

NATO's Purpose After the Cold War

Throughout history military alliances have formed to balance either countervailing power or the perceived threat thereof. They have collapsed when the need for a balance disappeared as a result of either power crumbling or threat perceptions changing. While the origins of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) can be found in its members' perceived need to balance rising Soviet power in the aftermath of World War II, the collapse of Soviet imperial rule in the late 1980s did not lead to NATO's demise. For that reason, NATO is often referred to as the most successful military alliance in history. Not only did it prove to be the key instrument in defending its members against Soviet attack or subversion and in helping to speed Soviet disintegration, the Atlantic Alliance survived and, at times, thrived in the decade since the disappearance of the Soviet threat robbed NATO of its main *raison d'être*. If success is measured by longevity, then NATO has rightly earned its historic designation.

What accounts for NATO's persistence? Three factors can be cited. First, in the immediate aftermath of Soviet imperial rule, few were ready to throw the Alliance overboard. As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher remarked at the time, "You don't cancel your home insurance policy just because there have been fewer burglaries on your street in the last 12 months!"¹ The need to hedge against an uncertain future was reflected in the new Alliance strategic concept, adopted in November 1991 by NATO Heads of State and Government just days before the Soviet collapse. This concept pointedly noted that the need to "preserve the strategic balance in Europe" would remain one of NATO's four fundamental security tasks.²

Second, the Alliance has always meant more than providing a countervailing balance to Soviet power. To a considerable extent, NATO evolved into a community of like-minded states, united not just by their opposition to Soviet communism but also by their determination (as the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 stated) "to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law."³ Over time, NATO grew from being an alliance principally dedicated to protecting its members against military threat or attack into the principal

institutional expression of the transatlantic community of states and the western values that both defined and united them. Together, the NATO allies formed a viable, yet pluralistic security community, one where (with the possible exception of Greece and Turkey) the thought of settling any dispute among its members by the threat or use of force has been ruled out *a priori*.⁴ That community remains as vibrant today as it did at the height of the cold war.

Third, when the military organization was established in the early 1950s to give full expression to the collective defense commitment of the Washington Treaty, the basis was laid for a large bureaucracy, staffed by many thousands of people dedicated to the organization and its mission. While old soldiers may fade away, large organizations rarely do. After initially resisting the need to change, the NATO bureaucracy responded, like all such bureaucracies, by seeking to adapt its mission and structure in a manner relevant to its new environment. On the military side, internal adaptation has taken the form of a streamlined and more flexible command structure capable of deploying military forces rapidly and over greater distances than was the case during the cold war. Politically, the Alliance has sought new missions to retain its relevance – from peacekeeping to countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In the process, NATO has not only survived but been transformed into a politico-military entity that differs in many significant ways from the organization that stood ready to meet a Warsaw Pact tank assault across the Fulda Gap.

Yet, as NATO turns fifty in April 1999, it largely remains an alliance in search of an overarching purpose. A shared commitment to protect western values, uncertainty about the future, and bureaucratic inertia together helped to prevent the end of alliance that the tectonic shifts in the European security environment would otherwise have predicted. After the Soviet demise, the Alliance embarked on ambitious projects and seemingly new directions – adopting a radically altered strategic concept that emphasized dialogue, cooperation, and crisis management over collective defense in 1991, embracing the East through its Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative in 1994, moving to end the war in Bosnia in 1995, solidifying its European pillar in 1996, and enlarging its membership in 1997. Although each of these initiatives has proven worthwhile individually, together they do not yet amount to a clear, convincing, and overarching purpose for the Atlantic Alliance.

NATO's 50th Anniversary Summit in Washington in April 1999 provides an opportunity to go beyond self-congratulation for having survived the end of the Soviet empire and propound a persuasive vision for NATO's purpose in the 21st century. There are three possible purposes: First, NATO can be an *alliance of collective defense*, a military alliance whose main purpose is to provide a hedge against a militarily vengeful Russia that may emerge out of the political and economic chaos that marks present-day Russia. Second, NATO can be an *alliance of collective security*, an institution whose main purpose is to promote the values of the Atlantic community of market democracies throughout Europe in an effort to promote the stability and security that derives from being part of the transatlantic security community. Third, NATO can be an *alliance of collective interests*, an organization whose main purpose is to defend against threats to common, European and American, security interests no matter where these threats come from.⁵

An Alliance of Collective Defense

For fifty years, the main *raison d'être* of the Atlantic Alliance was, as NATO's first Secretary General Lord Ismay so perceptively stated, "to keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down." One clear purpose of NATO in the 21st century would be to keep doing what it has done so well in its first half century, albeit in a form more appropriate to the post-cold war world. This means that NATO's purpose would be limited to continuing to provide political and military entrée for the United States to Europe; hedging against what remains an uncertain future confronting both an economically and politically reforming Russia and the chaotic post-Soviet space; and reassuring Germany and its neighbors that the Berlin republic has a productive and positive role to play in European affairs, in part by reducing the shadow of potential German power through multilateral military integration and denationalization of its defense policy.

