

The Miscalculation of NATO's Death

RYAN C. HENDRICKSON

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) continues to be the subject of considerable academic scrutiny and criticism. Starting with the Soviet Union's collapse and continuing through the bitter transatlantic dispute over Operation Iraqi Freedom, analysts in Europe and the United States have confidently predicted NATO's destiny of irrelevancy, if not total collapse. The view that the "United States is from Mars and Europe is from Venus" permeated much of the discussion surrounding NATO's future and its alleged trend toward insignificance.¹ American unilateralism under President George W. Bush and the views expressed by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld—that the future of multilateral security centers around "coalitions of the willing" rather than NATO, and that "old Europe" was out of step with modern security necessities—did much to lend credence to this view.² The acrid debate over Iraq between former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and President George W. Bush, whose immediate predecessors arguably built the foundation for NATO's post-Cold War survival, provided some observers with bona fide evidence of NATO's downfall.³

These perspectives capture part of NATO's evolution in one of its more difficult periods. NATO has not been without trials and tribulations in its post-Cold War life. Such views, however, often focus heavily on recent conflict-ridden aspects of the transatlantic relationship and fail to recognize why NATO continues to exist and play an instrumental role in fostering transatlantic security interests. This article provides a more balanced assessment of the alliance. Through a brief examination of NATO's history and ability to overcome previous crises, coupled with an analysis of the ongoing impact of NATO's expansion, its institutional flexibility to reshape itself after 9/11, and the renewed

interest from NATO's great powers, this analysis helps explain why NATO's skeptics have inaccurately portrayed the alliance's current condition. While it is clear that the transatlantic marriage remains rocky at times, such "gloom and doom" scenarios of NATO that are so popular today misrepresent the alliance's previous achievements and ongoing security functions. The article begins with a brief survey of recent literature on NATO, follows with a short summary of NATO's ability to overcome previous crises, and continues with an analysis of NATO's ongoing security functions and transformation. The article concludes with a discussion of how the major powers continue to utilize NATO within their larger national security policies, all of which gives reason to be skeptical about NATO's current critics and doomsayers.

NATO Skeptics

In the lead-up to the war in Iraq, with the NATO allies sorely divided over whether to provide defensive measures to protect Turkey in the event that Iraq decided to attack, then US Ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, referred to the political differences at NATO as a "crisis of credibility."⁴ The debate over how to address Saddam Hussein, coupled with the United States' decision to act without NATO in its 2001 strikes on the Taliban after 9/11, led a number of observers to argue that by 2003, NATO's place in transatlantic security had been badly, if not irreparably damaged. To many analysts it appeared that the United States, under President George W. Bush, had moved in a completely different direction from the European public and many European governments. In contrast to the Clinton administration, President Bush was viewed in Europe as far more unilateral and nationalistic in pursuing his administration's foreign policy ambitions, which had provoked a visceral political backlash from many in Europe, especially Belgium, France, and Germany.⁵

Analysts also point to NATO's war in Kosovo, noting that the military differences between the United States and Europe, and the absence of interoperable weaponry among the allies, made for an unequal partnership at best. The vast differences in military capabilities made many European militaries unattractive, if not unhelpful partners to the United States. Moreover, the joint war planning efforts in 1999, which involved debates over tactical decisions of the war, rubbed many American military planners the wrong way and consequently placed NATO's functional future in question.⁶

Dr. Ryan C. Hendrickson is associate professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He is the author of *Diplomacy and War at NATO* (University of Missouri Press, 2006) and *The Clinton Wars* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2002).

