

THE REINVENTION OF NATO

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At the end of the Cold War, many observers predicted the dissolution of NATO. The alliance was created during the Cold War in order in order to defend Western Europe against a presumed Soviet threat. Now that the Cold War had ended and the Soviet Union itself had ceased to exist, it seemed only reasonable to anticipate the demise of the alliance.

Yet NATO has not only outlasted the threat it was supposed to contain but has actually seen a considerable expansion in terms of its membership, its military activities and the geographical area of its operations. The alliance now has twenty-six members, compared to sixteen in 1990. NATO never went to war during the years of East-West confrontation; it did so in 1999, more than a decade after the Cold War had ended, when it took military action against Yugoslavia. The core provision of the North Atlantic Treaty (Article 5), which provides for collective defence in the event of an armed attack against a member state, was invoked for the first time in 2001, in the wake of 9/11. When the Soviet occupation forces withdrew from Afghanistan, not even a prophet could have foreseen that, in little more than a decade, NATO would step into a role in distant Afghanistan.

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These seeming paradoxes are explained by two factors. In the first place, states and alliances tend to redefine their goals in response to major shifts in the distribution of power. The post-Cold War evolution of NATO precept and practice provides an example. After the disappearance of the Soviet threat, NATO expanded its aims to cover a wide range of new “strategic risks and challenges”. It also embarked on an undeclared policy of “neo-containment” of Russia.

Second, while NATO’s central objective was the defence of West Europe, the alliance has always served other objectives as well. NATO’s *raison d’être* has never been confined exclusively to defence against an external threat. From its inception, NATO has served also to maintain or promote an *internal* power balance between its members. This latter objective continues to be valid even though it has undergone some mutation.

NATO’s first secretary-general, Lord Ismay, once famously observed that the alliance was intended to keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down. The United States had to be persuaded not to disengage from Europe, as they had done after World War I. This was the only basis on which West Europe could be defended against a presumed Russian military threat. Though post-war Germany was a divided and occupied country, her neighbours still entertained lively fears of German revanchism and the alliance, in its early years, served to assuage these fears.

France and some other European countries were initially opposed to permitting the Federal Republic of Germany to enter the alliance. It was only after the United States succeeded in overcoming this resistance that the FRG joined the alliance in 1955. The reasoning that carried the day was that, by incorporating it as a member, the alliance would serve to absorb and contain the military potential of the FRG. The German factor in the alliance took a further turn in the 1980s as a result of exploratory initiatives for German unification. The United States made it clear that it would not accept an unaligned Germany and that retention of Germany in NATO was the only acceptable basis for reunification.

Germany has consistently shown great sensitivity for the fears and concerns of its smaller neighbours, repeatedly demonstrating its willingness to firmly anchor its military and economic potential within NATO and EU structures. However, the evolution of a EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), together with a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) has given rise to a new question, or rather, a mutation of the German question. What should be the relationship between ESDI and NATO? Should EU military initiatives be cleared by NATO, drawing upon the alliance's military assets, or should they be launched autonomously by the EU? The answers to these questions hold the key to the internal power balance between the transatlantic partners, the US and the EU. NATO today serves to absorb and contain the EU's military potential, just as it once served to "de-nationalise" Germany's potential.

This paper traces the evolution of NATO after the Cold War focusing on the enlargement of the alliance and its implications for Russia; NATO's New Security Concept and its significance for "out of area" operations; and the EU-NATO connection and its implications for continued American leadership of the alliance. Its concluding section sums up the impact of these developments on the global power structure and NATO's role outside Europe.

NATO enlargement and neo-containment

In 1990, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington gave Moscow an assurance that NATO would not expand its role beyond the borders of Germany. Secretary of State Baker told President Gorbachev: "If we maintain a presence in Germany that is part of NATO, there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east."¹ We cannot conclude that Baker was being deliberately untruthful. Major shifts in the power balance often induce changes of policy. Baker's assurance was offered before the implosion of the Soviet Union. It did not long survive that dramatic shift in the global balance of power and the new opportunities presented to the western allies.

