The geography of the Atlantic peace: NATO 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall

Author(s): STEN RYNNING

Source: *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, November 2014, Vol. 90, No. 6 (November 2014), pp. 1383-1401

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Royal Institute of International Affairs

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24538672

The geography of the Atlantic peace: NATO 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall

STEN RYNNING*

A proper understanding of NATO's post-Cold War trajectory must begin with the enduring geopolitical condition that compels the United States to seek equilibrium in the Eurasian rimland.[1] This involves the management of a balance of power among the political centres with continental impact—a Washington–Berlin–Moscow axis[2]—and a concept of legitimacy on which order can be based. NATO's portfolio of tasks and policies has expanded almost continuously since 1989, but its greatest hurdles can all be related to this underlying challenge of aligning power and legitimacy in the heartland of Europe.

A certain confusion reigns with regard to legitimacy, which liberals tend to equate with peace, and which retrenchment realists claim has no relevance. Both positions are delusional. Europe's founding concept of legitimacy is the nation-state, and one cannot fully comprehend NATO without considering it and in particular the erosion it—the nation-state—is experiencing.[3] This erosion has triggered a European continental crisis of mistrust, paralysed governance and induced security incapacity, which in turn has tested US patience and provoked ridicule among critics of 'old' Europe. It not only strains Atlantic relations but also offers Russia the opportunity to divide and rule.

The gravest threat to NATO is therefore internal, rooted in the political stress that either liberal expansionism or Atlantic decoupling can cause in western Europe. Europe's institutional foundation—the eroding nation-state—is weak, and for NATO to be strong the alliance must craft strategic priorities that enable a coherent European effort in spite of this underlying weakness. This effort should be geographically focused and give meaning and purpose to the European pillar inside the alliance, and the best strategic option here is to focus on the management of Europe's geographical rim. A balanced partnership—an alliance in equilibrium—is possible in this geopolitical context. NATO would still be able to address

* I would like to thank Theo Farrell, Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Stanley Sloan and an anonymous reviewer for their very helpful comments.

1 Nicholas Spykman, *The geography of the peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944), p. 60.

2 As recognized by British Lord Ismay, NATO's first Secretary General, who quipped that NATO's purpose was to keep the Americans in, the Germans down and the Soviets out.

3 Henry Kissinger, 'Does the West still exist? America and Europe moving towards 2020', speech, Washington DC, 23 Feb. 2007, http://www.henryakissinger.com/speeches/022307.html, accessed 9 Oct. 2014; Henry Kissinger, *World order: reflections on the character of nations and the course of history* (New York: Allen Lane, 2014).

International Affairs 90: 6 (2014) 1383–1401

issues arising from outside the Euro-Atlantic context—issues of global partnership, for instance—but to do so successfully it must be geopolitically anchored. This article will argue, from an 'equilibrium' perspective, that the alliance was losing its balance until recently, but also that the Welsh summit of 4–5 September 2014 tends to work in favour of a restored Atlantic balance. However, misguided arguments continue to exert a strong pull on alliance policy.

The *liberal* argument runs deep in the policy world and academia; it emphasizes the Cold War victory of liberal institutions and values and their pacifying effect. It draws on the aspirational speech of President Bush in May 1989, when he stated that: 'The passion of freedom cannot be denied forever … The world has waited long enough. The time is right. Let Europe be whole and free.'[4] In this framework of thought, NATO's Cold War victory defines the end of European geopolitics. Europe is whole and free. Russia may not quite get it, and NATO may have to remain alert on this issue, but in time Russia too will modernize. NATO can then in earnest turn to its contemporary rationale of fighting globalized threats. This is 'new' NATO, or, as Secretary General Lord Robertson argued in 2003, it certainly 'ain't your daddy's NATO'.[5] Former Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen argued in 2010 that NATO had upgraded to 'NATO 3.0'; Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow maintained in 2014 that the alliance had reached 'NATO 4.0'.[6] This changing character has prompted a shift of focus among analysts who downgrade 'collective defence' as a framework of understanding in favour of broad concepts such as transformation, governance and risk management.[7]

Those who take the position argued by *retrenchment realists* agree that Europe by and large is 'whole and free' but urge a return to Atlantic separation. The logic is that the United States built up an alliance to win the Cold War and now, having won it, should resist nostalgia and draw back. Europe is a legacy region at peace where incidental issues can be managed from an offshore position; the future belongs to Asia where the United States should rethink its engagement policies.[8]

[4] President George Bush, 'Remarks to the citizens in Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany', 31 May 1989, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=17085, accessed 9 Oct. 2014.

[5] Speech by NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, at a conference on 'The Marshall legacy: the role of the transatlantic community in building peace and security', Washington DC, 12 Nov. 2003, http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/s031112a.htm, accessed 9 Oct. 2014.

[6] Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'The new Strategic Concept: active engagement, modern defence', speech to the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, 8 Oct. 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_66727.htm; Alexander Vershbow, 'Wales summit: the rollout of NATO 4.0', remarks at the NATO 'Future leaders' summit, Cardiff, 5 Sept. 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_112977.htm, both accessed 9 Oct. 2014.

[7] Philip H. Gordon, eds, *NATO's transformation: the changing shape of the Atlantic alliance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); David Yost, *NATO transformed: the alliance's new roles in international security* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1998); Mark Webber, Stuart Croft, Jolyon Howorth, Terry Terriff and Elke Krahmann, 'The governance of European security', *Review of International Studies* 30: 1, Jan. 2004, pp. 3–26; Alexandra Gheciu, *NATO in the 'new Europe': the politics of international socialization after the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Michael J. Williams, *NATO, security and risk management: from Kosovo to Khandahar* (London: Routledge, 2008); Ellen Hallams, Luca Ratti and Ben Zyla, eds, *NATO beyond 9/11: the transformation of the Atlantic alliance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013); Sebastian Mayer, *NATO's post-Cold War politics: the changing provisions of security* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

[8] Christopher Layne, 'From preponderance to offshore balancing: America's future grand strategy', *International Security* 22: 1, Summer 1997, pp. 86–124; G. John Ikenberry and Stephen Walt, 'Offshore balancing or international institutions? The way forward for US foreign policy', *Brown Journal of International Affairs* 14: 1, Winter 2007, pp. 13–23; Barry R. Posen, 'Pull back', *Foreign Affairs* 92: 1, Jan.–Feb. 2013, pp. 116–28.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

If the United States nonetheless remains heavily engaged in Europe, realist critics claim, it is not because of geopolitics—the Washington–Berlin–Moscow axis—but because of an 'imperial' mindset in Washington that has slowly but surely provoked Moscow to resist: the Ukraine crisis of 2014 is simply an outcome of liberal hubris.[9] The solution is not 'new NATO' but multipolarity—the separation of Washington, Berlin and Moscow, followed by flexible policies of accommodation.

