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NOTE FOR THE FILE

Rector's Reflections on the Center for Strategic &
International Studies Meeting, Rome, 31 October 1985

After opening remarks by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who characterized the meeting as a brainstorming session regarding the most promising and most threatening aspects of the accelerating changes that are now taking place, the former President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Karl Carstens, listed five of those threats: the nuclear arsenals, the ecological disaster, the population explosion, growing disparity in the standards of living and the threatening collapse of the financial system, and unemployment. Subsequently he identified a number of steps that could be taken in each case. Brzezinski then asked whether this was the right list and, if so, how would we have to prioritize. At that point I stepped in and made some general remarks that were critical of the whole approach.

I said that the problems listed were quite familiar and that in many ways they had been on the agenda of the global discourse for quite some time. It was also clear, at least to some extent, what needed to be done. Therefore a discussion of the priorities would not be very helpful, except that one could make the point that unless and until the nuclear arms race had been halted and a measure of détente had been reached, it would not be possible to deal with any of the other problems. I stated that the real question here was the extent of our capability to deal with these problems effectively. The problem that we would have to address, therefore, was the problem of management of the nuclear age and the growing incapacity of governments of nation states and systems of nation states to come to grips with the problems of the age. What we are now confronted with in many ways is the international political anarchy manifesting itself in unilateral behaviour of governments, state terrorism and individual or group terrorism. It is possible to discern a political spectrum, at the one end of which would be the superpowers with their tremendous nuclear arsenals, many middle and smaller states, where increasingly power is concentrated at the centre. At the other end of the spectrum we find dissipation and leakage of power despite the formal centralization of power, fragmentation of the polity, erosion of political cohesion and the emergence of small groups or grassroot movements totally alienated from the political system, often without clear leadership or clearly defined purposes and, therefore, to a large extent invulnerable to the usual forms of political manipulation and oppression. In a sense this deep divergence in political development has to do with the persistent problem of international poverty. To speak only of disparity would be to reduce the problem. The euphemism only serves to misguide us in this respect. It is the combination of continued poverty and growing political consciousness, coupled with the unemployment in the Third World, aggravated by the new technologies, that has led to this very

deep alienation from existing political systems, irrespective of their ideological orientation, the disaffection, especially among the young, and the loss of legitimacy of the nation state. This had led to the erosion of the concept of the nation state, in some cases to its collapse, like in Lebanon, and what is most likely going to happen in the Sahel, but also in other parts of the Third World. This, coupled with the ecological deterioration, especially in Africa, will, in the next two decades, lead to massive migration which is bound to strain the economic and political systems of receiving countries, possibly beyond their capacity to absorb and adjust, both within the region concerned as well as beyond the region. This alienation has in other countries led to the search for alternative societies, and the religious fundamentalism one finds in Islam as well as in other religions in practically all parts of the world is a manifestation of the rejection of society as it now functions. The easy availability of arms to anyone or any group with any grievances or political aspirations has led to political events totally beyond the control or manipulative ability of the superpowers. But generally one could also say that all political systems, especially those that are essentially conciliation systems, are incapable of dealing with the fanaticism of many of these newly emerging movements. The capacity of the major powers, not limited to the superpowers, to control events on the international scene has, as a result, been rapidly diminishing, and one observes the spread of violence everywhere.

While these phenomena can be explained in light of the growing rage and rejection of the real and perceived injustices by many in present-day world society, one should not overlook the other factors that have changed political behaviour in significant ways. One could, of course, make the general point that in the face of these very rapid and profound changes, but also the sliding of many processes, like the arms race and ecological deterioration as well as the malfunctioning of the global economy, closer to the point of irreversibility, our present political systems, as well as the international system, seem to be incapable of stemming the tide and of reversing the trend. Some of this incapacity has to do with the complexity of the problems that now have to be faced. Many of these problems are in very complex ways interlinked with each other and require broad-gauged approaches in order to be effective, something which governments, with their various conventional ministries, are incapable of handling. Also, many of the institutions that we have were developed at an earlier period, when this complexity was not so apparent or urgent. It is obvious that there are very clear limits to the adjustment capability of institutions. One can even speak of "outer limits" to institutional adjustments. But underneath all this lies an intellectual, a cognitive problem, namely the difficulties we have in dealing with the complexity of the problems where problems in the biophysical sphere come together with problems in the political, cultural and economic as well as technological sphere. We still lack, at this stage, the concepts and the analytical tools to help us understand the confluence of these problems and are, therefore, unable to devise effective policies. The frightening rapidity of change and the growing complexity of problems have led to a very primordial desire for reductionism and oversimplification, coupled with intolerance. Ideologization and religious fundamentalism, that is now on the rise