¹ Strobe Talbott: *The Russia Hand*, pp.93, 441. The Random House Trade Paperback Edition, 2003.

The initial impetus for enlargement came from the presidents of three former Warsaw Pact countries. In April 1993, Lech Walesa of Poland, Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic, and Arpad Goncz of Hungary pleaded with Bill Clinton for acceptance of their countries as NATO members. Estonia made a similar request in May, arguing that this was essential in order to prevent a future Russian re-occupation.²

Washington was at first divided on the issue. The State Department saw long-term advantages in enlargement but the Pentagon was apprehensive that its immediate effect would be to antagonize Moscow and to impede Russia's demilitarization and the denuclearization of Ukraine. As an interim measure, the Pentagon suggested the creation of a Partnership for Peace, a limited programme of co-operation open to all former Warsaw Pact members. This would not alienate Moscow since membership would be open to Russia. Clinton adopted the proposal as an interim measure.³ The Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme was duly launched by NATO in January 1994.

The crux of the problem facing US policymakers was accurately summed up by Clinton during a cabinet room meeting in February 1997. The problem, he observed, was about "keeping Russia sullen but not mutinous while we take its former allies into NATO."⁴ The United States solved the problem by accommodating Russia's quest for status (while denying it power) and paying close attention to the proper timing of its moves. In May 1997, NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, a document hailed as an "historic agreement" providing for an "enhanced partnership". The frequent US-Russia summits marked by exhibitions of camaraderie and Russia's inclusion in the G-8 served a similar purpose. Enlargement of the alliance was delayed until Russia's military forces had been run down and Ukraine's denuclearisation completed. It was only in July 1997 – after the Russian presidential elections held earlier in the year – that NATO invited the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to begin accession talks.

² Talbott, 2003, p.94.

³ Talbott, 2003, p.98-9.

⁴ Talbott, p. 234.

Two rounds of NATO enlargement have taken place to date. In 1999 - almost a decade after the Soviet collapse - the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were admitted as members of the alliance. The second tranche - consisting of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia – was inducted in 2004. Other prospective candidates include Albania, Croatia and Macedonia.

The West European allies were initially reluctant to antagonize Moscow but they were gradually brought around to accept the case for enlargement.⁵ Apart from domestic political pressures (originating from the Polish lobby), two major considerations explain the US decision to press the allies to accept enlargement.⁶ First, in view of the central importance of the alliance for America's leadership role in Europe, there were concerns about the threat of redundancy facing NATO after the demise of the Cold War. As Strobe Talbott, then US Deputy Secretary of State, explained:

*The decision to expand the alliance began with a question. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, should there remain, on the landscape of Europe, a military alliance or should NATO retire voluntarily in the ash heap of history?*⁷

Enlargement would not only provide a shot in the arm for an ailing alliance but would also expand the US role in Europe. In the words of two influential members of Washington's foreign policy establishment, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Anthony Lake, it would "enhance relations between the US and the enlarging democratic Europe".⁸

⁵ The German Defence Minister, Volker Ruhe, was an exception among European statesmen. He disagreed with Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and openly pressed for enlargement. See Volker Ruhe, "adapting the Alliance in the face of greater challenges", *NATO Review*, December 1993.

⁶ For a balanced analysis of US policy, see Peter Rudolph, "The USA and NATO Enlargement", *German Foreign affairs Review*, 4th Quarter, 1996.

⁷ Strobe Talbott, "Why the Transformed NATO Deserves to Survive and Enlarge", *International Herald Tribune*, 19 February 1997.

⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski and Anthony Lake, "The Moral and Strategic Imperatives of NATO Enlargement". *International Herald Tribune*, 1 July 1997.

An even weightier factor was the policy that has been described as “neo-containment” of Russia.⁹ In the words of Brzezinski and Lake, “an expanded alliance provides a hedge against the unlikely but very real possibility that Russia will revert to past behavior.”¹⁰

By permanently incorporating most of central and east Europe into the western alliance, NATO has preempted a future Russian attempt to regain a measure of its former influence in central Europe or to reabsorb the Baltic constituents of the former USSR. Adopting a neo-containment strategy, the alliance has seized the opportunity offered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia’s current disarray to expand into the strategic space vacated by the former USSR and to erect a permanent barrier against a future resurgence of Russian influence in Europe.

