

NATO's Transformation into a Contemporary Alliance

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Alliances have played a central role in the pursuit of inter-communal security throughout history and have been a salient feature of contemporary international relations. The growing complexity of a dynamic strategic environment contests the utility of traditional military alliances. Such alliances, argue some, have proven to be of limited value in an era of complex challenges stemming from the proliferation of WMD, transnational terrorism, failed states, counterinsurgencies, environmental degradation and other asymmetrical threats. Nevertheless, interest in alliance-based security arrangements is not waning. While it is unlikely they will simply go away, alliances will undoubtedly need to adapt to the changing security environment and growing diversity of security cooperation. NATO, perhaps the most successful modern-day political-military alliance, has gone through a fundamental post-Cold War transformation and is about to implement a new strategic concept that could well entrench a new standard for future alliances. These onerous changes are shaped by factors within and outside NATO.

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1. Introduction

Alliances have been deemed "a universal component of relations between political units, irrespective of time or place."¹ Associated with both war and peace, alliances have played a central role in the pursuit of inter-communal security and, whether in ancient or modern times, have helped shape key historical developments. From Antiquity to the Middle Ages to the Peace of Westphalia and from the Napoleonic wars to

the Cold War, alliances represented important means in the pursuit of interests, security and power. The increasingly complex nature of today's strategic environment and the diversity of security arrangements devised by states challenge the very notion of alliance, as many scholars wonder if it remains a useful concept at all.² But despite current attempts to dismiss contemporary alliances as gradually losing significance, states continue to seek security through alignment with other states.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has significantly expanded its scope and membership, despite the break-up of the former Soviet Union and the dissolution of its Warsaw

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Pact, the main reason NATO was established in the first place. Uncertainty, fear and a lack of trust, among other reasons, led many East European countries to seek shelter under NATO's security umbrella. On the other hand, older allies continue to perceive added value in maintaining the alliance. But since the end of the Cold War, scholars have been repeatedly predicting the end of NATO, arguing that with the disappearance of a clear adversary threat there was no longer a rational reason to maintain the alliance. Yet, NATO persisted against its critics and is developing a new strategic concept designed to reaffirm its traditional "collective defense" role and forge a new sense of purpose amid an ever changing strategic environment. Nevertheless, internal and external factors are increasingly testing the alliance's cohesiveness, structural bonds and viability.

2. Defining an Alliance

Generally speaking, an alliance is a relationship formed between distinct actors seeking to further common interests or a joint purpose. While this notion is easily applicable to political parties, professional associations and private enterprises, as well as inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, it is the state actor that is of particular concern here. Likewise, whereas the subject matter of alliances in general can equally be suited for a variety of political, economic and social purposes, the purview of this paper concerns those inter-state associations determined by military or security factors. Such relationships have been traditionally called military alliances and have long represented a fundamental component of international relations dynamics. Political and historical accounts of the importance that alliances played in shaping events and developments throughout the ages abound. It is difficult to describe international relations without referring to alliances as the two are often intricately linked in all but name.³

Defining alliance, however, is not an easy task. Never did relations between political units produce a more elastic notion as that of alliance. Efforts to develop a widely accepted, universal definition of alliance have been elusive, despite a rich body of academic literature, theoretical research and practical case studies. Critics point to the ambiguity and amorphousness of most treaties of alliance.⁴ While many writers shy away from

defining the term altogether and simply submerge themselves in conceptual and practical attributes, those more courageous often opt for definitions that are either narrowly linked to a particular prototype alliance set or are simply too broad and vague to be of any serious analytical value. Confronted with such a protean phenomenon, it is no wonder that "many a would-be alliance theorists" are more ready to retreat to a topic more manageable, such as another assessment of NATO.⁵

Definitions of alliance span a wide spectrum and can easily conjure different interpretations even among the most renowned scholars of international relations. Consider the following definitions readily found in the literature:

- a formal association between states against the threat of another more powerful state;⁶
- "a limited set of states acting in concert at X time regarding the mutual enhancement of the military security of the members;"⁷
- "a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states;"⁸
- a formal association "of states for the use (or non use) of military force, in specific circumstances, against states outside their own membership;"⁹
- "a formal contingent commitment by two or more states to some future action."¹⁰

One analyst found 35 distinct definitions in a self-proclaimed thorough review of the international relations literature.¹¹ Part of the difficulty lies in attributing alliance status to a wide variety of different state-to-state relationships. On the one hand, an alliance between states has implied a relationship based on a security guarantee or a mutual assistance pledge in case of aggression. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is a good example. An armed attack against one or more member states is considered an attack against all and results in an obligation of aid towards the member or members attacked. On the other hand, a broader interpretation includes all sorts of security arrangements and strategic partnerships of a meaningful nature short of a security guarantee. For example, *Wikipedia* lists the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO) as a military alliance "formed in 1996 to counterbalance NATO expansion."¹² One scholar

concludes that the European Union (EU) meets the criteria of being an alliance, but suggests it falls short of being deemed a military alliance, at least for now.¹³

