Occasional Papers

Nato's Current and Future Challenges

Three Viewpoints

Edited by
S. Victor Papacosma

Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Union Studies
Kent State University
Kent, Ohio
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This publication is based on papers originally presented on April 11, 2007, in an evening program sponsored by the Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Union Studies at Kent State University. The three distinguished speakers—Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ryan C. Hendrickson, and Thomas S. Mowle—addressed the topic of "NATO's Current and Future Challenges" with variant perspectives. Sean Kay subsequently wrote the "Introduction" to accompany these analyses. The editor wishes to acknowledge the important support roles of Joanna Hildebrand Craig and Darryl ml Crosby in the production of this publication.

The Lemnitzer Center was originally established in 1979 to provide an institutional setting for the academic examination of the historical, political, economic, and military experiences of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In April 1982 the Center was formally named after a distinguished participant in the affairs of the Atlantic Alliance, General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, 1963-69. A decision was made in 1991 to expand the mission of the Center to include an emphasis on the European Community (now European Union).

Among its activities, the Center sponsors public lectures and conferences that are open to the University community and the general public. Scholarly meetings sponsored or cosponsored by the Lemnitzer Center have resulted in fifteen books. The Center has research associates from Kent and other universities who participate regularly in its scholarly activities and contribute to its publications. Additionally, the Center maintains a corresponding associates category that includes scholars from U.S. and European universities who participate less frequently in its functions.

S. Victor Papacosma
Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Union Studies
Kent State University
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

RYAN C. HENDRICKSON is Associate Professor of Political Science at Eastern Illinois University and the author of two books: Diplomacy and War at NATO: The Secretary General and Military Action After the Cold War (2006) and The Clinton Wars: The Constitution, Congress and War Powers (2002). In addition, he has published 35 journal articles and book chapters, including articles in Political Science Quarterly, Armed Forces & Society, the Journal of Strategic Studies, and the Journal of International Relations and Development, among others. His current research examines NATO’s efforts to transform itself after September 11.

LAWRENCE S. KAPLAN is University Professor Emeritus of History and Director Emeritus of the Lemnitzer Center at Kent State University. Universally considered to be America’s preeminent historian of NATO, Dr. Kaplan has not restricted his writings to post-1945 developments—he is also recognized for his many writings on Jeffersonian diplomacy. Included in the extensive list of his publications are The Long Entanglement: NATO’s First Fifty Years (1999), Thomas Jefferson: Westward the Course of Empire (1999), NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance (1994), NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance (2004), History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, vol. 5, The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961-1965 (2006), and NATO 1948: The Birth of the Transatlantic Alliance (2007). Since his retirement from Kent State, he has been residing in the Washington area and continuing to publish actively. He has also been teaching on a regular basis at Georgetown University.

SEAN KAY is Chair of the International Studies Program and Professor of Politics and Government at Ohio Wesleyan University. He is also Mershon Associate at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies at the Ohio State University and a Fellow at the Eisenhower Institute in Washington, D.C. He was previously a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies in the U.S. Department of Defense and visiting professor at Dartmouth College. He is co-editor of NATO after 50 Years (2001) and Limiting Institutions: The Challenge of Eurasian Security Governance (2003) and author of NATO and the Future of

Thomas S. Mowle is Public Trustee in El Paso County, Colorado, and an instructor at Colorado State University–Pueblo. He has published Allies at Odds: The United States and the European Union (2004), edited Hope is Not a Plan: The Iraq War from Inside the Green Zone (2007), and with David H. Sacko published The Unipolar World: An Unbalanced Future (2007). He has published articles in Survival, International Studies Perspectives, and Political Psychology; and chapters in books on Iraq, Bosnia, Turkish foreign policy, and U.S. arms control policy. He served as a military officer in the Strategy, Plans, and Assessment Division, Headquarters Multinational Force-Iraq, Baghdad, from August to December 2004.

Introduction:
Is NATO an Alliance for the 21st Century?

Sean Kay

Not Your Grandfather's NATO

In assessing the evolving debates over NATO's survival and relevance, one is tempted to quip about it not being "your father's NATO." However, as time passes, your father or your grandfather would not recognize NATO today. NATO's survival is no longer in serious question. The central debate now rests on whether NATO's survival has relevance to contemporary security challenges. This collection of essays represents the new and vibrant debate about NATO's future. As the authors show, this debate is framed by NATO's past, in the very founding of the institution, not just its recent experience. These debates are also framed by assessments of a future for NATO that goes beyond Europe and relies on "going global." This volume provides an essential basis for understanding where the next stage in the decades-old contentious assessment over NATO's relevance and future is headed.

NATO's Origins as a Guide to NATO's Future

When NATO was founded, it was designed to be a flexible institution. The founding North Atlantic Treaty (NAT) was intended as a statement of collective defense, but it also initially came without an automatic security guarantee. Even in the height of the Cold War, evolving security dynamics would raise questions about the credibility of the NATO security commitment. The member states would, according to Article 5, agree to consult in the event of an attack and then agree on a common response to any attack. While the Soviet Union was clearly the intended concern, it was never identified in the treaty, thus implying a universal commitment to collective defense of the founding members. The founding membership was fluid, with enlargement built into Article 10 of the treaty. In the negotiations that created the NAT, the countries involved grew from an initial three—Britain,
Canada, and the United States—to include Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Eventually, twelve would sign the final treaty in April 1949, with the inclusion of Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway, and Portugal. During the Cold War, NATO expanded further to include Greece, Turkey, West Germany, and Spain. With the Cold War's end, a first round of further expansion included the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999 and a second round in 2002, with Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

That first document also laid the foundations for NATO missions beyond collective defense. Article 4 of the NAT provided for consultation in the event of a threat to the security concerns of any particular member. In effect, this implied that the members could use the institution as a foundation for political and military coordination for "out-of-area" NATO operations beyond Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union focused alliance planners onto Article 4 as a rationale for a "new NATO" that could undertake a range of new missions. NATO confronted a unique challenge after the Cold War, and, as an alliance, it might well have disappeared in the absence of the unifying Soviet threat. However, the cooperative functions ingrained in the consultative and consensus-based decision process within the alliance were seen by its members as worth sustaining. NATO had provided for a new security context in which, for example, France no longer had to worry about German power and the two could engage in a historic reconciliation facilitated by the process of European economic integration. These cooperative mechanisms provided an important rationale for NATO's institutional adaptation after the Cold War. Nevertheless, NATO would find agreeing to survive easier to attain than translating its survival into effective action in times of crises.

The NATO architecture, while not directly involved, supplied a very important platform for allied power projection into the Persian Gulf War of 1991. Yet the allies took nearly four years to utilize NATO assets in the Balkan crisis. The evolution of violence from civil war to ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina left the alliance deeply divided over how to respond and seemingly irrelevant in the new European security environment. NATO did, by 1995, eventually agree on intervention, and it played a central role in facilitating the peace implementation process and peace support operations in Bosnia. The Balkan crisis of the 1990s exposed a fundamental tension in NATO's post–Cold War role between interests and values. This clash can also be traced back to NATO's founding. In the NAT, the Preamble and Article 2 indicate that the purpose of the institution is to promote values consistent with the United Nations Charter and to advance the common values of the members of the Atlantic Community: democracy, peaceful settlement of disputes, and human rights. Yet at its founding NATO was also conflicted. Its functions reflected the Cold War division of Europe in which the people of Eastern Europe were relegated and subjugated to a Soviet sphere of influence. Internally, the alliance accommodated fissures, as with the founding presence of Portugal, which would be governed by an authoritarian regime until the mid-1970s. In 1967 a military coup in Greece overthrew a democratic government, establishing a military-backed government for seven years—and NATO did nothing in defense of democratic institutions. The alliance also tolerated occasional extra-constitutional political changes in Turkey. Ultimately, stability was preferred over the enforcement of values in the Cold War NATO.

NATO's post–Cold War mission emphasized a renewed commitment to Euro-Atlantic values, particularly with the policy of membership enlargement. There were strong strategic arguments for including Poland in NATO as a means to stabilize the area, between a rising united Germany and declining Russian power. Once Poland was admitted, however, it became very hard to say no to the like-minded Czechs, Hungarians, and others who sought to "return to Europe." One could make strong geostrategic arguments against membership in NATO for the three Baltic countries in light of strong Russian opposition. Yet it was difficult to look at these long-suffering people—who were willing to fight to be part of the West—and tell them that their future was conditioned on a Russian veto. Russia itself would be welcomed as a contributor to the new community of Euro-Atlantic partners, as long as it would conform to Western standards.

The historical basis for NATO's contemporary adaptation is carefully detailed in the essay by Lawrence S. Kaplan. NATO's preeminent historian. Kaplan shows how the creation of NATO reflected a historical departure from America's tradition of isolationism (particularly from European affairs). The treaty also reflected a shift in thinking about the Soviet Union as a threat and toward the question of German power at the heart of Europe. Kaplan raises a vital question: Were alternative strategic choices available in NATO's formative period? Kaplan points to George Kennan, who critiqued NATO and the militarization of containment as evidence that an alternative existed but was not taken. The Kennan precedent raises the question of whether similar concerns are being adequately accounted for in today's alliances. For example, NATO chose membership expansion over military operations as the major priority of the 1990s. Adding more NATO members was more important than developing a functional political and military operational architecture between the European Union and the United States.

This position was ironic, given the warning from NATO's first Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in the early 1950s that, if NATO was still in place in five years, it would have to be considered a failure. Indeed, it was the view of Kennan and other founders that the central purpose of NATO was to provide reassurance so that the Europeans could eventually assume full responsibility for their own future—a Europe strong enough to say yes and no to the United States but one that would also be there when it needed help. It is not hard
to imagine the answer to the question of whether an American general serving in Iraq in 2007 would have traded in several hundred Baltic troops deployed there for a German or French army division.

THE CASE FOR (AND CONCERNS ABOUT) NATO

The terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 served as a clear warning of the dynamic and catastrophic nature of new threats. Increasingly, the twenty-first-century security environment looks radically transformed, thus raising the question of whether NATO is sufficiently adapted to the evolving set of security conditions. NATO's high moment came on 12 September 2001 when, for the first time in its history, the allies invoked the Article 5 clause of the NAT, affirming that the attacks on the United States were to be an attack on all NATO members. Quickly thereafter, however, the United States bypassed NATO in engineering its response in Afghanistan, guided by the new mantra of "the mission will shape the coalition, not the coalition shaping the mission." Soon NATO would face one of the gravest crises in its history in a deeply bitter transatlantic dispute over the 2003 U.S. decision to invade Iraq. The situation deteriorated to the extent that in early 2003 NATO could not agree in a timely manner to provide an Article 5 security guarantee to Turkey in the event that Iraq attacked it in retaliation for the U.S. invasion.

Kaplan suggests that the fault lines displayed in the Iraq war exposed pre-existing cracks in the alliance that date back to its founding, especially French concerns about American power. NATO's Cold War history reveals a number of major challenges to its cohesion: the impact of decolonization in the 1950s, major disputes over nuclear policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Vietnam War, France's withdrawal from the military command structures of NATO, the 1980s missile crisis. These were serious crises that threatened the cohesion of NATO at pivotal times of the Cold War.

In this context, Ryan Hendrickson's essay challenges contemporary critics of NATO not to overreact to the current decline in the transatlantic relationship. Hendrickson shows that NATO has identified major challenges and implemented plans to meet them, as with the new NATO Response Force approved in 2002, command structure reform, capabilities commitments, and the undertaking of major military operations in Afghanistan. NATO facilitates the coordination of combined military action but also provides political legitimacy for the conduct of out-of-area military action. Hendrickson defends NATO's policy decisions surrounding membership enlargement, demonstrating the significance of various reforms that helped consolidate democracy and peaceful international relations among aspiring members. Despite critics' complaints of military dilution and complexity of decision making, Hendrickson sees little evidence to support the claim that NATO enlargement has weakened the alliance.

Hendrickson makes a compelling case that the proof of NATO's relevance resides in the actions of its member states, for which NATO remains a high priority in their foreign and defense policies. By 2006 NATO assumed a lead role in Afghanistan, and debates about future enlargement rounds persisted with possible consideration of Georgia and Ukraine. There is, of course, a danger in confusing process with security outcomes, as demonstrated with the estimated 250,000 killed or missing in Bosnia during the early 1990s. NATO's ongoing commitment to enlargement reflects this dilemma. As Hendrickson correctly points out, the prospect of NATO membership helped to promote reform in post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe. Poland, for example, made important strides in its civil-military reform and gained confidence, which, ironically, helped it build a better relationship with Moscow.

