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From Prague to Baghdad: NATO at Risk

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REPAIR WORK REQUIRED

THE CONCRETE IS CRUMBLING in the foundations of the labyrinth of drab low-rise buildings that house the main offices of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization just off Boulevard Leopold III in the outskirts of Brussels. Fresh paint can no longer hide cracks in the plaster along the winding corridors. Captains, majors, and colonels in a variety of uniforms share cubbies with diplomats and civil servants.

When the complex was hurriedly assembled 35 years ago, it was intended to be the temporary command center of a permanent alliance squared off against a robust and implacable enemy. Leonid Brezhnev was in the Kremlin, the Cold War was at its height, and Charles de Gaulle had pulled France out of NATO's unified military command, forcing the other allies to move from Paris to Brussels. But before they got around to putting up a more durable and dignified set of buildings, the Soviet monolith came tumbling down and escapees from its wreckage were knocking on NATO's door. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined three years ago, bringing the membership up from 16 to 19. There may soon be as many as 26 if, at their summit in Prague in November, the leaders of NATO have the foresight to accept the applications of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. That move would, in one stroke, increase stability from the Baltics to the Balkans.

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In addition to admitting new allies, NATO has established a network of so-called partnerships with 27 states. They include five neutrals (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland), all 15 former Soviet republics, four other members of the defunct Warsaw Pact, and three remnants of Yugoslavia. On the second day of the Prague summit, presidents, premiers, ministers, and other officials from all these countries will join the allies around a giant table for a session of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). For the past 11 years, this body, created and administered by NATO, has sponsored joint defense, peacekeeping, and civil emergency operations. It has also encouraged its members to respect minorities, resolve disputes peacefully, and ensure civilian control of their military establishments.

To cope with this boom in activities and associations, NATO has acquired from the Belgian air force a huge tract across the highway from its present location. Three renowned architects are bidding for the contract on a new headquarters to be completed by 2008. When the winner is announced at the summit in Prague, there will probably be a burst of rhetoric about how the plan demonstrates NATO's determination to be a sturdy and capacious fixture on the landscape of the twenty-first century.

But Prague will also highlight a paradox: NATO's long-term potential is virtually limitless, but its cohesion is at imminent risk. That is largely due to another paradox. The strength of the alliance has always derived from American power, which has never been greater, and from American leadership, which has never been more assertive. Yet these days many allies are feeling not so much led by the United States as bossed around; for them, the exercise of American power has become less a source of protection and more a cause of resentment and a problem to be managed.

The United States has been accused of high-handedness and unilateralism before, but the complaints have grown in volume and intensity during the nearly two years of George W. Bush's presidency. He has persistently taken the position that the United States knows best what is in the interests of the rest of the world, and his administration has sometimes seemed not just willing but eager to act alone, in defiance of treaties and over the objections of other nations. As a result, the United States has rarely been so at odds with so many of its traditional friends on so many issues, from trade and arms control to climate