Alliances come in a variety of shapes and forms. They can be bilateral or multilateral. While bilateral alliances can also be informal, most contemporary multilateral alliances are formal relationships usually codified by way of an international agreement or protocol. There have been many efforts to catalogue or categorize alliances based on a host of variables. In 1966, Singer and Small developed the first systematic and quantitative description of international alliances between the Napoleonic wars and World War II.¹⁴ A few years later, Russett examined and classified all military alliances concluded during the period 1920-1957.¹⁵ More recently, Gibler compiled and briefly described over 450 alliances since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.¹⁶ But such efforts are usually criticized for conceptual inconsistencies, self-imposed limits on data sets or a variety of other reasons. Sadly, a review of the available literature on alliances raises serious doubts about the prospects of reaching consensus on a common definition.

3. Traditional Nature of Alliances

The lack of a universal, widely accepted definition of alliance is reflected in similarly competing views that attempt to explain why alliances are formed, how they are managed and when they are terminated. Most explanations usually fall into two basic schools of thought. First, alliances are seen as a key element in a "balance of power" system where states coexist in a world of self-help. Unchecked power, irrespective of who wields it, is perceived as a potential danger and thus states perpetually seek to balance against each other through shifting alignments. Such arguments are consistent with the notion of *Realism* in international relations. Alternatively, alliances are believed to be by-products of shared values and other common characteristics that bring states together. This view stems from liberal perceptions or the *Idealism* theory of world politics.

Traditional realists argue that international politics is a competitive realm, whereby states struggle for power, mainly seek security and try to maximize their national interests. Such scholars rely heavily on balance of power concepts to explain alliances. Thus, Hans Morgenthau refers

to alliances as "a necessary function of the balance of power operating in a multiple state system."¹⁷ According to George Liska, whose 1962 *Nations in Alliance* remains one of the defining works on the subject matter, alliances are always against, and only derivatively for, someone or something.¹⁸ And while the "sense of community" may altruistically consolidate alliances, he argues, it seldom brings them about.¹⁹ The diplomacy by which alliances are made, maintained and disrupted, writes Kenneth Waltz, represents the very substance of balance of power politics.²⁰

In the 1980s, Stephen Walt suggested a slight modification of the popular realist theory by arguing that states balance not so much against power but against threat.²¹ In the neorealist tradition, Walt maintained that while power was no doubt a significant factor, it was the "level of threat" characterized by geographic proximity, offensive capability and perceived intentions that eventually accounted for states' behavior when it came to decisions to ally. If the danger was great enough, a state would partner with almost any other state. Alliances are made by states that share a basic common interest, namely, the fear of other states. To avoid the hell of military defeat, states will ally with the devil.²² While states are sometimes also prone to "bandwagoning," whether to appease a threatening power or simply because they are attracted to power, Walt maintains that "balancing" against a threat is "far more common."²³

Put yet another way, alliances are forged on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis. Whether a great or small power, a state will weigh the advantages and disadvantages of alliance membership. On the one hand, by dividing responsibilities and sharing assets, states believe they can acquire greater security and save costs. When the relationship is between a great power and a small one, their bonding can still make sense, despite their asymmetric military capabilities, if their respective cost-benefit calculus is somehow mutually self-serving. For example, this is true in the hypothetical case in which a small power is seeking greater security and the large power is simply seeking influence, access to military bases or other political concessions. If both perceive a net gain in their respective calculations, alignment is likely to come about. On the other hand, membership in an alliance has its costs and is certainly not without risks. Membership can affect sovereignty, create new obligations and restrict policy flexibility. A member state's

fear of "entrapment" can be realized when an ally reluctantly drags it into a conflict it had no interest in or previous wish to be part of. And despite pledges of aid, states also worry about "abandonment," the risk of overdependence on an ally's assistance which never materializes in a crisis.

Idealists would by contrast argue that states choose to establish and maintain alliances because of shared values and ideals. States with similar internal characteristics are more likely to ally than states with divergent domestic political systems. Meaningful alliances result when states share ideological, political, cultural or other key traits. "The natural tendency of mankind, as any schoolboy knows," writes Michael Howard, "is not to stand alone, or even to wish to do so: it is to join together for protection in like-minded groups – families, clans, tribes, not least juvenile gangs."²⁴ Despite a sharp contrast to traditional realist explanations, idealists believe that shared values and like-minded governments are no less important factors and significantly contribute to the establishment of an alliance. Without the shared values upon which democracy is built, NATO would not have been created; that is what separated it from the Warsaw Pact.²⁵ In today's world, it is a state's form of government, argues Robert Kagan, and not its civilization or geographical location that will greatly determine its geopolitical alignment.²⁶