An alliance limited to these purposes would tend to focus on the core mission of collective defense or, what Michael Brown more appropriately calls, "strategic reassurance."⁶ By concentrating on collective defense and eschewing more ambitious tasks beyond the defense of

allied territory, NATO's purpose would reassure current and prospective members that the allies will defend them if attacked, as provided for in Article 5, the core article of the Washington Treaty. Providing such reassurance in the post-cold war security climate requires a U.S. military and political commitment that would be acceptable to a budget-conscious and world-weary Congress and American public. At the same time, such a commitment suffices to ensure continued military integration of German and other armed forces into the Alliance and to reassure Russia of NATO's essentially defensive character.

Proponents of limiting NATO's purpose to an alliance of collective defense make several arguments.⁷ First, by focusing on NATO's longstanding core mission it is hoped that NATO can overcome its existential crisis and retain sufficient identity and purpose to remain strong and cohesive in the post-Soviet security climate. NATO's existential crisis results from both the disappearance of the threat against which it was created and a feeling that the sense of community holding both sides of the Atlantic together may be fraying, especially in North America. As a result of the Soviet collapse and the attendant removal of the need for allies to present a united front, the penalty for disagreements within the Alliance has been reduced and the number of alternative paths for pursuing national interests (through regional, global, or ad hoc arrangements) has increased. At the same time, Europe may still be the most important geographical region for American foreign policy, but its relative importance has declined in security, economic, and political terms. With relative peace reigning on much of the continent, U.S. security interests are focused elsewhere – especially in Asia. Economically, the non-European share of U.S. foreign trade and investment will continue to grow even if the Asian financial crisis indicates a temporary reversal in this trend. Politically, America's rapidly changing demographic character means that for an increasing number of Americans the mother country no longer lies across the Atlantic but below the Rio Grande or across the Pacific. Warren Christopher may have been the first American Secretary of State to have complained about the "Eurocentric attitude" of America's foreign policy elite.⁸ He is unlikely to be the last. Under these circumstances, clearly limiting NATO's purpose to its core function of collective defense, which under current circumstances is the most easily achieved, would be the best way to preserve the Alliance over the long term.

Second, the experience in Bosnia and elsewhere has demonstrated that, even if desirable, expanding NATO's purpose to encompass many new missions is likely to be a source of growing dissension rather than cohesion in the Alliance. For more than three years, NATO dithered and key allies engaged in a profound battle over whether, when, how, and to what extent the Alliance should intervene to end the Bosnian war. Differences among the allies about Bosnia became so severe that the United States, the Alliance's ostensible leader, felt the need in November 1994 to unilaterally abandon participation in the first ever military operation by NATO – the maritime enforcement of the United Nations weapons embargo imposed on the former Yugoslavia. And while the Alliance ultimately played a leading role in ending the war and maintaining the peace, this occurred only after the United States decided to take matters into its own hands, forcing NATO to choose between following the leader or staying behind.⁹ Whatever momentary unity was achieved in Bosnia quickly disappeared when NATO was confronted with the Serb challenge to Kosovo in 1998. Again deep divisions were exposed on the timing of possible military action (with most allies insisting on delaying action until it was almost too late), its legal mandate (especially whether a UN Security Council resolution authorizing intervention was necessary), and the extent of NATO military involvement (especially regarding the deployment of combat troops to the region). Finally, disagreement about the extent and form of military action in NATO's own Balkan backyard makes clear that consensus on NATO involvement in a more distant out-of-area operation – the Persian Gulf, let alone Korea – currently is beyond the scope of the Alliance. Rather than focusing on extending NATO's reach to areas where consensus is unlikely, proponents of keeping NATO in reserve for collective defense maintain that the Alliance should focus its energy on fulfilling the core purpose on which all allies have agreed.

Third, some proponents of a narrow NATO purpose fear that expanding NATO's reach to new members and/or missions will ineluctably detract from NATO's capacity to meet its collective defense obligations.¹⁰ As noted, out-of-area operations have occasioned sharp disagreements among the allies that alone could erode the Alliance cohesion fundamental to an effective collective defense posture. One of the reasons NATO finally agreed to address the Bosnia conundrum in the manner it did was the widespread fear that transatlantic disagreements concerning this issue were calling the vitality, if not future viability, of the Alliance into

question. Furthermore, the more NATO's defense structure focuses on and prepares for the crisis management and peace support operations that a transformed NATO might take on, the more probable it is that the Alliance will lose its edge in conducting high-intensity combat operations necessary to sustain the credibility of its collective defense functions. A similar concern exists among those who oppose the enlargement of NATO's membership. Here the fear is that militarily less capable members and the more cumbersome decision-making processes that accompany the increase in the number of voices around the NATO council table will dilute the Alliance's effectiveness in meeting its core obligations. In other words, an expansion of NATO's purpose and membership risks not only increased dissension among the allies but also dissipation of the Atlantic Alliance's ability to meet its fundamental collective defense tasks. For these reasons, a clear focus on retaining NATO as an alliance of collective defense is preferable.