Still others stress that post-Cold War changes implemented at NATO made the alliance become weak, without a well-defined mission. NATO's mission had become too broad and ad hoc, resulting in an alliance whose purpose had become confused and unclear as it took on more and more security and humanitarian functions that were arguably not relevant to the allies' national security interests. Although the criticism came from many quarters, much of this response was directed at NATO's decision to expand its alliance membership to Central and Eastern Europe. By including these newly democratized states into the alliance, NATO was ostensibly creating an organization of needy partners, who were decades behind the United States in their military capabilities and may not share the same security interests with the long-standing members of the alliance. An expansion to Eastern Europe especially was a recipe for the alliance's destruction, as an enlarged alliance would only further damage relations with Russia. Almost identical criticisms were raised when NATO expanded again at its 2002 Prague Summit, when the alliance invited seven additional countries to join its ranks.⁷

Many of the arguments that came in the late 1990s and during the administration of President George W. Bush were not necessarily new to the academic literature on NATO. In the early 1990s, in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, analysts most closely associated with the realist school of thought in international relations similarly stated that NATO's death was nearly a sure thing. Noted realist thinkers Waltz and Mearsheimer argued independently that without an external enemy (i.e., the Soviet Union) the alliance would lose its reason for existence. In a rather poignant manner, Mearsheimer noted, "It is the Soviet threat that provides the glue that holds NATO together. Take away that offensive threat and the United States is likely to abandon the Continent."⁸

Clearly, NATO's existence during the current Bush administration, especially in his first term in office, was difficult. The crisis in February 2003 that resulted over Turkey's invocation of NATO's Article 4 was one of the most arduous two weeks in the alliance's history and should not be underestimated.⁹ In addition, analysts are correct to highlight the growing divide in military capabilities between the United States, Europe, and Canada, which clearly limits the attractiveness of joint military operations.¹⁰ Yet despite these very real problems at NATO, the general tenor of much of the literature fails to capture why NATO continues to exist and why it remains a central player in transatlantic security. In contrast to what can be viewed as the "gloom and doom" scenarios presented of the modern NATO, a more balanced treatment of the alliance begins with an appreciation of its ability to overcome previous crises, and an understanding of the often traumatic Cold War debates that similarly seemed to threaten the transatlantic marriage.

When discussing NATO's problems today, NATO skeptics undervalue the vast discord within the alliance during the Cold War, and paint a falsely nostalgic view of NATO's transatlantic cooperation prior to the Soviet Union's collapse. In fact, much like today, NATO faced a number of internal battles during the Cold War that drove deep wounds into the transatlantic security community, yet were overcome with institutional evolution and adaptation.

NATO's History in Overcoming Crises

The threat of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe kept NATO's mission focused and limited for over 40 years. Given that the Soviet Union never invaded any of the NATO allies, and the communist empire began to crumble in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO can be considered as one of most successful military alliances in world history. Yet even a brief overview of NATO's history demonstrates that the alliance faced many internal debates, along with crises that arguably threatened the entirety of the alliance. Although one could identify a number of divisive policy differences among the allies during the Cold War, the focus here will be on primarily three crises in transatlanticism, which at the time—much like today—appeared to threaten alliance solidarity yet were rather quickly overcome. These events include the 1956 Suez Canal crisis, the French withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command in 1966, and President Ronald Reagan's decision to bomb Libya in 1986.

One of NATO's first major crises was the handling of the Suez Canal crisis, in which France and the United Kingdom cooperated with Israel to launch military strikes on Egypt for its decision to nationalize the Suez Canal. The strikes were conducted without any consultation at NATO and with NATO Secretary General Lord Hastings Ismay out of the decision-making process.¹¹ In fact, in the early military preparations for the strikes, the British made specific requests to their French counterparts to avoid any NATO involvement. In response to the strikes, the United States condemned the British-French-Israeli actions, and sided with the Soviet Union and Egypt in calling for the removal of Israeli forces from the region. Others in the alliance were upset with the British and French, given that the Soviet Union had just intervened in Hungary to suppress a democratic uprising, and that the alliance's credibility had now been threatened due to the open disagreements between allies. US President Dwight Eisenhower felt that he had been personally betrayed by the British due to the secret planning for the military strikes and the complete absence of consultation with the United States.¹² NATO historian Lawrence S. Kaplan notes that "the result was the near destruction of the alliance as the United States sided with the Soviets to oppose the Suez Operation."¹³