Nevertheless, NATO enlargement was, in the end, a purely political process. None of the new members, at any stage, met the declared criteria for admission to NATO. New projects such as the Response Force actually removed incentives among new allies to undertake major military reform, instead offering show forces for niche capabilities. True, the enthusiasm of the new alliance members for special missions was welcomed, but the five men and three dogs that Estonia first sent to Afghanistan in 2001 did not reflect a major military contribution. American foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman wryly commented in the New York Times in February 2007 that in enlarging NATO we lost the Russians but got the Czech navy.

NATO enlargement did not accompany a more fundamental reassessment of NATO's decision-making procedures. As the institution grew, the competing interests of its member states would inevitably make consensus-driven decision making harder to achieve. The problem goes beyond decision making to the problem of internal alliance management. There is, for example, no provision in NATO for punishing or expelling a member (old or new) that might "go bad" (i.e., step back on reform or enter into conflict with its neighbors). All alliance decisions are made by consensus. Therefore, even to discuss the bad behavior (internally or externally) of a member would require that ally to agree in the consensus process. No country in NATO is interested eliminating the consensus process, since it both legitimizes collective action by large members and provides smaller members with negotiating leverage. NATO cannot even put the issue of changing its decision-making process on the agenda for discussion unless there is consensus to do that, which there will not be. Members can agree to a mission but then opt out of contributing to it—but this, too, undermines the very notion of an alliance and only serves to exacerbate burden-sharing tensions.
The way enlargement was implemented also presents problems for new NATO members. New members sought entry as part of a return to the West and integration into Western institutions. But they also joined for the assumed collective defense commitments embodied in Article 5 of the NATO. However, all that the allies agreed to do in enlargement is identify any threat to a new member, discuss it as a potential threat to all of them, and then consider possible collective action. There is no guarantee of allied action to secure the borders of new NATO members. In particular, there are no “old NATO” troops on the ground to provide forward deterrence to the new allies. Paradoxically, countries not in NATO, such as Albania or Macedonia, had real security guarantees in the form of U.S. troops on their soil. Furthermore, alliance enlargement can not be said to have contributed to a productive relationship between the member states and Russia. Alienating Russia to gain the responsibility for security of small states in Central and Eastern Europe might, in the end, be a dubious proposition in the broader scope of effective strategic thinking. More importantly, how these developments translate into the new requirements of global security in the twenty-first century remains unclear.

NATO AND GLOBAL SECURITY

Since NATO’s founding, intense policy debates have raged over military strategy relative to evolving threat assessments. At its inception, the alliance was mainly a statement of purpose and only received its major institutional and military dynamics as Cold War tensions heightened in the 1950s. Most of the post-Cold War debates simultaneously focused on how to adapt NATO to meet new European security challenges, which, in this case, involved consolidating democracy and crisis management. The basic functions of NATO remain well summarized by its first secretary general, Lord Ismay, who asserted that the purpose of NATO was to “keep the Americans in, the Germans down, and the Russians out.” In terms of immediate contemporary threats, however, NATO does face a dilemma: Europe is at peace and great power war seems highly improbable. One could easily declare “mission accomplished” in Europe and be satisfied with a NATO playing a reserve strategic role. The alliance’s main function would thus be to foster the European Union as a security actor so that the United States can focus its attention globally. In this context, some analysts posit that its future resides in emerging as a “global NATO” — coordinating military coalitions for regional security management and for response activity well beyond the European area of operations.

Thomas S. Mowle’s essay posits that in order for the United States to invest further in NATO, the alliance would have to become a component of America’s unipolar power position and global engagement. Mowle cautions that for NATO to play any role at all, it must satisfy the core interests of all of its members. Here there is a serious, and perhaps unbridgeable, gap in both will and capabilities to make NATO a truly global force. Nonetheless, Mowle presents the case for this concept in a manner far superior to any to date, including by those who advocated the policy in the first place. Whereas the U.S. negotiators to NATO in fall of 2006 failed to persuade their allies as to the merits of such a new concept, Mowle does make a convincing case.

A global NATO has appeal because it removes the territoriality issue from the conceptualization of NATO area-of-responsibility. Instead, NATO would build a network of global partners determined not by geography but instead by military capabilities and will and democratic rule. A global partnership built around the NATO core membership would serve to answer the question of what to do with future membership rounds in NATO. Membership could be reserved for those in the broader transatlantic area and more advanced partnerships and then developed for countries on Europe’s periphery and beyond. This was done as a precursor to NATO enlargement in the 1990s with the Partnership for Peace, and such a concept could be expanded so that NATO coordinates global security operations. Already by 2007 NATO played a lead role in Afghanistan, a support role in Northern Africa, and a training role in Iraq, in addition to serving in ongoing operations in the Balkans and growing geopolitical contacts in the Black Sea region. Thus, the foundations for such an approach already exist.

Mowle’s article is particularly important because it addresses the question of NATO’s future in the theoretical context of structural realism, a theory of international relations that focuses on the relative distribution of power in the international system for explaining the role of international alliances and institutions. Structural realism offers a strong explanatory tool for understanding NATO’s role during the Cold War. However, it also predicted that when power dynamics shift, as with the end of the Cold War, NATO would have to realign itself or go out of business. Structural realism had a difficult time accounting for NATO’s survival, and thus in the 1990s it appeared that NATO was best explained by neoliberal institutional frameworks of international relations. Neoliberalism posits generally that international institutions facilitate international cooperation, define international rules, lower bargaining costs, and generally contribute to peace. However, neoliberal theory was best at explaining why NATO survived and not whether its survival had relevance to increasing security. The 1999 Kosovo war disproved neoliberal prescriptions for NATO as a major theoretical case study, since the institution itself caused major ineffectiveness in warfare. Indeed, the searing experience of that war forced the U.S. to seek to skirt NATO rules and procedures in the post-9/11 international security environment.

For Mowle, the global distribution of power generally reflects the unipolar dominance of the United States. In his view, a global NATO would thus better reflect the realities of contemporary international relations. He sees the U.S. as not
wanting to be constrained by tight alliance structures, instead preferring ad hoc coalitions of the willing. Meanwhile, smaller countries tend to want to align with the dominant power in the system and reap distributive gains from cooperation. At the same time, the U.S. would also seek burden sharing and effective policy coordination among willing partners. Consequently, there is a strategic logic to the idea of a global role for NATO. Mowle also sees such an institutional design as appealing to neoliberal institutionalists, given the key role of rules and procedures deeply embedded in the NATO architecture. Even if, in the end, American power will likely set the agenda and dominate strategic and tactical military choices, working through the institutional mechanisms of NATO will continue to foster a general cooperative security framework. NATO can thus serve to legitimize global military operations that might not pass the UN Security Council, as was the case in the 1999 Kosovo war.

Mowle asserts that decision-making procedures will not hinder military operations in a global NATO and that peace operations will not be underprovided and overconsumed by free-riders who approve missions but do not contribute resources. In large part, this would be managed by the U.S. offering rewards for contributions. However, it is in this area where the global NATO idea faces serious conceptual and operational challenges. Mowle readily acknowledges these challenges and does an outstanding job of explaining a new evolution for the alliance, and in so doing he provides a serious and sustained conceptual argument for a more global role for NATO. The case for this is compelling, because the threats to transatlantic security increasingly come not from within the European area but, rather, from the ebb and flows of the networks of globalization and its wide range of nontraditional threats. The nature of modern threats does pose serious challenges to the global NATO concept. NATO is, at its core, a military organization.

To be sure, there is a growing and diverse demand for military operations around the world—be it coalition war fighting, peace support and nation-building, or humanitarian and disaster relief. But modern security threats in the twenty-first century are increasingly civilian and nonmilitary in nature. In early 2007, member state Estonia believed it was under a cyberattack emanating from Russia. Would this constitute an Article 5 situation? If so, by what means would NATO respond? To the extent that global security mandates both a military and civilian capacity, it seems that a global NATO will just not suffice unless the alliance is radically transformed (i.e., to include rapidly deployable civilian capacity as well as military). However, it also appears to be the case that the European Union is likely to be much better suited for this kind of activity than NATO. The relationship between NATO and the European Union appears, therefore, to be an essential first step toward any serious relationship between NATO and global security.

NATO already has been put to the task in dealing with a new global security challenge in Afghanistan, a model for this very kind of architecture. The International Security Force (ISAF) under NATO command has included thirty-two European countries in addition to Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Jordan, and Malaysia. But at the same time that its role in Afghanistan has been a possible model for a global NATO, the alliance has also shown itself to have very severe limitations and even presented operational liabilities. NATO assumed primary responsibility for one of the most intensive counterinsurgency campaigns in the world: against the Taliban and al Qaeda at the heart of the war on terrorism. This was a mission for which NATO had literally no previous experience. NATO entered into Afghanistan with two fundamentally conflicted command architectures: one for combat operations and one for peace support operations. NATO rules meant that member states with diverging interests in the mission placed restrictive caveats on their operations and often provided insufficient troop numbers. In the serious combat in the south, only four NATO allies (Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States) offered troops. Other allies, conveniently positioned in safe areas, did not provide combat support operations, thereby making it difficult to sustain consistent combat and hearts-and-minds strategies. Furthermore, insurgencies were something largely seen by NATO allies as something to avoid and thus not to train and equip for. By summer 2007, NATO had expanded its total force numbers from an initial deployment of 7,000 to about 30,000. But this was still just half of what was deployed by NATO in Bosnia (in a more permissive environment) in 1995. NATO found itself vulnerable to the asymmetrical warfare tactics of the Taliban and al Qaeda, as its institutional decision-making process allowed these groups to play off public opinion and thus limit allied investments in Afghanistan. Ultimately, NATO provided just enough assets to stay the course in Afghanistan but never enough to succeed in a meaningful and timely way. Already the evidence suggests that, while the theory of a global NATO is sound, practice suggests something rather different.

NATO'S GENERATIONS

The three essays that follow portray a vital, adaptive, and essential alliance that has been at the core of world security for six decades, but one that also confronts potentially insurmountable challenges for further adaptation. Lawrence S. Kaplan skillfully shows how today's adaptation and challenges are highly consistent with the foundations and historical experience of NATO's evolution over time. Ryan C. Hendrickson demonstrates the key priority that member states have placed in keeping NATO adaptive and available for meeting new security requirements. And Thomas S. Mowle provides a scholarly foundation for understanding NATO's
role by offering the first new and original thinking about NATO in over a decade. While none of these studies can answer the question of whether NATO will play a critical role in twenty-first-century security—indeed, all three offer very important and serious caveats to their assessments—they do offer, as Kennan sought, a range of serious alternative choices.

The contributors to this volume share a deep commitment to the core idea that underpins NATO, the essential foundations of the transatlantic relationship. How that relationship will evolve for the future remains to be seen. These essays will certainly play a vital role in the debates over that future. It is inspiring to read this work and witness the coming-together of generations of solid scholarship and creative analysis that will surely lay the foundations for the next round of major debates about NATO's future.

THE MEANING OF NATO

Lawrence S. Kaplan

Looking back on the impact the events of 1948 have had on Europe and America in the subsequent six decades, observers will come up with a mixed verdict about the achievements of NATO's founding fathers. The allies met their initial goal of containing and ultimately outlasting the so-called Soviet empire and the Communist system it sheltered. NATO survived, and the Warsaw Pact did not. Communist remnants persist in Cuba and China, but the former is not a threat to the West, and the latter's future challenge to the United States and Europe derives from its capitalist energies rather than ideological ardor.

A PATH NOT TAKEN

Critics today, as well as two generations ago, believe that accommodation rather than confrontation with the Soviet Union might have yielded peace without the costs that the militarization of NATO incurred. One of the prices of the path the United States took in 1949 was the creation of a massive national security apparatus with concurrent infringement on individual liberties. The concomitant increase in executive power deriving from the president's position as commander-in-chief was a legacy of NATO, as was the vast permanent growth of the U.S. military establishment.