The systemic transformation of the European security environment by the collapse of Soviet power poses a challenge to an Alliance created to meet the threat of that power. But rather than seeking renewal in new missions and members, a minimalist Alliance clearly focused on the task of strategic reassurance is believed by its advocates to provide a sound basis for NATO in the 21st century. At a minimum, such an Alliance requires a continued American political and military presence in Europe, and a perpetuation of the integrated military command structure, as a hedge against uncertainty. Once that core purpose has been established, the Alliance capacity that exists to achieve that purpose can provide a basis for joint action by those allies willing and able to do so in contingencies beyond the immediate scope of collective defense. Indeed, it was on such a basis that much of the military muscle of the United States and its coalition partners was deployed to the Persian Gulf in 1990-91. But such actions should not detract from NATO's core purpose, let alone supplant that purpose as the focus of its future orientation.

An Alliance of Collective Security

From its creation, the Atlantic Alliance has combined the military aim of deterring the Soviet threat to Europe with the political aim of binding its members on the basis of a shared

commitment to the values of democracy, liberty, and market economics. That aim was implicit in the Washington Treaty and made explicit in the 1967 Harmel Report, which identified the Atlantic Alliance's main functions as both the need "to maintain adequate military strength and political solidarity to deter aggression" and, second, the need "to pursue the search for progress towards a more stable relationship in which the underlying political issues can be solved."¹¹ With the former gone, NATO's remaining purpose could focus on overcoming Europe's political and economic divisions by enlarging the community of market democracies to include the states of central and eastern Europe. NATO would then become an alliance of values, united in extending security to those states in Europe that embrace the political and economic norms that bind NATO's current members. Instead of importing European security, NATO would export it to the rest of Europe, ensuring stability, democracy, and prosperity throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. The very commitment to exporting security would provide states in central and eastern Europe with the incentive necessary to take the difficult political and economic steps to transition to stable and secure market democracies. Once these states had made this transition successfully, NATO's purpose could shift from collective defense to collective security for a Europe that would by then be both whole and free.

Since the end of the cold war, NATO has been steadily moving in a direction consistent with the purposes of an alliance of collective security. As early as July 1990, the NATO allies declared that "in the new Europe, the security of every state is inseparably linked to the security of its neighbors."¹² Thus the allies effectively tied their security to that of their erstwhile adversaries in central and eastern Europe. The following year, NATO noted that the risks its members faced were "less likely to result from calculated aggression against the territory of the Allies, [then] from the adverse consequences of instabilities that may arise from serious economic, social, and political difficulties, including ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes, which are faced by many countries in Central and Eastern Europe."¹³ This implied, as the new strategic concept underscored, that NATO ought to place a premium on crisis prevention and management rather than on deterrence. The disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 demonstrated the dangers of instability and ethnic conflict in former communist states and confirmed the need to focus on crisis management. In response, the Atlantic Alliance declared in 1992 that it stood ready to enforce the decisions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

(OSCE) and the UN Security Council on a case-by-case basis.¹⁴ By the end of that year, NATO did just that in Bosnia, agreeing first to monitor and then to enforce the UN's weapons embargo against the former Yugoslavia. In subsequent years, the Alliance made available air assets to support various additional UN Security Council resolutions and, in December 1995, it agreed to lead a 60,000-troop force to implement the Bosnian peace agreement.

NATO's reach beyond collective defense and into collective security tasks during the 1990s has been noticeable also in its dealings with central and eastern European countries. From a general commitment to support economic and political transition, NATO moved expeditiously to include the countries of the former Warsaw Pact in its councils, establishing in 1991 the North Atlantic Cooperation Council as a forum for formal interaction on issues of common concern. In 1994, engagement took on a more concrete form through the establishment of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), which aimed at enhancing stability and security throughout Europe. The partnership focused on defense-related cooperation in order to expand and intensify political and military interaction between NATO and "partner countries" throughout Europe and promote the commitment to the democratic principles that underpin the Alliance. PfP was also designed to lay the basis for NATO's enlargement by preparing those countries that so desired for future membership. The enlargement process itself was started in July 1997 at the Madrid Summit, when allied leaders invited the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to join the Alliance and emphasized that the door to future membership would remain open to all European countries that met the requisite criteria. Secretary Albright told her NATO colleagues in early 1997 that the aim of these successive steps was "to do for Europe's east what NATO did fifty years ago for Europe's west: to integrate new democracies, eliminate old hatreds, provide confidence in economic recovery, and deter conflict."¹⁵

Finally, similar sentiment informed NATO's approach to Russia. The Founding Act of May 1997 committed the Alliance and Russia "to build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security." This was underscored by the Act's first guiding principle: "Proceeding from the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible, NATO and Russia will work together

to contribute to the establishment in Europe of common and comprehensive security based on the allegiance to shared values, commitments and norms of behavior in the interests of all states.”¹⁶

The case for turning NATO into an alliance of collective security rests on three arguments.¹⁷ First, an alliance that exists solely to counter threats that have disintegrated will atrophy unless new missions can be found to provide such a conglomeration of states with a new sense of purpose. Christoph Bertram has argued, “the Alliance will not survive as a military organization; nor can the military organization survive unless the Alliance itself finds a common purpose beyond that of merely keeping military assets in reserve.”¹⁸ In today’s relatively prosperous and peaceful Europe, that common purpose must be a positive rather than negative one –strengthen and enlarge the reach of the principles and values that unite its members.