The truth is perhaps somewhere in between the entrenched confines of the two theories. States will enter into alliances for a variety of reasons, of which the pursuit of military security is but one.²⁷ Institutionalists would highlight the importance of institutions. They say that institution-based alliances like NATO may be difficult to create and set in motion, at the beginning, but once created, they can take on a life of their own. Alliances can also differ according to purpose. Likewise, the nature and purposes of alliances change as the structure of the international system varies. This is perhaps self-evident in the obvious differences between pre-World War I, multi-polar alliances in Europe and the global, bi-polar alignments of the Cold War. In the former case, most alliances consisted of a small number of member states of comparable capabilities. In the later case, the two major alliances, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, were respectively dominated by a single dominant power and were more like treaties of guarantee with the US and Soviet Union providing most of the security.²⁸

Douglas Gibling frames it in this perspective: "not all alliances are alike. Alliances are rarely formed only to balance power or avoid threats. Instead, alliances are created for a multitude of reasons, and their purpose can change dramatically over time. That is why theories of alliances that focus on the capabilities of states, or even on changes in these capabilities, often perform so poorly in explaining simple alliance behavior. There is a tendency to overemphasize the strategic nature of power and statecraft at the expense of understanding alliances as useful tools of cooperation."²⁹ Essentially, both theoretical explanations provide useful insight and need to be carefully balanced when applied. Following this prescription on the multifaceted nature and variability of alliances should enable us to forward our thinking about how alliances will evolve in years to come.

4. Contemporary Security Challenges

Changes in the international system and structure have had a determinant-like impact on state behavior and their alliances. The adoption of the UN Charter in 1945 and the growing emergence of widely-accepted international norms established new principles and imposed limits that would have a profound affect on alliances. The UN Charter's reference to an inherent right of collective self-defense (Chapter VII, Article 51) and recognition of the existence of "regional arrangements or agencies" for dealing with international security (Chapter VIII, Article 52) codified the legitimacy of alliances, albeit somewhat constrained from traditional notions. It also reiterated the sovereignty of states, brought about commitments to resolving disputes peacefully and introduced far-reaching restrictions on states' resort to use force. While old-styled alliances of the nineteenth century and those leading up to the First World War usually identified opponents, contemporary alliances, especially after 1945, seldom do. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act and a series of other international declarations and agreements confirmed that a state had an inherent right "to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve."³⁰

These normative changes were also intertwined with strategic developments. The end of the Cold War brought about the end of bipolarity of world politics based on the United States-Soviet Union rivalry. But as the Soviet Union's Warsaw Treaty

Organization (WTO) was dissolved, its arch-rival NATO was struggling to re-conceive itself. Cooperation between former adversaries suddenly became trendy and led to a resurgence of security cooperation through arms control, strategic partnerships, regional initiatives and a host of other security arrangements. NATO extended offers of partnership to its Eastern neighbors and opened its doors to new members. Even non-aligned and staunchly neutral countries, such as Switzerland, opted to take advantage of this new era of security cooperation. Today, it seems that states are ready to shed orthodox approaches in pursuing security and more willing to explore other options in choosing a security arrangement that suits them best.

Traditional alliances first and foremost served as principle means and instruments in the pursuit of national security. Threats to states mainly came from other states that were militarily capable of causing serious harm. Thus, two fundamental attributes characterized a typical alliance—a threat from another state (or group of states) and military security. While contemporary states cannot completely rule out the possibility of being the victim of aggression from other states, more likely, they will have to deal with a host of non-traditional security concerns and face transnational challenges to their security. A typical lineup of such worries includes international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, weak and failed states, consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, organized crime, illegal trafficking, migration and other demographic pressures, pandemics and infectious diseases, resource competition and energy security. Thus, if alliances are to remain useful instruments of statecraft, states' expectations from alliances may need to be adjusted accordingly. This would imply alliances retain part of their traditional competence of dealing with the vestige of potential threats coming from other states and adapt to the new strategic environment by also developing the capacity to deal with these nontraditional security challenges.

But many uncertainties remain. Can contemporary alliances adapt and make this transition? Are they able to maintain traditional military assurance and yet deal with these new security challenges? What can alliances do about climate change? Can they combat international terrorism? How can they contribute to energy security and cyber defense? While these and similar questions beg for answers, they are difficult

issues to address directly. As a phenomenon of international relations, alliances appear to be in the middle of the current changing security environment and the structural changes taking place in world politics. But it is proving difficult to get a sense of any permanent changes on how we perceive alliances. Historically, alliances have shown a remarkable ability to adapt to varying circumstances and it will be interesting to see how alliances as concepts emerge from the current changes taking place. The purposes and goals of existing alliances have changed with time. New alliances have adopted conceptual and structural postures that conform to the new, nontraditional security concerns, yet also maintain certain traditional characteristics.