The question of how an accommodation might have been reached was easily answered by the Progressive Party of Henry Wallace as the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) was being framed. It involved first an appreciation of the enormous losses suffered by the Soviet Union in World War II and the contribution that nation made to the victory over Nazi Germany. It would also recognize the defensive nature of the Soviet reaction to the Anglo-American activities in Western Europe. Given the barbarity of the Nazi wartime occupation of Russia, it was understandable that the Soviets would share France's fear of a revived militant Germany. From the Soviet perspective, the American and British rebuilding of the West German economy
boded a prelude to the creation of a state that threatened the Soviet Union and its control of Eastern Europe, including territory taken from Germany. Rather than the Berlin blockade serving as a means of attaching all of Berlin to the Soviet bloc, it could be considered a response to the West's perceived reconstruction of a German threat. In brief, a badly wounded Soviet Union was not in any position to challenge U.S. power in Europe. Its aim in the postwar years was primarily to secure a buffer zone in central Europe against a hostile Western alliance in the making.

Would a more accommodating American approach have cut short the Cold War? This seemed possible, if not in 1949 then in the early 1950s after Stalin's death, when his successors offered to reach a détente on the basis of a disarmed Germany. The example of Austria, removed from the Cold War by mutual consent in 1955, may have been the solution that Nikita Khrushchev, general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, would have found acceptable. These were the years in which the Soviet Union actually pressed for denazification of Germany—East and West—and the removal of U.S. troops from Western Europe. The Soviet aim was the undermining of Nato, clearly expressed with diplomatic language in the last article of the Warsaw Pact, formed in 1955, which would "cease to be operative from the day a general European treaty enters into force."

Without advocating former Vice President Henry Wallace's faith in the essential good intentions of the Soviet adversary, George Kennan nonetheless shared his concern about the militarization of the alliance. His was a reluctant endorsement of Nato in 1949. He was under no illusion about the ultimate objectives of Soviet communism, agreeing that the ideological fervor spread throughout Europe under Moscow's patronage was a genuine threat to Western democratic governments. His response was to contain Communist expansion, as he expounded in his "Long Telegram" in 1946, through economic and political means until the internal contradictions within the Communist system would destroy it.

Although Kennan lived long enough to witness the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the implosion of the Soviet empire, his views failed to convince Secretary of State Dean Acheson in the Truman administration or Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in the Eisenhower administration. With the exception of a brief period in the Kennedy administration, when he was ambassador to Yugoslavia, Kennan had to witness U.S. foreign relations from Princeton, where he studied and wrote on European history and issued philippics from his office at the Institute for Advanced Studies. The militarization of containment, he wrote in 1958, had become too rigid to respond to new trends in the Soviet Union as well as to changes in Western Europe. The transatlantic allies ignored the advice from the father of the containment doctrine.

The consequences of a militarized Nato under firm American leadership, according to critics of the alliance, were first an uncomfortable embrace of fascist Portugal in 1949, informal accommodation with Franco Spain in the 1950s, and acceptance of a Greek military junta for seven years following 1967. These Faustian arrangements were based on the necessity of using every means of coping with the Soviet adversary, even if they subverted the principles on which the alliance had been made. As the Senate debate in 1949 reflected, a distinction was made between "authoritarian" friends and "totalitarian" enemies. They compromised the principles on which the alliance was formed but were rationalized as a necessity in the face of an aggressive Soviet Union.

Given the challenges of the Cold War, it was not surprising that critical commentators such as John Hopkins political scientist David Calleo in 1970 would characterize the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe as an American proconsul controlling the governments of the Western European allies. An even darker picture of Nato's behavior in the Cold War, and after, appeared in the charge of Swiss scholar Daniele Gensler in 2005 that Nato collaborated repeatedly with right-wing elements to subvert democratic governments of every member nation.

**THE PREFERRED PATH**

This view of negative consequences from the decision to build Western defenses against potential Soviet aggression might have some merit, but it fails to cover the totality of the circumstances leading to the creation of the alliance. For example, it does not do justice to the sense of despair that pervaded the West in the wake of World War II. The cri de coeur of the Brussels Pact powers required a military, not just an economic, response from the United States in 1948. The American reaction, initially hesitant, rarely signified an opportunity to assert an imperial presence in Europe. It was, as Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad described it, an empire by invitation. Without the "pledge" of Article 5 in the NAt, the revival of Western Europe would not have taken place. The Marshall Plan would have failed because of the political insecurity evident among its beneficiaries. Soviet acquisition of an atomic bomb and the loss of China to communism in 1949 combined with the Korean War in 1950 to increase the role of the military—and this meant the U.S. military—to contain Soviet expansion.

The European allies accepted a junior status in the first dozen years of Nato's history, partly because of their dependence on U.S. deterrent power and partly because of the governance of the new organization. Decisions were to be made by consensus, "the NATO method," and the United States did its part to avoid the taint of an occupying power in Europe by its status of forces agreements in the 1950s, which allowed U.S. troops charged with off-duty crimes to be tried in the courts of the host nation. These actions appeared to demonstrate a reluctance to assume a permanent military presence in Europe, a position that would have
been heartily endorsed by NATO’s founding fathers. The extensive debates in the U.S. over the nature of its commitment to Europe before the signing of the treaty ended in an understanding of just how far the nation should go in shouldering responsibility for Europe’s defense.

THE UNILATERAL TEMPTATION

The U.S. objective in 1949 was to help Western Europe recover from the devastation of World War II and then reform its institutions so that ultimately it could defend itself independent of American support. Until that time, the principles of self-help and mutual aid, as explicit in the treaty’s Article 3 as it was in the Marshall Plan, would apply. While the Brussels Pact members, particularly France, had made military aid seem almost as important as Article 5, it was of lesser significance to the United States and ultimately to the Europeans themselves. What counted was the U.S. commitment, manifested by a troop deployment in 1951 of four new divisions—originally intended to be temporary but which still remain in place in the twenty-first century. The presence of some 60,000 U.S. armed forces in Europe today, long after the end of the Cold War, evolved into an unintended consequence of the North Atlantic Treaty.

It was hardly a surprise that there would be friction between the senior partner and its allies, even at the height of the perceived Soviet threat in the 1950s and 1960s and despite U.S. efforts to respond to European sensibilities. As early as 1948, Europeans expressed their resentment over the contradiction between American demands for integrated European military use of U.S. assistance and American insistence on bilateral negotiations for base rights on the territory of member nations. These negotiations included the stationing of U.S. inspectors to ensure proper management of the military aid being supplied. The allies regarded the U.S. demands as establishing a double standard: Americans operated on a binational plane while requiring Europeans to function multilaterally. The latter was an insult to their pride; the inspectors were abusing the sovereignty of presumably equal partners in the alliance.

The larger powers felt the slights more keenly, particularly when France blamed the senior ally for the loss of Indochina in 1954 and when both France and Britain lost face in the Suez crisis of 1956. The smaller members, in turn, felt excluded from consultation about major decisions in spite of the “NATO method” of consensus. Only the United States, Britain, and France had representation in the Standing Group of the Military Committee. The report of the “Three Wise Men” (from Canada, Italy, and Norway) in 1956, which asked for greater involvement, was lost, as the crisis over the botched Anglo-French intervention in the Suez Canal diverted NATO’s attention from the concerns of the smaller nations.

While these grievances were genuine, they did not disrupt the alliance. Not one of the allies, large or small, sought to activate Article 12 of the treaty, which permitted any member to request a review of its terms after it had been in force for ten years. The menace of Soviet communism under the erratic leadership of Nikita Khrushchev served as a centripetal force. The placement of Soviet missiles in Castro’s Cuba in 1962 and the Soviet threat to incorporate West Berlin into East Germany in 1958 and 1961 reminded the allies of the importance of American nuclear power in the defense of Europe.

The successful conclusion of both crises did not make the alliance irrelevant. But by the mid-1960s there were differences within NATO that altered the nature of the transatlantic relationship. One of them was an increasing U.S. discontent with Europe’s role in the alliance, a sense that it was not sharing the costs of defending Western Europe to the extent that its economic revival, the Wirtschaftswunder, should have afforded. The unwillingness of the allies to support the U.S. war in Southeast Asia compounded this grievance. The United States claimed that its participation in South Vietnam’s war against the Communist North served the common cause against Communist aggression. Europeans should have appreciated that Moscow was still the mastermind behind Communist subversion everywhere in the world. The allies disagreed with this judgment, feeling that America was diverting its resources from Europe to uphold its historic interests in Asia, thereby putting European security in jeopardy. But since the alliance remained vital to the West, particularly to West Germany, more vulnerable than the others to a Soviet attack, NATO allies increased their contributions to American military expenses in Europe.

Arguably, the more significant change derived from a sense among the European allies that the threat of a Soviet invasion of the West had diminished to the point where Western Europe could live with the adversarial Warsaw Pact. The concept of détente dominated the alliance from the late 1960s into the mid-1970s, with the smaller nations leading the way. A new report, chaired by Belgium’s Pierre Harmel in 1967, made détente equal to defense as a NATO goal. And the United States, whose authority was weakened by the Vietnam War, agreed to accept this direction, even though it did not share fully the optimism of the European colleagues. France’s 1966 departure from the military structure of the alliance helped ease the way for the greater sharing of nuclear information with all the allies. The U.S. may have resented paying as much as it did for the defense of Europe, but it was aware of the need to consult with its allies about nuclear matters, even if the decision-making process was excluded from their discussions. To keep the alliance alive, the U.S. made concessions to European sensitivities as it dealt with the Soviet bloc.

The Cold War did not end with détente in the late 1960s. Détente itself would be shoved into the background by the end of the 1970s when it became apparent that the Soviet Union not only had stymied negotiations over asymmetrical troop
reduction but was also steadily building its war machine at a time when NATO had reduced its military budgets. The Soviets were now specifically targeting new medium-range nuclear missiles on Western European cities; and so twenty years after the signing of the NATO, the European allies were demanding once again a U.S. response to an unsettling military threat. A new Cold War was in progress.

Although during the Carter administration the U.S. had increased its defense budgets, a policy massively expanded in the Reagan years, the allies did not respond to Washington's request to increase their budgets by at least 3 percent. Once again, Europe turned to the United States for its protection and demanded deployment of American intermediate-range nuclear missiles to cope with the Soviet adversary. At the same time that the allies wanted to continue the dialogue with the Soviet bloc over mutual reduction of nuclear and conventional weaponry, they were repelled by the militant tone of President Ronald Reagan in his dealings with the Warsaw Pact adversary. European dependence on American nuclear power did not mean acquiescence in the superpower's leadership in the manner of the 1950s. Western Europe was now in a situation of economic, if not military, strength, and after a generation's experience with the U.S. as the senior partner, its governments, particularly Germany's, did not trust its discretion to maintain peace with the East. Once the new missiles were in place in 1983, they wanted diplomacy to resolve East-West differences, while the American president continued to rail against the "evil" Soviet empire.

The arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev to power in 1985 transformed relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Recognizing the heavy costs of competing with NATO as well as the relative backwardness of the Soviet economy, the new leader consciously set out to reform his own society and terminate the second Cold War with the West. Surprisingly, he seemed to find a soulmate in Reagan, who responded wholeheartedly to Gorbachev's overtures. They both looked for ways to reduce, if not to remove, nuclear weaponry from their arsenals. Rather than expressing relief over the new Soviet-American entente, the NATO partners were now anxious about its effects on their security. Reagan, not NATO, met with the Soviet general secretary, and the allies wondered if their interests were being sacrificed on the altar of Soviet-American friendship. A unilateral American initiative to destroy all nuclear weapons would leave Western Europe vulnerable to Soviet superiority in conventional weaponry. Suspicions of U.S. behavior—even if based on naïveté—persisted until the end of the decade, though U.S. troops in Europe remained in place, albeit in reduced numbers, and would continue to guarantee U.S. engagement in the event of war. The "pledge" of 1949 remained valid forty years later.

The sudden implosion of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991 was an unintended by-product of Gorbachev's reforms. These developments exposed the internal contradictions within the Communist system and accentuated the disaffection of the subordinate states, much as Kennan had predicted almost a half-century earlier. The contrast between the successful economies of the West, made possible by the sense of security supplied by NATO, and the failed Communist economies was markedly evident. Equally striking was the example of NATO: an alliance of free nations whose continuing quarrels, most notably between Europe and the U.S., obscured the common bonds permitting its survival when the rival Warsaw bloc collapsed.