Second, to the extent a threat to allied security remains, it exists in the uncertainty of the democratic and economic transitions of the central and east European states and the inevitable instability that this process has engendered. A NATO that has embarked on the positive mission of exporting security, by encouraging military cooperation through PfP and participation in NATO-led peace support operations like the one in Bosnia, can have a stabilizing influence on the transition process. Moreover, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has argued that the prospect of NATO membership provides these states “with additional incentives to strengthen their democratic and legal institutions, ensure civilian command of their armed forces, liberalize their economies, and respect for human rights, including the rights of national minorities [as well as foster] a greater willingness to resolve disputes peacefully and contribute to peace-keeping operations.”¹⁹

Third, peace and stability in Europe is more likely to reign if the vast preponderance of states in the region are governed democratically. Democracies are more likely to adhere to established rules of behavior (like those codified in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 1990), regarding their conduct vis-à-vis both their neighbors and their own citizens. They are less likely to disturb the peace. As Immanuel Kant first argued, democracies are less likely to go to war against each other, a contention that history has demonstrated to be largely correct. Allied security would therefore be served by promoting

democracy in neighboring countries through a conscious effort to export security. As Strobe Talbott has maintained, “All of Europe will be safer and more prosperous if these post-Communist lands continue to evolve toward civil society, market economics, and harmonious relations with their neighbors.”²⁰

As an alliance of values, NATO would be the preferred instrument to promote and enforce the common norms and standards of conduct throughout the Euro-Atlantic area that are enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act. They include commitments to the principles of sovereignty and rule of law, demonstration of peaceful intentions, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and equality between peoples.²¹ Since the OSCE has neither the organizational capacity nor the military means to enforce these norms, rules, and principles of behavior, NATO can serve as the operational vehicle for ensuring that they become the operative standards of conduct within and between states in the Euro-Atlantic area. Once accepted by all, NATO in effect would become the institutional expression of the security community that existed for that area.

An Alliance of Collective Interests

During the cold war, the recognition that Alliance cohesion was necessary to ensure a credible deterrent posture vis-à-vis the Soviet threat led to an understanding among the allies that NATO qua NATO would not engage in out-of-area operations, since these were viewed as likely sources of intra-Alliance discord. In the early cold war years, it was the United States that opposed such operations, fearing that it could be dragged into conflicts resulting from Europe’s withdrawal from its colonial possessions. Later, Europe opposed NATO’s out-of-area engagement for fear of becoming embroiled in disputes resulting from the globalization of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. With the end of the cold war, however, a widespread belief emerged that confining NATO’s actions and interests to Alliance territory was no longer viable. As the reigning phrase of the early 1990s had it, “NATO should either go out of area or out of business.”²²

From this perspective, NATO's fundamental purpose after the cold war would shift from defending common territory to defending the common interests of Alliance members. As an alliance of interests, NATO would be the vehicle of choice to address threats to these shared interests, wherever these threats reside. Secretary Albright has said, NATO should be "the institution of choice when North America and Europe must act together militarily."²³ An alliance of collective interests would not be a "global NATO;" but rather it would place NATO within a global instead of a regional context. In this era of globalization, placing geographical limits on NATO's reach and purpose would marginalize the Alliance in the foreign and security policy of the United States and its major European allies, all of whom have interests that reach well beyond the geographical confines of the Euro-Atlantic region. As Secretary Albright explained in December 1997 to her NATO colleagues in Brussels, "the United States and Europe will certainly face challenges beyond Europe's shores. Our nations share global interests that require us to work together to the same degree of solidarity that we have long maintained on this continent."²⁴

There are at least three arguments in favor of NATO as an alliance of collective interests.²⁵ First, the basic security threats confronting the United States and the NATO allies are outside rather than within Europe. Europe today is at relative peace. For the first time in a century, European stability is not threatened by a major power – be it a revisionist Germany or an expansionist Russia. Instead, Europe's actual peace is today disturbed only by Serbia, which is led by a thug, whose actions cause large-scale human suffering but pose no fundamental or systemic threat to NATO countries or European stability. Instability and threats to real, if not vital, interests do exist outside of Europe. These include the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, disruption of energy supplies, and challenges to the balance of power in critical regions like southwest and northeast Asia. Addressing these threats in concert would be in the interest of all NATO allies and therefore ought to guide NATO's purpose. Warren Christopher and William Perry have argued with respect to the Alliance, "the danger to the security of its members is not primarily aggression to their collective territory, but threats to their collective interests beyond their territory. Shifting the alliance's emphasis from defense of members' territory to defense of common interests is the strategic imperative."²⁶

Second, if threats outside Europe pose the most immediate challenge to the shared interests of the NATO countries, the Alliance combines countries that are both the closest of allies and the most capable of dealing with these types of threats in concert. America and its European allies share the key values of democracy, market-based economics, liberty, and the rule of law, and they are committed to defending these values against emerging threats, wherever these may come from. At the same time, the nations allied as NATO are together the economically, technologically and militarily most potent force in the world, accounting for nearly half of the world's economic output and well over half global defense spending in 1996.²⁷ It is therefore to their advantage to combine resources in order to defend against threats to their values and interests and to use NATO, the militarily most capable and best organized instrument, for that purpose. As Albright told her Alliance colleagues in December 1997, "when the world needs principled, purposeful leadership against aggression, proliferation, and terror, the nations represented in this room have to set other concerns aside and lead, because few others can or will."²⁸