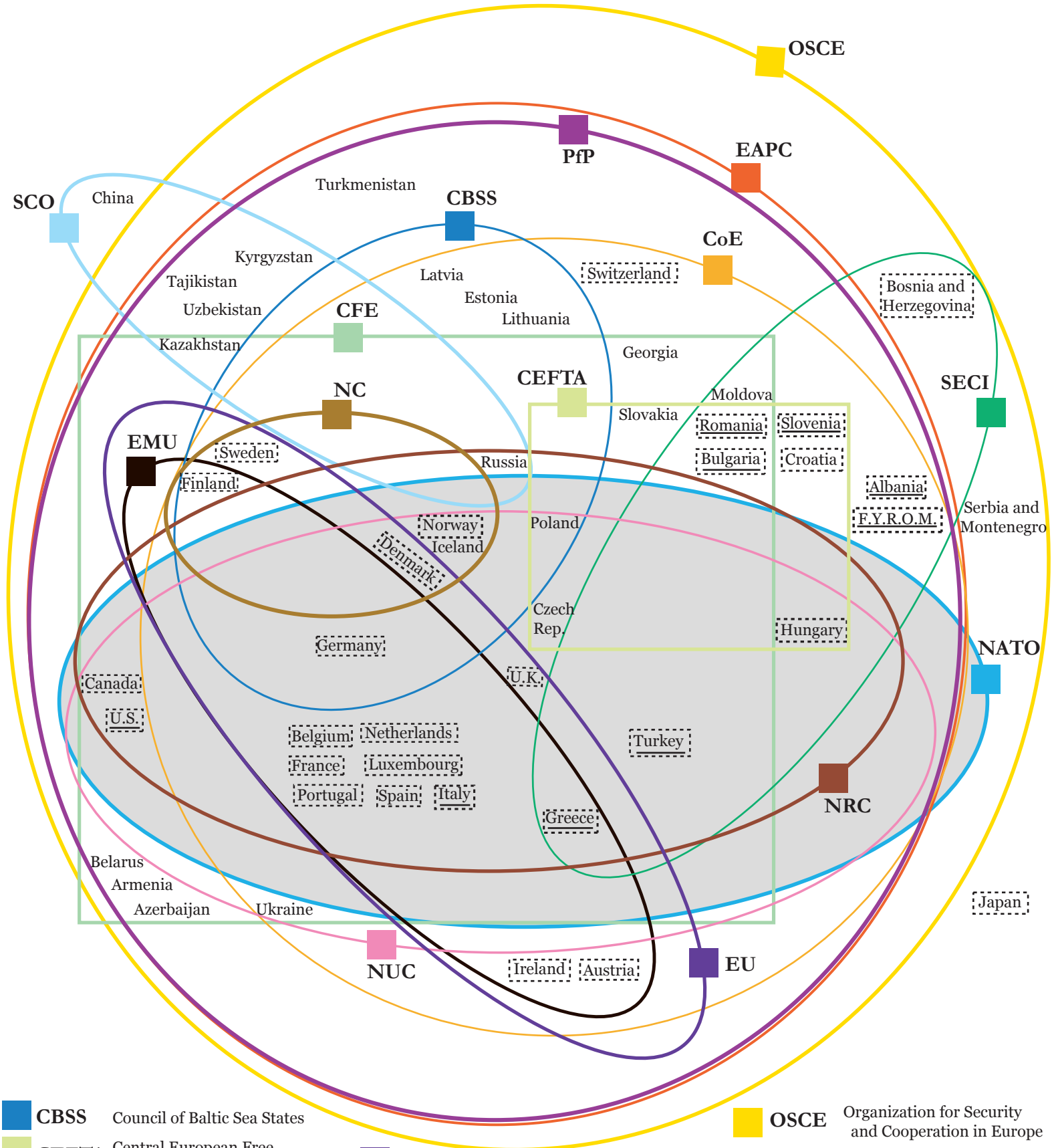
change and the International Criminal Court. This general dispute has naturally taken its toll on NATO, an organization that is itself based on a treaty, on the notion of America as first among equals, and on the principles of common interest, shared responsibility, concerted resolve, collective action, and decision by consensus.

The Prague summit will dramatize the specific issue of Iraq as a moment of truth for NATO. For starters, Bush has some repair work to do. The U.S. administration's success after September 11 in crushing the Taliban stoked the president's confidence in the ability of the American armed forces, acting largely on their own, to bring down enemy regimes. In planning and executing the campaign in Afghanistan, the administration gave NATO short shrift. Many in Canada and Europe, and some in the United States, worry that if the administration is similarly dismissive of NATO when push comes to shove in Iraq, the alliance might never recover, since NATO must be taken seriously by its strongest member if it is to be taken seriously by anyone.

During the summer, apprehension mounted that the fight Bush was spoiling for with Saddam Hussein was one that he would just as soon wage alone. Thus his speech in New York City on September 12 was greeted with widespread relief. He used the podium of the United Nations to assert his preference for working through that body. He did not alter either the objective to which he is committed (regime change in Baghdad) or the timetable he has in mind (soon). Nor did he back away from his explicit, often-repeated willingness to act outside the UN if he deems it necessary. Nor, finally, did he rule out the possibility of preemption, which he and others in his administration have elevated from an option of last resort to something close to a new doctrine for American defense.