NEW MISSIONS, OLD QUARRELS

The question of why NATO should continue to exist arose inevitably after the disappearance of the Soviet empire. Its raison d'être had rested on the fate of a devastated Europe threatened internally and externally by aggressive Communist forces. By the 1990s Western Europe had survived and prospered and no longer faced threats to its survival. Alternative organizations were considered as possible replacement for the Atlantic alliance: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) embracing the former Warsaw Pact organization as well as NATO; the expanding European Community (EC), which included most of the members of NATO; and even the United Nations itself, now freed from the veto power of the Soviet Union. None proved suitable. For all its internal tensions, NATO, under the leadership of the lone superpower, had the military capability of attending to what the allies felt would be new challenges in the years ahead: crisis management in areas bordering the member states or in situations where the security of a member was threatened. Under the rubric of Article 4, NATO would be justified in extending its reach to what was awkwardly called "out of area" regions. Such was the judgment of the North Atlantic Council's meeting in Rome in 1991.

This approach seemed to be a reasonable new mission for the alliance. It would keep the United States involved in Europe, an important consideration when the remnants of the Soviet Union still possessed nuclear weapons that could be a danger in the future. It would also safeguard its members from outbreaks of violence beyond NATO's boundaries.

"Out of area" problems did arise in the 1990s, and NATO managed Balkan crises, but only after considerable delay and consequent friction within the alliance. Given the proximity of the former Yugoslavia to its NATO neighbors, the wars that erupted from its dissolution should have been the perfect occasion for the organization's intervention when the UN failed to stop the Serbian president's aggression against Croatia and Bosnia. The European allies, expected to take the initiative in coping with the crisis, failed to act and essentially left it to the U.S. to work through NATO to strike at Slobodan Milosevic in 1995 and again in 1999. Air strikes against Serbia in those years were the first times that NATO employed military force against
an aggressor, not under the auspices of Article 5 but under Article 4, which authorized consultation if the security of any member were threatened.

NATO succeeded in restoring order in the Balkans but at a heavy cost. One part of it was the continuing need for peacekeeping troops in the area, even though in reduced numbers today. There is room for some optimism in the relationships among the former Yugoslav republics and the work of the various peacekeeping agencies over the past decade. There is less optimism over the frictions between the superpower and its transatlantic allies that accompanied operations. American leaders resented the inability or unwillingness of the European partners to confront the challenge in the Balkans. NATO allies were unable or unwilling to make the financial sacrifices to pay for communications and intelligence systems and airlifts, all prerequisites to the rapid responses needed for managing crises. They refused to raise even minimal armed forces to supplement those supplied by the United States. American frustration was clearly expressed in the conflict over Kosovo in 1999 when the Supreme Allied Commander felt that the North Atlantic Council in Brussels tied his hands until late in the campaign by holding back the threat of ground troops and air strikes against Belgrade. Europeans, for their part, raised the familiar and understandable argument against excessive American aggressiveness and an unwillingness to give more attention to diplomacy in dealing with crises.

This transatlantic gap widened into a schism in the twenty-first century after the al Qaeda assault on New York City and Washington, D.C., on 11 September 2001. This situation may have been avoidable. NATO’s immediate response was solidarity under Article 5. Ironic as it was, Europeans and Americans spoke with one voice in September 2001 when the North Atlantic Council invoked the article not on behalf of a European ally, as envisioned in 1948, but on behalf of the superpower itself. However, the U.S. squandered the opportunity for continued consensus by refusing to use allied help in taking on the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The military command in Tampa, Florida, remembered that allied involvement in 1999 had prolonged the war and felt no need for NATO help in 2001. This unilateral impulse reflected the general approach of the Bush administration toward the world at large and alienated its NATO allies. European resentment at being shunted aside in Afghanistan increased in 2002 when the Bush administration identified Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction as an appropriate target in its overall campaign against al Qaeda. America appeared to part ways from its allies in the UN when France and Germany conspicuously opposed American intervention in Iraq. France would have opposed action even if the UN had given its blessing in 2003.

The Iraq war illuminated fault lines in NATO that had origins in the negotiations over the North Atlantic Treaty in 1948. It was no coincidence that France, with considerable support from the peoples of almost all the NATO members, led Europe in opposing America’s intervention in Iraq in 2003. There had always been an undercurrent of discontent with American power among Europeans that centered on the inappropriateness of an upstart society asserting superiority over the great civilizations of the Old World. Britain’s Alistair Buchan had rationalized this situation by comparing America to ancient Rome and Britain to ancient Greece when intelligent Greek slaves guided the empire of the stronger but less civilized Romans. President Jacques Chirac of France and former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder were less diplomatic in their disdain for American pretensions of leadership of the West.

Their American counterparts were just as dismissive of Europeans. Pundit Robert Kagan characterized Western Europe as effete, vainly expecting the soft power of diplomacy to solve hard geopolitical problems. He underscored the notion that Europeans were from Venus while Americans were from Mars. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld looked for a new breed of European allies from the former Warsaw Pact to replace Old Europe of the West as America’s supporters.

Conceivably, NATO might dissolve over the differences within the alliance. De Gaulle’s assumptions that America was neither a reliable partner nor a worthy leader could be validated a generation after his death. But this scenario has not yet occurred, and may not. NATO is still too important for all its members to go the way of the League of Nations. Once Iraq proved to be in danger of replicating the American debacle in Vietnam, the Bush administration and Congress qualified their unilateral approach to foreign affairs and turned to NATO for help in Iraq and Afghanistan. The allied response often has been reluctant and inadequate, but at least NATO has a presence in both countries today. The United States needs the support of the allies, who, in turn, need the U.S. to compensate for their minimal defense budgets and insufficient military forces. The circumstances today do not replicate those of 1948, but the importance of allied solidarity does.

NATO VS. EU

Defense of the West was not the only aspiration expressed in the negotiations of 1948. A federated Europe, even a United States of Europe, was to be an end product of the transatlantic alliance. Although some advocates of this goal were interested in it solely as a means of ridding the U.S. of its obligations, the majority welcomed the prospect of a democratic West as a partner in maintaining peace and prosperity that the United Nations had failed to provide. This position explains American backing of the many steps toward European unity during the Cold War, ranging from encouraging the integration of West Germany into the European Coal and Steel Community and into NATO itself, to the Treaty of Rome in 1957 that created the European Economic Community, and finally to the European Union in 1991, which would develop a military as well as political dimension by side by side with
NATO. Through much of this period, American leaders continued to believe that the interests of a united Europe would always dovetail with those of the U.S. That American efforts might be helping to create a Frankenstein's monster did not fully penetrate the consciousness of policymakers until the Cold War had ended.

By the 1990s the rival movements toward a United States of Europe had matured to the point of making a common currency, the euro, for the European Community, renamed the European Union in 1993. Not all members accepted the new currency, but under Franco-German leadership the European powers surpassed the United States in population and resources. The new NATO members from central and eastern Europe were as anxious to join the European Union as they were the Atlantic alliance. A united Europe promised them economic benefits that conceivably could be more valuable than the political and military protection offered by the NATO umbrella.

The rise of the European Union inevitably posed a potential conflict between the American-dominated NATO and the Franco-German conception of a united Europe. While there were economic rivalries within Europe, they paled in contrast to transatlantic conflict with the U.S. over tariffs and subsidies. But the major source of difficulty in the twenty-first century involves on the military component that NATO has in abundance and the EU still lacks. Granted, the old Brussels Pact of 1948 had morphed first into a Western European Union in 1954 to include Britain, West Germany, and Italy, which the EU then incorporated as its official military arm in 1999. Yet the disparity between the military capabilities of NATO and those of the EU has not been bridged. The question has been raised about the need for each of the two organizations to have a military arm, since NATO could serve the EU, almost all of whose members were inside NATO.

The competition between the two organizations reflects a longstanding European resentment of American power from the inception of the Atlantic alliance, most vigorously expressed by France. The Iraq war provided the most visible occasion to demonstrate differences. The idea of a European identity separate from the American-dominated NATO had been an integral part of the intra-European debates in 1948 when Britain's Ernest Bevin often joined with France in wistful hopes of Western Europe becoming a "third force" between the superpowers. While most of the European allies recognized its illusory aspects, France kept it alive throughout the Cold War, most notably in de Gaulle's scenario of a Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, free of American and ultimately Soviet control.

Since 1990 the rapid evolution of a European identity sharpened the differences between the two organizations to the extent that the future of NATO itself was seemingly at stake. Yet there are mitigating elements in the relationship that could promote collaboration rather than discord. The most persuasive is the disparity in military power between the two organizations. The EU could talk—as it did in 1999 when the evolved Brussels Pact (the Western European Union since 1954) was officially designated the military arm of Europe—about plans for a rapid response force in place within three years. But the EU's concentration on soft power, necessitated by the costs of social benefits in their constituent states, made it impossible to provide the military muscle that NATO possesses. With tensions mounting in many parts of the world from the ambitions of radical Islam, and with Russia and China ambivalent about relations with the West, a NATO military—smaller in size than in the Cold War but more flexible in its movements—is obviously better equipped to manage global crises that come under the aegis of Article 4. That NATO had to deal with crises in Africa and Asia as well as the Middle East inspired former Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar's research center in 2005 to recommend a transformation of NATO into a global organization.

Another consideration dampening conflict is the attitude of new EU members toward NATO. The EU, as NATO, expanded in the last ten years, drawing from the same pool of countries in central and eastern Europe. These newcomers did not share resentments of the older members against U.S. power. In fact, an incentive for membership on the part of Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic states was the kind of security Western Europeans had sought in 1948. American, and not European, pressure was responsible for their admission into NATO in 1999 and 2002. The U.S., not the EU, is the bulwark against a revival of Russian temptation to reassert authority over former satellites and former republics of the Soviet Union. It was no coincidence that these newer members of NATO have been more supportive of the U.S. in Iraq than have older members of the alliance, notwithstanding reservations on the part of their publics. They are not likely to follow the path of confrontation within NATO led by France and Germany. And within the EU itself the continuing uneasy British and Scandinavian involvement in the EU, along with its members' rejection of a European constitution, suggests in 2007 that the EU may be more open to cooperation with NATO than it was a few years before.

There is already evidence that some of the early expectations of the EU may be realized. In the 1990s NATO leaders had hoped that the EU would serve NATO's interests by managing crises that would be of greater concern to its members than to the United States or to NATO itself. This concept was implicitly advanced at the Brussels meeting of the North Atlantic Council in 1994 when the Council decided to make NATO assets available to the Western European Union, provided that it report to NATO how the facilities or materiel were used. A dozen years later the EU took responsibility for peacekeeping in Kosovo. Collaboration rather than conflict between the United States and a federated Europe had been the assumption in transatlantic relations in 1948, a premise that remains alive in 2007.

THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY TODAY

From the foregoing sketch of NATO's history, it is obvious that the questions raised in the lengthy negotiations between the U.S., Canada, and the Brussels Pact nations were answered in one way or another over the past sixty years. The Brussels Pact
It may be an act of faith to assert that the groundwork of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization laid in 1948 created an entity that could withstand any challenge in the future. Arguably, the most compelling evidence of the alliance’s durability has been the silence of its members with respect to terminating their membership in NATO. In 1966 France did withdraw from the military structure, as did Greece in 1974. But Greece resumed its role inside the military structure in 1980, and France has made it clear that its attachment to the alliance remains in place. Under Article 13 any member after twenty years “may cease to be a Party one year after its notice of denunciation.” No member has chosen to take advantage of this way out of the organization. The danger in the future lies less in the likelihood of dissolution through defections than in NATO’s becoming as irrelevant as the League of Nations in the 1930s, should America and Europe fail to share the responsibilities of crisis management beyond the original boundaries of the treaty. No other organization can serve this function.

Yet the credibility of this scenario is speculative. If peaceful accommodation with the Soviet Union was not possible, the militarization of the United States might have had more drastic consequences if it had to confront the Soviet adversary without allies. The end of the Cold War did not signify the end of NATO. The turbulent 1990s witnessed the alliance attempting to identify a meaningful role. It assumed the burden of crisis management, first in Europe and then after 9/11 in Asia as well. In the course of fulfilling this mission, NATO incurred painful errors but did manage to bring relative peace to Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999. NATO’s conflict with Serbia in those years involved the kind of military action that had been absent in the Cold War.