5. Changing Nature of Alliances

Alliances have changed greatly over time. But whether the fundamental nature of alliances has changed much remains a matter of debate. Realists would say that as long as states continue to perceive the existence of external threats to their national security, alliances, in the traditional sense, will continue to matter.³¹ Once established, an alliance is expected to endure until the purposes of the allies are met.³² Intuitively, if the threat is removed, an alliance becomes obsolete. Idealists would contend that as long as states shared common values and similar characteristics, they will be inclined to ally. The removal of a specific threat does not in itself imply the end of the need to ally as states see enduring benefits in safeguarding their common values. Regardless of which side of the argument one takes, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances has enabled alliances to become ubiquitous in the international system and evolve into useful tools for cooperation and conflict management that serve far-ranging purposes.³³ This can be equally said of alliances that have managed to survive the end of the Cold War, as well as those most recently established such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The evolution, modification and eventual merger of the 1948 Brussels Treaty into the EU is a particularly instructive and unique case. Initially established by five Western European states against the possible resurgence of German nationalism and to counter the growing power of the Soviet Union, the original treaty was renegotiated in 1954 and eventually expanded

to a total of ten members, to include Germany, becoming the Western European Union (WEU). These states, also members of both the EU and NATO, acknowledged the existence of common values and interests, pledged assistance to each other in the wake of aggression and committed to promoting unity and encouraging the progressive integration of Europe. But for most of its existence, the WEU appeared redundant, given US security guarantees in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and was opaquely overshadowed by NATO's integrated military structures and tangible capabilities. Slowly but surely, the Europeans began to develop their own security and defense cooperation within the EU. Under its European Security and Defense Policy, the EU has developed closer military cooperation among its member states and the capacity to deploy forces and assume complex stability operations.

The EU took another important step in its evolution by carefully incorporating defense and other security-related commitments into its new Lisbon Treaty. This was not an easy task as the language of the mutual assistance clause, Article 28A.7[42.7] of the Lisbon Treaty, had to be surgically formulated to satisfy three groups of states: those seeking security assurance; those that wanted to maintain their neutral status; and those concerned about consistency with their NATO commitments.³⁴ So while the WEU ceased to exist, the nascent treaty was effectively able to match and carry forward the security guarantees of the original Brussels Treaty. The new treaty also introduced a "solidarity clause," whereby *all* member states pledged to act jointly and assist one another if a member state was a victim of a terrorist attack or in the event of a natural disaster. The EU's emergence as a security actor is perhaps one of the most original developments in the contemporary history of alliances and international institutions.

The Organization of American States (OAS) is another post-World War II alliance that had to reinvent itself in order to fit into the post-Cold War era and adjust to shifting relationships within its ranks. The initial purpose of the alliance, based on the 1947 Rio Treaty, was to organize the states of the Western hemisphere in a system of collective security. The OAS's 1948 Charter also had strong collective defense provisions. Article 28 of the Charter maintained that an aggression against a member state shall be considered an aggression against all the other states. Its founding member states were initially concerned with the spread of

communism. After the demise of communism, many observers felt the OAS would disband. Instead, the alliance repurposed itself and proved to be a useful format for resolving a host of regional issues.

Current efforts of the OAS include strengthening democracy, peace support and conflict management, as well as promoting human rights, development and free trade. In line with the organization's new multidimensional concept of security, the OAS's 2003 "Declaration on Security in the Americas," hardly makes reference to mutual assistance in case of aggression, instead focusing on the various aspects of security cooperation among member states. Nevertheless, the alliance has had its share of internecine conflicts, including the rift between member states, namely Venezuela and the US, tensions between Columbia and Venezuela, and disagreement over allowing Cuba to return to the OAS. Also, there are inchoate efforts by South American countries to create new regional structures that would counterbalance US influence and create more equitable relations, although it is still uncertain if such efforts will lead to an end of OAS or to the emergence of a new alliance.³⁵

The CSTO was established to formally institutionalize the 1992 Commonwealth of Independent States Collective Security Treaty, a framework for cooperation in parts of the post-Soviet space. Russia's overwhelming dominance of the CSTO has not always been wholeheartedly welcomed by the other members. Azerbaijan and Georgia left the initial grouping, while Uzbekistan defected and then returned again. Dmitri Trenin calls the CSTO "a very loose alliance providing political consultations, a degree of cooperation, and very limited interoperability among" its member states.³⁶ While the purpose of the CSTO is to "ensure the collective defense" of member states, its Charter also refers to an enduring "objective of maintaining and nurturing a close and comprehensive alliance."³⁷ Clearly, this opens the possibility for a wide range of activities. Fittingly, Article 9 of the Charter stipulates that member states "shall agree upon and coordinate their foreign policy positions regarding international and regional security problems."³⁸ However, when Moscow extended political recognition to Georgia's break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it stood alone. None of its CSTO allies followed suit.