Moscow has been particularly concerned about NATO’s expansion to its “near abroad”, the Baltic Republics that were formerly part of the USSR. The vital Russian naval base of Kaliningrad has now become an enclave surrounded by NATO territory, being sandwiched between Lithuania and Poland. Kaliningrad is dependent upon the western powers for transit facilities and there is every possibility that the alliance will exploit this dependence to weaken the links between the enclave and the rest of Russia, for example, by encouraging moves for autonomy and offering preferential economic ties with the European Union.

Yet, the Russian reaction, as Clinton had anticipated, has been “sullen but not mutinous”. In March 1997, Foreign Minister Primakov threatened that “if any countries of the former Soviet Union are admitted to NATO, we will have no relations with NATO whatsoever.”¹¹ The Russian reaction turned out to be much more restrained. The Foreign Ministry spokesman avoided a confrontational line, complaining only that “in admitting the Baltic

⁹ For an analysis based on an “offensive realism” approach, see Christopher Layne, “US Hegemony and the Perpetuation of NATO”, in Ted Galen Carpenter (ed.), *NATO Enters the 21st Century*, pp.50-91, Frank Cass, London, 2001.

¹⁰ Brzezinski and Lake, 1997. These words were echoed by Jesse Helms, Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, who wrote: “a central strategic rationale for expanding NATO must be to hedge against the possible return of a nationalist or imperialist Russia”. See Jesse Helms, “New Members, Not New Missions”, *Wall Street Journal*, 9 July 1997.

¹¹ Talbott, 2003, p. 236.

States and arranging guarantees for their security, many in NATO apparently proceeded from previous perceptions that a war is possible in Europe.” Foreign Minister merely observed that it was “high time to start developing structures that would leave no one [i.e. Russia] feeling excluded.”

New “Security Challenges and Risks” and “Out of Area” Operations

By 1990, NATO was an alliance in search of a threat. The Cold War was over. The Warsaw Pact had been dissolved and its former central European members had freed themselves from the role of subordinate allies of the USSR. Soviet forces had already been withdrawn from Hungary and Czechoslovakia and were scheduled to leave Poland and Germany by 1994. The Baltic Republics had broken away from the USSR. Thus, Soviet capabilities, as well as intentions, had undergone a radical transformation. A buffer zone had come into existence between NATO and the USSR. The balance of power had shifted decisively in favour of the western alliance. The threat of a massive Soviet Union of West Europe had ceased to be credible to even the most ardent Cold Warrior.

Strategic Concept: It was against this background that the NATO summit held in Rome in November 1991 adopted a revised Strategic Concept for the alliance. The revision acknowledged that the threat of a major Soviet invasion had “effectively been removed and thus no longer provides the focus for allied strategy”, even though “Soviet military capability and build-up potential, including its nuclear dimension, still constitute the most significant factor which the alliance has to take into account in maintaining the strategic balance in Europe.” Collective defence against an invasion of the territory of a member state (under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty) retained its formal place as the core task of the alliance but it was recognized that this was a highly improbable contingency.

Having discounted the Soviet threat, the Strategic Concept now identified a number of new “security challenges and risks” of a “multi-faceted” and “multi-directional” nature. These included instability in central and east Europe arising from such causes as ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes. Similarly, the alliance was concerned about the prospect of instability in

its southern periphery, in North Africa and the Mediterranean region. Finally, the strategic concept also asserted that alliance security interests could be affected in a global context by such diverse “risks” as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), terrorism and sabotage, and disruption of the flow of oil or other vital resources.

In one important respect, the November 1991 Strategic Concept was out of date within a few weeks of its adoption. The Soviet Union ceased to exist in December. The disintegration of the USSR created a second layer of buffer states between NATO and the new Russia. The possibility of a revived Russian “threat” in the proximate future could be further discounted.