An important post–Cold War impact on NATO was the enlargement of its membership. This was not in itself a new phenomenon. As the original negotiations for the alliance disclosed, American demands for the “stepping-stone” countries forced the Brussels Pact members to allow five nations to participate, including one that was outside the Atlantic basin with questionable military credentials. Moreover, one of the stepping-stone countries was an authoritarian regime with fascist connections. In brief, the origins of NATO represented compromise with the democratic pretensions in the preamble of the treaty.

The precedent for enlargement had thus been established in 1949. Before the end of the Cold War four more countries had joined the alliance, and two of them—Greece and Turkey in 1952—only for Cold War reasons. This was true in part for West Germany. But the Federal Republic’s membership in 1955 and Spain’s in 1982 had a broader purpose of encouraging European integration and promoting the spread of democracy. Those two goals animated the drive for incorporating the former Soviet satellites into NATO in 1999 and 2004, bringing the total number to twenty-six. How many more members can be absorbed by the alliance is an open question, but the principle of encouraging membership to advance democratic values is arguably more fixed today than it was during the Cold War.
American unilateralism. No member has exercised the option of leaving NATO. The globalization of the alliance, now extending its reach from the Balkans to Afghanistan, suggests that NATO continues to have a future. If so, its mission would be crisis management, an aspiration that NATO, with its unique military capabilities and administrative infrastructure, has the ability to fulfill.

The consequences of the transatlantic bargain of 1949 resonate in the twenty-first century. America’s rejection of its old relationship with Europe is permanent no matter how tempting European provocations may be to revive isolationism. And Europe will never revert to its destructive nationalist past. Its movement toward unity, which had been encouraged by the Atlantic alliance, has advanced too far to be abandoned. Whatever NATO’s future may be, the changes it fostered over the past sixty years made a permanent impact on the history of the twentieth century.

ENDNOTES
NATO'S GLOBAL MISSIONS AND ONGOING RELEVANCE

Ryan C. Hendrickson

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) continues to be the subject of considerable academic scrutiny and criticism. Starting with the Soviet Union’s collapse and continuing through the bitter transatlantic dispute over Operation Iraqi Freedom, analysts in Europe and the United States have predicted NATO’s destiny of irrelevancy, if not total collapse. The view that “Europe is from Mars and the United States is from Venus” permeated much of the discussion surrounding NATO’s future and its alleged trend toward insignificance. American unilateralism under President George W. Bush and the views expressed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld—that the future of multilateral security centers around “coalitions of the willing” rather than NATO and that “old Europe” was out of step with modern security necessities—did much to lend credence to this view. The acrid debate over Iraq between former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder and U.S. president George W. Bush, whose immediate predecessors arguably built the foundation for NATO’s post–Cold War survival, provided some observers with bona fide evidence of NATO’s downfall.

These perspectives, no doubt, capture part of NATO’s evolution in one of its more difficult periods. NATO has not been without trials and tribulations in its post–Cold War life. Such views, however, often focus heavily on recent conflict-ridden aspects of the transatlantic relationship and fail to recognize why NATO continues to exist and play an instrumental role in fostering transatlantic security interests. This essay provides a more balanced assessment of the alliance by focusing on primarily three aspects of NATO’s mission, including analyses of NATO expansion, its institutional flexibility to reshape itself after September 11, and the renewed interest from the major powers in the alliance. While it is clear that the transatlantic marriage remains rocky at times, such “gloom and doom” scenarios of NATO misrepresent the alliance’s previous achievements and ongoing security functions. The essay begins with a brief survey of recent literature on NATO and follows with an analysis of NATO’s ongoing security functions and transformation. It concludes with a discussion of how the major powers continue to utilize NATO within their larger national security policies.

NATO SKEPTICS

In the lead-up to the war in Iraq, with the NATO allies sorely divided over whether to provide defensive measures to protect Turkey in the event of an attack by Iraq, then U.S. ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns referred to the political differences in NATO as a “crisis of credibility.” The debate over how to deal with Saddam Hussein, coupled with the U.S. decision to act without NATO in its 2001 strikes on the Taliban after September 11, led a number of observers to argue that by 2003 NATO’s place in transatlantic security had been badly, if not irreparably, damaged. To many analysts it appeared that the United States, especially under President George W. Bush, had moved in a completely different direction from the European public and many European governments.

Analysts also point to NATO’s war in Kosovo, noting that the military differences between the United States and Europe and the absence of interoperable weaponry among the allies made for an unequal partnership at best. The vast differences in military capabilities made nearly all European militaries unattractive, if not unhelpful, partners to the United States. Moreover, the joint war planning efforts in 1999, which involved debates over tactical decisions of the war, rubbed many American military planners the wrong way and consequently raised serious questions over NATO’s functional future.

Still others stress that post–Cold War changes implemented in NATO made the alliance weak. NATO’s mission had become too broad and ad hoc, resulting in an alliance whose purpose had become confused and unclear as it took on more and more security and humanitarian functions that were, arguably, not relevant to the allies’ national security interests. Although the criticism came from many quarters, much of this response was directed at NATO’s decision to expand its alliance membership into central and eastern Europe. By including these newly democratized states in the alliance, NATO was ostensibly creating an organization of needy partners who were decades behind the United States in their military capabilities and may not share the same security interests with the longstanding members of the alliance. In addition, an expansion into eastern Europe could provide a recipe for the alliance’s destruction, as an enlarged alliance would only further damage relations with Russia. Almost identical criticisms were raised when NATO, at its 2002 Prague Summit, extended invitations for seven additional countries to join its ranks.

Many of the arguments aired in the late 1990s and during the administration of President George W. Bush were not necessarily new to the academic literature on NATO. In the early 1990s, in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse,
analysts most closely associated with the realist school of thought in international relations similarly stated that NATO's death was nearly a sure thing. Noted realist thinkers Kenneth N. Waltz and John J. Mearsheimer argued independently that without an external enemy (i.e., the Soviet Union), the alliance would lose its reason for existence. While many analysts bemoan the recent developments at NATO, including many who want to see NATO as a strong and robust military alliance, it is clear that there is no shortage of literature suggesting that NATO's days are numbered or that it has become a strategically irrelevant organization.

Clearly, NATO's existence during the George W. Bush administration, especially in his first term in office, was difficult. The crisis in February 2003 stemming from Turkey's invocation of NATO's Article 4 was one of the most arduous weeks in the alliance's history and should not be underestimated. In addition, analysts are correct to highlight the growing divide in military capabilities between the United States and the rest of Europe and Canada. Yet despite these very real problems at NATO, the general tenor of much of the preceding literature fails to capture NATO's ongoing relevance and critical role in fostering transatlantic security.

NATO'S PRAGUE SUMMIT AND POST-SEPTEMBER 11 EVOLUTION

Central to NATO's ability to survive and remain relevant after the Cold War's end was the alliance's willingness to redefine its new mission(s) in transatlantic security. In doing so, NATO agreed in 1991 to address conflict prevention and crisis management issues: it extended its diplomatic outreach and cooperative military partnerships to much of central and eastern Europe and, perhaps most significantly, used force in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, which were followed by major peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. Like many of the Cold War deliberations, the changes enacted after the Soviet Union's collapse and the bombing operations in the Balkans similarly entailed considerable debate over the appropriate direction for the alliance. Yet these changes produced fundamental change at NATO in its security functions. Now, in the aftermath of September 11 and the crisis over Iraq, evidence again suggests that the alliance is in another stage of evolution and is anything but irrelevant.

At NATO's Prague Summit in November 2002, during the lead-up to the war in Iraq, the alliance enacted a number of transformative changes. Besides its willingness to expand its membership by seven members, its most fundamental changes involved its agreements to create the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the implementation of a new command structure. The NRF promises a force of 25,000 troops, which involve air, land, and sea components, and special forces deployable on five days' notice for up to one month. While it has taken some prodding from the United States on the European allies to create this force, NATO officials announced at the Riga Summit that the NRF is now fully functional. Elements of the NRF performed admirably in response to the humanitarian crisis and earthquake in Pakistan in 2006, and successful training operations have been conducted in Operations Steadfast Jackpot and Brilliant Mariner in 2006. All NRF components were also tested for the first time from June 14 to June 28, 2006, in Operation Steadfast Jaguar in the Cape Verde Islands. Much of the evidence suggests a high degree of cooperation on this major facet of NATO's transformation.

The alliance has also successfully adapted its military organizational structure. At Prague, it agreed to reduce its strategic operational commands from two to one. Now, the Allied Commander Operations near Mons, Belgium, is the headquarters for NATO's military strategy planning, which is overseen by the SACEUR. NATO also created a new functional command, Allied Command Transformation, which is located in Norfolk, Virginia, to assist in the alliance's ongoing evolution. In addition, it reduced its regional command centers from three to two, with commands in Brussel, Netherlands, Naples, Italy, and one smaller headquarters in Lisbon, Portugal. Its additional subordinate commands were reduced from thirteen to six. This transformation has proceeded successfully. The Prague Summit also produced a pledge from all the allies to improve on their existing military capabilities and an informal promise to meet the 2 percent GNP spending level for national defense. These goals have not been met and continue to be a sore point in U.S.-European relations, presenting real limitations on how well the alliance can project force and meet new security threats in the future. At the same time, these developments should not entirely overshadow the progress the alliance has made with regard to its structural changes and in its efforts to create the NRF.

One indicator of NATO's ability to adapt and find consensus is through its decision to overtake the United Nation's operational leadership role of the International Stabilization Force in Afghanistan (ISAF). Only five months after NATO's internal dispute over Turkey's invocation of Article 4, at the joint urging of Canada, Germany, and the United States, NATO assumed control of the UN International Stabilization Force in Afghanistan in August 2003. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer repeatedly emphasized that Afghanistan is the alliance's number-one priority. After initially taking control of the mission, which was limited primarily to providing security to the national government located in the capital city of Kabul, the mission expanded to include a number of provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs). The PRTs are small groups of civilian experts that work alongside NATO forces to foster support for Afghanistan's democratic government. After overseeing successful national elections in 2004 and 2005, NATO expanded its presence into the more volatile southern region of Afghanistan with some 35,000 troops. Although many more terrorist incidents have been witnessed in Afghanistan since the second half of 2005, a number of analysts point to NATO's initial success in Afghanistan. Its PRTs have had some success in rebuilding civil society and schools, fostering new economic growth, and even in training the new
Afghan military. NATO faces ongoing political obstacles due to the heightened terrorist attacks, the surging levels of opium production and heroin trade, and its expansion into the more volatile regions of southern and eastern Afghanistan, especially as some allies place considerable combat restrictions on their troops.17

Despite these challenges, and unlike the conflict in Iraq in many respects, NATO continues to garner considerable international and diplomatic legitimacy for its presence in Afghanistan, which some analysts suggest is a crucial variable in determining the success of peacekeeping operations.18 ISAF's international and diplomatic legitimacy has been robust from the onset, with its role in Afghanistan discussed initially by the "2+4 group" soon after the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom. This group involved the United States, Russia, and five of Afghanistan's neighbors, including Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These talks also included input from the UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi. The rapid fall of the Taliban in Kabul on 18 November 2001 served as an additional catalyst for discussion of Afghanistan's future among a variety of Afghan political factions in Bonn, Germany, in late November and early December 2001. Among an array of Afghan political factions meeting to address the country's future, all groups agreed to the presence of an international transitional peacekeeping force that would provide security and stability to Kabul. The United Nations Security Council approved this agreement in Resolutions 1383 and 1386, with the latter specifically endorsing ISAF's presence.19

What is noteworthy about ISAF's creation is the broad international agreement for the operation. Although some debate among the Afghan factions existed in Bonn over the actual need for a peacekeeping force, it did not take long for diplomatic support among the factions to emerge.20 Since then, the UN Security Council has continued to provide strong diplomatic backing to ISAF.21 By these standards, excellent diplomatic support exists for NATO's leadership of ISAF, and it is difficult to challenge the international "legitimacy" that exists for NATO's presence in Afghanistan. Such high levels of approval are much different when compared to NATO's other activities in Iraq and, to some extent, even Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, which did not receive approval from the UN Security Council.