There are a number of efforts intended to energize the CSTO. In keeping with global perceptions of contemporary security concerns, Article 8 of the CSTO Charter specifically points to transnational challenges such as international terrorism and extremism, illicit trafficking, organized crime and illegal migration. The alliance has embarked on the development of a rapid reaction force, similar to NATO's NRF, and is keen on developing the necessary capabilities to undertake peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, the CSTO and the UN signed a declaration on cooperation on March 18, 2010. Russian officials often complain that NATO refuses to interact with the CSTO because it fears it would bestow greater recognition on an organization frequently referred to as a "paper tiger" by Western officials. While UN officials see the agreement strengthening cooperation with regional organizations, CSTO leaders claim it represents UN recognition of their organization's authority and legitimacy. Analysts claim Moscow would like to carve out zones of responsibility for conducting operations and authorized interventions under the CSTO flag.³⁹ After the 2010 election victory of President Viktor Yanukovich, Russia has been adamant about encouraging Ukraine into the CSTO. The 2010 Kyrgyzstan crisis, however, cast serious doubts in the CSTO's credibility and capacity to deal with a regional conflict, especially within its own ranks.

6. The Transformation of NATO

The Atlantic Alliance, established over six decades ago in a strategic environment far removed from today's complex world order, appears to be enjoying a renaissance in relevance. Western officials and policymakers have called NATO "the most successful alliance in history." On the other hand, Russian officials have repeatedly expressed their concern about NATO enlargement and called the alliance a relic of the Cold War. Russia's 2009 national security strategy and 2010 military doctrine portray the alliance as a potential source of danger to Russia's national security. Scholars, academic analysts and other observers are divided. Some are quick to praise NATO's transformation and point to the alliance's remarkable ability to adjust to internal and external changes. They argue that the alliance has become a forum for forging solutions to today's security problems and that its functions are becoming even more important for the security challenges ahead.⁴⁰ Others are fairly confident

that the alliance had outlived its purposes and are sure it will dwindle and ultimately disappear. "Static and formal defense alliances are outdated, and will be replaced," they say, "by more fluid, *ad hoc* coalitions of like-minded countries."⁴¹ The debate continues despite the development of the alliance's third strategic concept since the end of the Cold War.

NATO's transformation has been both a necessary response and a reflection of the dramatic changes taking place outside and within the alliance. While transformation tacitly conjures thoughts of military and technological innovation, it is NATO's political and overall transformation that is behind the alliance's Twenty-First century renaissance. The main characteristics of this transformation include NATO's non-article 5 missions and out-of-area operations, its global and regional partnerships, relations with other institutions like the UN and EU, and its enlargement. It helps explain the alliance's relevance following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the consequent watershed of changes in world politics--the end of the Cold War, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the conflict in the Balkans. If NATO had not transformed, probably it would not have existed today. Yugoslavia's collapse forced NATO to undertake a role which it had never before contemplated, claimed former NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, that of crisis manager and peacekeeper, adding that the Alliance's Balkan involvement shaped NATO's own evolution in critical ways, perhaps more than any other outside event.⁴² The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US and NATO's decision to deploy forces in Afghanistan, as well as Russia's 2008 intervention in Georgia, have also had dramatic impacts on the alliance.

Internal factors have been no less a staple of NATO's transformation as those coming from outside the alliance. The enlargement of NATO has also altered some of the dynamics within the alliance, put strains on its long-standing cohesiveness and challenged its traditional consensus-based decision-making process. As debate surrounding the recent strategic concept revealed, allies often disagreed on key issues such as threat assessments, relations with Russia and the future of nuclear weapons in Europe. Disparity of defense spending and capabilities development between the US and European allies continues to cause tensions. Likewise, repeated concerns raised by the US officials about the lack of more equitable commitments in NATO's

ISAF operation also puts additional strains on the transatlantic link within the alliance. And in the wake of the current financial crisis where European governments are keener on cutting into defense expenditures, senior NATO officials worry that excessive cutbacks could prompt the US to seek out new allies elsewhere. On a positive note, the 2009 return of France to NATO's integrated military structure has contributed, at least symbolically, to rejuvenating moral and self-confidence among allies to continue on the path of transformation.

It is nevertheless still unclear if the course of NATO's current transformation will be adequate enough for the alliance to prevail. For Realists, in order to pass the critical test, NATO needed to find a suitable common enemy to replace the former Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. And given their state-centric view of global order, they would likely rule out unconventional threats such as terrorism, climate change and illegal migration, as falling outside the purviews of traditional military alliances which were more suited to respond to military threats. The hallmarks of a military alliance are the integration of a military command, common defense planning, the unification of ordinance, the sharing of bases on foreign territory, the organization of joint exercises and the exchange of intelligence.⁴³ Idealists counter that the alliance was always more about shared values based on democratic institutions than pure military might. NATO's new strategic concept is intended to establish whether the newly transformed alliance still has value for its member states and how it will best serve the purposes of their collective efforts.