This was rapidly followed by two further developments which re-shaped NATO’s strategic concerns. First, Russia progressively sank into economic and administrative chaos, resulting in a sharp decline in her military capabilities. Though the Western allies continued to be alive to the long-term possibility of a resurrection of Russian power, their immediate anxieties were now focused on Moscow’s control over its nuclear and missile assets. Second, the Yugoslav federation fell apart in stages, heightening NATO concerns about instability in its Balkan neighbourhood.

The combined effect of these developments was to further concentrate NATO’s focus on the new “security challenges and risks” already identified in the 1991 Strategic Concept. This was reflected in the *New Strategic Concept* adopted by the alliance in April 1999. The updated concept dropped all direct references to Russia in enumerating its concerns (except for a non-specific reference to the need to take into account the “existence of powerful nuclear forces outside the alliance.”). Thus it focused even more closely on the new “military and non-military risks which are multi-directional and often difficult to predict”, including those posed by non-State actors.

NATO’s new security concerns gave rise to two related questions. Should “risks and challenges” (as distinct from “threats”) be addressed through political consultations and initiatives under Article 4 of the Treaty, or also through military means? Should the alliance

undertake “out of theatre” operations and, if so, within what geographical limits? The transatlantic partners were divided on these questions. The US took a more muscular view of the role of the alliance, insisting that its role should be to defend the *interests* of the allies, not merely their territorial borders. It opposed placing specific territorial limits to NATO’s theatre of operations. The Europeans placed much greater emphasis on political - as distinct from military - initiatives, and they pressed for retaining the focus on Europe and its periphery. They were prepared to contemplate military action only on NATO’s periphery. Even within this area, until 1999, they envisaged military operations outside Article 5 only when a UN or OSCE mandate could be obtained.

During the Cold War, it was understood that NATO’s mandate did not extend beyond Europe. NATO as an alliance was not involved in East-West conflicts outside Europe. It played no role in the Vietnam War; indeed, some members of the alliance were critical of US policies during the Indo-China conflict.

Expanding political horizons After the Cold War, NATO’s political horizons underwent a certain expansion, as reflected in its revised strategic concept. Such “risks and challenges” as NBC proliferation, terrorism and disruption of oil supplies could originate from distant areas. An additional factor was the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, under which the alliance built up a new network of political ties with the Caucasian and Central Asian republics that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. As a result of these factors, Asia entered NATO’s field of vision, but initially only in a political sense and not as a potential area of military deployment.

As already noted, the 1991 Strategic Concept identified *proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons* as one of the major “risks” faced by the alliance. NATO concerns were stimulated not only by the problem of exercising effective export controls in the former USSR but also by other developments, in particular the clandestine Iraqi and DPRK WMD programmes. These “risks” were to be addressed through political initiatives. The “Alliance Policy Framework on Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction” adopted by

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NATO ministers in June 1994, declared that the “principal non-proliferation goal of the alliance and its members is to prevent proliferation from occurring or, should it occur, to reverse it *through diplomatic means*” (emphasis added). Since it might not always be possible to prevent or reverse proliferation through diplomatic means, the strategic concept also drew attention to the need to “address the military capabilities needed to discourage WMD proliferation and use, and if necessary, to protect NATO territory, populations, and forces”.

However, by 1997, US proliferation concerns led Washington to press for a revision of NATO policy. At the NATO ministerial meeting in December 1997, Secretary of State Albright sought to elevate WMD proliferation to the position of a new “unifying threat” for the alliance. She stated:

During the Cold War, we were brought together by our over-riding interest in containing the Soviet Union...Many people believe that we no longer face such a unifying threat, but I believe we do, and NATO has recognized it before. It is to stop the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. It is to douse the combustible combination of technology and terror, the possibility, as unthinkable as it may seem, that weapons of mass destruction will fall into the hands of people who have no compunction about using them.

This threat emanates largely from the Middle East and Eurasia, so Europe is especially at risk. It is the overriding security interest of our time, in the sense that it simply cannot be balanced against competing political or commercial concerns.¹²

Albright specifically referred to Iraq where, she said, unconditional and unrestricted access to sites had yet to be secured. She also referred indirectly to Iran, noting that in certain problem areas, the US and its European allies “have not always seen eye to eye, especially when it comes to the proper balance between sanctions and diplomacy.