In another measure of legitimacy, ISAF's diplomatic backing is evident in NATO's December 2005 decision to expand its PRTs into the more volatile area of southern Afghanistan. The UN Security Council supported NATO's decision on 15 February 2006 when the Council noted that it "welcomes the adoption by NATO of a revised Operational Plan allowing the continued expansion of the ISAF across Afghanistan."22 Indeed, the decision to expand into southern Afghanistan involved some controversy. First, it is noteworthy that the troop contributions to southern Afghanistan come from primarily four of the allies: Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While there is diplomatic support within NATO for the expansion, it is clear that these four NATO mem-

bers are shouldering most of the military burden. Moreover, even though the Netherlands supported ISAF's expansion in the North Atlantic Council, NATO's principal decision-making body, Dutch domestic opposition was considerable.23

Since this time, NATO has overseen the entire peacekeeping and combat operation in Afghanistan. In 2007 the United States increased its troop presence in Afghanistan by approximately 3,300 troops. Other major allies also maintain a significant military presence in Afghanistan. In addition, some of NATO's smaller allies, including the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, recently announced their heightened commitment to additional contributions to the mission.24 While these troop levels still fall short of senior NATO officials' requests, it is clear that evidence exists for ongoing and, in some cases, increased support for the mission.

Besides NATO's leadership of ISAF, NATO agreed in 2005 to assist the African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission in Sudan. To the surprise of many, NATO also found consensus for the creation of a NATO Training Mission for Iraqi military leaders, where NATO advisers are located just outside of Baghdad at Ar-Rustamiyah.25 Although the mission is small, consisting of only about ninety troops from eleven NATO countries, the alliance did manage to find a small role for itself in the ongoing reconstruction efforts in Iraq.26 In addition, NATO also used elements of its NRF to address the humanitarian crisis after the earthquake in Pakistan with approximately 1,000 troops.

In sum, NATO's critics have identified many real problems for the alliance. The ongoing defense spending levels in Europe coupled with the considerable political and military challenges in Afghanistan present profound obstacles for the allies. Yet its institutional adaptations, including ISAF and its strong diplomatic backing, suggest that the alliance is adopting new and clearly salient security operations beyond Europe. Its operational reach and functional missions have evolved to demonstrate the alliance's institutional flexibility and, by definition, its ongoing security relevance.

THE IMPACT OF NATO EXPANSION

Despite the profusion of literature that predicted otherwise, ample evidence now suggests that NATO's two rounds of enlargement have been successful policy decisions. Although the military contributions provided by the newest allies are understandably limited, much evidence indicates that expansion had an immediate effect on stabilizing democratic civil-military relations in these new member states. In the applicants' desire to work with NATO to gain eventual admission, which began initially with membership in NATO's 1994 Partnership for Peace, the aspirant states worked closely with NATO officials who served as catalysts to help these states restructure their military in accordance with democratic principles.
and to reshape their military postures for the future. All of the allies that gained invitations at the Prague Summit also worked in NATO's Membership Action Plan, which was introduced at NATO's Washington Summit in 1999. Although many of the newest member states still suffer from a dearth of civilian military professionals, it is nonetheless clear that NATO exercised a profound influence on the candidate states as they prepared for admission into the alliance.27

In Poland, for example, NATO officials helped the Polish government and military to comport with alliance guidelines. Rachel A. Epstein notes, "NATO accelerated the consolidation of democratic civilian control in Poland by removing key elements of Polish military tradition from both the rhetoric and practice of Polish public policy. . . . Had NATO not provided guidelines for reform of the armed forces and their governing structures, or had NATO declined to enlarge its membership after the cold war, Polish civilians would not have adopted NATO's view as to what it means to secure control over the military by 1999.28 Like Poland, all other applicant states sent military and defense officials to NATO's English language training centers, where they not only gained new English skills but also acquired and arguably accepted many of NATO's political and military concepts, values, and advice. In Romania, NATO was also deeply involved in the domestic debates over military defense reforms and played a critical role in shaping how Romania's military would be organized and structured in the future.29

Similarly, additional evidence indicates that NATO played an influential role in the Czech Republic as it prepared for admission. While there was and continues to be some resistance to NATO requests, much of the evidence still demonstrates that the Czechs worked closely with alliance officials in shaping their reformed military. Again, as noted by Alexandra Gheciu, the "socialization activities carried out by NATO had a significant impact on the ideas and attitudes of Czech(s) . . . as well as on the policies and defense-related practices enacted in Prague."30 While NATO's impact has not been equally influential across all of the Prague invitees, additional research provides comparable supporting evidence for the Baltics, especially in their transitions from Communist military rule to democratically governed militaries according to NATO input.31

It should be added that many of these new member states continue to fear the threat of a potentially resurgent Russia with imperial ambitions. Due in large measure to these fears, the Madrid and Prague invitees remain very supportive members of the alliance. For these states, NATO's security guarantee is arguably the central component of their national security policies.32

In addition to the benefits of democratic stabilization and military professionalism that came with alliance expansion and continue to occur within aspiring NATO allies, a number of NATO's newest members have contributed to the alliance's external security missions. One example of such an endeavor is Lithuania's leadership role in one of NATO's PRTs in Afghanistan. Working in the mountainous Ghor province, with its headquarters in Chaghcharan, Lithuania has deployed approximately 120 troops to the mission and works alongside NATO allies Denmark and Iceland in carrying out the operation.33

As one of the three states invited to join NATO at the Madrid Summit in 1997, Poland is another new member that was exceptionally supportive of NATO's military operation in Kosovo in 1999 through its vocal condemnations of Slobodan Milosevic and its offers to provide military assistance to the alliance. With NATO's diplomatic backing, Poland also led a military stabilization mission in Iraq after Operation Iraqi Freedom, and it provided 140 troops to NATO's humanitarian efforts to Pakistan in 2005.34 Membership in NATO brings opportunities for new allies to contribute to global security in ways that would have been unlikely absent NATO enlargement.

To be sure, serious opposition to NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo surfaced in the Czech Republic only weeks after its formal induction into the alliance, and statements from the Hungarian Defense Ministry led some observers to view Hungary as a free-rider in the alliance.35 In addition, with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, the defense spending levels for the newest member countries continue to fall short of the 2 percent GNP goals that the allies informally agreed to at the Prague Summit. Ongoing challenges also remain in the area of civil-military relations.36 Yet even in light of these problems, given the benefits of democratic consolidation in eastern and central Europe and the small but consequential contributions to external security provided by some of NATO's newest members, most of the indicators lean toward the benefits of NATO's enlargement, which far outweigh the ongoing criticism of membership expansion. There is little evidence to suggest that enlargement has actually weakened the alliance, especially with regard to the decision-making procedures and requirements for consensus. NATO's most recent public fissures over NATO's training mission in Iraq and its assistance to the African Union in Sudan occurred between the United States and primarily France. Recent divisive discussions over the decision to expand the mission in Afghanistan occurred as a result of primarily Dutch domestic opposition.37 The newest allies have not been an impediment to identifying alliance consensus.

Finally, the impact of NATO's ongoing "open-door" policy continues to be significant. While alliance skeptics continue to suggest its irrelevance, a number of European countries are aggressively seeking closer relations with NATO. Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, among others, have lobbied aggressively for NATO membership. For example, Croatian president Stjepan Mesić recently noted that EU and NATO members were the two foremost foreign policy objectives for the country and that Croatia intends to increase its presence in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008.38 In taking such steps, these aspiring NATO members continue to cultivate relations with the alliance, responding to requests for defense modernization and reform from Brussels.39 In these cases,
NATO is anything but irrelevant, but rather it serves as arguably the central motivating tool for the implementation of democratic military structures and defense modernization, which, for the most part, have proven successful.

GREAT POWER LEADERSHIP

Much of the reason for NATO's survival in the first decade after the Cold War rests with the Clinton administration, which pushed aggressively for NATO's transformation. In the same respect, without American leadership and active support from the other larger powers of the alliance, NATO's relevance is placed in question. While the differences over Iraq illustrated a deeply divided alliance, a number of events since George W. Bush's successful reelection in 2004 demonstrate that NATO's place in U.S. foreign policy has been elevated.

In the second term of his presidency, Bush's first trip abroad was to Europe, which included a stop at NATO headquarters. Similarly, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's first visit abroad was to Europe and to NATO. At the symbolic level, the second Bush administration appeared to be far more committed to multilateral solutions to security issues.

The symbolic efforts were reflective of substantive diplomatic efforts that have come since these visits. The United States has made considerable (and successful) lobbying efforts to expand NATO's presence into southern Afghanistan. In addition, in 2006 President Bush also requested that NATO take additional steps to have a wider role in Sudan in assisting African Union forces, and a bipartisan coalition in the U.S. Senate similarly called for a larger NATO presence in Sudan. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried noted in May 2006 that "unilateralism is out. Effective multilateralism is in. We are working to make NATO the centerpiece alliance through which the transatlantic democratic security community deals with security challenges around the world." Such views reflect a different orientation toward NATO and multilateralism more generally and have resulted in a much more visible role for NATO in American foreign policy in addressing international security issues.

Besides the Bush administration's active backing of NATO, the election of German chancellor Angela Merkel in 2005 helped restore the wounded U.S.-German relationship. In the allies' first meeting together, and her first trip abroad, Merkel commented that while differences still remain between the two, she chose to emphasize their shared concerns. Moreover, she emphasized the importance of having a strong NATO. In contrast to her predecessor, she noted that "NATO is the forum" for discussions of all strategic issues. Such words have proven to be more than rhetoric, as Merkel's Germany has not blocked NATO's recent and expanded missions and has made tangible efforts to increase the deployability of its troops. In addition, recent findings indicate that U.S. and German intelligence officials in fact cooperated quite extensively in the lead-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, which provides some evidence of a more functional and cooperative relationship than assumed during Gerhard Schröder's administration. As of May 2007, Germany maintained 3,000 troops in Afghanistan, deciding also to send a small number of noncombat troops into southern Afghanistan. It has additionally expanded the use of its Tornado surveillance aircrafts. Given that Germany plays its own leadership role among the Europeans within the alliance, the Merkel-Bush relationship and Germany's ongoing and increased levels of support for Afghanistan provide favorable signals for a more vibrant alliance.

In the United Kingdom, British defense secretary Des Browne has also proven to be an active and ongoing supporter of NATO's evolving role by providing a total of 5,000 troops to the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, many of which are now stationed in NATO's expanded southern presence. Moreover, on NATO's response force, Browne has noted that it is "key to our vision for the modern NATO, capable of mounting the full range of military missions." In light of widespread public misgivings about Iraq and cooperation with the United States in Iraq, the British government only seems to be more engaged in NATO.

While not a "major" power in NATO, Spain has assumed a new leadership role in the alliance by serving as NATO's lead country in the humanitarian mission to Pakistan and by providing 370 troops to the operation. In addition, Spain currently has some 700 troops deployed in Afghanistan. These developments have all come since the 2004 defeat of Spain's former prime minister, Jose Maria Aznar, whose opponent actively campaigned against Spain's cooperation with the United States in Iraq. Clearly, a case can be made that while the Spanish government continues to have its differences with the Bush administration in Iraq, its support for NATO operations and missions abroad has grown stronger.

Indeed, France remains a reluctant ally within NATO and has made the identification of consensus a difficult task. French and American differences were the key reason for the delayed response to the African Union's request for NATO's assistance in Darfur in 2005. Moreover, in the planning stages for NATO's presence in Iraq, France also raised most of the concerns and objections. France opposed the originally proposed site of Mauritania for Operation Steadfast Jaguar, the largest operational test of NATO's Response Force, and also criticized the U.S.-UK-led efforts regarding a possible NATO Global Partnership Initiatives. In this respect, France is acting quite unlike its 1990s détente with the alliance. Current French opposition to NATO, however, should be placed in the larger context of NATO's history, which reflects a longstanding debate between France and the United States over the appropriate security role for NATO. France having different views from the United States and many of its European allies is nothing new to transatlantic security questions. Certainly, the recent election of Nicolas Sarkozy, who has been far more pro-American than recent French politicians, provides some reason to expect that France will be more favorable toward the alliance than Jacques Chirac.
CONCLUSION

Much like during the Cold War, when transatlantic tensions and periodic crises seemed often to threaten the corpus of the alliance, NATO is again recovering from its bitter dispute in 2003. In contrast to the abundance of NATO skepticism from current analysts, a more balanced assessment of the alliance’s health indicates that another progressive evolution is under way. Its institutional flexibility after September 11, the positive and ongoing impact of NATO expansion, the new evidence of greater public support for transatlantic cooperation suggest that NATO remains a relevant player in global security affairs.