There is a more satisfying way to grasp post-Cold War NATO, which might be labelled the *equilibrium* school. It posits that alliance strength flows from the balancing of North American and European legacies in terms of both legitimacy and power.[10] Raw power matters, but the character of power, and views of what legitimate power is, vary across the Atlantic. NATO can be a strong policy tool only if it emerges from an Atlantic concert and reflects an alignment of Europe's and North America's distinct ways of mobilizing and exercising power. The differences reflect deeply rooted continental experiences and cannot be wished away. The stronger party in the alliance, the United States, will at times be tempted to dispense with concert. It might then seek hegemony, only to find that hegemony is a 'fantasy' that denies the nature of Atlantic partnership.[11] Conversely, it might seek to walk out—go offshore—only to find itself pulled back in by the prospect of the failure of concerted power inside Europe and the return of unrestrained balance of power politics.[12]

As a political condition equilibrium is messy but necessary, reflective of NATO's nature and America's European destiny. As a framework of analysis it is a sophisticated and powerful tool for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the evolving alliance. Finally, it is also a policy-prescriptive tool in so far as it leads to the conclusion that alliance renewal cannot happen in the geographical void known as globalization but is possible inside the geography of the Atlantic peace—where the two pillars must be brought into concert and focused on the stabilization of Europe's approaches, from North Africa across the Middle East to Russia.

The remainder of the article first conducts an overview of post-Cold War NATO. I next engage NATO from the perspective of equilibrium. Finally, I turn to NATO's September 2014 summit to ask whether its outcome is indicative of an improved allied ability to root the alliance's changing character in its enduring nature.

[9] John J. Mearsheimer, 'Imperial by design', *The National Interest*, no. 111, Jan.–Feb. 2011, pp. 16–34; Alexander Lukin, 'What the Kremlin is thinking: Putin's vision for Eurasia', *Foreign Affairs* 93: 4, July–Aug. 2014, pp. 85–93; John J. Mearsheimer, 'Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs* 93: 5, Sept.–Oct. 2014, pp. 77–89.

[10] Kissinger, *World order*; David P. Calleo, *Rethinking Europe's future* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[11] David P. Calleo, *The Atlantic fantasy: the US, NATO, and Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970); idem, *Follies of power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[12] Sten Rynning, *Germany is more than Europe can handle: or, why NATO remains a pacifier*, NDC Research Paper no. 96 (Brussels: NATO Defence College, Sept. 2013).

Post-Cold War NATO

NATO's founding Washington Treaty is permanent, but NATO's Strategic Concepts change along with the security environment, and there is no better place to begin an overview of 25 years of change than with a brief comparison of the Strategic Concepts of 1991 and 2010.

In 1991 NATO had a clear hierarchy of tasks, with defence dominating all the 'fundamental' ones. In a changing Europe the alliance did anticipate a 'broad approach to security', including an enhanced role for diplomacy and lowered defence readiness, but the bottom line remained defence: 'None of [NATO's] weapons will ever be used except in self-defence.'[13]

These boundaries did not withstand the test of time. Collective defence turned out to involve not only strategic balances but also new threats such as terrorism; NATO forces have been fighting bloody battles far from Europe; in-place forces have been ditched in favour of expeditionary capacities; and diplomacy has become important far beyond instances of crisis management. The 2010 Strategic Concept takes stock of and rationalizes change. It places 'three essential core tasks' on a par—collective defence, crisis management and cooperation—and promises continuous renewal.[14] Task plurality has replaced defence hierarchy, just as globalization has replaced geography.

Collective defence

For most of the 1990s the real 'future defence' debate took place in the context of NATO enlargement. The underlying idea was that if democracies do not wage war on one another, as liberal thinking and enquiry seemed to confirm, then the best defence is the enlargement of the community of democracies.

President Clinton aligned the United States with this liberal idea once his national security team, led by Anthony Lake, had gone in search of a new doctrine for the post-Cold War era and come up with the 'strategy of democratic enlargement'. Where the preceding Bush administration had been torn between doctrines of superpower and transnationalist management, offered by Pentagon and State Department thinking respectively, the Clinton administration discarded both options in favour of expanding its circle of friends.[15] In January 1994 President Clinton argued that NATO enlargement was a question not of 'whether but when', and by January 1996 NATO as 'a guarantor of European democracy' had become integral to the US National Security Strategy.[16] Subsequently, NATO has been enlarged three times—with three countries in 1999, seven in 2004 and an additional two in 2009. NATO thus grew from a Cold War club of 16 countries to

[13] NATO, *The alliance's new Strategic Concept* (Brussels, 7 Nov. 1991). The fundamental security tasks are covered in para. 20; enhanced diplomacy in para. 31; pure self-defence in para. 35; and reduced and graduated forces in para. 45.
[14] NATO, *Active engagement, modern defence: Strategic Concept* (Brussels, 19–20 Nov. 2010), para. 4, p. 7.
[15] Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America between the wars* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), p. 67.
[16] United States, *A National Security Strategy of engagement and enlargement* (Washington DC: The White House, Feb. 1996), p. 37.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

a broad gathering of 28, and additional enlargements remain possible via the institutionalized track of the Membership Action Plan (MAP), which opened in 1999.

The rationale of enlargement was transcendent: US officials promoting it sought to overcome geopolitics and achieve simultaneously enlargement of the alliance and partnership with Russia.[17] This rationale also permeates the 1995 NATO Enlargement Study that settled the 'whether' of enlargement by establishing that enlargement would not only offer 'enhanced stability and security for all countries in the Euro-Atlantic area' but also offer Russia 'broad, enhanced dialogue and cooperation'.[18] Obviously, it was impossible to ignore the concern that Russia might resist the policy, which was widely debated, and within NATO ranks France took the lead in positioning itself and Germany as 'honest brokers' between Washington and Moscow. It was a push for trilateral geopolitics that Germany's Chancellor Kohl ultimately turned down in favour of alignment with the United States.[19] NATO enlargement thus became tied up with Germany's desire to signal strategic continuity in terms of *Westbindung*.