everywhere, as well as the breakdown of communications across ideological or religious or cultural barriers are manifestations of this condition. This is happening at a time when such discourse, such communication, is more essential than ever, given the total interdependence between countries and peoples.

There are also, of course, problems at another level that have to do with values, the moral dimension of problems and the psychological difficulties for the human individual to live with uncertainty, unpredictability and vulnerability. The problem for modern man is how to learn to live with these conditions without fear and while maintaining the necessary level of civility and rationality. The problem is that we have gone through an age where problems have been defined in materialistic terms and the solutions, therefore, are looked for on that plane. But what we are beginning to see now is a sort of reassertiveness of moral values. What the Catholic bishops in the United States have done in their statements about the economy and about nuclear warfare, but also the Archbishop of Canterbury in the U.K., are manifestations of this new moral assertiveness. One has the feeling that we are nearing the end of the long road of secularization and that people are beginning to realize that it is impossible to be human in a totally secularized world. The emergence of a new fundamentalism is simply one element in this process. It is not the only manifestation of the resurgence of religiosity, and it is important to bear this in mind and not become too obsessed by the social implications of religious fundamentalism as such. Likewise, I believe we are beginning to get to the end of the road towards individualization. Individualization seems to have reached the point where it becomes counter-productive, where it begins to erode the very primeval linkages between people, not only affecting the nation and the community, but also the family. It is becoming very clear how impossible it is for modern man to live in the utter loneliness that has also become part of modern life. So in addition to the difficulties that we have in managing these global problems, we are also reaching very important watersheds in the evolution of the human being. There is not only a revolt against the value-free and ethical neutrality of technocratic decision-making; we are reaching a point where we simply cannot afford the nation state to remain the sole and ultimate object of our loyalty. There is an overriding loyalty now, and that is the survival of the human race, the solidarity with the rest of humankind. With the changes in the human condition which are unique and have never been experienced before in the history of humankind, certainly not on this scale and with the immediacy of the threat of human extinction, it is important that we develop or reinforce those values that are reaffirming of life and of human solidarity, that reach out not only across national boundaries, encompassing the whole world, but that also reach out over time to future generations. At the moment we have not articulated those values, and we have not integrated them into the basic tenets of each of our cultures, but that is a major task that has to be done. Our future is dependent on our success in doing so. We are engaged in an effort to search for an ethic of human solidarity, an ethic of human survival. It is an ethic that has to be rooted in the various cultures and value and belief systems in this world, but the effort must bring out the shared

values that will make possible the survival of humankind under the conditions under which modern man will have to live.

The question was raised whether it is possible to have a viable international community within which certain members refuse to accept the compromises that have to be part of an interdependent world system. How would, for instance, the rest of the world live with the contradiction between Islam and human rights. The question, of course, was an astounding one, showing how limited the historical perspective is that even senior statesmen bring to today's problems. I responded to the question by asking what the connections might be between respect for human rights and the behaviour of Christianity in the 12th to the 17th century, both within their own countries as well as outside. One might want to ask the Indians in America what they thought about Christianity's respect for human rights. Think of what has happened in the name of Christianity over the ages, the atrocities, the wars, etc. I made the point that all religions have in their sacred texts references to basic human rights, but that throughout human history people seem bent on violating them. So the question was not a very relevant one, and the discussions later on did not return to that point.

The organizers and several subsequent speakers expressed their appreciation for the direction the discussions had taken. These discussions were subsequently dominated by continued interchanges between Michel Rocard and Etienne Davignon. Rocard made the very interesting point, after having stated his general agreement with my approach to the problems, that there was a very serious institutional lack, namely that there were no fora in which the differences of opinion about the nature of the various historical events now taking place could be discussed dispassionately and without being unduly influenced by national interests or ideologies. He cited the question of Nicaragua. Rocard also spoke about the growth of irrationality, and about the strength of regional cultures within countries.