Third, to sustain American public and congressional support for continued U.S. engagement in Europe, NATO needs to become an instrument for sharing burdens in a manner that is not only fair but supportive of basic American national security interests. To many Americans, while U.S. involvement in Bosnia may have been necessary to demonstrate continued fidelity to NATO and underscore the commitment to American engagement in Europe, the deployment of 20,000 U.S. soldiers was not necessarily mandated by the need to defend vital U.S. interests. At the same time, the failure of most allies to support the United States in, for example, helping to stabilize the Persian Gulf when their dependence on mid-east oil is far greater than that of the United States, will reduce support for U.S. involvement in future Bosnia-like situations. A European commitment to join the United States in non-European contingencies is therefore necessary to demonstrate Europe's willingness to fairly share the burdens of upholding international security. As David Gompert has warned, a "division of labor in which Europe specializes in its internal affairs and enrichment while the United States protects Europe's oil supplies and combats nuclear proliferation will collapse of its own unfairness and its ultimate rejection by the American people."²⁹

In an age of globalization, a military alliance that narrowly focuses on the most prosperous and peaceful region on the globe and that ignores developments beyond it even when these might eventually threaten both its peace and its prosperity is likely to be doomed to irrelevance. As an alliance of collective interests, NATO would have to abandon its narrow geographical focus and the primacy of territorial defense in favor of a commitment to combating threats to its members' common interests that emerge beyond Europe. Its fundamental purpose would be to provide for allied collective defense – not only of allied territory, but also of allied interests.

The Debate within NATO

There is widespread agreement among the NATO allies that the Atlantic Alliance fulfills a useful purpose, even if there is only a vague sense of what that purpose is. Appeals for either NATO's disestablishment or its fundamental transformation continue to fall on deaf ears.³⁰ For these reasons, none of the three proposed visions of NATO's future purpose described above is likely to prove acceptable to all nineteen Alliance members. This is due in part because the three models, though useful for analytical purposes, are drawn too starkly to be acceptable for the real world of policy makers and in part because different allies lean in opposite directions as to NATO's preferred future purpose. The three new NATO countries, as well as some more established NATO members (like Norway, Turkey, Spain, France, and, to some extent, Germany) lean towards a NATO that emphasizes collective defense over other purposes. Others, including some smaller NATO members as well as some American commentators and Clinton Administration officials, lean towards a NATO that promotes and protects the values of its members as a means to strengthen stability and security throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. Many others in the United States, finally, favor a NATO that would unite around the defense of common interests, even beyond Europe, especially to stop the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

In view of Allied differences concerning NATO's purpose, what is the basis for a possible Alliance-wide consensus on this issue? Clearly, there is widespread agreement that the core of the Atlantic Alliance remains the collective defense commitment of Article 5. As

Albright underscored, “NATO’s primary mission will always remain defense against aggression.”³¹ However, there is also agreement that few direct threats against allied territory exist and that those that might occur would result from the spill-over of conflict outside NATO territory rather than from direct aggression. As a result, many members would agree that a NATO that made collective defense of territory not just the Alliance’s core or primary mission but its only one risks marginalizing NATO and could lead to its descent into strategic and political irrelevance. It therefore appears that a consensus is emerging that the purpose of NATO must be more than collective defense, for fear that otherwise Stephen M. Walt’s depiction of the Alliance – as “beginning to resemble Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Grey, appearing youthful and robust as it grows, but becoming ever more infirm” – might turn into an unwelcome reality.³²

But if NATO should do more than prepare for collective territorial defense, what else must it do? In the aftermath of NATO’s interventions in the Balkans, first in Bosnia and more recently in Kosovo, allied agreement clearly exists that a NATO beyond allied territory, albeit confined to the European region, is one the Alliance can and should undertake when the circumstances warrant. Similarly, the Alliance’s program of engagement with non-NATO members in Europe through the Partnership for Peace and its open door policy regarding possible Alliance membership demonstrate an allied consensus in favor of using NATO to strengthen democracy in the economic transitions in the countries in central and eastern Europe. Differences concerning NATO’s future purpose emerge on the question of how far to push these out-of-area and engagement activities.

As part of its 1991 strategic concept, the Alliance agreed that its security tasks included providing “one of the indispensable foundations for a stable security environment in Europe, based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes.”³³ At the same time, the allies agreed that NATO was one, not the only, instrument of European security and stabilization and that its core collective defense mission posed real limits on the Alliance’s ability to assist in, let alone affect, the democratic and economic transitions that would provide the lasting foundation for security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. Many Europeans look to the OSCE and the European Union as complementary, even alternative, instruments of change in Europe. The OSCE already encompasses all the states of Europe, and

its actions invariably garner greater legitimacy than do those of a more limited military organization. The EU, though restricted in membership, emphasizes economic and political integration over military security as a means of extending stability eastwards. There is therefore considerable opposition within the Alliance to NATO undertaking such tasks. Some fear that such an enlargement of NATO's fundamental purpose risks undermining the Alliance's capacity for ensuring military preparedness and collective defense of allied territory. The implication also exists that NATO might enlarge to include states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, and even Russia itself – a prospect that some NATO governments strongly reject.³⁴