7. NATO's New Strategic Concept

Alliance strategies are usually the product of compromise since the interests of allies and their preferences of how to protect those interests are seldom identical.⁴⁴ NATO allies attached significant importance to the process of developing the strategic concept, with the view that it was no less important than the end product itself. Not only were all the NATO capitals previously consulted, but Ally officials also traveled to Moscow to discuss the new strategy with their Russian counterparts. At the start, expectations varied. For years, a heated debate ensued on whether the alliance should be "globally oriented" or "stay put" defending the homeland. "NATO

mostly makes sense as an expeditionary force in an unstable world, wrote Richard Haass, "not as a standing army on a stable continent."⁴⁵ Many allies were arguing that defense of the homeland begins far from allied territory. And since there were many other key issues on which allies had differing opinions, relations with Russia, missile defense, enlargement and counterterrorism, to name a few, some analysts predicted that the final product would be a watered-down document or a strategic compromise based on a least-common denominator. But as the process was winding down in October 2010, diplomats acknowledged differences were narrowing and NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, confidently announced "a real convergence of views on the essential questions."⁴⁶

NATO's new strategic concept could represent another key milestone in the Alliance's ongoing transformation. Not only does it set a clear future path for the organization, but it also tacitly impacts on shaping perceptions and expectations of contemporary alliances. NATO was clearly setting a standard for other alliances to follow. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev was not able to hide his admiration for NATO when he said the CSTO's newly established rapid reaction force had to be "just as good as comparable NATO forces."⁴⁷ The new strategic concept is a reflection of the organization's intent to retain the fundamental attributes of a traditional military alliance while at the same time adapt to a new security environment and changing circumstances within and outside the alliance. The recommendations of the NATO Group of Experts, responsible for developing a report on the new strategic concept, stem from two basic conclusions: first, NATO serves to guarantee the safety and security of its member states; second, this objective can be achieved only if the alliance actively engages with states and institutions beyond its borders.⁴⁸ Clearly, both conclusions are indicative of the alliance's core purpose -- collective defense.

One of the fundamental elements of the new strategic concept is to signal the alliance's continued and unwavering security commitment under Article 5 to all its member states as well as to any potential aggressor. NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as countries such as Iceland and Norway, have voiced concerns that the alliance would not be able to come to their defense in a real crisis.⁴⁹ It is no secret that the Baltic countries and Poland in particular are somewhat weary about a resurgent Russia, especially after

Russia's 2008 military intervention in Georgia. As a result, the new concept clearly reiterates the primacy of mutual defense, intuitively calling for the need to develop contingency plans and military exercises. As this may be unpalatable to Moscow, it is unclear how the alliance will be able to pursue a meaningful partnership with Russia, nor is it clear how its old adversarial counterpart will react. The risk of further antagonizing a resurgent Russian Federation is undeniably on the minds of Germany, France and Italy and other allies that want to improve relations. The new strategy also stipulated the continued necessity to maintain an adequately balanced mix of military capabilities, to include both conventional and nuclear capabilities. As long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will likely remain a nuclear-armed alliance. In addition, allied views converged on the further need to develop an alliance-wide antimissile defense system.

The new strategic concept represents a collective peek at the alliance's strategic landscape and recognizes that NATO faces "a new generation of dangers" that call for the alliance to become "more versatile."⁵⁰ The likelihood of a military attack against an ally, according to the Group of Experts, is believed to be "slight," provided NATO remains vigilant.⁵¹ Instead, it is more likely that the alliance will face challenges from non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, and will have to deal with an assortment of complex issues and irregular threats. The threat of cyber attack is a good example. Due to growing dependencies on information technologies and the consequent vulnerabilities of civilian and military infrastructure, computer viruses can disrupt or deny essential services and functions. Already, system-targeted computer viruses are seriously recognized as new weapons of war, although it is still unclear whether a cyber attack could justify an Article 5 collective self-defense response in the alliance. The source of the 2007 denial-of-service virus attack in Estonia has yet to be determined and would probably be even more difficult to prove.

NATO's unique assets, stemming from its integrated military capabilities, enable it to take on complex stability operations well beyond the borders of its member states. As many nefarious groups lurk in the shadows of weak and failed states, allies are quickly realizing the importance of maintaining NATO. The challenge will be to decide when and where to act and when to resort to other means. But as NATO seeks to become

more versatile, it must be careful not to become overambitious in trying to defend, deter and contain everywhere, because we are reminded that "to defend everywhere is to defend nowhere."⁵² Its previous success has been attributed to the modesty of its goals and simplicity of purpose.⁵³ Such qualifications enabled the alliance to withstand a great deal of turbulence and maintain stability through difficult times. NATO's demanding hybrid-operation in Afghanistan is already having a profound effect on the alliance and its future. Afghanistan tops the agenda of almost any NATO event. Some say the alliance's credibility may be at stake. While it is premature to predict the outcome of the conflict and the success of the operation, one thing is certain, the allies are showing remarkable solidarity, despite enormous strains and given that the war effort is unpopular in many of the home capitals.