Other members made remarks about the need for nuclear parity, about local and regional wars and about the destabilizing effect of the SDI. But the one interesting point that followed in the discussion of what I consider minor issues, was the differentiation between human rights, basic economic and social rights and basic needs. The point was made by Ambassador Millicent Fenwick that to speak about rights instead of needs could create expectations that are not always fulfillable and which therefore might lead to unrealistic hopes and expectations and a sense of injustice which may have destabilizing effects.

Madame Pintasilgo made interesting remarks from her own experience during the elections. In her observation external forces played an extraordinary role. She spoke about the political dependency of small nations, how the politics of small countries could be and are being dominated by coalitions with elements of the outside world. She also spoke about the bipolarity of complexity on the one hand and the ideologization as a means of simplification, both affecting governability.

Of course, also the debt problem came into the discussion, but it was really the intervention by Rocard, the former French Minister of

Agriculture, which was important. He made a number of points beyond the ones I already mentioned. He spoke about the technology of collecting votes in a modern democracy and how difficult it is for ministries to deal with the problems they face because the present political structures and administrative divisions make synthetic thinking, encompassing a number of interlinked problems, impossible.

He raised a point about techniques of international negotiations which later on led Davignon to enter the discussion. He pointed out, using the failure of the wheat agreement and the sugar agreement, that there should be shared equitable interests as a prerequisite before negotiations really become possible. However, very little intellectual investment is being made in the mechanisms that would make possible the mediation or negotiation of such shared interests.

Davignon then made an exposition about the paradox of our times, that the problems that we face are really of the long haul, but there is at the same time the need for quick solutions, given the very limited political time horizon. There is, therefore, a need for a degree of sustainable consistency in the short-term decisions that governments make, and this is a very difficult thing to achieve. There are no mechanisms and institutions in the present political systems that make this possible. So there is also a conflict between rationality and the capability to deliver in dealing with these problems. We have, in fact, a post-war structure, a political system and methodologies which are not capable of dealing with new realities. He mentioned how senseless many of the negotiations at present are. The lowering of tariffs to which people have agreed in GATT or in the EEC has become meaningless because of the rise of the value of the dollar. He saw as a fundamental issue the need to have rules that allow for a much greater diversity of situations than is possible at present. That holds true for North-South or South negotiations and so forth.

Among his listings of opportunities Davignon wanted to mention science and communications. He was very afraid of the impact of communications on the human condition, on public life and on political processes. He did not know which way things would go, but it raises already some great problems because of the erosion of social cohesiveness as a result of communications. There is the question of how the young unemployed and the marginalized can be socialized into a world system. It is obvious that democracies will have to develop a greater capacity to manage long-term problems, dependency, and scarcity and to adjust to the fact that democracy now will encompass a much larger number of people. India, for example, will have one billion people by the year 2000.

One of the speakers from the Third World, Samuel Motsuenyane of South Africa, spoke about the ideologization of conflicts in the Third World, the real conflict of allegiances, whether they are ideological or tribal. He spoke about how dangerous big power involvement had been.

There was also talk by several about how aid has helped to distort the economy and the self-development of developing countries. The same member also wanted the escalation of urbanization to be one of the

problems mentioned, although I believe that problem would be covered by the demographic item that had been proposed.

The former President of Colombia, Misael Pastrana-Borrero, spoke about the failure of international organizations to provide solutions. What we now are faced with is a situation in which the number and scale of problem are increasing rather than decreasing. In El Salvador alone more than 300,000 lives have been lost in their war. He also mentioned the debt problem and that Latin America pays 150 million dollars a day in interest payment. He spoke about terrorism, how it has destabilized not only governments and the state, but also society in general and even the family. He brought out some of the linkages of the drug problem. He mentioned that Florida alone has an arms export of one billion dollars a year. These arms go to drug gangs and to terrorist gangs. He asked the question why the United States cannot do anything about this.