If turning NATO into the instrument for overcoming Europe's division has its opponents within the Alliance, the notion of transforming it into an alliance of collective interests focused primarily on threats beyond Europe faces at least as much opposition. The first difficulty is that European and American perspectives of the security problems confronting them diverge. With peace reigning through much of Europe, the United States, as a global power with global interests, naturally seeks to focus the Alliance's attention on those problems it regards as posing the gravest threat to security. According to Secretary Albright, that threat now is "the combustible combination of technology and terror, the possibility ... that weapons of mass destruction will fall into the hands of people who have no compunction about using them." Halting this threat, which "emanates largely from the Middle East and Eurasia ... is the *overriding* security interest of our time."³⁵ Although Europeans agree that proliferation outside of Europe poses a major threat to their interests, their security focus remains predominantly regional and European. To them stability in Europe continues to be the overriding security interest. Moreover, for the vast majority of European NATO members, the Atlantic Alliance remains a fundamentally European security institution whose focus is on, in, and for Europe. Before NATO can become an organization concerned with extra-European threats and interests, its members must first overcome this fundamental divergence of perspective.

Second, the concept of NATO as an alliance of interests is premised on three assumptions: (a) that U.S. and European have common interests; (b) that they perceive threats to these interests in the same manner; and (c) that they would respond to these threats in identical ways. These premises may or may not hold up. Take, for example, what the United States

continues to see as the pre-eminent post-cold war threat to NATO – WMD proliferation, which, according to Secretary Albright, constitutes as much of a unifying threat to the Alliance as the Soviet threat of yesteryear.³⁶ Although most European allies share the U.S. perception that WMD proliferation poses a severe challenge to security, they neither perceive it as the immediate threat to Europe that Washington often assumes nor regard NATO as the primary instrument for effectively dealing with the WMD threat. International treaties and organizations, including the United Nations, as well as more ad-hoc supplier regimes are generally regarded as the preferred instruments for addressing proliferation. In contrast to the U.S. penchant for a policy of isolation and confrontation, most Europeans believe that an emphasis on engagement is more likely to produce results.³⁷ So while the allies share the interest in halting proliferation, they neither see the threat in the same manner nor agree on NATO's role in combating it. The same divergence is likely in the case of other challenges to protect common interests.

Finally, even if agreement could be reached that the defense of common interests ought to become NATO's primary purpose, the European allies generally lack the capacity to contribute significantly to this effort. NATO operations, or those by smaller coalitions of the willing, have to rely on U.S. strategic lift, intelligence, communications, and logistical support to operate effectively far (and even not-so-far) from home, since European militaries lack these crucial ingredients of power projection. Realizing this, some European governments (led by Britain and France) have called for increasing Europe's capacity to act militarily at greater distances either in concert with or autonomous from the United States.³⁸ Although generally welcomed, this development is focused primarily on providing the European countries with the capacity for military action in rather than outside of Europe, and if need be, without U.S. participation.³⁹ Thus, whereas an enhanced capacity for joint action might provide Europe with the ability to operate more effectively within Europe, it would do little to support the broader goal of meeting threats beyond Europe. Such a development, however, could encourage a division of labor between the United States and Europe (with the former concentrating on non-European contingencies and the latter on European ones) that advocates of NATO as an alliance of interests rightly regard as a likely source of allied discord.

NATO A Political Alliance with a Military Foundation

Where, then, does NATO's future purpose lie? An alliance of collective defense is too narrow and provides insufficient grist for sustaining NATO's large, dynamic, and increasingly flexible military machine whose existence provides the crucial capability for supporting allied security goals. An alliance of collective interests risks increasing discord over which interests would be defended, whether and how these are threatened, and what the appropriate response to such threats ought to be. An alliance of collective security, finally, will likely dilute the military foundation of NATO by turning the Alliance into a peacekeeping organization whose ability to meet collective defense and other combat commitments would soon atrophy.

While none of these strategic purposes on their own provide an adequate basis for NATO, together they do contain the necessary ingredients for a unifying vision for an Atlantic Alliance on the threshold of the 21st century. Specifically, NATO's fundamental purpose in the next century should be to fulfill George Marshall's original vision of a Europe "united in peace, freedom, and prosperity" – one in which democratic forms of government are the norm, individual liberty and minority rights are protected and upheld, and open, market economies provide an expanding basis for the welfare of people throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. It can achieve that purpose by extending the security and stability its members have long enjoyed to other European states and, ultimately, throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. At the same time, NATO's integrated and increasingly flexible command structure, the interoperability of its forces, and the habit of cooperative defense and contingency planning provides its members with a unique foundation for joint military actions, be it to defend Alliance territory, enforce European rules and norms, or defeat threats to the common interests of some or all NATO members.