The new strategy also outlines a host of other elements important in defining NATO as an international organization and an alliance that brings added value to its member states. For example, NATO's extensive and diverse partnerships make it well suited to take on even the most difficult challenges. Expectations are that NATO will seldom act alone. Thus, building a network of relationships with -- other organizations, like the EU, UN and the OSCE, strategically important regions like the Mediterranean and Middle East, and key regional players like Russia and other democracies across the globe that not only contribute to NATO operations but also share common values -- makes sense. The strategy calls for exploring how NATO can improve the way it does business by emphasizing key reforms, promoting change in its approach to common funding and effectively implementing the often referred to "comprehensive approach" to complex problems. Such efforts will surely shape NATO for years to come.

NATO is a political-military alliance of sovereign states. It is also a successful international security institution. Its fate will eventually be determined, not so much by variables of unifying risks and threats exclusively, as many Realists would have us believe, or by the mere existence of common values or like-mindedness, advanced by Idealists, but by conscious, rational decisions of the member states themselves. The recent global economic crisis and the austerity that many states were faced with may have convinced some that increasingly constrained defense

resources can be spent more wisely through the burden-sharing schemes of modern military alliances. NATO member states are recognizing the opportunity to rationalize their defense efforts through multinational collaboration, common funding and role specialization. And while no one can deny the growing importance of irregular and nontraditional security challenges, it is perhaps too soon to conclude that a permanent paradigmatic shift in international security is taking place or to completely rule out the possibility of inter-state conflict. Clearly, there are many states that do not share the moral and political values of the Euro-Atlantic community.

NATO will likely remain relevant as its member states continue to believe that its existence serves a useful purpose and brings added value. For most of the Cold War period, the transatlantic alliance has been the backbone of the US and Western European security. At the heart of the alliance was the belief that transatlantic security cooperation under the NATO banner was in the interest of the US and its European allies. Indeed, much has changed since the ideological East-West confrontation. But even with its internal strains and external pressures, NATO has weathered difficult times and is still in demand. That the alliance has merit resonates in Washington and all European NATO capitals. The foreign and security policies of most European allies regard NATO as a vital asset in their respective calculations. According to the 2010 US National Security Strategy, the US reiterated its commitment to ensuring NATO remains the world's "pre-eminent security alliance" by describing alliances as "force multipliers," stating that "through multinational cooperation and coordination, the sum of our actions is always greater than if we act alone."⁵⁴ Such language may serve to comfort those European allies that worry about the US losing interest in Europe and seeking new allies elsewhere.

8. Conclusions

This article explores the issue of whether an alliance like NATO is still useful in the post-Cold War era where nontraditional threats and challenges have emerged to dominate the security agenda. The issue of whether these new threats also require novel arrangements is largely about whether or not the current alliance-based institutions are working, and whether new security arrangements would work better. Looser coalitions of the willing and more functional regional security arrangements like the SCO also provide practical frameworks for cooperation. As we do not have the comfort of a historical perspective, we may have to wait years to learn which arrangement worked best. Due to the lack of a universal definition, alliances come in many different shapes and forms, and serve a variety of purposes. While one set of factors may have been important in the formation of the alliance, the same set of factors do not necessarily carry the same weight throughout the lifetime of the alliance. An alliance may be established for one reason, maintained for another and terminated for an altogether third reason. Thus, it is not unusual that the purpose and objectives of an alliance are subject to change with time.

Observations of existing alliances, including NATO, seem to suggest the general concept of an alliance is still a useful one. While some Cold War alliances have dissolved, many have adapted and are still around. NATO, in particular, has displayed a remarkable capacity for endurance. Its transformation has been a massive undertaking of unparalleled historical proportions. NATO has taken on new tasks and almost doubled its membership since the end of the Cold War. The adoption of the Alliance's new strategic concept is testament to the enduring nature of the transatlantic bond that holds NATO together. It is also vindication of NATO's own recognition that its survival depends on its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and take on new roles and missions, yet without shedding its basic DNA -- a mutual commitment to collective self-defense -- the very essence of traditional military alliances.