Yet after the crisis, a case can be made that the American-British relationship actually became stronger.¹⁴ In December 1956, NATO also accepted a report provided by the foreign ministers from Canada, Italy, and Norway (Lester Pearson, Halvard Lange, and Gaetano Martino), who later came to be known as NATO's "Three Wise Men." Their report, which had been called for by then US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, allowed for greater leadership authority from NATO's secretary general, who could formally propose measures to improve consultation at NATO and oversee all North Atlantic Council (NAC) sessions; NATO's official decisionmaking body. The report also allowed the NAC to broaden its scope of discussion by allowing any member of the alliance to raise any issue of concern. In addition, the report reaffirmed the allies' commitment to greater transatlantic consultation. Although the report had little immediate impact, it is clear that American, British, and French differences over military action in the Middle East were rather quickly overcome and that the alliance found consensus to work toward an improved and stronger NATO.¹⁵

Among NATO's most severe crises was the decision by French President Charles de Gaulle to demand the removal of NATO headquarters and military installations from France in 1966. In response, NATO was forced to move its political and military headquarters to Belgium and responded institutionally with the creation of the Defense Planning Committee since France no longer wished to work within NATO's integrated military command. Analysts have indicated that these events created "the most traumatic moment in NATO's history." Ludwig Erhard, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, worried at the time that France's decisions could make "the world go apart."¹⁶ American Ambassador to NATO Harlan Cleveland later downplayed the events by quoting a NATO official who maintained that the "French 'withdrawal' was a cheap, anti-American gesture, which changed almost nothing militarily."¹⁷ Yet de Gaulle's demands in fact forced a serious logistical problem for the allies in the short term. At the time, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, noted that de Gaulle's decision called for the relocation of "100,000 United States and NATO personnel and over one million tons of supplies and equipment of all types."¹⁸ In this regard, de Gaulle's decision suggested an open and deep division in the military front against the Soviet Union.

However, within a year of these events, NATO successfully relocated to Belgium. In addition, the alliance issued its Harmel Report, which most importantly, helped to reconcile the different diplomatic approaches preferred by American and European leaders to face the Soviet challenge. The report called for the allies to place dual emphasis on defense and détente approaches to address existing Cold War tensions. Although the United States later made clear

that its emphasis remained on defense, the Harmel Report is still viewed as a successful moment in NATO's history, and for the analysis here, provides meaningful evidence of the alliance's ability to overcome a crisis of the previous year.¹⁹ Even as one of NATO's most significant members distanced itself from the alliance, NATO quickly rebounded and made transformative changes in its mission while maintaining its political and strategic significance.

One additional crisis at NATO occurred when President Ronald Reagan conducted air strikes against Libya and its leader Muammar Qaddafi on 14 April 1986. The American strikes came as a result of Libya's involvement in a previous terrorist strike on a German dance club, which killed two US soldiers and one Turkish woman, and injured 229 others, including 60 Americans.²⁰ NATO allies were officially informed of the military action soon after the strikes occurred, when US Ambassador to NATO David M. Abshire met with NATO Secretary General Lord Carrington and the other NATO ambassadors to formally share the news. Prior to the attack the NATO ambassadors and North Atlantic Council were not consulted regarding the forthcoming military action. The absence of consultation with the allies in Brussels is noteworthy given that American General Bernard Rogers, then NATO's SACEUR, directed the bombings.²¹

With the exception of support from the Prime Minister from the United Kingdom, there was almost uniform European opposition to the bombing. Nearly two weeks after the strikes, Lord Carrington stated in an interview with the BBC: "The situation is as bad between Europe and America as I can remember in the period I have been associated with the alliance."²² In addition, France, who had been consulted with bilaterally by the United States prior to the strikes, had refused to allow the use of its airspace for American military aircraft en route to Libya. The lack of support generated a visceral response from the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Vernon Walters, and from some in the US Congress.²³ Yet like its crises before, NATO again moved forward and managed to survive this temporary setback in transatlantic differences. By the year's end, NATO's foreign and defense ministers had called jointly for the Soviet Union to support President Reagan's arms control efforts. NATO's foreign ministers also issued the Brussels Declaration on Conventional Arms Control, again aimed at the Soviet Union. In short, consensus was again reached on major issues of concern for the alliance, only months after one of the ostensibly deepest divisions in transatlantic unity.