¹² US Mission to NATO, *Statement by Madeleine Albright during the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 16 December 1997 (Morning Session).*

The elevation of WMD proliferation to “rogue states” from “risk” to “unifying threat” was not accepted by the allies. The Final Communiqué issued by the meeting merely reiterated the earlier position that proliferation posed “risks” for the alliance (as distinct from a “threat”) and that the aim of the alliance was to “prevent proliferation from occurring, or should it occur, to reverse it through diplomatic means”.

Thus, when India conducted the Pokharan tests a few months later, NATO ministers issued a condemnatory statement (broadly on the lines of the earlier G-8 statement).¹³ News of the Pakistani tests (which reached Brussels shortly after the NATO ministerial meeting) evoked a similar response from the NATO Secretary-General. The Indian and Pakistani tests did not result in any revision in NATO’s approach to proliferation. The concerns that led the US to press for a policy review in December 1997 were related to Iraq and Iran – described by Washington as “rogue states”- not South Asia.

Six years later, the underlying differences between the allies erupted dramatically when the US went to war against Iraq in order to destroy its supposed WMD capability. The Iraq war brought to the surface not only a deep transatlantic rift but also a division within Europe itself. France and Germany took the lead in opposing the US at the Security Council, playing a much more prominent role than Russia or China. On the other hand, Britain, Italy and Netherlands were troop contributors and they were joined by contingents from all the new members of the alliance, with the exception of Slovenia.

“Out of area” operations: If proliferation concerns extended NATO’s political horizons, two other elements of the new “security risks and challenges” – instability in its peripheral regions and terrorism – led the alliance to undertake “out of area” operations outside its borders. The chaotic situation resulting from the disintegration of *Yugoslavia* drew NATO into a peace-keeping and peace-enforcement role, for the first time. In December 1992, the alliance declared its readiness to support peace-keeping operations under the authority of the

¹³ *Statement by the North Atlantic Council on The Indian Tests*, NATO Press Release (98)/58, 20 May 1998.

UN Security Council. It subsequently undertook a number of peace-keeping and peace-enforcement operations - monitoring and enforcing the UN embargo in the Adriatic; enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina; providing close air support for UNPROFOR and carrying out air strikes in Bosnia-Herzegovina. All these operations were conducted under the authority of the UN Security Council.

The principle of acting under a UN mandate was compromised for the first time in 1998, when NATO threatened to use force unless Yugoslavia accepted a set of proposals to resolve the Kosovo problem. US Assistant Secretary Holbrooke announced that the decision had set a new precedent freeing NATO to engage in “out of area” operations even without a Security Council mandate, as long as it acted in accordance with the “principles of the UN Charter”. Most of the European allies distanced themselves from this interpretation but time was to show that Holbrooke had drawn the correct conclusion. If the alliance failed to implement its threat, it would lose its credibility - an unacceptable price for the allies. It was this consideration that finally led many of the initial doubters to acquiesce in the decision to launch military operations against Yugoslavia. The alliance bypassed the Security Council where it would have invited a Russian veto. Russian objections were brushed aside. In the absence of a countervailing power, NATO decided to assert its authority in the Balkans, asserting a “right of humanitarian intervention”. For the first time in its history, the alliance went to war and it did so outside its borders, for a purpose unconnected with the defence of its territories, and without a UN mandate.

Curiously, it was the disarray over Iraq, in conjunction with 9/11, that eventually caused NATO to stumble into *Asia*. In Europe, as in many other parts of the world, there was a great outpouring of sympathy for the United States after 9/11. Previous terrorist attacks in NATO countries (e.g. the Lockerbie and the Munich night club incidents) had not been viewed as matters involving the alliance. 9/11 was different: it was an attack on a far greater scale, it involved the leading member of the alliance and, finally, terrorism had come to occupy a much higher place in NATO’s priorities. NATO’s response to 9/11 was to invoke

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, for the first time in its history. A member state had been subjected to an armed attack and a collective response would have been in order.