By making his "or else" so clear, the president seemed, at first, to have increased the likelihood of what would be the best denouement of the world's 12-year showdown with Iraq: a UN-authorized military action that removes Saddam from power. By convincing the other members of the Security Council that he will not settle for any result that leaves Saddam in place, Bush gave them an incentive to close the gap between their positions and that of the United States, if only to preserve what the president pointedly called the "relevance" of the UN itself. Bush based his argument on Saddam's record of repeatedly attacking his neighbors,

Eurasian-Transatlantic Architecture



CBSS Council of Baltic Sea States

CEFTA Central European Free Trade Association

CFE Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe

CoE Council of Europe

EAPC Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council

EMU Economic and Monetary Union (Euro-area)

EU European Union

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NC Nordic Council

NRC NATO-Russia Council

NUC NATO-Ukraine Commission

OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PfP Partnership for Peace

SCO Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SECI Southeastern European Cooperation Initiative

Austria Signatory to the Stability Pact Agreement

Albania Southern Europe Defense Ministerial

using weapons of mass destruction, and flouting past attempts to carry out inspections and enforce existing UN resolutions.

Then Saddam tried his own hand at preemption by announcing—before the UN could come up with a new, tougher resolution—that he would agree to inspections. He hoped that this familiar tactic of cheating and retreating would, yet again, divide the Security Council and thwart the United States in its determination to bring him down.

When Bush goes to Prague, he will be tending to an alliance at risk. He will probably make a case similar to the one he made in New York City: the only way to end the menace Saddam poses to world peace is to eliminate Saddam himself. How receptive the allies are to that message will depend on the extent to which the United States is holding its own against those in the UN who believe that Saddam can be deterred, contained, and disarmed without being toppled.

More generally, Bush's audience in Prague will be looking for evidence that he is committed to making full and proper use of the international institutions the United States helped found more than half a century ago. Just as the UN should be the mechanism of choice—notably, American choice—for dictating terms to Saddam and authorizing force if he fails to comply, NATO is the best mechanism for applying that force. Most immediately, the allies' and partners' participation is necessary for military reasons: the more of them that are involved, the better the chance of a swift victory, which will be crucial if escalating violence and contagious turmoil in the region are to be avoided.

But there is a larger political stake as well: if there is to be a war against Iraq in the coming months, its justification, conduct, and outcome must vindicate the relevance not just of the UN but also of the U.S-led alliance that rightly claims to be the most successful in history. Otherwise, NATO may not survive to serve as a general contractor for the pan-Eurasian renovation project symbolized by its plans for a shiny new home in Brussels.

THE SECURITY SOLAR SYSTEM

NATO'S MILITARY and political functions have always been intertwined. When Harry Truman signed the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949, he said that the allies were dedicated to achieving "unity on the great principles of human freedom and justice, and at the same

time to permit, in other respects, the greatest diversity of which the human mind is capable." In short, even at its inception, NATO was about more than just banding together against a common enemy; it was also about creating, consolidating, and expanding a zone of safety within which common values and cooperative institutions could prosper.

But NATO was never intended to tackle that assignment alone. Its founders envisioned it as part of a network of organizations, each with its own history, makeup, and mission but all serving the cause of democracy and pluralism. The prime example is the symbiosis between NATO and the European Union. For all the controversy and criticism that vex that work in progress, the EU is the most ambitious and promising venture in supranational governance on the face of the earth. Yet it owes its very existence to NATO. The alliance made possible the historic reconciliation between Germany and France, which then made possible the EU. Under NATO's umbrella, democracy took hold in Portugal, Spain, and Greece. By leading the way in enlargement, NATO helped induce the EU to open its own doors to central Europe.

Less than 20 years ago, Russia seemed to be in another galaxy.

Recent years have seen a burgeoning of organizations that together encompass Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Siberia and that are intended to assist postcommunist states in their transitions—to help them, quite simply, join the West. The figure facing page 48 illustrates the point. Lurking in the swirls, boxes, and acronyms is an overarching logic and a promising dynamic. Just as the EU came into being thanks to NATO, so have the other 15 organizations depicted on the chart emerged under its aegis. The two that will be spotlighted at the Prague summit—the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the Partnership for Peace—are offshoots of the alliance. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which continues to regulate the disposition of military equipment, was signed by the member states of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in the closing days of the Cold War. The Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in the north, and the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative and the Balkan Stability Pact in the south rely heavily on NATO. The alliance encourages the militaries of the participating

countries to collaborate on search-and-rescue and other humanitarian tasks and provides them with training and technical backing. More broadly, the sense of security that comes with a connection to NATO makes participating governments feel more confident about permitting the free flow of people, goods, and ideas across what used to be the Iron Curtain.