Enlargement was defence, therefore, and external crises related to civil war and failed states fell into the lesser category of crisis management (of which more shortly). There was in fact a new defence agenda related to missile threats, weapons of mass destruction and terrorism; but, in spite of some US effort, it had trouble gaining traction in an alliance engulfed by Balkan crisis management. The revised Strategic Concept of 1999—adopted in the midst of the Kosovo intervention—therefore subsumed this new agenda under a 'strategic perspective' that did not directly impinge on the more noble 'purpose and tasks' of the alliance.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the ensuing 'war on terror' fundamentally shook this approach to defence priorities. For a while the Iraq War confused matters, but when the dust settled there was allied agreement that NATO had to address a broad range of threats. These are enumerated in the 2010 Strategic Concept's section on defence and deterrence, which deals first with the classical issues of nuclear and conventional defence and deterrence, and then moves on to consider all the new issues—missile attacks, weapons of mass destruction, cyber-attacks, international terrorism, energy security and, finally, emerging technologies.[20]

NATO thus acquired a vastly overhauled defence concept in the course of the post-Cold War years. Geography, once translated into a concern with 'strategic balance', by and large vanished: Europe 'whole and free' nullified the concern with continental geography. New threats whose reality was brutally revealed on 11 September 2001 made it to the top of NATO's agenda but again without reference to geography: the threats apparently concerned means (missiles, terror, cyber, etc.) rather than political geography (actors in geographical locations). NATO's renewed defence agenda thus aligned with reigning thinking on globalization as a process of transnational management, as opposed to old-school geopolitics.

[17] James Goldgeier, 'NATO expansion: the anatomy of a decision', *Washington Quarterly* 21: 1, 1998, pp. 83–102.
[18] NATO, *Study on NATO enlargement* (Brussels, 3 Sept. 1995), paras 3 and 24.
[19] See Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's door: how the alliance remade itself for a new era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 181–8.
[20] NATO, *Active engagement, modern defence*, para. 19.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

Crisis management

The need for a broad approach to security crises in and around Europe was obvious from the outset in the early 1990s: the difficult question was how to organize it. A broad approach invites an expansion in the reach of organizational authority, which is also to invite turf wars among key stakeholders. NATO has indeed managed to broaden its organization, but the turf war has gained an unfortunate permanent character.

The Soviet Union and later Russia tended to favour the Conference (later Organization) on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later OSCE), of which it was a part, but its behaviour early on in the Baltic states and elsewhere raised questions about the depth of its commitment, as did its later effort to mobilize the CSCE/OSCE in opposition to the enlargement of especially NATO but also the EU.[21] In the West the allies were divided between Atlanticists seeking NATO's broadening and Europeanists seeking the extension of EU competences. The compromise of seeking 'complementarity' or 'interlocking' institutions failed to address, much less resolve, the underlying political tension.

Operations, first in Bosnia and then later in Kosovo, were too small to break the deadlock. In 1994, in the midst of Bosnia's crisis, the Atlanticists sought a compromise by way of a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) and flexible Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) command options inside NATO, but Europeanists continued to look for non-NATO options. Tortuous institutional deals (the 1996 Berlin agreement and the 1999 Berlin Plus agreement) failed to resolve the matter. The Kosovo intervention of 1999—heavily dominated by US expeditionary capacities—then drove Britain to seek a greater European bang for the buck, which led to its alignment with France and the creation of a new institutional option in the shape of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). At this point both NATO and the EU had moved, but the sum total was a standstill rooted in unresolved conflicting political ambitions.

The war in Afghanistan was big enough to become a game changer.[22] In fact, the allies never considered Afghanistan a 'war' effort in the sense of collective defence; rather, they saw it as a large crisis management operation designed to provide 'security assistance' to the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai. This posed problems for Europeanists because the lead organization was NATO, which aroused concerns that NATO would dominate the EU, and there was no way to counter this concern by establishing a real EU security footprint in Afghanistan. As a badly deteriorating Afghan security situation in 2004–2007 exposed troops, the allies were pushed to agree on NATO reform nonetheless. At a summit in Riga in 2006 they agreed to realize a 'comprehensive approach' (CA), though it would take them another two years to flesh out this ambition in the

[21] Martin A. Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991: from Cold War through cold peace to partnership?* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 9–12.

[22] Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: the liberal disconnect* (Stanford, CA: Stanford, University Press, 2012); 'Of sirens and deceptive virtue: a critical look at NATO's Comprehensive Approach', *Studia Diplomatica* 64: 2, 2011, pp. 37–56.

shape of both a generic CA policy and a targeted CA strategy for Afghanistan.[23] Still, the timing was not bad: the CA became the framework through which the allies could channel widespread support to the US-led counter-insurgency 'surge' of 2009–2012. In effect, the 'surge' institutionalized the CA.

NATO's Strategic Concept of 2010 reflects this peak of engagement. It—rather ambitiously—states that NATO must be ready to engage with crises 'before, during, and after' their peak. It foresees that NATO must 'manage ongoing hostilities' and 'contribute to stabilization and reconstruction'; and in order to do this it must organize a 'modest' civilian crisis management capability in the headquarters and more generally provide for enhanced planning, training and intelligence sharing across civil–military divides.[24] Significantly, France and Germany have signed off on this document, thus putting aside their traditional reservations—for France with regard to EU autonomy and for Germany with regard to the militarization of civilian crisis management efforts.

Yet all is not well. The CA enabler—the Afghan combat mission—is closing, and mission lessons are mixed, at best. The nature of crisis management tasks tends to speak against stable institutional compromises: the tasks are plentiful and invariably complex, just as they involve dynamic diplomatic constellations. Moreover, crises can be threatening to countries, and some allies might therefore appeal to their inherent right to allied security consultations (article 4 of the treaty); but other allies will resist this facile resort to consultations on the grounds that consultations on threats are tied to prospective 'attacks' (article 5 of the treaty) and thus issues of collective defence.[25] Under these circumstances there is ample reason to expect the underlying political stalemate related to the NATO–EU balance to revive.

Cooperative security

Cooperative security is the final of NATO's three 'core tasks'. Like crisis management, it has had to be detached from the Cold War priority of collective defence and given independent shape. It has become a diplomatic means for managing NATO's security environment and in many ways is the closest thing NATO has to a traditional foreign policy. The making of foreign policy, though, is difficult at the national level and even more so at the multilateral level, and NATO's enhanced profile in matters of diplomacy is torn among rival priorities.