Washington, however, did not avail itself of the implied offer, choosing instead to launch a unilateral counterattack against the Al-Qaeda and its Taliban accomplices in Afghanistan. US failure to consult NATO caused resentment among the allies. The NATO Secretary-General, Lord Robertson, has revealed that “there was an assumption that the alliance would be asked to do more than it was ultimately asked at that time, and that maybe has left some bruises behind.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, a number of NATO and PfP countries contributed peace-keeping contingents to the UN–mandated International Assistance Force (ISAF), accounting for the bulk of the force. Secretary-General Robertson and the German Defence Minister, Peter Struck, saw in these contingents an opportunity to fashion a role for NATO in the Afghanistan. They hoped that this would change the image of an alliance hobbled by deep differences over Iraq.¹⁵

NATO foreign ministers met in April 2003 at the suggestion of the US, in an effort to bridge the divide in the alliance. A US proposal that the alliance should assume a role in post-conflict Iraq had to be abandoned for want of adequate support. Afghanistan, however, provided an opportunity for demonstrating alliance cohesiveness. There was general agreement in favour of a NATO role in ISAF. Lord Robertson rightly commented: “I think six months ago this would have been inconceivable.”¹⁶

Accordingly, in August 2003, ISAF was placed under NATO auspices. ISAF became a NATO-led force operating under a UN mandate. NATO thus stumbled into Afghanistan. The alliance was engaged in Central Asia. The “inconceivable” had happened.

¹⁴ Michael R. Gordon, *NATO Chief Says Alliance Needs Role in Afghanistan*, New York Times, 21 February 2003.

¹⁵ See Note 7.

¹⁶ Press Statement by NATO Secretary-General, 3 April 2003. *NATO Online Library*. Updated 3 April 2003.

The US and the ISAF operations in Afghanistan have enhanced the importance of NATO's Central Asian Partners for Peace. Apart from logistical facilitation, some of the Central Asian republics are in a position to make a political contribution to the success of these missions. In the words of a senior NATO official: "given the diverse ethnic make-up of Afghanistan, several Central Asian Partners also have influence on important local actors, which they use in support of ISAF objectives. As a result of these various factors, the states of Central Asia, once considered as being on the periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area, are now an important neighbouring region of the Alliance."¹⁷

To sum up, in the absence of a countervailing power, two of the new "security threats and challenges" discerned by NATO – instability on its periphery and terrorism - have led the alliance, step by step, to extend the objectives and geographical range of its operations. Concerns about instability in a peripheral region drew the alliance into a peace-keeping and peace-enforcement role in the Balkans and, eventually, into military action against Yugoslavia. The massive terrorist assault on 9/11 led initially to invocation of Article 5 and eventually to a NATO-led operation in distant Afghanistan.

EU, NATO and US Primacy

We saw earlier that NATO's rationale was never confined exclusively to maintaining the external balance against the erstwhile Soviet Union. The alliance has also helped to preserve the internal distribution of power between its members. It is the main instrument of US primacy, or "leadership", in Europe and it has ensured that no rival power should emerge among the allies. During the Cold War, the main internal question in the alliance revolved around Germany's place in Europe. Since deterrence was largely based on US nuclear weapons and delivery systems, American leadership was unquestioned during the Cold War period, except for occasional French grumbling. Indeed, in the early years of the alliance, Europe was doubly dependent upon the US since its post-war economic recovery relied

¹⁷ Robert Weaver, "Continuing to build security through partnership", *NATO Review*, Spring 2003. Weaver is the Political Affairs Director at NATO Headquarters.

heavily upon the Marshall Plan. It has been said that “America’s post-1945 informal empire was indeed an ‘empire by invitation’”¹⁸

This situation changed in the closing years of the twentieth century as a result of the interplay of two new factors. First, the Soviet threat passed into history. West Europe ceased to be critically dependent on the US in the realm of defence. Second, the slow process of European integration entered new phase. Under the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the European Community (EC), which had dealt mainly with economic trade matters, was converted into the European Union (EU) and given a limited but progressively developing role in the foreign policy and security sphere. The treaty launched an EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Adding a military dimension to the new project, the EU decided in December 1999 to develop an “autonomous capacity to take decisions, and where NATO as a whole is not engaged, to launch and conduct EU-led military operations in response to international crises.”¹⁹ The idea of an alliance in which Brussels would be an equal partner of Washington began to be debated in parallel with the growth of the political dimension of the EU.

