

THE CHANGING SECURITY CLIMATE AND THE FUTURE OF NATO

The Limits of Alliance: NATO Out-of-Area Problems Since 1949

By Douglas Stuart and William Tow

Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, ix + 383 pp., including index, \$42.50 cloth.

Halt! Who Goes Where? The Future of NATO in the New Europe

By John Leech

London: Brassey's, 1991, xx + 156 pp., including index, \$19.95 paper.

NATO: An Institution Under Threat?

By Jan Willem Honig

Occasional Paper Series No. 22. New York, N.Y.: Institute for East-West Security Studies, 1991, vii + 69 pp., \$12.85 paper.

Securing Europe

By Richard Ullman

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991, xv + 183 pp., including index, \$19.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Robert Charles

The difficulty is that in security, as in meteorology, the weather inevitably does change. When circumstances alter, we will need the benefits of a reasonably resilient and coherent system.¹

The fall of Eastern European Communist regimes, the German unification, the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact, and the demise of the Soviet Union—these and other hitherto unimaginable events have created, in three short years, a new

1. François Heisbourg, "From a Common European Home to a European Security System," in Gregory F. Treverton, ed., *The Shape of the New Europe* (New York, N.Y.: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992), 56.

political landscape and a new security atmosphere in Europe.²

After a half-century, the cool, high-pressure system known as the cold war is gone, taking with it a Europe divided, both ideologically and politically, into East and West. The low-pressure warm front that advanced westward across the European security landscape is forcing the post-1945 international institutions that did not melt down spontaneously in the post-cold war thaw to face fundamental questions. The leaders of these structures—namely, national politicians who guide them, international staffs that administer them, and think-tank analysts and conferees who hope to influence agendas—are asking themselves: can we survive in this new environment? Are we still necessary? If so, for what purposes? And with what modifications?

Not the least affected by this change in the European (and global) security climate is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The demise of its long-time adversary, the Warsaw Pact, along with the still-uncertain Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), means that NATO is now the only effectively functioning security institution in Europe. But as Talleyrand once noted, the difficult moment is not that of the struggle but rather when success is at hand. The disappearance of NATO's traditional external adversary, which spurred its formation and provided its glue for four decades, has created unprecedented internal challenges for the Alliance.

NATO has never known a golden age of perfect political concord and strategic consensus. The historical study of Douglas Stuart and William Tow, *The Limits of Alliance: NATO Out-of-Area Problems Since 1949*, completed before the dramatic changes in Europe, provides timely evidence of this. Before the ink had dried on the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, and throughout NATO's subsequent development, the Alliance was consistently, according to most assessments, in internal disarray and on the verge of disintegration. Perhaps more than any other coalition in history, and this because of its longevity, NATO has confirmed Winston Churchill's observation that every alliance is to some extent "an exercise in mutual recrimination." The internal disagreements, enlivened by the underlying fears of abandonment and entrapment endemic to all alliances, have centered on strategic doctrine, weapons deployments and force levels, management of East-West relations, and out-of-area issues.

Today, however, a "NATO-in-crisis" diagnosis can be made with greater justification than perhaps at any other time over the past four decades. Whatever the internal disagreements prior to 1991, externally there always loomed a Soviet threat to focus minds and political cooperation, to galvanize and to justify a collective defense effort. Now that this external threat has largely dissolved, conditions are ripe for America and Europe to drift apart, for the "Atlantic Community [to be revealed] for what it was: a live-in relationship; more than a fling, like 1918-1919, but something less than a marriage; perhaps a conjugal partnership—intimate and intense and demanding but without enduring bonds."³

2. See Stjepan G. Mestrovic, "Why East Europe's Upheavals Caught Social Scientists Off Guard," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (25 September 1991): 56(A).

Even if such extreme conclusions about present trends are not universally shared, rethinking of the rationale for and the future strategy and tasks of the Atlantic Alliance is unavoidable. Within official circles, this adjustment was initially necessitated by German unification and the search for an internationally acceptable way to allow a united Germany to be a member of NATO. Several significant milestones have been passed in this process. First, the London Declaration of July 1990 affirmed that "the Atlantic Community must reach out to the countries of the East which were our adversaries in the cold war, and extend to them the hand of friendship." Second, the creation in late 1991 of a "North Atlantic Cooperation Council" provided a regular forum for consultation between NATO member states and the countries of the former Warsaw Pact. A third step was the adoption at the November 1991 Rome summit of the Alliance's new strategic concept. This document notes that "opportunities for achieving Alliance objectives through political means are greater than ever before," and it identifies "dialogue, cooperation, and the maintenance of a collective defense capacity" as the "three mutually-reinforcing elements of Allied security policy."⁴

The emergence of the new European security environment—although not the recent breakup of the Soviet Union—provides the explicit point of departure for three authors of recent works on NATO: John Leech of Great Britain, Jan Willem Honig of the Netherlands, and Richard Ullman of the United States. All agree that the changes since 1989 have made a large-scale, catastrophic European war—the kind rehearsed in NATO and Warsaw Pact scenarios for decades—extremely unlikely. While their opinions diverge on how NATO should respond to a threat of irrelevance, all agree that the Alliance cannot engage in ostrich-like behavior.