NATO has a range of partnerships. There are the multilateral forums that began in the east (the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, EAPC) and then moved south (the Mediterranean Dialogue, MD), and finally, with the war on terror, south-east to the Persian Gulf (the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, ICI).[26] And then there are

[23] The Comprehensive Approach Action Plan and Comprehensive Strategic Political–Military Plan, respectively.

[24] NATO, *Active engagement, modern defence*, paras 21–4.

[25] For this relationship between threats and attacks, see Stanley Sloan, *NATO's future: beyond collective defense*, INSS (Institute for National Strategic Studies) McNair Paper no. 46, Dec. 1995.

[26] The EAPC is a follow-on to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which in 1991 reached out to the former Warsaw Pact countries. The EAPC was formed in 1994, at which point the MD was also created. ICI originated at the 2004 Istanbul summit.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

inter-organizational relations, notably with the EU and UN, and bilateral relations with a range of individual partner countries across the globe. These countries are a diverse lot: rival Russia is among them, as are distant Mongolia as well as close friends such as Sweden, Japan and Australia. Some partners are major contributors to NATO missions, serving on a par with NATO allies; some share the liberal democratic values of NATO; some see partnership as a way station to membership; some hope to direct NATO's attention to their particular national security interests.

In all this there is no dominant pattern, except for the trend away from big multilateral formats (EAPC, MD, ICI) towards bilateral relationships and flexible agendas. A major change introduced in the 2010 Strategic Concept was the espousal of 'flexible formats ... across and beyond existing frameworks ... with any nations and relevant organisations across the globe sharing our interest in peaceful international relations'.[27] This principle has led to the integration of all NATO partnership tools in a single partnership toolbox that is then used in a '28+n' format (i.e. NATO and one or several partners).[28]

The organization of flexibility, however, has accentuated the challenge of managing diversity. One might argue that NATO's flexible framework invites diversity and therefore policy tension. One such tension is the balance between values and operations: should NATO privilege partners who can deliver operational impact or those who are fully committed to liberal democratic rule? Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan were close partners in NATO's 2011 Operation Unified Protector in Libya, and also in the 2014 coalition assembled by the United States against Islamic State. They add both punch and international legitimacy to operations, but they are not liberal democracies and would not take kindly to a formal partnership challenging their domestic legitimacy.

Another tension is the balance between friends and rivals. Should NATO reach out to like-minded nations to strengthen its own relative position? If so, it would become the hub of a type of League of Democracies.[29] The alternative is to use NATO as a tool for dialogue among the alliances of the major (rival) powers of the world.[30] Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 have damaged the prospect of such 'concertation'; but still, the stabilization of rivalries is in many ways diplomacy's purpose.

NATO has not prioritized these options; its menu of 'strategic objectives' in cooperative security is broad and, in its own words, 'without any indication of priority ranking'. This explains why outside observers suggest further reform and the identification of real priorities.[31] In its current format NATO partnership policy initiatives are certain victims of a rush of political tension. What NATO

[27] NATO, *Active engagement, modern defence*, para. 30.

[28] NATO, *Active engagement in cooperative security: a more efficient and flexible partnership policy* (Brussels, 15 April 2011).

[29] Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Goldgeier, 'Global NATO', *Foreign Affairs* 85: 5, Sept.–Oct. 2006, pp. 105–13.

[30] Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'An agenda for NATO: toward a global security web', *Foreign Affairs* 8: 5, Sept.–Oct. 2009, pp. 2–20.

[31] The citation is from NATO, *Active engagement in cooperative security*, para 4. See also David Yost, *NATO's balancing act* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2014), pp. 213–19; Karl-Heinz Kamp and Heidi Reisinger, *NATO's partnerships after 2014: go west!*, NDC Research Paper no. 92 (Brussels: NATO Defence College, May 2013).

needs is a measure of grand strategic thinking, an issue to which we shall return once we have briefly touched on the final dimension of post-Cold War NATO.

Reform and transformation

Alongside three core tasks—defence, crisis management and partnership—placed on a par, NATO finally promises constant adaptation. It does so in the 2010 Strategic Concept with a short section on 'reform and transformation'. It precedes the conclusion (just one paragraph) on 'NATO in the twenty-first century', where NATO leaders declare: 'We are firmly committed to preserve [NATO's] effectiveness as the globe's most successful political–military alliance.' The ambition is not surprising. Its realization is another matter, though, and this is where reform and transformation are critical.

The key paragraph states with almost deceptive simplicity that 'NATO must have sufficient resources—financial, military and human—to carry out its missions'.[32] However, the message is a tough one: there is no escaping the pain of financing defence. NATO is an insurance policy, and nations must pay the premium.

The Strategic Concept does not go into numbers, but we know the targets with which NATO operates: defence budgets should amount to at least 2 per cent of a member state's GDP, of which expenditure on major equipment should account for at least 20 per cent, and 50 per cent of a national force should be deployable while 10 per cent should be actively engaged in or preparing for deployment.[33] These targets are meant to prompt European allies to do more, which is nothing new. However, spending trends are alarming. In 2007 three out of 26 allies besides the United States met the budget guidelines (Britain, France and Bulgaria); in 2013 only one of 28 did so (Britain). Moreover, even though the US defence budget is declining, its share of the NATO pie has increased, to 73 per cent in 2013 from 68 per cent in 2007—for the simple reason that other allies are cutting defence budgets further and faster.[34]

The Strategic Concept's emphasis on 'sufficient resources' was therefore part of a wider US-led push to have Europeans pay a higher—some would say fairer—premium for their collective defence insurance. For most of the 1990s and 2000s the allies were able to stave off criticism with reference to defence output—maintaining that they were getting a fair bang for a small buck—and also civilian and diplomatic inputs to NATO crisis management and partnership initiatives. No longer: the emphasis is back on defence and, notably, defence input. Money-strapped European governments are predictably uncomfortable, but with hardship they in fact gain an occasion to address the fundamental value of a more balanced alliance.

[32] NATO, *Active engagement, modern defence*, para. 37; for the ambition to remain on top, see para. 38.

[33] Linking defence expenditure to national income has been NATO practice since 1950–51. Pre-NATO comparisons of defence strength focused on forces and capabilities but, led by the United States, NATO sought early on a new framework for reviewing national capacities and defence obligations. Defence ministers have been defining and revising spending guidelines ever since, and in 2006 they set the expenditure targets of 2% of GDP and 20% for modernization. In 2004 the allies introduced a new measure, a usability target of 40/8 (40 per cent deployable and 8 per cent deployed or preparing for deployment), which in 2008 was upgraded to 50/10.