It is appropriate that the chart resembles a solar system, with NATO and the EU as its twin suns, since those two bodies exert a gravitational pull on Bosnia and Herzegovina at the far right and on Tajikistan at the far left. Tajikistan is the equivalent of Pluto. With much of its population living in poverty and famine, an infant mortality rate higher than that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a feudalistic society, an authoritarian government, an economy dominated by drug trafficking, and a festering civil war, that country is even further away politically from the capitals of western Europe than it is geographically. Nonetheless, Tajikistan and other struggling nations, such as Macedonia and Georgia, are more likely to close that political distance if they remain part of the system that NATO and the EU are helping to put in place through their eastward extension.

Less than 20 years ago, Russia seemed to be in another galaxy altogether. Now it has been drawn into multiple Western-centered orbits, including the NATO-Russia Council, the Partnership for Peace, and the Council of Europe. Bush, like Bill Clinton before him, has left open Russia's eligibility for NATO membership. Although that day is still a long way off, Russia today is more genuinely a partner of NATO than it was before. President Vladimir Putin's decision to accelerate his country's alignment with the West has profound implications for the future of NATO, including its scope and even its name. "North Atlantic" will seem inadequate as the geographic designation of an experiment in collective security expanding, as Winston Churchill might have put it, from Vilnius on the Baltic to Vladivostok on the Pacific.

As that possibility becomes more of a reality, NATO planners will have to give fresh thought to the alliance's relations with China. Strategists in Beijing cannot be sanguine about Russia's eventually becoming a real ally of the West. Four NATO partners—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia—are already on China's borders.

As for the Russians themselves, they look to China not as a natural partner but as an almost certain geopolitical rival and as a potential military adversary. One reason Putin has been relatively relaxed about the next wave of NATO enlargement and the impending admission of the Baltic states is that he knows, as Western officials have long been saying, that Russia faces no threat from the west. But it does face one from the east, if only for a combination of demographic and economic reasons. Siberia and the Russian Far East are as rich in resources as they are barren in population, while the opposite is true on the Chinese side of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers. That discrepancy is a recipe for tension and even conflict.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or "Shanghai Six," might serve as a useful starting point for engaging China in the network of NATO-sponsored Eurasian security structures. That organization brings Chinese officials together with ones from Russia and several Central Asian states, all members of the Partnership for Peace and of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. Thus, in a development Truman and his contemporaries could hardly have imagined when they founded NATO 53 years ago, the alliance may turn out to be, at least indirectly through the EAPC, an ameliorating agent in relations between what used to be the Soviet Union and what is still the People's Republic of China.

NO GLOBAL NATO

NATO'S REACH may ultimately not even be confined to the Eurasian landmass. Several countries in the Pacific are already at only a degree or two of separation from the alliance. Japan is a signatory of the Stability Pact agreement and a financial contributor to rebuilding the Balkans; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is a direct descendant of the Marshall Plan, now includes Australia and New Zealand.

No other part of the world has a web of overlapping, mutually reinforcing political, economic, and security structures comparable to the one anchored in the Euro-Atlantic region. Charts for those regions would be as simple as the one for Eurasia is complex. That is largely because of the absence in those other areas of a militarily capable and

politically respected defense pact that can create an environment conducive to cooperation and integration.[1]

To fill that partial vacuum, NATO may, over time, extend its gravitational field even further. However, that does not mean there will ever be, or should be, a global NATO that brings together representatives from the nearly 200 countries on earth, ranging from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, arrayed around a table far larger than that in Brussels or anywhere else. If that happened, the alliance might as well merge with the UN General Assembly.

Nonetheless, it is both imaginable and desirable that over the coming decades NATO will take on new members and develop partnerships and ancillary activities in ways that strengthen its increasingly far-reaching political influence. This expansive reach and the possibilities it opens up argue for inclusiveness. But the imperative for NATO to maintain its core capabilities and effectiveness as a military alliance argues for selectivity, especially in the acceptance of new members. If it can strike that balance, NATO may someday be in a position to advance the interests of members and partners alike by leading coalitions on missions in virtually any region of the world where the defense of international peace demands.