Leech, whose title, *Halt! Who Goes Where? The Future of NATO in the New Europe*, evokes the rapid pace of recent change and betrays a hint of anxiety that the process may somehow get out of hand, notes that NATO's rationale was

the threat from the East. When that threat has been removed, can NATO still be relevant?... Once the main protagonists in eastern Europe base themselves on the same principles of democracy and human rights, what further need of opposing blocs and alliances? (p. 2).

For Honig, author of *NATO: An Institution Under Threat?*, the ebb of the Soviet military threat "backed up by what was perceived to be an expansionist ideology" means that "the primary rationale for [NATO's] existence has become far less compelling, if indeed it has not wholly disappeared" (p. 1). Ullman, whose

3. Michael Vlahos, "The Atlantic Community: A Grand Illusion," in Nils H. Wessell, ed., *The New Europe: Revolution in East-West Relations* (New York, N.Y.: The Academy of Political Science, 1991), 189.

4. "Text of the Declaration After the NATO Talks," *The New York Times*, 7 July 1990; and "The Alliance's Strategic Concept, Agreed by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Rome on 7th-8th November 1991" (Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press, November 1991).

discussion of NATO in *Securing Europe* is set within an exploration of the European security arrangements now possible, points out that while NATO "is flushed with success" and "is not broken...in the long run [it] risks irrelevance and then atrophy, the all-but-inevitable fate of an alliance whose designated threat loses its credibility" (pp. 63, 54).

Given these prognostications, is it any use to think about a future for NATO? The answer is yes. Yet, policy-oriented discussion must not fail to include "serious reference to both the history and the historiography of the alliance" which allows "the discussion [to be] liberated from the self-importance of the present moment."⁵ The Alliance's original objectives, whose formal written expression is the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, were condensed into a pithy formula often attributed to Lord Hastings Ismay, NATO's first secretary-general (1952-1957). NATO, he is said to have quipped, was intended "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." Yet, the obvious was left unstated: it was a Briton, no stranger to his country's traditional balance-of-power security thinking, who forged this inspired formula—hardly a surprise given that the "studied purpose" of British postwar policy had been "to maneuver what they saw as a reluctant and uncertain United States into a forward role in the Cold War."⁶ Any assessment of the Alliance's future viability must be based on a reading of the intentions and capabilities of these same states in the post-cold war era.

Changing Roles in the New Security Climate

Russia

The need to keep the Russians out of Western Europe has, for all practical purposes, disappeared. In the post-Soviet era this no longer requires the massive NATO troop concentrations and large numbers of battlefield and theater nuclear weapons. Now, in an ironic twist, "keeping the Russians out" means finding reasons to prevent Russia—as well as other former Warsaw Pact members such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia—from joining the Alliance. According to Russian President Boris Yeltsin's statement read to the first meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in December 1991, becoming a NATO member is a "long-term political aim" of Russia. As much as this idea caught NATO officials by surprise, in the opinion of Australian scholar Coral Bell "the most promising option for NATO if that organization is to avoid obsolescence" would be "one quite simple though radical step: *the offer of membership to Russia and other major members of the now-defunct Warsaw Pact.*"⁷ In this

5. A. W. DePorte, "The Uses of Perspective," in Robert W. Tucker and Linda Wrigley, eds., *The Atlantic Alliance and its Critics* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 29-30.

6. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 214.

7. Coral Bell, "Why Russia Should Join NATO: From Containment to Concert," *The National Interest* No.22 (Winter 1990-1991): 41. See also Thomas L. Friedman, "Yeltsin Says Russia Seeks to Join NATO," *The New York Times*, 21 December 1991, and Flora Lewis, "Russia in NATO, and Other

vein, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council has been formed, even while the merits of such an extension of the Alliance are still being debated.