[34] Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *The Secretary General's Annual Report, 2013* (Brussels: NATO, 27 Jan. 2014), pp. 19–20.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

Equilibrium

The Atlantic peace that sustains NATO has two key elements: the Washington–Berlin–Moscow balance of power, and the purpose around which western power is organized. In this section I shall first trace the post-Cold War dynamics arising from these elements, then establish their deep roots in Atlantic history, and finally conclude with some observations on the difference between the three schools of thought—liberal, retrenchment and equilibrium.

A troubling divide

NATO's evolution—away from geography, Europe and defence towards globalization, generic risks and flexible partnerships—could simply be attributed to international change. Asia *is* rising and Europe *is* declining, and while Russia's aggression in Ukraine is real, so is the spectre of radicalized politics blended with weapons of mass destruction haunting large parts of the Middle East and South Asia.

Yet NATO's evolution also reflects political choices, among which choices defined in Washington weigh heavily. To realize the vision of 'Europe whole and free', the United States opted for NATO enlargement. To manage a turbulent world, the United States opted for NATO transformation—because the management of global power requires alliance flexibility as opposed to geographical or thematic constraints. While it would be wrong to summarize US policy with the quip 'the mission determines the coalition', there is a definite sense that the alliance must be ready to adapt to and support whichever mission the allies bring to the table. The quip might thus instead be that 'the alliance must enable the mission and the coalition'.[35]

This choice is reasonable from the perspective of individual campaigns, say in Afghanistan or Libya, just as missions are an important tool for building practical cooperation and cohesion. However, cumulated campaigns and a sustained high operational tempo also engender a utilitarian approach to politics that erodes the critically important mutual understanding of power's diverse social and political conditions inside allied nations. The Atlantic concert thus weakens.

NATO's high operational tempo—following from the fight against terrorism, piracy, extremism, and contagious cases of corrupt and failing governments—has created a tension of capacity by playing to America's strengths and Europe's weaknesses. The asymmetry was always there, but in a context where European allies could compensate for their relative lack of muscle. During the Cold War, most of them were front-line states that lent territory to and prepared conscripted forces for the collective defence. Later, in the early 1990s, the European allies could move some of their land forces into the Balkans as observers and peacekeepers. Peace enforcement—in all its guises, from Kosovo through Afghanistan to Libya—has upset this delicate balance. For 15 years, from Kosovo onwards, Europeans have

[35] See Sten Rynning, 'Coalitions, institutions, and big tents: the new strategic reality of armed interventions', *International Affairs* 89: 1, Jan. 2013, pp. 53–68.

consistently struggled to contribute a high number of trained professionals and sophisticated machines to NATO's expeditionary missions.

The asymmetry has fed a negative culture of transactionalism where the key question is: 'What have you done for me lately?' European allies are warned that 'dwindling appetite and patience in the US Congress' could lead US leaders to the conclusion that NATO is not worth the cost.[36] If NATO did not exist today, James Goldgeier warns, 'the United States would not seek to create it'.[37] Allied power, it would seem, has become a question of global utility.

Expeditionary warfare, power asymmetry and transactionalism not only create an acute power asymmetry, but also have a direct and negative impact on the collective sense of legitimacy and purpose. We see it in Europe, where lack of expeditionary muscle has de facto strengthened the continent's penchant for substituting ideals of justice for policies based on necessity; for substituting collective security for collective defence. Put bluntly, collective security is Europe's strategy of weakness; and it is one to which the United States does not subscribe.

The rub is that collective security and alliances are 'diametrically opposed': collective security organizations, such as the UN, presume a global common interest, whereas collective defence alliances, such as NATO, presume a specific adversary; collective security is meant to uphold international law, whereas alliances are meant to sharpen political obligations based on national interests.[38] The United States tends to view UN-centred collective security as desirable but also secondary to defence in its national efforts to confront direct threats to its position as global leader. Europe, in a position of expeditionary weakness, leans in the inverse direction. The allies thus lose the ability to speak the same language of defence. In Afghanistan they struggled to maintain unity, national caveats multiplied, and the public scorn directed at the laggards of the campaign increased: sometimes the Europeans were lumped together in the basket of effeminate Venus; sometimes, individual allies such as Germany were singled out for special attention.

The Ukrainian crisis of 2014 does not imply a return to the good old days; it must be integrated in a larger policy framework. To develop it, one option is to continue to knock European heads together in the hope that this will suddenly produce a European dash for expeditionary muscle. Another and better option is to work with the fundamental building blocks of the political alliance.

Roots

NATO represents the coming together of different geopolitical experiences, and its challenge in this respect is to keep them in balance rather than denying their character. The United States entered NATO in April 1949 having made a choice—

[36] Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, 'The security and defense agenda (future of NATO)', speech delivered in Brussels, 10 June 2011, http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581, accessed 9 Oct. 2014.

[37] James Goldgeier, *The future of NATO*, Council on Foreign Relations Special Report no. 51 (Washington DC, Jan. 2010), p. 3.

[38] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 1994), p. 247.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

to dominate rather than be dominated by Eurasia.[39] It brought to the old continent the perspective of a geopolitically privileged power: it is a 'continental-type state' with no hemispheric rivals and a dynamic polyglot nation unified by culture and history. America's impulse is to shape policy at the intersection of democracy's ever-expanding international 'frontier' and the opportunities offered to the entrepreneurial individual, the bedrock of American democracy, by way of overseas 'open doors'.[40] NATO was shaped by this impulse and the opportunities Europe afforded—multilateral and open-ended.[41]

In contrast, Europe's primary strategic challenge is itself—which is to say its internal balance of power and the solidity of its component parts, that is, the nation-state. The balance of power has been marked by grabs for hegemony and then collective efforts to introduce restraint in the system by way of concerted power adjustment. Grabs for power nearly destroyed Europe in the early twentieth century, and the concert of power has prevailed ever since, anchored in NATO and notably also in the European Union. The EU is where Europeans in the spirit of Montesquieu seek to constitutionalize a separation of powers.[42] It embodies a rejection of power politics rooted in history, but also the crisis of the European nation-state, whose paradoxical combination of popular attachment and low capacity locks down the process of integration. A strong EU could potentially help solve Atlantic burden-sharing problems, and it is certainly a vision pushed by Europeanists seeking, in the spirit of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to inspire and mobilize a European 'general will'. However, given Europe's fragmented and national identities, it is a vain hope. Europe's foreseeable future is tied to a concert run by weak but popular nation-states.