The means by which NATO can export security and create stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic region are three. First, the allies must intensify their efforts to assist non-member countries to successfully complete the transition to market democracies. This entails a redoubled dedication to ensuring the success of the Partnership for Peace, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the Permanent Joint Council, the NATO-Ukraine Council and other bodies, initiatives, and programs designed to reach out to partner countries and provide the fundamental means for

enhanced security cooperation and assistance in Europe. Second, NATO must provide a positive inducement for the politically, economically, and militarily desired changes in non-member countries by keeping membership to the organization open to all European countries, as provided for in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty. The accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland can only be the beginning of a process that includes future membership for any country that both desires to join and has met the basic criteria of membership, to the exclusion of no one. Finally, as the only organization capable of mounting significant and credible military force in Europe, NATO can be a decisive instrument for security and stability throughout Europe by standing ready to enforce the rules, norms, and codes of conduct (as set forth in the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris, and other OSCE documents) that govern the relations within and between the states in the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO's leading part in implementing peace agreements in the Balkans and in contributing to the stabilization of war-torn societies throughout the former Yugoslavia is a crucial building bloc for creating this military role for the Alliance in support of European security beyond allied territory.

Although NATO's fundamental purpose as a political alliance must be to enhance security and stability throughout Europe, it should not do so at the expense of undermining its unique military foundation. That foundation provides a crucial basis for the kind of joint military action necessary to enforce the rules, norms, and codes of conduct that govern relations among and within all European states. In addition, NATO's integrated military structure has proven to be the critical means for resolving Europe's longstanding security dilemmas by providing a home for national military capabilities and joint defense planning and operations. Increasingly, however, NATO's military foundation must become more flexible and more capable of projecting military force over longer distances. In so doing, the Alliance will provide a basis for joint military action by those allies that perceive the need to deploy, threaten, or use military force. Of course, joint action in support of collective defense commitments must remain a fundamental function of the Alliance. But contingencies requiring the fulfillment of this commitment will likely be few in the future, whereas the opportunities for joint military action in, around, and even beyond Europe by some or all allies is likely to increase, as the last decade has amply demonstrated. NATO's internal adaptation must be geared toward providing a sound and flexible basis for rapid joint action by those allies that perceive the need for military

engagement in a particular situation – in Europe or beyond, in defense of vital interests or of other important or humanitarian interests.

During the cold war years, NATO was a military alliance with a political foundation. It united a community of countries that, in the main, was committed to upholding the principles of democracy and individual liberty and sought to deter and, if necessary, defend against a possible attack by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. With the collapse of the military and political threat to Alliance partners, the political principles that united NATO members now remain the element that holds the Alliance together. That suggests the need for NATO to reverse priorities – to become a political alliance with a military foundation. At the threshold of the 21st century, NATO's principal purpose must be to enlarge the community of democratic states throughout the Euro-Atlantic area while providing its growing number of members with the military foundation to undertake joint military action in defense of their common territory, values, and interests. NATO's essential focus will therefore remain on Europe, though extending ever further eastward. At the same time, the Alliance must continue to strengthen the military foundation for allies concerned to act not just within the Euro-Atlantic area but also beyond. This broad political and military purpose for the Atlantic Alliance will have specific implications for NATO's new strategic concept, as well as for its policy toward future enlargement, issues that are discussed in detail below.

NOTES

¹ Cited in Robert B. McCalla, "NATO's Persistence After the Cold War," *International Organization*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Summer 1996), pp. 445-475, here p. 455.

² North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Alliance's Strategic Concept," Agreed by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Rome on 7-8 November 1991, para. 21.

³ Of course, when these two objectives clashed during the cold war in the case of Portugal, Greece, and Turkey, the need to balance Soviet power outweighed the need to support democracy and individual liberty.

⁴ The concept of a "pluralistic security community" as applied to the North Atlantic area was first introduced by Karl W. Deutsch, et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

⁵ In addition to sources cited below, this discussion draws on the first session of the Brookings NATO Study Group, and in particular the three visions of NATO's future presented by Michael E. Brown, David C. Gompert, and Charles A. Kupchan.

⁶ Michael E. Brown, *European Security: The Defining Debates* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, forthcoming).

⁷ See Brown, *European Security*; Charles Glaser, "Why NATO Is Still Best," *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Summer 1993), pp. 5-50; Josef Joffe, "Is There Life After Victory? What NATO Can and Cannot Do," *National Interest*, no. 41 (Fall 1995), pp. 24-5; Michael Mandelbaum, *The Dawn of Peace in Europe* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1996), pp. 11-24; and Stephen Walt, "The Precarious Partnership," in Charles A. Kupchan, ed. *Atlantic Security: Contending Visions* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998), pp. 5-44.

⁸ Quoted in Ann Devroy and R. Jeffrey Smith, "Clinton Reexamines a Foreign Policy Under Siege," *Washington Post*, October 17, 1993, p. A1.

⁹ On the U.S. decision, see Ivo H. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnia Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

¹⁰ See David S. Yost, "The New NATO and Collective Security," *Survival*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 135-60, here p. 146; and Howard Baker Jr., Alton Frye, Sam Nunn, and Brent Scowcroft, "Will Expansion Undercut the Military?" *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1998, p. B9.

¹¹ The report to the North Atlantic Council, "The Future Tasks of the Alliance," was annexed to "Communiqué of the North Atlantic Council," December 14, 1967.

¹² They went on to say: "NATO must become an institution where Europeans, Canadians and Americans work together not only for the common defense, but to build new partnerships with all the nations of Europe. The Atlantic Community must reach out to the countries of the East which were our adversaries in the Cold War, and extend to them the hand of friendship." See "London Declaration on a Transformed

North Atlantic Alliance,” Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council. London July 5-6, 1990, paragraph 4.