SOFT POWER IS NOT ENOUGH

NATO'S ABILITY to deal with new threats faces an early test in the Middle East. The region reaching from North Africa to Pakistan is virtually an organization-free zone, which is a major reason why it is a zone of danger, both to itself and to surrounding areas, notably including Europe.

[1]East Asia has the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the latter's more inclusive spinoff, the ASEAN Regional Forum, none of which has a military component. Indeed, the principal security structure in the area is the one provided by U.S. bilateral defense treaties with South Korea, Japan, and Australia, and U.S. training relationships with Brunei, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and others. Africa has the African Union (previously known as the Organization of African Unity), and several subregional groupings that are beginning to exert a coherent and beneficial influence. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is nearly moribund partly because India's predominance intimidates the other members. Latin America has a number of organizations, including Mercosur (the common market between Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay), the Andean Pact, and the Rio Pact, which is the closest thing to a regional NATO outside of Europe. But the Rio Pact is a far cry from NATO, not least because of the priority the United States gives its relations with Europe: to wit, the American refusal to invoke the treaty in 1982 at the request of Argentina during the Falklands war.

In the last eight years, NATO has begun to establish connections with six Arab countries through the Mediterranean Dialogue. The modest purpose of this effort is to support scientific cooperation, education, training on crisis management and defense planning, and the sharing of information on terrorism. The Mediterranean Dialogue is a tentative first step by NATO toward doing in the Arab world what it is has been doing for the past dozen years in the post-Soviet region: foster modern concepts of domestic governance and cooperative patterns of international behavior.

In the term coined by political scientist Joseph Nye, these endeavors represent the projection of "soft power," the use of suasion along with cultural, political, and economic influence to co-opt rather than coerce. However, that amalgam is less potent in the Middle East than in central Europe, since the central Europeans have, for the most part, decided they want to be part of the West, whereas the Arabs, to put it mildly, have not. The Mediterranean Dialogue is further hobbled, at least under current circumstances, by its Arab members' disinclination to cooperate with Israel, which is also a member. The only other grouping of any significance in the region is the Arab League, which includes 22 members ranging from Morocco to Yemen—and Iraq. Fortunately, the Arab League is quite ineffectual both politically and militarily. If it were otherwise, the Arab League would greatly increase the threat to Israel and further complicate the challenge of dealing with Saddam Hussein.

Although soft power is a necessary component of what it takes to keep the peace, it is insufficient; the hard stuff is required as well. For NATO to succeed as a master builder of structures such as those now taking shape across Eurasia, its members must occasionally be ready to pick up the tools of war and undertake a demolition job against regimes that threaten the values and interests that the alliance champions.

Every day from its founding in 1949 until the collapse of the Soviet bloc 40 years later, NATO was ready to unleash its destructive might in response to aggression by the Warsaw Pact. In the waning days of the Cold War, the successful prosecution of Desert Storm depended on the coordinated participation of allied and associated forces and the use of NATO bases in Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey. British armored units, along with French legionnaires, joined the U.S. Army for the charge into Iraq. British and American special forces worked behind

enemy lines to seek out and destroy Iraqi missile launchers. Meanwhile, warships from as far away as Australia, Norway, and Japan provided transport, force protection, mine clearing, and at-sea refueling in the Persian Gulf. The orchestration of a broad-based and highly effective coalition that drew much of its strength from allies was a lasting credit to George H.W. Bush and an important legacy to his successors.

Not until the Cold War was over did NATO itself go into combat on the basis of a formal "Action Order" from the North Atlantic Council, the alliance's governing body in Brussels. Moreover, it did so "out of area"—that is, beyond the borders of its member states—and in partnership with former adversaries. First in Bosnia, then in Kosovo, the alliance provided the muscle so that more than a dozen other international bodies could help rebuild the economy, establish the institutions of self-government and civil society, and supervise elections. As a result of NATO's projection of hard power against Belgrade, Slobodan Milošević is in the dock in The Hague today, and what might be called Miloševićism is discredited in the Balkans. As a symbol of its return to the fold, Serbia may be invited to send an observer delegation to the meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council during the Prague summit.

Although NATO rose to the first major challenge of the post–Cold War era, its role after September 11 was more ambiguous. For the first time in its history, NATO invoked Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty, which declares an attack against one of its signatories an attack on the alliance as a whole. Even so, the United States flew 90 percent of the sorties and delivered 99 percent of the precision-guided bombs against targets in Afghanistan. By that index, Operation Enduring Freedom was nearly an all-American display of power.