If NATO cannot build on and reinforce both these Atlantic experiences, it is doomed to fail. It was never simple to provide for an Atlantic concert, of course, because the desire for influence is national whereas the organization of it is multilateral. When US policy has been at its strongest, it has been based on the realization that the quest for national influence is intrinsically linked to questions of continental order.

At the very outset the United States sought influence and few continental ties. It wanted to ally with 'stepping stones'—privileged allies in critical geographical locations[43]—but then foresaw the organization of a strong European pillar

[39] Nicholas Spykman graphically illustrated the illusion of comfort with a map that had the Americas at its centre and the rest of the world at its flanks, painted in black and with big arrows of intrusion and dominance pointing in the direction of the Americas: Spykman, *The geography of the peace*, map 51, p. 59.

[40] Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, pp. 807–12. The frontier thesis in the American political tradition emerged in the late nineteenth century and coincided with the articulation of an 'open door' policy in respect to China, then dominated by European empires. See Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The significance of the frontier in American history' (1893), in *The early writings of Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. F. Mood (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938).

[41] The Atlantic Treaty has no date of expiration and does not define conditions under which the alliance would be considered irrelevant. Instead, article 12 allows for consultations, if any ally so requests, 'for the purpose of reviewing the Treaty' once it has been in force for ten years. Article 13 grants individual allies the option of alliance exit once the treaty has been in force for 20 years.

[42] See David P. Calleo, 'Power and legitimacy among western states', in *Follies of power*, pp. 130–37; also *Rethinking Europe's future*.

[43] These include Britain as a geopolitical 'aircraft carrier' but also Norway, Denmark, Iceland and Portugal,

(i.e. the Brussels Pact) that the United States could assist militarily and economically. This ran in the logic of Marshall Aid, outlined in mid-1947, and it had the support of most planners, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon and State Department officials such as George Kennan and Charles E. Bohlen. However, European leaders knew their own limitations—their pillar could not support itself. Their invitation to America's empire, extended in cooperation with a number of foreign policy thinkers and officials in the United States, perhaps notably John D. Hickerson and Theodore C. Achilles of the State Department, led America to accept the alliance.[44] The conclusion of the alliance represented the realization that Europe's Montesquieu bargain could not be made or upheld in the absence of the United States' onshore engagement.

The United States has since then faced the hardship of leading a multilateral alliance, which has always involved a prioritization of external threats and the political needs of intra-alliance management. In this context the challenge of statesmanship is to speak to all political constituencies while crafting policy based on a set of durable geopolitical priorities.

Alliance management

The compelling rationale of focusing on external threats has shaped two of the schools of thought outlined in the introduction, liberalism and retrenchment realism. Liberalism calls for active leadership—a lean-in style of defending the zone of liberal peace from a variety of illiberal threats. Retrenchment realism calls for the converse, a lean-back leadership style made possible by a eurozone of peace that has become incidental to US vital interests.

Equilibrium agrees that liberal values influence policy, but only as filtered by the history and capacity of nation-states. It observes that Europe's liberal heritage is distinct from that of North America, and argues—in opposition to liberalism—that liberal values cannot be advanced in the absence of an Atlantic balance. It observes repeated instances of strategic upheaval in the alliance and traces its root cause to poor 'alliance politics', as the late Richard Neustadt brilliantly argued in 1970.[45] The war on terror that began in 2001 was sadly a rerun of this history—a valiant effort to counter an external threat, but so poorly crafted in terms of alliance politics that it nearly broke the alliance.[46]

Equilibrium is equally in opposition to retrenchment, as it argues that an Atlantic balance is an essential part of the management of Eurasia's rims. It warns that Europe is not 'at peace' but engaged in a tenuous Montesquieu bargain to which the primary threat comes from within. The concert could be destroyed by a crisis of constitutional proportions, such as the euro crisis, that tempted France

countries the United States insisted on having included in an Atlantic framework during the Washington exploratory talks in mid-1948 that involved the United States and Canada on the one hand and, on the other, members of the Brussels Pact: Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

[44] Geir Lundestad, *The United States and western Europe since 1945: from 'empire' by invitation to transatlantic drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[45] Richard Neustadt, *Alliance politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

[46] Elizabeth Pond, *The near-death of the transatlantic alliance* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2004).

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

and Britain to go it alone and exposed Germany in a singular leadership position that would not resonate across Europe, except perhaps in Moscow where the opportunity for influence would be welcomed. The geography of globalization simply does not afford the United States the luxury of choice: the Eurasian rim has become an integrated challenge, and the Atlantic balance is part of the answer.[47]

As NATO moves forward, then, it faces a dual challenge—to steer clear of all the strategic reservations that follow from a liberal dash for freedom, and to avoid the recriminations that follow from the belief that the alliance is superfluous. NATO must rebuild the balance between Europe and North America and construct a strategy to support it.

The 2014 Wales summit and beyond

The initiatives that emerged from the NATO summit of 4–5 September 2014 in Wales do as a matter of fact go some way towards rebuilding the alliance. Naturally, the self-acclaimed 'historic' character of the summit invites some scepticism: in Wales, it can be argued, NATO put just a handful of new forces on the table, offered no new defence money, had no comment on Libya's descent into civil war, and remained on the sideline as a 'core coalition' prepared for war with Islamic State in the Middle East.[48] From the perspective of 'equilibrium' and the need to restore balanced partnership, however, there were some signs of progress. We begin with a short overview.

Summit overview

The summit communiqué is lengthy—a full 113 paragraphs—but addresses as a matter of priority the Ukrainian crisis and Russia's violation of Europe's order. Western nations have responded to these events with sanctions and crisis diplomacy, among other things, and in NATO they have defined a policy of assurance, adaptation and renewed partnership.

Assurance and adaptation combine to form a Readiness Action Plan, presented with some fanfare.[49] Assurance refers to measures that physically demonstrate alliance solidarity on the territories of eastern allies, notably the Baltic states, Poland and Romania but also Bulgaria. These measures include notably the permanent rotation of western air, land and sea forces to these countries to provide 'continuous presence' and 'meaningful military activity'. Assurance is effectively a policy of deterrence, signalling to Russia that a test of strengths will lead it to encounter western and notably US troops. As it involves rotation and fairly light troops, it is designed to fit within the offer made in the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act to pursue collective defence by means other than the 'permanent stationing of substantial combat forces' in new member states. NATO could have

[47] Robert D. Kaplan, *The revenge of geography* (New York: Random House, 2012).
[48] Judy Dempsey, 'NATO isn't going anywhere', *Strategic Europe*, 8 Sept. 2014, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=56561, accessed 9 Oct. 2014.
[49] NATO, 'Wales summit declaration', press release 120, 5 Sept. 2014, paras 5–12.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

discarded this Founding Act on account of Russian actions but chose instead to freeze it.