Indeed, NATO faces new and increasingly difficult challenges in promoting democracy and stability in Afghanistan. Unless NATO finds a way to stem the Taliban’s growing influence, the growing drug problem, and the increasingly high rate of suicide terrorism attacks in Afghanistan—which the United States and coalition forces have thus far failed to stop in Iraq—NATO will be emmeshed in the region for years to come. Moreover, the omnipresent military spending gap between the United States and the other twenty-five allies has short- and long-term implications. Some analysts have suggested that only slight adjustments in defense spending decisions will allow European governments to generate more useful force structures, especially with the likely future needs for small groups of special operation forces. At the same time, these steps still need to be taken. So defense spending remains an ongoing concern but is an area that has potential for progress.

Despite these problems, NATO’s skeptics fail to consider the growing multilateral cooperation within the alliance, especially during the second Bush administration. A more centrist and multilateral American foreign policy direction bodes well for NATO’s future and more accurately captures the alliance’s current role(s) and future prospects for fostering transatlantic security consensus.

ENDNOTES


41. See UN Security Council Resolutions 1510 (13 Oct. 2003) and 1621 (13 Sept. 2005), both of which authorize ISAF to take "all measures necessary" to accomplish its tasks. It should be added that on ISAF’s original deployment, under British leadership, strong differences arose between Afghan security forces in Kabul and the British ISAF troops; but after diplomatic intervention by Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld, these problems were alleviated. See Maloney, "The International Security Assistance Force," 7.

42. S/RSS/1659 (15 Feb. 2006).


49. Alexandra Ghecui, NATO in the "New Europe" (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

50. Ibid, 139.


52. Michta, The Limits of the Alliance, 73–98. Also, author interview with NATO ambassador in Brussels, (June 2001).


Global NATO: An Alliance for a Unipolar World

Thomas S. Mowle

Most discussions of the future of NATO begin with an assessment of what NATO can do and how well it is doing it. Those who see NATO doing many things, and doing them well, conclude that it is an alliance “renewed.” Those who see it doing only a few things, and doing them poorly, conclude that it is “an alliance in continuing decline.” This is the wrong starting point. We must ask not what NATO can do, but what its members want NATO to do. NATO cannot survive as a meaningful institution unless it serves the primary interests of its members. In a unipolar world, neither the United States nor other members of the alliance want a rigid consensus-based organization. An organization with a larger membership, stepping away from current decision practices, would better suit the interests of all members. Without this change, NATO will become less and less relevant.

At the moment, NATO members have very different expectations from the alliance. Those members located closest to Russia continue to emphasize its original mission and are troubled by the alliance’s recent focus on new and distant missions. Other new members used NATO as a stepping-stone for rejoining Central Europe and the European Union and are not enthusiastic about being asked to increase defense spending while reconstructing their economies. Members of the “transatlantic” group in NATO, which reliably includes the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark, and Portugal, view NATO as a counter to deeper European/French control over their sovereignty, though they pay a price by supporting the United States. More Eurocentric members, especially France, use NATO to maintain a voice in American foreign policy, one that will only be heard as long as they sometimes support that policy. Finally, the United States primarily wants to maintain a pool of military power that can operate with its own in coalition while at the same trying to avoid restrictions on the use of its own power.

Against this background, NATO in 2006 began to explore “global partnerships” with “contact countries” around the world. The Global NATO (GNATO) would
be based on military capabilities and will and on democratic rule rather than on geography. These countries would participate in NATO missions of their choosing, with little or no voice in NATO decisions. This essay describes this currently tabulated proposal and explains how a GNATO would address many concerns that both realists and liberals have about world order over the next several decades. For realists, GNATO offers the United States a looser alliance structure while expanding the pool of countries able to assist it. It also offers partners— and members—a way to support American initiatives indirectly. For liberals, GNATO offers a shift away from reliance on a United Nations that once again has displayed ineffectiveness. GNATO thus moves closer to ratifying Kant’s separate peace among liberal states, tying the industrialized democracies together. GNATO would also have fewer collective action problems than the current alliance. While this essay makes no predictions about GNATO being implemented, the logic behind it suggests that the proposal deserves to be taken seriously.

**GLOBAL NATO AND THE TRANSATLANTIC CONTEXT**

NATO secretary general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer announced the “Global Partners” initiative on 4 February 2006. He argued for “building closer links with other like-minded nations beyond Europe—nations such as Australia, New Zealand, South Korea or Japan. NATO is not a global policeman, but we have increasingly global partnerships.” Sweden, Brazil, and South Africa have also been mentioned as possible members of a Security Provider’s Forum. As Scheffer elaborated on the concept later in 2006, he emphasized that “global partners” had been initiated by the prospective partners, not by NATO.

Much of the opposition to the concept came from France, whose defense minister, Michele Alliot-Marie, argued that this would “dilute” both the alliance’s “natural solidarity” and “its soul and effectiveness.” National reconstruction, she argued, is properly left to the United Nations or European Union. By the time of the Riga Summit on 29 November 2006, even the four most prominent countries had backed strongly away from any formal relationship with NATO.

“Global Partners” became “Contact Countries” who “contribute to stability and security across the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond.” The Summit Declaration asked the North Atlantic Council to “increase the operational relevance of relations with non-NATO countries, including interested Contact Countries; and in particular to strengthen NATO’s ability to work with those current and potential contributors to NATO operations and mission, who share our interests and values.” The Declaration also called for ad hoc meetings with relevant regional states “using flexible formats for consultation meetings of Allies with one or more interested partners . . . and/or interested Contact Countries, based on the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and self-determination.”

This scaled-down version of GNATO meets most members’ interests better than formal membership would have. The ad hoc meetings are reminiscent of the flexible geometry of the old European Security and Defense Initiative (ESDI) first proposed at NATO’s Rome summit in November 1991 as a “European security identity and defense role” within NATO. In January 1994 ESDI was given shape in the form of Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTFs), which would be “coalitions of the willing” operating under European command. ESDI was eventually superseded by the EU’s own European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) and the Berlin Plus arrangements that gave the EU access to a certain NATO assets. GNATO would extend the flexibility of ESDI to include the United States. Not only would Europeans be able to take action when the United States did not wish to, a role the ESDP has taken on, but the U.S. would also be able to act in a formal coalition with those Europeans states wishing to participate. This approach would make consensus easier to reach, since approving a mission would not mean participating in it, though GNATO might also choose to relax the consensus basis of decision making.

Recent changes in the geopolitics of transatlantic relations may also provide some impetus for GNATO. Russia, for example, has begun behaving more like the old Soviet Union. In the winter of 2006, natural gas exports to Ukraine were interrupted and the pipelines to Georgia were mysteriously blown up. These developments help remind Europeans that energy security is a vital problem for Europe. The illiberalism of Russian domestic politics has been highlighted by the unresolved murders of Anna Politkovskaya and Alexei Litvinenko. Russia, joined by China, has also been less than fully cooperative in addressing security issues from Iran to Darfur. Finally, on 26 April 2007, Russia announced that it would suspend compliance with the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, as it complained about American plans to deploy a minimal antiballistic missile system in parts of central Europe. These behaviors do not directly create a GNATO, but they remind all members that NATO might someday be useful for its original purpose—and it therefore should be kept in business.

Despite the differences between the United States and Europeans on the war in Iraq, progress has been made on many of the other issues that have divided alliance members. Even with respect to Iraq, public disagreements have been limited, since there is nothing active to debate: American troops will probably remain in Iraq throughout George W. Bush’s tenure, and American and European public opinion no longer diverges as much as it did. Regarding Iranian development of nuclear technology, the United States supported European diplomatic initiatives and the UN process. The U.S. has eased its objections to the International Criminal Court, allowing the UN Security Council to refer the Darfur crisis to that body. On Kyoto, the EU has even come to agree with the American view that meaningful action on climate change will require imposing global obligations, so as to include China and India. Once again, while these steps do not directly lead to a GNATO, they create the backdrop for increased transatlantic cooperation.
Perhaps the most significant shift in transatlantic geopolitics is America's increasing acceptance of the ESDP. The EU has demonstrated its capacity by taking the lead on peace initiatives from Congo to Aceh, with U.S. blessing. As this capacity has developed, the Berlin Plus accords are now "dead" in the view of everyone except those most closely involved in them. The only possible future Berlin Plus mission would be a repeat of Bosnia, as the EU may take responsibility for Kosovo from the alliance. Growth of the EU's capabilities have made Berlin Plus less necessary, so that the new informal borderline of complementarity between the organizations has been to assign the most complex operations to NATO and less complex ones to the EU. The EU has also continued to develop its European Defence Agency (EDA), which integrates member states' procurement strategies with industry. Given that states will want their military units to be interoperable, and that NATO mandates interoperability among most European states at the upper level of capability, the practical effect of EDA has been to move toward increasing interoperability among all European states. Once again, this makes GNATO easier to contemplate, especially since GNATO makes sense from both the realist and liberal perspectives on international politics.

REALIST PERSPECTIVE

One way to view the concept of GNATO would be through the lens of structural realism. In its most succinct form, realism assumes that the most important actors in international politics are sovereign states, that the interests of those states inherently come into conflict with each other, and that those conflicts are resolved through material power. The structural version of realism directs our attention to the distribution of power in the anarchic international system rather than to the idiosyncrasies of individual leaders or states. That distribution is currently unipolar. No other state comes close to matching American material power as realists traditionally measure it. Two effects of the unipolar structure are particularly relevant to NATO. The first is that a unipolar power has less interest in maintaining a tight alliance structure than a bipolar one does. The second is that weaker states have an incentive to bandwagon with the unipolar power, rather than balance against it.

The great powers of a bipolar world prefer tight alliance structures because every ally might be needed in case war breaks out with the other great power. NATO and other Cold War alliances provided bases for American power and forces that could deter or defeat the bipolar rival, denying those countries the Soviets' own alliance system. The transition to unipolarity made those reasons less salient. Unipolar powers do not need strong alliances as much as great powers do in other systems. A unipolar power is not trying to balance or block the power of near-equals, so it does not need allies to supplement its power. A unipolar power is not worried about countries joining a rival's camp because there is no such rival. A unipolar power has few restrictions on its ability to go to war, and it certainly does not need much material help to do so, other than access to bases. Allies, therefore, are only more likely to slow down and complicate operations without contributing much to the effort. In addition, those allies may drag the unipolar power into wars where its stakes are low.

The Wars of Yugoslav Secession illustrate this point. While the wars were unlikely to escalate into an invasion of any NATO member (Hungary was not a member during the first set of wars), the conflict nevertheless threatened to unleash further wars in the region and refugees on NATO members. American advocacy of "lift and strike" undermined European diplomacy, prolonged the war, and resulted in a peace very similar to those rejected three years earlier. When the Kosovo crisis developed, the United States assumed direct command of the war yet nevertheless felt that NATO had been too limiting. Indeed, these crises artificially prolonged the apparent strategic value of Europe. American intervention in those wars was largely predicated on the need to maintain NATO's credibility, a need that only existed because NATO existed. Without NATO, Bosnia and Kosovo would truly have been Europe's problems.

Thus, the American reaction to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack is not surprising. While the alliance for the first time invoked Article 5's common defense provisions, the United States rejected this offer because, in the words of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, "the mission determines the coalition, and we don't allow coalitions to determine the mission." Following that logic, the U.S. launched its invasion of Afghanistan outside NATO. The alliance did contribute indirectly by redeploying its forces to backfill for American forces sent to Afghanistan and providing air patrols over the United States. Even after NATO took command of the UN-authorized International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) stabilization mission in 2003, the United States maintained its antiterrorism Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in parallel. Even in 2005, only 100 Americans were assigned to ISAF but more than 10,000 to OEF. In 2006, the NATO stabilization mission was gradually extended to cover the entire country, and more Americans came under NATO authority. On the whole, however, the Afghan war demonstrates the American preference to fight with ad hoc coalitions, a pattern continued in Iraq, in which NATO has no combat role. The NATO alliance is used to stabilize a country after the end of what the U.S. deems to be major combat operations.