¹³ “The Alliance’s Strategic Concept,” paragraph 10.

¹⁴ The commitment to the OSCE (until 1994, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) was made in June 1992 and to the UN Security Council in Brussels in December 1992. See “Communiqué Issued by the North Atlantic Council,” Oslo, Norway, June 1992; “Final Communiqué” Issued by the North Atlantic Council,” Brussels, Belgium, December 1992, paragraph 7.

¹⁵ Madeleine K. Albright, Prepared Statement before the North Atlantic Council, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, February 18, 1997.

¹⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation,” Paris, May 27, 1997. On this point, see also James Goodby, *Europe Undivided* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 1998), pp. 173-77.

¹⁷ See Goodby, *Europe Undivided*, esp. pp. 159-79; Christoph Bertram, *Europe in the Balance: Securing the Peace Won in the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1995), pp. 27-30; Charles A. Kupchan, “Restructuring the West: The Case for an Atlantic Union,” in Kupchan, ed., *Atlantic Security*, pp. 64-91; and Rob de Wijk, “Towards a New Political Strategy for NATO,” *NATO Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 14-18.

¹⁸ Bertram, *Europe in the Balance*, p. 27.

¹⁹ Strobe Talbott, “Why NATO Should Grow,” *New York Review of Books*, August 10, 1995, p. 2.

²⁰ Strobe Talbott, “Russia Has Nothing to Fear,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1997, p. A25.

²¹ Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Helsinki Final Act of 1975,” August 1, 1975.

²² Richard G. Lugar, “NATO: Out of Area or Out of Business,” Remarks Delivered to the Open Forum of the U.S. State Department, August 2, 1993; and Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee, “Building a New NATO,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 4 (September/October 1993), pp. 28-40.

²³ Madeleine K. Albright, Press Conference at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, December 8, 1998, p. 3.

²⁴ Madeleine K. Albright, Statement at the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, December 16, 1997, p. 5.

²⁵ See David C. Gompert and F. Stephen Larrabee, eds., *America and Europe: A Partnership for a New Era* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially Gompert, “Introduction: A Partner for America,” pp. 1-18; Ronald D. Asmus, “Double Enlargement: Redefining the Atlantic Partnership after the Cold War,” pp. 19-50; and Gompert and Larrabee, “Conclusion: Institutions and Policies,” pp. 231-256. See also Coit D. Blacker, and others, *NATO After Madrid: Looking to the Future*, Report of a Conference by Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Arms Control and Institute for International Studies and Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Stanford University, September 19-20, 1997; and Warren Christopher and William J. Perry, “NATO’s True Mission,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1997, p. A27.

²⁶ Christopher and Perry, "NATO's True Mission," p. A27.

²⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1998/99* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 300; and Borgna Brunner, ed., *The Time Almanac 1999* (Boston: Information Please LLC, 1998), pp. 150-324.

²⁸ Albright, Statement at the North Atlantic Council, December 16, 1997, p. 6.

²⁹ Gompert, "Introduction," p. 12. Proposing just such a division of labor in the name of fairer burden sharing is Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, "A New Division of Labor for a New World Order," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1999, p. C7.

³⁰ Favoring NATO's disestablishment are: Ronald Steel, *The Temptation of a Superpower*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 78-9; Hugh De Santis, "The Graying of NATO," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Autumn 1991), pp. 51-65; and Irving Kristol, "Who Now Cares About NATO," *Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 1995, p. 12. Proposing NATO's fundamental transformation is Charles A. Kupchan, "Reconstructing the West: The Case for an Atlantic Union," pp. 64-91, in Kupchan, ed., *Atlantic Security*.

³¹ Madeleine K. Albright, "The Right Balance Will Secure NATO's Future," *Financial Times*, December 7, 1998, p. 16.

³² Stephen M. Walt, "The Ties that Fray: Why Europe and America are Drifting Apart," *The National Interest*, no. 54 (Winter 1998/99), pp. 3-11, here p. 11.

³³ "The Alliance's Strategic Concept," paragraph 20.

³⁴ Former German Defense Minister Volker Rühle has stated that Russian membership would effectively destroy the Alliance. See Rick Atkinson, "Allies Seek New Ties to Bind NATO," *Washington Post*, September 10, 1994, p. A16.

³⁵ Albright, Statement at the North Atlantic Council, December 16, 1997, p. 5, emphasis in original.

³⁶ Albright, Statement at the North Atlantic Council, December 16, 1997, p. 5

³⁷ Cf. Richard N. Haass, ed., *Transatlantic Tensions: The United States, Europe, and Difficult States* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

³⁸ See especially Tony Blair, "It's Time to Repay America," *New York Times*, November 13, 1998, p. 31; "Statement on European Defence," Text of a Joint Statement by the British and French Governments, Franco-British-Summit, Saint-Malo, France, December 4, 1998; and *The Strategic Defense Review*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty (London: The Stationery Office, July 1998).

³⁹ A key motivation for the British push was London's belief that Washington's refusal in 1998 to consider deploying ground forces alongside the Europeans in and around Kosovo severely limited NATO's ability to effect a favorable resolution to the conflict there. See Joseph Fitchett, "A More United Europe Worries About Globalizing NATO," *International Herald Tribune*, December 31, 1998, p. 4.