Adaptation refers to reaction capacity within NATO's military structure. If Russia wants to test NATO, it has the luxury of choosing the time and place. NATO is therefore in need of greater speed and flexibility, and has therefore created a new spearhead force—a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force of some 4,000–5,000 troops—that will be able to deploy within hours. It will not stand alone: the bulk of NATO forces along with those of select partners will be ready to provide reinforcement, partly through the new Connected Forces Initiative, a training framework; also, the 'situational awareness' of the command structure will be upgraded, and equipment and supplies will be pre-positioned at a number of bases along the periphery of NATO territory.

The spearhead force has grabbed headlines and been likened to the Allied Mobile Force (AMF) of the Cold War. It is indeed similar in character, but it is also significantly smaller and will likely not fall fully under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR), as the AMF did. Delegating command up front is a way of avoiding the time-consuming task of seeking parliamentary approval in 28 capitals—and SACEUR has such delegated authority in the cases of air surveillance (AWACS and AGS) and standing NATO maritime groups (SNMG)—but land troops in regard to Russia is a sensitive matter. As the concept falls into place, therefore, the allies are likely to rein in SACEUR's delegated command, either by delegating to him the authority to 'deploy' but not 'employ' the force, or by delegating to him just a fraction of the spearhead.

Renewed partnership has several dimensions. With regard to the entirety of the post-Soviet space, NATO reaffirms its policy of supporting 'the right of partners to make independent and sovereign choices on foreign and security policy, free from external pressure and coercion'. This is a direct political response to 'the violence and insecurity in the region caused by Russia and the Russian-backed separatists'.[50] NATO specifically offers enhanced capacity-building measures not only to Ukraine but also to Georgia and Moldova, and it is undeterred in its policy of maintaining the perspective of membership for Georgia and Montenegro—two states in which Russian interests are strong. However, where Montenegro is in the enlargement fast lane, within the MAP, both Georgia and Ukraine remain outside it, and their future relationship to NATO—as partners or prospective members—is uncertain.

The summit focused also on the transatlantic fundamentals of the alliance. A crisp (only nine paragraphs) 'Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond' establishes that 'our vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace faces multiple challenges' and goes on to locate these in the periphery of Europe, from Russia to North Africa.[51] It lines up NATO for a support role with regard to the 'core coalition' of nine allies (the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Canada, Turkey and Denmark) and one partner (Australia) that formed to combat Islamic

[50] NATO, 'Wales summit declaration', paras 30, 17.
[51] NATO, 'Wales Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond', press release 122, 5 Sept. 2014.

State in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, it commits the allies to 'reversing' the decline in defence spending and to ensuring a fair and balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities. Significantly in this respect, the guideline of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence has been moved to the highest level—from defence ministers to heads of state and government. It takes little imagination to foresee that all US allies will have to argue for progress on this issue at their next summit—in 2016 in Poland.

Towards equilibrium?

Two dangers to the alliance were noted earlier in the context of equilibrium—a liberal dash for freedom, and recriminations following from a declining belief in the alliance. The summit in fact did fairly well in both respects. Certainly, NATO's stance on the Ukrainian crisis is in some respect rooted in a liberal policy of self-determination and a rejection of spheres of influence. However, the underlying sense of realism in the summit communiqué is noteworthy and probably reflects a more restrained interpretation of how the big issues—membership, partnership and crisis management—can underpin collective defence, as opposed to collective security.

The key point with regard to membership was that NATO was not ready to extend new guarantees in response to threatened values in outside countries but instead focused on ramping up its capacity to defend existing members. In spite of the declared ambition at the 2012 Chicago summit, Newport was *not* an enlargement summit. The newfound sense of realism resulted in the Readiness Action Plan for allies and deferred membership perspectives for Ukraine and Georgia. Moreover, the Action Plan will be expensive—because high readiness is inherently expensive—and is probably at the borderline of existing capacities, but this is a good sign: strategic necessity trumped existing capacity.

A similar twist is observable with regard to partnership policy, where the distinction between rivals and like-minded partners has become clearer. The Founding Act with Russia remains in place, though frozen, which is a diplomatic opening of sorts but also a signal that future partnership will focus on managing the East–West balance. Other partners are viewed differently, as NATO allies pledged to 'strengthen the political dialogue and practical cooperation with our partners who share our vision for cooperative security in an international order based on the rule of law'.[52] This framework for privileged partners must now be shaped and implemented, and it will be a key measure along with the Connected Forces Initiative for tying certain partners into the politico-strategic orbit of the alliance.

Crisis management, finally, is likewise gaining a more distinctive geographical and therefore strategic edge. This is happening as crises in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq, are troubling the allies, so much so that they intricately link the two approaches of defence and crisis management.[53] Regarding crisis management as an early step on the ladder of escalation will strengthen

[52] NATO, 'Wales summit declaration', para. 81.
[53] NATO, 'Wales summit declaration', paras 32–3.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014

NATO's collective defence character, where previously crisis management's status as a separate task led to the conflation of collective defence and security.[54] Crisis management can thus be activated to support the aforementioned 'core coalition' against Islamic State, and more generally to assure southern allies that their strategic interests in Mediterranean stability are on a par with the interests of eastern allies in balancing Russia.

A restrained alliance more distinctively oriented towards its geopolitical borders can be traced in the summit conclusions, which speak to the concerns of the equilibrium perspective. The next question is whether the allies can move forward collectively and counter the pull of mutual recrimination.

The encouraging signs include the fact that the allies have collectively signed up for and underwritten the Readiness Action Plan. The North American and northern European footprints may be comparatively large, but all allies have contributed forces: this is not a coalition but an alliance in action. Equally important is the fact that Germany is not an outlier. For most of the spring of 2014 Germany's foreign minister Walter Steinmeier searched for a diplomatic opening to a settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, which could have put Germany at odds with eastern allies and the United States; but the poverty of diplomatic advances and Chancellor Merkel's increasingly visible involvement have made Germany the key ally next to the United States in the alignment of the western camp.[55] In short, the Atlantic part of the Washington–Berlin–Moscow axis has succeeded in driving policy.