Besides these three major crises, the NATO allies faced serious political differences during the Cold War over European defense spending levels, the Vietnam War, Germany's *Ostpolitik* foreign policy approach, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, the American military invasions of Grenada and Panama, the deployment of new American cruise and Pershing

II missiles in Europe, and the United States' Strategic Defense Initiative, among a host of issues.²⁴ Many of these differences evolved around how to confront the external enemy and were not tertiary to alliance interests; rather these issues hit at NATO's political core; its *raison d'être*. Thus, it is a stretch to be nostalgic about NATO's "commonly" shared vision during the Cold War. NATO's history is replete with profound transatlantic differences and internal debates, which the allies overcame. Recent analysts have failed to recognize NATO's history of discord, and how the alliance adapted to quite profound internal crises, much like it is attempting to do today. While there is no guarantee that NATO will fully overcome its current diplomatic challenges, NATO's ability to successfully address transatlantic discord suggests a pattern of dispute resolution and effective adaptation.

NATO's Prague Summit and Post-9/11 Evolution

Central to NATO's ability to survive and remain relevant after the Cold War's end was the alliance's willingness to redefine its new mission(s) in transatlantic security. In doing so, NATO agreed in 1991 to address conflict prevention and crisis management issues; it extended its diplomatic outreach and cooperative military partnerships to much of Central and Eastern Europe; perhaps most significantly NATO used force in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, which were followed by major peacekeeping operations in the Balkans.²⁵ Like many of the Cold War deliberations, the changes enacted after the Soviet Union's collapse and the bombing operations in the Balkans similarly entailed considerable debate over the appropriate direction for the alliance. Yet these changes produced fundamental change at NATO in its security functions. With the Soviet Union gone, NATO found new roles and can be viewed as a successful institutional adapter to the era's new security realities.²⁶ Now, in the aftermath of 9/11 and the crisis over Iraq, evidence again suggests that the alliance is in another stage of evolution and is anything but irrelevant.

At NATO's Prague Summit in November 2002, during the lead-up to the war in Iraq, a number of transformative changes were enacted in the alliance. Besides its willingness to expand its membership by seven members, its most fundamental changes were its agreements to create the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the implementation of a new command structure. The NRF promises a force of 25,000 troops, which involve air, land, and sea components, and special forces that could be deployed upon five days' notice for up to one month. While it has taken some prodding from the United States on its European allies to create this force, the allies announced at their Riga Summit that the NRF is now fully functional. Elements of the NRF performed admirably in response to the humanitarian crisis and earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, and successful training

operations have been conducted in Operations Steadfast Jackpot and Brilliant Mariner during 2006. All components of the NRF were tested for the first time from 14 to 28 June 2006 in Operation Steadfast Jaguar in the Cape Verde Islands. Much of the initial after-action reports suggest a higher degree of cooperation on this major facet of NATO's transformation.

NATO has also successfully adapted its military organizational structure. At Prague, NATO agreed to reduce its strategic operational commands from two to one. Now, the Allied Commander Operations near Mons, Belgium, is the headquarters for NATO's military strategy planning, which is overseen by the SACEUR. NATO also created a new functional command: Allied Command Transformation, located in Norfolk, Virginia, to assist in the alliance's ongoing evolution. In addition, NATO reduced its regional command centers from three to two, with commands located in Brunssum, Netherlands, and Naples, Italy, with an additional smaller headquarters located in Lisbon, Portugal. Its additional subordinate commands were reduced from 13 to six. This transformation has proceeded successfully.²⁷ The Prague Summit also produced a pledge from all the allies to improve their existing military capabilities, and an informal promise to meet the two percent gross national product spending level for national defense. These goals have not been met, and continue to be a sore point in United States-European relations, presenting real limitations as to how well the alliance can project force and meet new security threats in the future.²⁸ At the same time, these developments should not overshadow the progress the alliance has made with regard to its structural changes and efforts to create the NRF.