The United States

If the Russians appear eager to get in, the US attitude might best be characterized as ambivalent. NATO was the main instrument of US cold war policy in Europe. Thus, the end of the cold war—creating “a sudden hole in the country’s sense of purpose” and a shift in national mood to one of “let other countries sort out their own problems; we have enough of our own”⁸—means questioning whether the “entangling alliance” is really still necessary. But gauging true American inclinations toward NATO is difficult. Public declarations are still tactically designed either to coax from allies renewed declarations that Americans are indeed still wanted in Europe, or to obtain concessions on other issues by threatening to pull out of Europe and return to isolationism.

Ever since Secretary of State James Baker’s December 1989 speech in Berlin outlining new missions for the Alliance, the Bush administration has sought to adapt and preserve NATO as the primary Western security organization (American proposals are helpfully summarized by Honig, pp. 3-7). Washington, strongly seconded by London, has frowned on any French-led talk about the formation of a European entity that would make superfluous an American defense role. In a frank and public way during the NATO summit in Rome, President Bush energetically sought—and received—European assurances that, in the words of a French spokesman, “we all support the presence of US forces in Europe; it is not we Europeans who are pushing the US out of Europe.” At the same time, other US politicians—perhaps oblivious to a European perception that the United States is increasingly irrelevant in their affairs—have wielded the American commitment to NATO as a bargaining chip on other issues. The half-hearted response to Vice-President Dan Quayle’s suggestion that the United States might cut back on its commitment to NATO if Europeans did not make concessions on agricultural subsidies in GATT negotiations is one example. Europeans, after all, have witnessed US efforts to give NATO a new look. And they also have heard comments like those of Maine’s Senator William Cohen to the Munich Conference on Security Policy—that the “prevailing view” in the United States is that NATO “is no longer necessary, relevant or affordable,” and that he expected the Alliance to become “a mainly European organization.”⁹

Germany

Lord Ismay’s undated quip was most likely made before the Federal Republic joined NATO in 1955. Yet, it articulates one of the dual intentions of the West’s

Laughs,” *The New York Times*, 30 December 1991.

8. “When Cold Warriors Quit,” *Economist*, 8 February 1992, 13; and Strobe Talbott, “Post-Victory Blues,” *Foreign Affairs: America And The World*, 1991/92, Vol. 71, No. 1 (1992): 53.

9. Alan Cowell, “Bush Challenges Partners in Nato over Role of U.S.,” *The New York Times*, 8 November 1991; Marc Fisher, “Americans Warn Europeans of Rising Isolationism,” *Boston Globe*, 10 February 1992; and Jonathan Kaufman, “America’s No Longer First in Europe’s New Politics,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, 16 February 1992.

postwar policy of "double containment." If the Soviet Union was to be contained "at arm's length," West Germany would be restrained "with an embrace."¹⁰ West German incorporation into the West via the European Community and NATO solved the historical dilemma of Germany as "either too weak or too strong for Europe."¹¹ And Germans accepted "the West" as "an emotional surrogate for the nation they had lost," as Willy Brandt once remarked.

Rethinking of the rationale for, and the future strategy and tasks of, the Atlantic Alliance is unavoidable. Within official circles, this adjustment was initially necessitated by German unification and the search for an internationally acceptable way to allow a united Germany to be a member of NATO.

Is this arrangement—keeping Germany "down" by keeping it in NATO—still viable as well as congenial, both for Germany and her European neighbors, now that the lost nation has been regained and sovereignty restored to a populous economic powerhouse in the center of Europe? It is, though it may not be easy to maintain the balance. Lately, disagreement has arisen over whether German foreign policy is hanging back too much (as in the Gulf war) or is too self-assured and arrogant (on the issue of EC recognition of Slovenia and Croatia). Ullman cites Michael Doyle's historical argument that liberal democratic states do not make war on each other—and assumes that states to the east will continue to democratize—to find favorable prospects for a Germany at peace with its neighbors. His conclusion, tinged with Francis Fukuyama's "end-of-history"-ism, is that "in the present and foreseeable European political context, characterized by the wholesale rejection of totalitarianism, a German flight from democracy would be, to say the least, ahistorical" (p. 41). Leech foresees German distaste for, not reassertion of, military aspirations. "There is no indication of any historic military ambitions coming to the surface, and that possibility can be safely dismissed. On the contrary," he warns, "the problems are likely to arise precisely because, with peace reigning and their objective of unification achieved, they want to see no more of war" (p. 141). In sum, Germany's continuing political acquiescence to being "kept down" by NATO seems clear. Ullman finds that "Germans may be weary of many of NATO's irritating concomitants" such as low-level flights and tank maneuvers,

10. Wolfram F. Hanrieder, *Germany, America, Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 6.

11. Pierre Hassner, *Change and Security in Europe, Part II: In Search of a System*. Adelphi Paper 49 (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1968), 10.