Despite the second-place status assigned to NATO, Europeans have continued to support the United States far more than people appreciate. This orientation is in keeping with the second relevant impact of unipolarity: the inclination of states to bandwagon with the unipolar power rather than balance against it. Balancing is "opposing the stronger or more threatening side in a conflict." In other words, it is a set of policies or actions that try to match, exceed, or block the power of a stronger
state. These policies must be material. So-called "soft balancing," which includes "territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signaling of resolve to participate in a balancing coalition," or "politicico-diplomatic" or "psychosocial" balancing do not offer true examples of balancing. Balancing properly includes the formation of military alliances that exclude the balanced state, military spending that at least keeps pace with the balanced state, development of weapons systems that target the balanced state, and actions that physically frustrate the balanced state's use of power. The only one of these that applies to European behavior is Turkey's denial of its territory for a northern front in the invasion of Iraq. European defense spending has declined relative to the United States, NATO remains intact, and, as far as we know, there are no European weapons systems targeted at the United States.

The tendency toward bandwagoning, rather than balancing, in a unipolar world may explain why European leaders have supported American policy under both Clinton and Bush even when they do not seem to like that policy. Bandwagoning is "joining the stronger coalition." A bandwagoning state seeks to increase its power by receiving favors from the stronger state but may also fear punishment if it resists. European states have bandwagoned with the United States in alloying with the stronger power and assisting it in its use of power. NATO has remained intact and has added ten members since the dawn of unipolarity. Europeans have also made it easier for the United States to exercise its power, and not only in the Balkans, where American forces have been freed up for use in the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. At least thirty-two European countries have contributed to ISAF, along with nonmembers of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), such as Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Jordan, and Malaysia. At least twenty-one European countries have contributed to the coalition in Iraq, along with non-NATO, non-PfP Australia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Tonga. GNATO would provide a means for some of these states formally to be part of the U.S. efforts.

Bandwagoning has gone beyond mere participation in American military operations. Late in 2005, allegations were published that Poland and Romania had hosted secret prisons for terrorist suspects. In addition, stories surfaced of European nationals being transported by the CIA to prisons in distant countries, where they were subjected to very harsh treatment. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concluded in June 2006 that "these incidents... were made possible either by seriously negligent monitoring or by the more or less active participation of one or more Council of Europe member states." European governments declined to cooperate in the investigation or show much concern over it. In a January 2007 report, a special committee of the European Parliament (EP) severely chastised the European Council and its member states, concluding that "it is unlikely that certain European governments were unaware of the extraordinary rendition activities taking place in their territory." The committee singled out the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany as particularly egregious violators of European standards by participating in these activities and then deceiving the EP. It was also critical of Poland and Romania for hosting and refusing to investigate "secret detention facilities." The EP noted lesser problems with Sweden, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Denmark, Belgium, Turkey, Macedonia, and Bosnia, not all of which are usually counted among American allies most supportive of its current defense policy. Perhaps more than any other incident, cooperation with renditions shows the depth of bandwagoning, though with the light of public attention Italy and Germany have since brought charges against CIA agents.

The GNATO initiative neatly addresses all of these concerns and realities. This looser form of alliance would allow the United States to receive most of the benefits of NATO without being so constrained by the rules of the formal organization. GNATO also makes it easier for NATO to be used as a vehicle for bandwagoning with the United States. Thus, the GNATO is a vehicle for consolidating the power of like-minded states around the U.S. while making the alliance more likely to retain the interest of the United States and other members. And since these countries also happen to share the same liberal political and economic ideology as the U.S., this newly ordered NATO would be intriguing from the liberal perspective.

LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE

While Global NATO suits the general realist preferences of states in a unipolar system, it also supports the goals of liberal perspectives on international politics. Liberalism argues that international conflict can be managed through institutions like law, democracy, trade, or shared values. Institutions may be formal organizations or the rules and norms of state behavior. Institutions, once created to serve specific state goals, tend to be modified to serve new purposes rather than dismantled. Such evolution is evident in NATO during the 1990s after its Cold War mission became less prominent.

For institutions to be meaningful, they must be seen as legitimate by their members and by the targets of their actions. The UN has generally been accepted as legitimate since its founding because its membership is nearly universal. Nevertheless, even the UN can be criticized on that basis because the Security Council includes only fifteen nonrepresentative members. States like Iran, Iraq, and Sudan—all frequent subjects of UNSC debates—rarely have a direct voice in its decisions. Thus, they may reject even UNSC rulings as illegitimate. While a GNATO would also not include such states, it would be more legitimate than the current organization. There is precedent for non-UN legitimacy, even for members of the EU, as, for example, in
NATO's authorization of the 1999 war in Kosovo when the mission was blocked in the UNSC. This perspective was relatively easy for members of the EU, since most of them are also in NATO. In February 2007, Russian president Vladimir Putin criticized the Italian defense minister for implying that the EU or NATO could substitute for the UN. In a similar vein, Alliot-Marie wrote that a GNATO might "send a bad political message: that of a campaign launched by the West against those who don't share their ideas. What a pretext we would offer to those who promote the idea of a clash of civilizations." With sufficiently expansive membership, however, this may be surmountable, especially with the inclusion of non-Western states, such as South Africa or India, as well as Japan and South Korea. In any case, the perceived legitimacy of GNATO would be higher than that of the United States acting alone or with an ad hoc coalition of the willing, or even than that of NATO as currently constituted. As an organization of liberal states, it might also have more legitimacy with respect to UN values than does the current UN, in which authoritarians judge human rights and aggressors weigh dangers to peace.

In addition to legitimacy, a meaningful institution must be able to take effective action. The divergence in governing philosophies makes agreement difficult on issues like Darfur or Iran. An alliance of democracies would be more cohesive, moving toward Kant's notion of a pacific union of liberal republics that would form a separate compact as a step toward "perpetual peace." A GNATO with a flexible geometry of coalitions would be even more willing to act against an international threat than the current consensus-based NATO is. As with legitimacy, the standard is not one of complete effectiveness but a comparison to the options. The GNATO members would have an overwhelming proportion of usable global military and economic power, and they would train and be able to operate together. GNATO would be more effective than the UNSC or the current NATO, just as it would be more legitimate than the current NATO (or arguably, at least), the UNSC. GNATO would help resolve the tension between legitimacy and effectiveness in international institutions.

GNATO would also help to reduce the collective action problems that have plagued recent NATO operations. Collective action problems—when members of a group gain the benefits of group actions by contributing their fair share of resources to the group—are most apparent when those benefits are rival in consumption and nonexcludable. NATO worked well during the Cold War because it did not face these problems. The benefits of collective defense were clearly excludable under Article 5. Thus, the Soviets could invade nonmembers Hungary and Czechoslovakia with impunity. In addition, members that did not live up to their alliance commitments could in principle cease to be protected. Article 6 of the NAT also limited the applicable geographic area, thus excluding the protection of overseas colonial territories, such as Portuguese Goa or British Falklands when they were invaded by India and Argentina, respectively. Furthermore, the particular means of pro-

viding security, nuclear deterrence, was essentially nonrival in consumption. One state could protect the rest while protecting itself. Conventional defense spending, of course, was more rival in consumption, but the shared sense of danger helped ease this problem.

With NATO's new missions, however, the collective action problem is intense. The goods provided by NATO are rival and nonexclusive. The gains from reducing civil conflict in the Balkans or from reducing the threat from terrorists inspired by Islamic extremism are diffusely provided to all members of NATO, regardless of their contribution to the mission. Indeed, one could argue that, to the extent that Islamic extremists might prefer to target states fighting them directly, free-riders actually receive more benefits by hiding from the enemy. Furthermore, since nuclear deterrence cannot protect NATO members from these kinds of threats, consumption is rival as national and defense budgets (and soldiers' lives) must be devoted to these missions rather than to others. Given these limits, and the absence of a common threat, states will try to steer NATO's attention to the threat that most troubles them. Thus, it is not surprising that peace operations will tend to be underprovided and overconsumed. Once free-riding becomes entrenched, it will spread as other states resent it.

One might expect that a GNATO, with global missions, would make this problem worse. It would not. That expectation would be based on the belief that peace is the only good provided by NATO. NATO also allows states to meet their structural preference for bandwagoning with the United States while still supporting their domestic preference for supporting an international institution. It also gives states a means of trying to influence American policy. In return, the United States can offer rewards for cooperation, such as preferential treatment in military basing, the prestige of being a respected ally, and greater attention to their foreign policy preferences. These rewards are easily excludable from free-riders. If the states support American initiatives, they are rewarded; if they do not, they are not. Lest this sound too cynical, one must note that the United States must actually follow through with these rewards. If allies are ignored, they have no reason to cooperate with the United States—but this is a problem that faces NATO as much as GNATO. Many of these gains are also not rival in consumption. Military basing would be, but prestige can be offered to many, and influence over American policies would actually increase as more states participated. In a unipolar world, GNATO need not face much of a collective action problem; the difficulty today is the mandate for consensus as opposed to flexible participation.

Much of this discussion has focused on the benefits of GNATO for its non-American members. The United States also receives benefits from NATO that it would lose if the alliance dwindled away. Primary among these is the ability to create coalitions. NATO defense planning means that allies and partners develop their militaries to be interoperable in both equipment and operations.
Without peacetime planning and training, multilateral military operations would be inefficient or ineffective. GNATO would increase the pool of such states. Second, placing an operation under that NATO flag rather than the U.S. flag can diffuse resistance toward the West as a whole, rather than leaving it targeted at the United States. Third, NATO gives the U.S. a role in Europe that it otherwise would not have. Without NATO, the relationship between the United States and the EU and its member states would be no different than the relationship between any other set of states with interests that are not always aligned. Fourth, NATO confers a legitimacy to American operations that would not be achieved by an American-led alternative coalition. The latter would always be perceived by others as simply "the United States and its cronies." The former, however, would reflect the mutual agreement of the leading free states of the world, especially with the expansion to GNATO. Finally, the NATO process illustrates the liberal values the United States professes: working to achieve a common position among competing views rather than the raw use of force.

These American benefits are earned at relatively low cost. Relatively few American forces remain in Europe, and most of these support ongoing operations in other parts of the world. The United States also must provide a senior military leader to act as Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) as well as his staff in Mons and at NATO headquarters in Brussels. The U.S. must also maintain good relations with allies and partners, but NATO makes this easier to do than trying to maintain ad hoc coalitions. These are low costs. An effective GNATO would enhance American power. As the National Security Strategy of 2002 says, "There is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of its allies and friends in Canada and Europe."

CONCLUSION

While this essay discusses a proposal that, at this writing, officially is no longer being proposed, the recent history of European institutions suggests that no idea is ever truly dead. This one should not be, as a Global NATO would allow NATO to survive as a meaningful institution that can better promote the interests of its members. GNATO would meet the various material interests of liberal states and help resolve the institutional dilemma of promoting international peace. It would serve the American interest in having a flexible pool of allies on which it could rely without being excessively committed to a single group and in enhancing the structural reflex toward bandwagoning. It would serve the interests of other liberal states in keeping the United States in an alliance, rather than running freely and unilaterally, and also in maintaining their interest in bandwagoning with the U.S. while laundering that cooperation through an institution. GNATO would create a more effective international organization with a more plausible claim to legitimacy than any organization short of the UN itself.

ENDNOTES

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Air Force, Department of Defense, or government. Another version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Chicago, February 2007, and is under review by Comparative Security Policy.

5. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, speech at the joint meeting between the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the North Atlantic Council, Paris, 30 May 2006.
11. This theory is more thoroughly developed in Thomas S. Mowle and David H. Sacko, The Unipolar World: An Unbalanced Future (New York: Palgrave, 2007).
lists Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.


31. Alliot-Marie, "Don't Diminish NATO's Effectiveness."


33. The NATO text does not explicitly provide for this, however.

34. "The Algerian Departments of France" were included while they existed, as are certain North Atlantic islands, such as the Canaries and Azores.


38. Australia, the most prominent other state to join such coalitions, uses these standards as well.