Since Operation Iraqi Freedom, another indicator of NATO's ability to adapt and find consensus is through its decision to assume the United Nations' operational leadership role of the International Stabilization Force in Afghanistan (ISAF). Only five months after NATO's internal dispute over Turkey's invocation of Article 4, at the joint urging of Canada, Germany, and the United States, NATO assumed control of the United Nations ISAF in August 2003. Current NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has repeatedly emphasized that Afghanistan is the alliance's number one priority.²⁹ After initially taking control of the mission, which was limited primarily to providing security to the national government located in the capital city of Kabul, the mission expanded to include a number of provisional reconstruction teams (PRTs). The PRTs are small groups of civilian experts who work alongside NATO forces to foster support for Afghanistan's democratic government. After overseeing successful national elections in 2004 and 2005, NATO has now expanded its PRT presence into the more volatile southern regions of Afghanistan, and now oversees the entire allied presence there, including some 35,000 troops under NATO command. Although much higher

levels of terrorist incidents have been witnessed in Afghanistan since the second half of 2005, a number of analysts point to NATO's initial success in Afghanistan. Its PRTs have had some success in rebuilding civil society and schools, fostering new economic growth, and training the new Afghan military.³⁰ NATO faces ongoing political obstacles due to the heightened terrorist attacks, the surging levels of opium production and heroin trade, and its expansion into southern and eastern Afghanistan.³¹ Yet the expansion of this mission, and its early successes in promoting democracy, point to an alliance that clearly has security relevance.

Besides NATO's leadership of the ISAF, in 2005 the alliance agreed to assist the African Union peacekeeping mission in Sudan. Moreover, to the surprise of many, NATO also found consensus for the creation of a NATO Training Mission for Iraqi military leaders, where NATO advisers are located just outside of Baghdad at Ar-Rustamiyah. The mission began in August 2004, and has since trained over 1,000 Iraqi security forces and a small number of senior officers.³² Although the mission is small, consisting of approximately 90 troops from 11 NATO countries, the alliance did manage to find a role for itself in the ongoing reconstruction efforts in Iraq.³³ In addition, NATO also used elements of its NRF to address the humanitarian crisis after the earthquake in Pakistan, which involved approximately 1,000 troops.

In sum, with the exception of the ongoing low defense-spending levels in Europe, much of NATO's evolution since 9/11 suggests that the alliance is adopting new and salient security operations beyond the European continent. Its operational reach and functional missions have evolved to demonstrate the alliance's institutional flexibility, and by definition, its ongoing security relevance. While debate within the alliance has continued over Iraq and over its current operations, NATO has still managed to meet new and unexpected security challenges.

Impact of NATO Expansion

Despite the profusion of literature that predicted otherwise, ample evidence now suggests that NATO's two rounds of enlargement have been successful policy decisions. Although the military contributions provided by the newest allies are understandably limited, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that expansion had an immediate impact in stabilizing democratic civil-military relations in these new member states.

The first positive impact of NATO's expansion is evident in the democratic stability that the enlargement policy helped foster in NATO's newest members. In the applicants' desire to work with the alliance to gain eventual admission, which began initially with membership in NATO's 1994 Partner-

ship for Peace Plan, the aspiring states worked closely with alliance officials who served as catalysts to help these states restructure their militaries in accordance with democratic principles and to reshape their military postures for the future. All of the allies who gained invitations at the Prague Summit also worked on NATO's Membership Action Plan, which was introduced at the Washington Summit in 1999. Although many of the newest member states still suffer from a dearth of civilian military professionals, it is nonetheless clear that NATO exercised a profound influence on the candidate states as they prepared for admission into the alliance.³⁴

