Present-day alliances, though suspected of illegality and accused of immorality, are nevertheless the organizers of the international political arena. Reverting to the reality of alliances and special military agreements from the ideal of a world system of collective security took only a few years: the ineffectiveness of the world organization confers legitimacy upon alliances and counter-alliances which, like the feudal barons of the Mamelukes, pay lip service to the sovereign but retain the real military power.[1]

Though antagonistic by nature, in practice alliances are a fundamental constituent of the international system, by virtue of the balance (however precarious or unjust) which they create and by virtue of the dialogue between them. This is illustrated by the preparation of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Dag Hammarskjold, the Secretary General of the United Nations, himself acknowledged this fact in his 1957 report to the 12th Session of the General Assembly, stating that alliance systems, operating concurrently with the United Nations to take account of the current balance of power, may have a certain value during the present period.

The structural relationships between the two principal alliances have been perceptively analyzed by Jean-Louis Martres.[2] Like the United States and the Soviet Union, the Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact are based upon fundamentally different power structures: an attempt to compare and classify them in ambiguous terms such as "twin-pole" or "multiple-pole" systems leads to a narrow view of the system concept while allowing the notion that these poles are similar (and therefore comparable) to emerge. Our author goes on to bring out the idea that the meeting of asymmetrical powers of different types leads to a number of logical and
implied effects which, although the parties themselves may be unaware of them, nevertheless provide the basis for regulation of the system. Does such a situation exclude all free will on the part of those who govern? No. It makes it possible to assess the practical effectiveness of their behavior in relation to the logical structure revealed. Does it consign relationships between the two alliances to a kind of "unreasoning automatic regulation"? On the contrary, it reveals a kind of law of gravity, which the parties may respect or attempt to flout.

Two World-Oriented Alliances?

The Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact have dominated international society since the 1950s by virtue of their continuous ascendancy and by the relative stability of the relationships which they have established with each other. Nonetheless they differ profoundly: in the nature of the links between their members, in their economic and military structure and in their ideological behavior.

The Eastern Alliance has a very closely-woven fabric; it was preceded by a tight network of bilateral agreements and has led to the glorification of the "limited sovereignty" of its members; it is truly transnational, insofar as it involves control of the various kinds of national machinery (military, political, economic and trade-union) which interlock to form the machines which make up the European Communist States. The Western Alliance, on the other hand, has to reckon with a dual tendency towards division: the division of power in each nation among a large number of centers of decision and the contradiction in relationship between Allies: between the political discourse of independence and the requirements of joint defense.

The Eastern Alliance has been successful in giving pride of place to the military sector, to which the advanced areas of the economy are assigned, to the detriment of a domestic civilian sector which is subordinate to it, under-developed and, in the last analysis, maintained by the West.[3] On the other hand, the parties to the Western Alliance are essentially economy oriented, anxious to develop trade and to increase their markets and submitting to increases in their military machines only when their vital interests are threatened.

The Eastern Alliance acts as if it had the monopoly of truth: it justifies all its actions by reference to an ideology of which it is the sole interpreter. The Western Alliance brings together liberal democratic regimes aiming at the uninterrupted pursuit of the democratic Utopia, which accept public denunciation when the