consultations before and during those negotiations.

Beyond consulting on those negotiations, and beyond consulting on other policies that directly affect the NATO nations themselves, I intend to consult on a broad range of other matters. I shall not only

welcome but actively seek the counsel of America's NATO partners on the questions that may affect the peace and stability of the world, whatever the part of the world in which they arise.

The nations of NATO are rich in physical resources, but they are even richer in their accumulated wisdom, in their experience of the world today. In fashioning America's policies, we need the benefit of that wisdom and that experience.

As NATO enters its third decade, I see for it an opportunity to be more than it ever has been before: a bulwark of peace, the architect of new means of partnership, and an invigorated forum for new ideas and new technologies to enrich the lives of our peoples.

In creating new policy-making machinery in Washington, one of my principal aims has been to shift the focus of American policy from crisis management to crisis prevention. That is one of the reasons why I value NATO so highly. NATO was established as a preventive force--and NATO can be credited with the fact that while Europe has endured its share of crises in these last 20 years, the ultimate crisis that would have provoked a nuclear war has been prevented. Those nations that were free 20 years ago are still free today.

Thus, in its original purpose, NATO has been a resounding success. Europe and America, the old world and the new working together, have proved that the dream of collective security can be made a reality.

But we cannot rest on our laurels; there is no real security in stagnation. The successful strategies of the past two decades are inadequate to the decades ahead.

The tie that binds Europe and America is not the contemplation of danger, to be stretched or tightened by the fluctuations of fear.

The ties that bind our continents are the common tradition of freedom, the common desire for progress, and the common passion for peace.

In that more constructive spirit, let us look at new situations with new eyes, and in so doing, set an example for the world.

*Note: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. The Chairman of the North Atlantic Council and Secretary General of NATO was Manlio Brosio.*

Richard Nixon, Remarks to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/240586>