In Poland, for example, alliance officials helped the government and military to comport with alliance guidelines. Epstein notes:

NATO accelerated the consolidation of democratic civilian control in Poland by removing key elements of Polish military tradition from both the rhetoric and practice of Polish public policy Had NATO not provided guidelines for reform of the armed forces and their governing structures, or had NATO declined to enlarge its membership after the cold war, Polish civilians would not have adopted NATO's view as to what it means to secure control over the military by 1999.³⁵

Like Poland, all other applicant states sent military and defense officials to NATO's English language training centers, where they not only gained new English skills but also acquired and arguably accepted many of NATO's political and military concepts. In doing so, one Romanian defense official, who was among the hundreds that attended over the years as each applicant country prepared for membership, noted that the NATO training "made it easier to understand NATO, what it stands for and how it functions," and that the courses "opened up a new way of thinking about security."³⁶ In Romania, the alliance was also deeply involved in the domestic debates over military defense reforms and played a critical role in shaping how Romania's military would be organized and structured in the future.³⁷

Similarly, additional evidence indicates that NATO played an influential role in the Czech Republic as it prepared for admission. While there was and continues to be some resistance to NATO requests, much of the evidence demonstrates that the Czechs worked closely with alliance officials in shaping their reformed military. Again, as put by Gheciu, the "socialization activities carried out by NATO had a significant impact on the ideas and attitudes of Czech(s) . . . as well as on the policies and defense-related practices enacted in Prague."³⁸ While NATO's impact has not been equally influential across all of the Prague invitees, additional research provides comparable supporting evidence for the Baltics, especially in their transitions from communist military rule to democratically governed militaries according to NATO input.³⁹ In short, it seems clear that NATO's Partnership for Peace Plan and later its Membership

Action Plan resulted in significant and successful efforts by NATO to advance democratic principles in civil-military relations.

It should be added that many of these new member states continue to fear the threat of a potentially resurgent Russia. Due in large measure to these fears, the Madrid and Prague invitees remain very supportive members of the alliance. For these states, NATO's security guarantee is arguably the central component of its national security policy.⁴⁰ Thus, the short- and long-term impact of expansion is clearly a more secure, stable, and democratic Europe.

In addition to the benefits of democratic stabilization and military professionalism that came with alliance expansion and continues to occur within aspiring NATO allies, a number of NATO's newest members have contributed to the alliance's external security missions. One example of such an endeavor is Lithuania's leadership role in one of NATO's Provisional Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan. Working in the mountainous Ghor province, with its headquarters in Chaghcharan, Lithuania has deployed approximately 120 troops to the mission, and works alongside NATO allies Denmark and Iceland in carrying out the operation. As an aspiring NATO ally, Croatia has recently contributed a small group of mine clearance experts to work in the mission.⁴¹

As one of the three states that were invited to join the alliance at the Madrid Summit in 1997, Poland is another new member that was exceptionally supportive of NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo in 1999 through its aggressive condemnations of Slobodan Milosevic and its offers to provide military assistance to the alliance. With NATO's diplomatic backing, Poland also led a military stabilization mission in Iraq after Operation Iraqi Freedom, and it provided 140 troops to NATO's humanitarian efforts to Pakistan in 2005.⁴² Like Lithuania, membership in NATO brings new opportunities to contribute to global security in ways that previously seem unlikely in the absence of NATO expansion.