However, after having been largely excluded at the beginning, NATO allies and others were drawn in as the campaign gathered momentum. British, Canadian, and German units have been on the ground, undertaking risky sweeps through the caves where al Qaeda was hiding; the United Kingdom and France have provided significant help from the air, conducting reconnaissance missions, refueling American strike aircraft, and launching attacks of their own. In support of the action in Afghanistan, the British have deployed their largest naval task force since the Falklands war. French and Italian vessels are helping patrol the Indian Ocean. The Europeans and the Canadians have increased

their presence in the Balkans so that the United States could shift units from there to Afghanistan. Turkey leads the peacekeeping force deployed in Afghanistan today. At the same time, NATO partners have provided bases, overflight rights, troops, and equipment. Russian forces, whose Soviet predecessors were driven out of Afghanistan by a U.S.-supported jihad 13 years ago, have returned to Kabul on American coattails. Five AWACS early-warning and command-and-control planes with allied crews patrolled the skies over the continental United States for more than six months starting shortly after September 11.

For no good reason, the Bush administration tended to disparage these substantial contributions by allies and partners, feeding the impression on both sides of the Atlantic that NATO was a wasting asset. Playing up rather than playing down the allies' and partners' participation would have entailed no cost and brought sizable benefit, not least because it would have helped establish the military operation in Afghanistan as a model for the one that may be required to end the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.

THE RIGHT CHOICE

AMERICANS ARE JUSTIFIED in expecting the principal military alliance in which they have invested so much over the past half-century to prove itself up to the tasks of the years and decades ahead, many of which loom in the Middle East. At the same time, America's allies are justified in expecting the United States to assemble a genuine coalition of the willing, not just a coalition of the obedient. To meet that standard, the Bush administration must make effective, enforceable, UN-authorized inspections the centerpiece of America's Iraq strategy rather than a pretext for what much of the world would see—and oppose—as unilateral action of dubious legitimacy.

Some in the administration—particularly among top civilian officials at the Pentagon—have tended to lump the UN and NATO together as "talk shops" that are all but worthless when it comes to dealing with the worst villains of this world. If they were to succeed in basing policy on that view, it could become self-fulfilling.

The UN's potential efficacy in applying pressure on Saddam, and if necessary using force against him, has increased in the last year. That change is largely due to the continued improvement in U.S.-Russian

relations that has been institutionalized in the NATO-Russia Council and personalized in the rapport between Bush and Putin. It is now conceivable to secure Russian support for UN resolutions with teeth in a way that was impossible in previous confrontations with Iraq.

Even though Putin has engaged in tactical maneuvers to pacify domestic constituencies and maintain leverage in future bargaining with the United States, he has shown signs of being prepared to abandon Moscow's traditional regard for Iraq as a client and instead throw in his lot with the West. But first he must be convinced that the United States and the West are, on this issue, one and the same. That was not the case this fall, given the transatlantic discord over whether military action against Saddam is justified and, if it is, how the operation should be authorized and conducted. Putin must also be convinced that Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council, will be part of the process that puts a cocked pistol to Saddam's head and pulls the trigger if he refuses to comply with what are UN as well as U.S. demands.

Only in those circumstances would most NATO member states feel they can participate in the operation. They would have both the political motive and the military capacity to join forces effectively. They would not need (nor would they likely want) a formal Action Order from Brussels. Instead, they would act on the basis of a resolution passed in New York. Once again, as in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, and Afghanistan, the main operation would involve primarily U.S. and British forces, but other allies could provide various forms of backup, such as securing the Iraqi borders to prevent Saddam from escaping or from shipping his weapons of mass destruction out of the country. Some of the new allies have niche capabilities that could be valuable. The Czechs, for example, have key expertise in chemical and biological weapons-detection equipment.

After the war is won, a force of at least 100,000 will be needed to keep the lid on what will inevitably be an even more unstable region in the immediate wake of the conflict. NATO troops will have to be at the core of that mission to secure its success. Then, for decades afterward, the international community will need the mixture of hard-power capabilities available through NATO for dealing with future threats. Indeed, the extent to which there truly is an international community will depend in no small degree on whether NATO and its web of partnerships are around to make that concept real.