Challenges remain, naturally. America's security agenda is global, and America's readiness to uphold its credibility by protecting NATO from Russian blackmail should not be confused with willingness to foot the bill. Europeans must take seriously the message of the Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond—the burden will be shifted. We can be certain that European governments will be hard put to raise defence budgets in significant ways, and thus we return to the deceptively attractive suggestion made by retrenchment realists—that Europe will not get its act together until the United States pulls out.

Next steps

Decoupling is a poor idea from the perspective of managing Eurasia's rim, because it will cause a collapse of concerted power in Europe. Decoupling will incapacitate European foreign policy, invite Russian and other outside meddling, and compel the United States to sort out European affairs rather than mobilizing an Atlantic

[54] This ladder of escalation is now in effect: the Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond states that 'should the security of any Ally be threatened we will act together and decisively', which in effect is to merge the treaty's language on threats (article 4) with that on attacks (article 5) as causes of collective action. See Stan Sloan, 'A successful NATO summit? Proof will be in the pudding', *War on the rocks*, 10 Sept. 2014, http://warontherocks.com/2014/09/a-successful-nato-summit-proof-will-be-in-the-pudding/, accessed 9 Oct. 2014.

[55] Germany will help carry extraordinary costs in the strengthening of the command chain behind the Readiness Action Plan, which will involve the upgrading of the Multinational Command North-East Headquarters in Stettin, Poland. Costs in NATO lie where they fall, and in this case the costs fall to the MNC-NE owners—Germany, Denmark and Poland.

partnership for the management of global affairs. Next steps should therefore nourish the complex balance of power on which Europe's stability rests and focus on the wider contribution Europe can make to a working Atlantic partnership. This involves more than simply defence budgets, and it cuts across the two premier institutions, NATO and the EU.

Within NATO, European allies could allocate their resources differently and do more to staff the collective command structure. Allies always staff the command structure at the senior level, for obvious reasons of prestige and influence, but they often fail to staff below these levels, which results in a hollowed-out structure. From a geopolitical perspective, this matters. The command structure is where allies can develop military area expertise in the shape of long-term and consistent assessments of neighbouring trends and capacities. NATO's current approach to this issue is lagging behind, and NATO promised at Wales to enhance the 'situational awareness' within the command structure.[56] It should now be mainly Europeans who deliver on this.

Across the NATO–EU divide, Europeans could do more to develop interoperable and complementary security policy tools, notably in respect to hybrid threats as seen in Ukraine. The EU has economic muscle and lucrative association agreements, but also a tendency to think about security policy in narrow crisis management terms applicable to beleaguered African nations. The EU's official resources of Common Foreign and Security Policy and CSDP are stagnant, therefore, but need not be: they should be linked more explicitly to the transatlantic agenda for 'rim' management. A common energy policy worthy of its name should be another European priority, which ought to tie in with a review of the EU's bland Neighbourhood Policy.

Finally, Europe's military muscle ultimately depends on the sorting out of defence industrial relations.[57] No European nation will give up its national champions, and there is no chance that the defence industry will be considered merely another integral part of the common market. Defence industries are exceptional, which is also why collective mechanisms such as NATO defence planning or the European Defence Agency can do no more than merely scratch the surface of national interests. Change happens only when nations perceive a strategic interest in it, and that means either industrial salvation or operational necessity. Germany's proposal for 'framework nations', adopted at the Welsh summit, is perhaps mostly about defence industrial restructuring, and Britain's Joint Expeditionary Force mostly about operational depth and sustainability; but both will be caught up in the renewed European effort—channelled through the EU—to consolidate and rationalize the continent's main defence industries. The leaders of Europe's largest nations must engage this imperative head-on and commit to regular reviews of progress at the highest political level.

[56] NATO has located area expertise mainly within a new Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre (CCOMC) at the SHAPE strategic headquarters in Mons, Belgium. CCOMC can build up expertise in reaction to a crisis, but will not and cannot build up long-term, in-depth area expertise.

[57] As recognized by the EU in December 2013: European Council Conclusions, 19–20 Dec. 2013, EUCO 217/13.

Conclusions

The post-Cold War years have brought dramatic change in the shape of globalized security and transnational threats, and NATO has adapted and changed significantly. Yet the underlying challenge of managing the Washington–Berlin–Moscow axis in relation to the reigning European security environment has remained unaltered, as has the allies' tightrope walk between liberal enthusiasm and realist retrenchment.

Buoyed up by enthusiasm, the allies have been tempted to design policy according to liberal ideas that know no geography, which ultimately leads to overstretch, American hegemony and all the recriminations that follow from it. Conversely, disillusioned by the cost of engagement, they have been tempted to play up the virtues of an Atlantic divorce and the scope for go-it-alone policy. Either option is delusional and ultimately anchored in a love for self—the liberal West, or distinct American or European versions of it.

The real challenge for Atlantic statesmanship is to maintain the balance. This involves in part the alliance's adaptation to its environment, which has led to enlargement, out-of-area crisis management operations and partnerships. However, it primarily involves the balancing of geopolitical experiences in Europe and North America, where the decisive difference concerns the fate of the nation-state. In Europe, it is eroding. The 'EU', therefore, is not a type of geopolitical competitor to the United States, Russia, or anyone else on the outside, but the rationalization of Europe's own need for concerted power. If NATO policy—on enlargement, crisis management, partnership or any other issue—fundamentally contradicts this need, then NATO will lose.

NATO's Strategic Concept of 2010 is a masterpiece in public diplomacy—easy to read and recall. However, it is also a product of its time, a reaction to years of upheaval provoked by this contradiction during the early years of the war on terror. The Concept's elasticity resulted from the placing of defence, crisis management and cooperative security on a par; it served to appease inflamed relations, but its utility is less evident today when new challenges, from Russia to Islamic State, challenge NATO's balancing act anew. To maintain its equilibrium, and thus to maintain itself, NATO must develop a framework of political geography and explore the strategic priorities that flow from it.

The Welsh summit in September 2014 is moderately encouraging in this respect. NATO managed to give priority not only to Russia but also to the Mediterranean, thus Europe's geographical rim, and it focused with unusual stringency on the need for new defence requirements within this area. These concern notably the spearhead force, but also force rotation and exercise, and a sharpened partnership policy to draw the most valuable partners closer. To continue to move forward, European allies must advance their broad contribution to the political geography of Atlantic order, within national force structures, within NATO and within the EU, and the United States must accept and encourage this type of burden-sharing in recognition of the strategic compass it offers.

International Affairs 90: 6, 2014