France took the lead in the debate. Paris envisages a truly independent EU military capability and a decision-making process located exclusively within EU structures. The linkage with NATO would be limited to coordination. France envisages the European Union as an equal partner of the United States in a multi-polar world. The vision has been spelled out by Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin.

*This new world must be based on a number of regional poles. They are the cornerstones of an international community built on solidarity and unity in the face of new challenges. The determination of the European countries to develop a common foreign and security policy must reflect that.*²⁰

¹⁸ Geir Lundstad, *The American ‘Empire’ and Other Studies of US Foreign Policy in a Comparative Perspective*, OUP, New York, 1990, cited in Layne, 2001, p.89.

¹⁹ Presidency Conclusions, Helsinki Summit. Reported in *Boletín Quotidien Europe* (Brussels), 12 December 1999.

²⁰ Speech delivered at IISS, London, 27 March 2003.

All Europeans do not share the vision. Britain is committed to pursuit of its “special relationship’ with the United States. Many other Europeans are also more comfortable with a continent dominated by Washington than one, which they suspect, might be dominated by a Paris-Berlin axis. Thus a leading Polish editor has commented: “we can’t put up with an EU in which France and Germany have the last say. And we don’t want an anti-American EU.”²¹ Post-war Europe has buried ancient animosities but not rivalries. The disarray in the European Union was starkly evident during the US-led war against Iraq.

In themselves, the steps taken so far by the EU have been quite modest. CFSP amounts to little more than partial coordination of the diverse - and sometimes divergent – national foreign policies of EU member states. The EU has a limited competency in foreign and defence policy matters. While EU decisions in trade matters are taken on the basis of a qualified majority), CFSP and CSDP decisions require unanimity (with unimportant exceptions). In other words, the EU functions as a supranational authority in the sphere of international trade but only as an intergovernmental body in the area of foreign and security policy. An EU army is not contemplated; the EU military capability consists of national contingents earmarked for EU by their respective governments. Moreover, there is no agreement on the end goal of the process of political integration. The EU states are deeply divided on the extent to which they are prepared to pool sovereignty in the areas of foreign and defence policy. There are rival visions of a “Federal Europe” and a “Europe of Nations.”

The asymmetry in the EU’s competency in the commercial and political areas has very important implications for the global power structure. In the area of international trade, where the EU acts like a supranational or federal entity, it is able to exercise a degree of influence equal, or at least comparable, to that of the US. A unipolar situation does not exist in the world of commerce. It exists in the political-military sphere, where an EU with limited

²¹ Adam Michnik, editor of *Gazeta Wyboreza*, cited in article entitled “Union but Not Unanimity as Europe’s East joins West”, *New York Times*, 11 March 2004.

competency is in no position to challenge US primacy. Unilateralism is a feasible option for Washington in political issues because Europe remains divided – mainly by choice but also as a result of US policy.

Even though European federation is at best a distant prospect, it has the potential to undermine US primacy in the Atlantic alliance and, indeed, unipolarity itself. Hence, US policy is to press for subordination of ESDP to NATO structures. With the support of many EU countries opposed to the federal goal, Washington demands that any EU military operation should first be considered within NATO and the question of an EU operation would arise only if the alliance as a whole decided not to undertake the mission but to authorize the EU to do so. Second, the US insists that “duplication of assets” should be avoided, in the sense that the EU should refrain from building up the independent intelligence, command and control, and airlift capabilities for which the Europeans are currently dependent on NATO assets. Third, European members of NATO who are not EU members (Turkey, in particular) should be allowed to participate in EU policy-making. These restrictions deny the EU a truly autonomous decision-making capability as well as an independent military capability for undertaking any significant operations. In effect, they subordinate an EU force to NATO and give the US a veto over any EU operation. Currently, under the “Berlin Plus” arrangements (agreed in March 1993), the NATO deputy commander in Europe (Deputy SACEUR) will “in principle” act as the operational commander for EU-led operations. In security matters, the EU is unable to act independently of NATO or to pose a challenge to US primacy.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has served as an instrument for preempting a possible resurgence of Russian assertiveness in Europe, a policy that has been described as “neo-containment”. Five Central European states that were formerly members of the Warsaw Pact (Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) have been incorporated into the western alliance, together with the Baltic republics that broke away from the erstwhile Soviet Union. The Russian naval base in Kaliningrad has now become an

enclave within NATO territory. Russia's powerlessness was vividly demonstrated during and after the NATO military campaign against Yugoslavia.