To be sure, serious opposition to NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo surfaced in the Czech Republic only weeks after their formal induction into the alliance, and statements from the Hungarian Defense Ministry have led some observers to view Hungary as a free-rider in the alliance.⁴³ In addition, with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, the defense spending levels for the newest member countries have continued to fall short of the two percent gross national product goals that NATO agreed to informally at the Prague Summit. Ongoing challenges remain in the area of civil-military relations.⁴⁴ Yet even in light of these problems, given the benefits of democratic consolidation in Eastern and Central Europe, and the small but consequential contributions to external security provided by some of NATO's newest members, most of the evidence leans toward the benefits of NATO's expansion, which far outweigh the ongoing criticism of alliance expansion. At minimum, there is little evidence to suggest that enlargement has actually weakened the alliance, espe-

cially with regard to the decisionmaking procedures and requirements for consensus. NATO's most recent public fissures over the alliance's training mission in Iraq and its assistance to the African Union in Sudan occurred between the United States and primarily France. Recent divisive discussions at NATO over the decision to expand the mission in Afghanistan occurred primarily as a result of Dutch domestic opposition.⁴⁵ The newest allies have not been an impediment to identifying alliance consensus.

Finally, the impact of NATO's ongoing "open-door" policy continues to be significant. While NATO skeptics continue to suggest the irrelevance of the alliance, a number of European countries are aggressively seeking closer relations with NATO. Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Georgia, the Ukraine and Azerbaijan among others have lobbied aggressively for NATO membership. In doing so, these states continue to cultivate relations with the alliance and respond to requests for defense modernization and reform from Brussels.⁴⁶ In these cases, NATO is anything but irrelevant, but rather serves as a motivating tool for the implementation of democratic military structures and defense modernization, which for the most part, have proven successful.

Great Power Leadership

Much of the responsibility for NATO's survival in the first decade after the Cold War rests with the Clinton administration, who aggressively pushed for NATO's transformation. In this regard, without American leadership and active support from the other major powers of the alliance, NATO's relevance would be placed in question. While the differences over Iraq illustrated a deeply divided alliance, a number of events since George W. Bush's reelection in 2004 demonstrate that NATO's place in US foreign policy has been elevated.

In the second term of his presidency, President Bush's first trip abroad was to Europe, which included a stop at NATO headquarters. Similarly, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's first visit abroad was to Europe, and a visit to NATO. At the symbolic level, the second Bush administration appeared to be far more committed to multilateral solutions.⁴⁷

These symbolic efforts were reflective of substantive diplomatic efforts that have come since these visits. The United States has made considerable (and successful) lobbying efforts to expand NATO's presence into southern Afghanistan. President Bush also requested in 2006 that NATO take additional steps to have a wider role in the Sudan, assisting African Union forces. A bipartisan coalition in the US Senate similarly called for a larger NATO presence in Sudan.⁴⁸ US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and

Eurasian Affairs, Daniel Fried, noted in May 2006, “Unilateralism is out. Effective multilateralism is in. We are working to make NATO the centerpiece alliance through which the transatlantic democratic security community deals with security challenges around the world.”⁴⁹ Such views reflect a different orientation toward NATO and multilateralism generally, and have resulted in a much more visible role for NATO in American foreign policy.

Besides the Bush administration’s active backing of NATO, the election of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2005 helped restore the wounded US-German relationship. In their first meeting and her first trip abroad, Merkel noted that while differences still remain between the two allies, she chose to emphasize the allies’ shared concerns. Moreover, she emphasized the importance of having a strong NATO. In contrast to her predecessor, she noted that “NATO is the forum” for discussions of all strategic issues.⁵⁰ Such words have proven to be more than rhetoric, as Merkel’s Germany has not stood in the way of NATO’s expanded missions, and has made tangible efforts to increase the deployability of its troops.⁵¹ In addition, recent findings indicate that American and German intelligence officials cooperated quite extensively in the lead up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, which provides some evidence of a far more functional and cooperative relationship than assumed during Schröder’s administration.⁵² Given that Germany plays its own leadership role among the Europeans within the alliance, the Merkel-Bush relationship provides good signals for a more vibrant and active alliance.

In the United Kingdom, British defense minister Des Browne has also proven to be an active and ongoing supporter of NATO’s evolving role by providing a total of 5,000 troops to the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, many of whom are now stationed in NATO’s expanded southern presence. Moreover, on NATO’s Response Force, Browne has noted that it is “key to our vision for the modern NATO, capable of mounting the full range of military missions.”⁵³ In light of widespread public misgivings about Iraq and cooperation with the United States in Iraq, the British government only seems to be more engaged in the alliance.