There was also some discussion about the debt problem in connection with the capital flight that is taking place. Borrero tried to minimize the problem by stating that some of the capital had been earned legitimately through commissions on contracts, etc.

What I found extremely interesting was Brzezinski's impression at the end of the morning session. He said first that he sensed that what we had discussed was a disassociation from the idea of progress, progress in the sense of the managed improvement of the human condition, and that the discussions were reflecting a different perception, namely one of uncontrolled fragmentation. He also pointed out how little the Soviet Union had been mentioned, and interpreted that to mean that it has become insignificant in terms of the future, except in military terms, and that many of the problems seemed to be soluble if governments were more sensitive to the wishes of the people, which would result in more democracy. I was a little taken aback by his over-simplifications. He also mentioned a number of themes which he saw emerging from the discussions, namely the question of international political anarchy and the loss of control over political events; secondly, the global economic disorder; and thirdly the interrelationship between political systems and philosophies; as well as, in this connection, the question of religious revival and the quest for deeper meaning in modern technological society.

Although the afternoon session was supposed to deal with opportunities, most of the discussion kept returning to the earlier problems. Davignon made his presentation by stating that it would be wise not to anticipate too much, however that certain difficulties could be turned into opportunities. He looked at the problems in an order of priority determined by the number of people that would be touched by these problems, and by that standard the economic problems and the debt problem, of course, were the biggest ones. The economic problem turned around the forecast of practically everyone concerned that the world would go through a long period of slow growth, with the result that economic growth will not be commensurate with the scale of the problems and that the room to manoeuvre necessary for concerted international action would not be there. Certainly at the level of one and a half percent growth that would not be likely. If growth were possible, then there was the question of inflation. He described the debt problem as

the result of the fact that at a given point the oil surplus had to be recycled without adequate rules having been established beforehand. There was no single authority that could make the rules that were needed, and so the whole system fell down. It should be said that the private bankers never wanted to play the role that they have been playing, but that that role simply fell on them by default, and this has led to the debt problem.

After a brief discussion of the trade problem, he then mentioned a second area in which concerted action would be meaningful, i.e. the area of scientific development and application in the fields of desertification, education, environment, and so forth. He repeated his misgivings about communications and spoke also about the present tendency in this interdependent world to fall back on bilateral approaches at a time when really the only effective action that would be possible would be multilateral action guaranteed by an international organization. He spoke about the need to improve negotiating techniques, which would show that a bilateral approach was not good enough, and to negotiate on the basis of draft solutions after everyone had agreed and had committed themselves to an agenda beforehand. He felt that to get this process going it would be important to start it by selecting areas of negotiations where results were most likely to be achieved.

Then Johannes Rau, who may well be the next Chancellor of West Germany, spoke about the role of Europe in a North-South dialogue and the loss of faith in progress which was affecting often the best of the younger generation. He also spoke about the relationship between private possibilities and public duties and the need for Europe to speak with one voice.

Finally, Brzezinski made the summing up. He described the kind of conference that he was thinking of organizing in April and mentioned a few possible topics. For the moment he thought that three such topics might be: the national security implications of needed policies for coping with low economic growth; secondly, the security implications for coping with the communications revolution; and thirdly, the security implications of a new fundamentalism in values. The response was quite cool, and in the evening session, at dinner, Robert Neumann of CSIS suggested that the references to international security implications might well be dropped.

The conference was an interesting one. It showed in many ways how people who have high positions of responsibilities were often quite unaware of the underlying issues, although they are familiar with the usual agenda of global problems. Obviously they had not thought very much beyond them. I have some misgivings about the usefulness of the meeting in April, even though I had suggested some procedural points. My feeling was that here was an attempt on the one hand to grapple with some big issues without having a clear vision themselves (that is on the part of CSIS), and on the other hand it was an example of "have money - will hold conference": money in search of a theme, essentially. The money apparently had been acquired from Prince Turki of Saudi Arabia, who, at some point, had also promised to give money to ICIHI. However,

when he discovered that one of his brothers was a member of that Commission, he changed his mind.

The meeting in Rome was intellectually extremely stimulating. I learnt a great deal from the interchanges between Davignon, Rocard and myself. But it was also a conference that showed the limitations of an intellectual fishing expedition.

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