NATO has also helped contain and absorb trends in the EU towards a greater measure of political integration through a European Security and Defence Identity. A federal Europe is in any case a distant and uncertain prospect, given the deep divisions within the EU on the goal. NATO has served as a double lock to thwart EU political integration. In an earlier period, the alliance had been employed to absorb and contain Germany's military potential; today, it serves a similar purpose in relation to the EU. NATO is the principal instrument of American leadership of the transatlantic alliance.

By preempting a revival of Russian influence in Europe and by checking the emergence of an autonomous EU military capability, NATO helps to preserve US primacy in Europe and to prevent the emergence of a rival power in the continent. It is thus one of the mainstays of the unipolar international system. In this sense, NATO's significance is not limited to North America and Europe; it has a global relevance.

From an Asian view-point, there is a further reason for paying closer attention to NATO. The alliance has broken with past practice and taken a first step into Asia. There is no reason to believe that this will be the last step.

NATO's arrival in Afghanistan has inspired advocacy of a major expansion in the role of the alliance in Asia. Thus an article in the official journal, *NATO Review* argues:

Whereas a decade ago NATO's prime concern was the stabilization and transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, today it is addressing problems coming from, or passing through, countries of the "Greater Middle East". If NATO is to meet the security concerns of its members, it will have to shift the focus of its attention from Central and Eastern Europe to this region over the coming months and years.

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This grand theoretical vision disregards a number of practical problems. There are major unresolved differences between the US and its leading European allies on the most important Middle Eastern issues – Iraq, Iran and Palestine. Washington has not succeeded in persuading France, Germany and a number of its other European allies to accept a NATO involvement in Iraq, with the exception of a marginal role in training the new Iraqi forces. Indeed, many of the allies who had earlier loyally contributed troops to the US-led occupation force have pulled out their contingents, or are in the process of doing so. The “coalition of the willing” is fast becoming a “coalition of the reluctant”. In regard to Iran, there is an even clearer division in the alliance. Britain is united with France and Germany in opposing US calls for economic sanctions against Tehran to compel it to accept non-proliferation demands. Similarly, the transatlantic partners are split over the Arab-Israeli question. There is little chance of NATO assuming a role in the Middle East on any of these issues.

If the alliance does expand its activities in Asia, it is more likely to do so through incremental steps in response to specific situations, rather than by embracing a grand design. Such advances are more likely in Central Asia and the Caucasus rather than the Middle East. In *Afghanistan*, the NATO-led ISAF is currently expanding its area of operations. ISAF’s role was initially confined to Kabul and its environs. It is now extending its constructive role to areas outside the capital region, under a mandate provided by the Security Council in October 2003. It should be noted that the Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan were adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which authorizes enforcement actions. Though ISAF is described as a peacekeeping operation, its mandate extends beyond mere observation and covers enforcement measures. The Partnership for Peace agreements between NATO and the republics of *Central Asia and the Caucasus* provide for “consultations” in the event of a threat to security; they neither explicitly provide nor exclude military cooperation in dealing with such threats. The existence of US air bases in Central Asia enables the alliance to respond to an appeal for military assistance, should it choose to do so. One cannot, therefore, rule out a possible NATO role (presumably in coordination with Russia), in a contingency involving a major terrorist threat in Central Asia. Similarly, one can

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speculate about a possible NATO peacekeeping role in the strife-torn Caucasus. None of this may actually come to pass but Asia will be affected, one way or the other, by NATO's moves in regions with an explosive mix of oil and terrorism.

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