NOTES

- 1 Holsti, O., T.P. Hopmann, and J.D. Sullivan, p. 2.
- 2 Tertrais, B., p. 135.
- 3 Liska, G., p. 3.
- 4 Fedder, E.H., p. 70.
- 5 Snyder, G.H., *Alliance Politics*, p. 2.
- 6 Liska, G., p. 3.
- 7 Fedder, E.H., p. 68.
- 8 Walt, S.M., *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 12. Walt later expands his definition of alliance as "a cooperative security relationship between two or more states, usually taking the form of a written military commitment. See Walt, S.M. (2001), "Alliance" in Krieger, J. et al., eds. (2001) *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 20.
- 9 Snyder, G.H. (1997) *Alliance Politics*, p. 4. Also, see an earlier version of this definition by the same author in Snyder, G.H. (1990) "Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut," p. 104.
- 10 Gibler, D.M., p. xlix.
- 11 Bergsmann, S. (2001), p. 20. On p. 29, the author proposes his own definition of alliance as: "an explicit agreement among states in the realm of national security in which the partners promise mutual assistance in the form of a substantial contribution of resources in the case of a certain contingency the arising of which is uncertain."
- 12 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_military_alliances (accessed October 1, 2010).
- 13 See Salmon, T.
- 14 See Singer, D. J. and M. Small.
- 15 See Russett, B.M.
- 16 See Gibler, D.M. (2009).
- 17 Morgenthau, H.J., p. 175.
- 18 Liska, G., p.13.
- 19 Ibid, p. 13.
- 20 Waltz, K.N., *Realism and International Politics*, p. 139.
- 21 See Walt, S.M "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power."
- 22 Waltz, K.N. (1979) *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, p. 166.
- 23 Walt, S.M. (1987), p. 5.
- 24 Howard, M. (2007) "A Long War?" *Survival* 48(4), p. 10.
- 25 Gorka, S. and J. Lindley-French (2010).
- 26 Kagan, R., p. 73.
- 27 Russett, B.M., p. 263.
- 28 Waltz, K.N. (2008), p. 207.
- 29 Gibler, D.M., p. 556.
- 30 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Lisbon Declaration on a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the Twenty-First Century," Lisbon, December 3, 1996.
- 31 Shen, D., p. 165.
- 32 Liska, G., p. 42.
- 33 Gibler, D.M., p. 553.
- 34 Quille, G. (2008) "The Lisbon Treaty and its implications for CFSP/ESDP," European Parliament, Brussels, p. 8.
- 35 In May of 2008, South American nations established the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), an intergovernmental union inspired by the success of European integration and modeled on the EU. It also established a defense council within the UNASUR, designed to facilitate regional security, promote military co-operation and regional defense. Although there are no current plans to develop NATO-like ties and structures, UNASUR certainly has the potential to develop into a contemporary military alliance.
- 36 Trenin, D. (2009) "Russia's Spheres of Interest, not Influence," *The Washington Quarterly*, 32:4, p. 14.
- 37 "Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization," signed by Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan on October 7, 2002, in Chisinau. Uzbekistan, which had withdrawn from the original 1992 Collective Security Treaty, rejoined the group in 2006 and became the seventh member of the CSTO.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Socor, V. (2010) "The UN Accepts CSTO as a Regional Security Organization," *Eurasian Daily Monitor* 7(54).
- 40 For example, see Kaiser, K. (2008) "NATO is Indispensable," *IP Summer*: 10-13.
- 41 Van Ham, P. (2008) "NATO's Day is Over," *IP Summer*, p. 17.
- 42 de Hoop Scheffer, J. (2007) "Europe's New South," Speech by NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the "Croatia Summit 2007," Dubrovnik, Croatia, July 6, 2007, URL: <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s070706a.html> (accessed October 1, 2010).
- 43 Dinstein, Y. (2001) *War, Aggression and Self-Defense*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 230.
- 44 Waltz, K.N. (1979), p. 166.
- 45 Haass, R.N., "Goodbye to Europe as a High-Ranking Power," *Financial Times*, May 13, 2010, http://www.cfr.org/publication/22109/goodbye_to_europe_as_a_highranking_power.html (accessed May 15, 2010).

- 46 Lobjakas, A. (2010), "NATO Ministers Finalizing Fresh 'Strategic Concept' Ahead of Summit," *RFE/RL*, October 14, 2010.
- 47 See "CSTO's rapid-reaction force to equal NATO's – Medvedev," *RAI Novost*, February 4, 2009.
- 48 Albright, M.K. (2010) "Remarks of Madeleine K. Albright at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council with the Group of Experts on NATO's New Strategic Concept," Brussels, May 17, 2010, URL: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_63678.htm (accessed October 1, 2010).
- 49 Asmus, R., et. al. (2010) "NATO, new allies and reassurance," *Policy Brief*, CER, London.
- 50 See Albright, M.K. above.
- 51 NATO Group of Experts (2010) "NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement. Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept," Brussels, May 17, 2010, p. 8.
- 52 Warren, P.T.
- 53 Dinerstein, H. (1965) "The Transformation of Alliance Systems," *The American Political Science Review* LIX(3), p.599.
- 54 White House (2010) "National Security Strategy," May 2010, p. 41, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf (accessed June 29, 2010).

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