While not a “major” power in NATO, even Spain has assumed a new leadership role in the alliance by serving as the alliance’s lead country in the humanitarian mission to Pakistan by providing 370 troops to the operation. In addition, Spain currently has 700 troops deployed in Afghanistan.⁵⁴ These developments have all come since the defeat in 2004 of Spain’s former prime minister, Jose Maria Aznar, whose opponent actively campaigned against Spain’s cooperation with the United States in Iraq. Clearly, a case can be made that while the government continues to have its differences with the Bush administration in Iraq, its support for NATO operations and missions abroad has grown stronger.

To be sure, France remains a reluctant ally within NATO and continues to make the identification of consensus a difficult task. French and American differences were the key reason for the delayed response to the African Union's request for NATO's assistance in Darfur in 2005. Moreover, in the planning stages for NATO's presence in Iraq, France also raised most of the concerns and objections. More recently, France opposed the United States' originally proposed site of Mauritania for Operation Steadfast Jaguar, the largest operational test of NATO's Response Force.⁵⁵ In this respect, France is acting quite unlike its 1990s détente with the alliance.⁵⁶ Current French opposition to NATO, however, should be placed in the larger context of NATO's history, which reflects a long-standing debate between France and the United States over the appropriate security role for NATO. The fact that France has different views from the United States and many of its European allies is nothing new to transatlantic security issues.⁵⁷ In addition, unlike in 2002 and 2003, with the Merkel government now more in accord with the United States, France is far more isolated in objecting to American leadership within the alliance, which may provide some explanation for France's willingness to contribute to NATO's Response Force.

In sum, a number of diplomatic indicators point to an alliance that is rebuilding after its 2003 quarrels. In contrast to much that is written, NATO's position in transatlantic security affairs remains far more relevant than its critics suggest.

Conclusion

Much like during the Cold War, when transatlantic tensions and periodic crises seemed to often threaten the core of the alliance, NATO is again recovering from its bitter disputes in 2003. In contrast to the abundance of NATO skepticism from current analysts, a more balanced assessment of the alliance's health indicates that another progressive evolution is underway. Its institutional flexibility after 9/11, the allies' progress toward its Rapid Response Force, the positive and ongoing impact of NATO expansion, and the new evidence of great power support for transatlantic cooperation are all signs that NATO is far from dead, but rather is again resuming a central place in global security affairs.

Indeed, NATO faces new and increasingly difficult challenges in promoting democracy and stability in Afghanistan. Unless NATO finds a way to stem the Taliban's growing influence and the increasingly high rate of suicide terrorism attacks, which the United States and coalition forces have thus far failed to stop in Iraq, NATO will be enmeshed in the region for years to come. Moreover, the omnipresent military spending gap between the United States and all other 25 allies has not only short-term, but long-term implications. Although some positive signs exist due to Europe's increased integration in the NATO Re-

sponse Force, which may suggest improvements in European capability to deploy forces outside of Europe, the wide differences in military spending makes Europe an increasingly less attractive military partner over time. Some analysts have suggested that only slight adjustments in defense spending decisions will allow European governments to generate much more useful force structures, especially with the likely future needs for small groups of special operation forces.⁵⁸ Yet such steps still need to be taken, so defense spending remains an ongoing concern, but is an area that does have potential for progress.

Despite these problems, as demonstrated above, NATO's skeptics fail to consider the growing multilateral cooperation within the alliance, especially in the second Bush administration. A more centrist and multilateral American foreign policy direction, which has been witnessed in 2005 and 2006 in multiple ways at NATO, including initiatives related to Iran and North Korea, bodes well for NATO's future, and more accurately captures the alliance's current role(s) and future prospects for fostering transatlantic security consensus.

NOTES

1. Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

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