"but on the whole they seem not to be weary of the Alliance itself" (p. 58). His comments are substantiated by influential voices inside Germany.¹²

Given the interests of these three major players as well as the other NATO allies, some kind of future for NATO seems in the cards, despite changes in Europe's security climate. Few voices are calling for an outright termination of the Alliance. Political leaders in the West (Honig, pp. 3-17), public opinion polls in NATO countries, and "even the countries in Eastern Europe and—curiously—the Soviet Union see NATO as a useful institution" (Honig, p. 1). Nonetheless, the positive consensus on "whether NATO?" belies the divergence of opinions on "whither NATO?" and the need for it to change fundamentally to remain relevant. The authors reviewed here are clearly divided on this question. Leech and Ullman argue for change; Stuart, Tow, and Honig oppose it.

Stuart and Tow make the case for "the fundamental wisdom of keeping NATO as a regionally focused alliance" (p. 316). They advocate continued respect for the by-now familiar distinction made in the North Atlantic Treaty between "in-area" and "out-of-area" issues. Within the treaty area, the allies pledge to cooperate with one another in common defense. Outside the treaty area, they have promised to consult each other. Stuart and Tow conclude that while out-of-area issues have generated continual controversy, they have been essential to NATO's survival. Had the NATO founders adopted instead

a concept of global security cooperation rather than the region-specific cooperation...it is unlikely that the alliance would be around in any form today....[A] more ambitious, globalist alliance would probably have torn itself apart over events in the Third World (p. 314).

Honig reaches much the same conclusion, though he objects to NATO's proposed mission to "further understanding" or "cooperation" with the East if it is to remain relevant. NATO, asserts Honig, "is a military alliance" which "provides a framework for military planning, coordination, and cooperation" within the treaty area. Attempts to widen the mandate of the Alliance in terms of geography or issues addressed "have not met with any great success in the past." The more NATO strays from dealing with "military security cooperation, the greater is the resistance by individual allies....The logical conclusion, therefore, would be for NATO to continue to do what it has done best: provide a coordinating framework for the defense of the North Atlantic Treaty area" (p. 37).

Yet, Honig does not think NATO should be disbanded. Uncertainty in the outside world "should induce the greatest caution" (p. 53); nuclear and conven-

12. See, for example, comments of Christian Democrat Lothar Rühl, "Germany's Future 'Anchored in Western Alliance,'" *The German Tribune*, No. 1500, 24 January 1992, 2-3; Hans-Dietrich Genscher, "The Foreign Policy of a United Germany," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer 1991): 88; and Christoph Bertram, "The German Question," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Spring 1990): 60.

tional cooperation between America and Europe is still desirable; military planning and joint exercises, though made more difficult by the lack of a clearly identifiable threat, are still possible. Honig sees four political reasons for NATO's continuance as well: it can strengthen the rationale for individual defense efforts; it can safeguard the development of other international institutions such as the EC and the CSCE; it can both provide security for and stifle conflict between alliance members; and it can play a useful role in ongoing arms control through coordinating initiatives and verification (pp. 55-64). With a strong public relations efforts targeted to these areas, a militarily focused NATO can be made politically acceptable to European and North American publics.

Ullman sets forth a very different scenario for the future of NATO. Out of the cocoon of NATO a pan-European butterfly should emerge. He searches for a clear and compelling case "for the creation of a new European Security Organization linking together the members and former members of both alliances" and extending "the zone of peace that has come about in Western Europe" through "collective security and collective confidence" (pp. 63, 67). This new security system would be "NATO transformed" through the inclusion of "the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw Pact" as they become democracies (p. 75). This presumes, of course, extensive changes for NATO. It would need to forego its integrated military organization in favor of bilateral or multilateral troop basing agreements. Ullman speculates that NATO might then end up looking like a revived European Defense Community in which a politically unified European Community could be a single member.

Clearly, the options for NATO in the new European security environment are numerous, though the path to be taken is not yet certain. As Robert Jordan suggested not so long ago, NATO's development, far from representing "the conscious unfolding of a plan," has been "more closely akin to the process by which a committee in attempting to create a horse instead produces a camel."¹³ If so, tomorrow's ungainly creature will likely be an amalgam of the various thoroughbred ideas now circling the track. For forty-three years, NATO has been "a reasonably resilient and coherent system" and appears capable in the foreseeable future, if not of elegance, then of adaption—whether or not Europe's security climate once again changes.

13. Robert S. Jordan, *Political Leadership in NATO* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979), 13.

