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**THE UNITED STATES AND NATO
IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA:
AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE**

by Richard Grimmett

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NATO And The Cold War

Throughout its existence NATO has successfully confronted various challenges to its cohesion as an alliance of states sharing common security goals and interests. For over 40 years the most important factor in cementing political-military ties between members of NATO and the United States has been the perception of a serious military threat to Western Europe from the Soviet Union. It was the strong belief in such a threat that led to the establishment of NATO in the first place. The U.S. policy of containment--which had its beginnings in aid to Greece and Turkey--was based on the view that developing a strong military force and enhancing the ability to project it would best serve to deter any prospective Soviet aggression against allied nations in the Western world.

To support the concept of collective security inherent in the NATO alliance, many NATO countries permitted the establishment of military bases and the deployment of American military forces on their soil. NATO countries in the Mediterranean region provided important military facilities in support of the common security effort. This action strengthened the credibility of the U.S. military deterrent and provided the basis for the development of closer political-military cooperation between the United States and the other members of NATO. It also facilitated the rapid economic recovery of Europe from the devastation of World War II.

At the height of the Cold War, there was a spirit of common purpose shared by members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United States. The threat of Soviet subversion and expansion was credible to most allies and friends of the United States. Thus, the willingness of the United States to commit its power, both military and political, to contain Soviet influence and expansion was seen as a positive good.

Since those early days of Alliance solidarity circumstances have changed dramatically. The Cold War is over and the West has won it. The Soviet empire has collapsed. The Warsaw Pact has been dismantled. Eastern Europe has gained its independence and Germany has been reunited. All these things have occurred within the last four years! They are the basis of much satisfaction throughout nations that have stood for democracy and the self-determination of peoples. Yet these very positive changes have also destroyed the basic assumptions that have been at the heart of the Cold War, and have, as a result, raised serious questions about the future of NATO in the new era we are entering. These changes have led many within the United States to conclude that a major reassessment regarding the role of NATO as an instrument for

promoting security is essential. This American perspective has developed gradually, but has gained increasingly strong and broad support as the core threats of the Cold War era have been dramatically reduced, if not totally eliminated.

New Circumstances And New Expectations

In the new circumstances, the United States has increasingly taken a more critical approach to key elements of America's relationship to NATO and its members than was the case at the height of the Cold War. This more critical approach has centered on the issues of burdensharing in NATO, levels of American military assistance to NATO members and the question of "out-of-area" operations by the United States and NATO members. This approach is being applied to the Atlantic Alliance in its entirety. For the United States views NATO as a total entity--as an integrated whole--not a grouping of individual nations or individual regions.

Thus it is important to note, as the American perspective is discussed throughout this paper, that the Mediterranean is viewed by American policymakers as one part of the entire NATO European theater. Although the Mediterranean area is geographically and culturally distinct from other areas of Western Europe, it is not viewed by the United States as a region with unique security problems. As a consequence, the basic American approach to NATO countries in this region is based on the general American view of NATO and its problems--not by isolating NATO states in the Mediterranean into a special category requiring a special approach. The policy decisions and actions taken by the United States in recent years regarding NATO illustrate this point.

While the United States still sees value in the forward deployment of some military forces at installations throughout NATO Europe, both the change in the nature of the military threat and serious United States budget difficulties will place important limits on what the United States will be prepared to do in the future. As a consequence, the United States Congress in recent years has insisted, in legislation, that the President seek a greater sharing of the burden of collective defense by America's NATO partners.

This fall the United States Congress provided only \$60 million in funds for the NATO Infrastructure Program, compared to \$225 million appropriated in the previous fiscal year. The United States Senate initially argued that no additional funds be provided for the Infrastructure program. It also stated that in the future the program should be expected to finance much of the European construction requirements.¹ In other defense legislation enacted this fall, the Congress stated that the President should seek multi-year agreements with European NATO partners, similar to those currently in force with

¹ See U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. 102nd Congress, 2nd session. Conference Report to accompany H.R. 5428, Military Construction Appropriations for FY1993, [House Report 102-888], September 22, 1992, p.12 and U.S. Congress. Senate. 102nd Congress, 2nd session. Report to accompany H.R. 5428, Military Construction Appropriations for FY1993, [Senate Report 102-355], July 31, 1992, pp. 8-9, 15-16.

Japan, to pay a substantial and increased share of the operating expenses of the American military at bases located in NATO countries. Among the commitments the U.S. Congress has directed the President to seek from America's European allies within the next four years are these:

--to assume the costs of labor, utilities and services, military construction projects, property maintenance at European military installations used by U.S. military forces, and to pursue those actions necessary to meet local environmental standards at these military installations;

--to end all tax liabilities incurred by U.S. armed forces stationed in NATO host countries;

--to guarantee that goods and services furnished to the U.S. Armed Forces stationed in NATO countries are provided at minimal cost and without user fees.

These Congressional initiatives are not directed at those Mediterranean NATO nations--Portugal, Greece and Turkey--that receive certain categories of American foreign military assistance. But they are aimed at allies that do not agree to assume--by September 30, 1996--at least 75% of the non-personnel costs related to maintaining U.S. military installations in their countries.² Independent of these efforts at seeking greater allied burdensharing, the Congress this fall set by law the authorized strength of United States military personnel in Europe at 100,000--as of October 1, 1995.³ So American costs of maintaining military forces in Europe will be reduced by the very process of withdrawing a number of them back to the United States in the coming three years. Advocates of this approach in America argue that it is not logical to maintain a large military force or base structure in Europe when there is no longer a compelling military threat there to justify it.

As the Cold War's end has undermined the basis for large numbers of American troops in Europe, so has it undermined the support in the United States for the American foreign military assistance program. This change in attitude has led to reductions in the levels of U.S. military assistance to NATO countries in the Mediterranean region. This year the U.S. Congress, citing both the end of the Cold War and the American budget deficit as rationales for its action, made a major policy shift by ending the grant military aid program for Portugal, Greece and Turkey; converted what was previously grant aid to low interest loans; and reduced the overall military aid levels of each of these countries by 10% from the previous year. While taking these actions, the U.S. Congress noted that they were not intended to be punitive and that each of these three countries continued to be viewed as a valuable ally. The Congress took the position, as it has with other

² See U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. 102nd Congress, 2nd. session. Conference report to accompany H.R. 5006, National Defense Authorization Act for FY1993, [House Report 102-966], October 1, 1992, pp. 238-240, 773-775, 777, and U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. 102nd Congress, 2nd session. Conference report to accompany H.R. 5504, Defense Department Appropriations Act for FY1993, [House Report 102-1015], October 5, 1992, pp. 54-55.

³ House report 102-966, supra, at pp. 239-240.

wealthier NATO allies, however, that all NATO states must assume, in some tangible way, greater shares of the Alliance's burdens in the post-Cold War era.⁴

Congress has pointed out in recent years that when the United States developed a military assistance program in the post-World War II period, its central purpose was to assist friendly nations to develop their capacity to defend themselves against armed aggression. While most of the assistance provided was in the form of military grants, this U.S. aid program was based on the presumption that at some point nations that received it would "graduate" from dependence upon such grant assistance. The United States did not intend for allied nations to continue to be "wards" of American assistance. Recent Congressional aid reduction actions may be frustrating to NATO allies in the Mediterranean that receive U.S. military assistance, and suggest to them a diminution of American interest in supporting the maintenance of their defensive capabilities.

Yet as a practical matter it is very difficult for the United States, given its own budget difficulties, to give aid increases to any country--even to allies that provide military bases--unless a major reallocation of spending priorities is made within the U.S. national budget. That prospect is very hard to envision when the Cold War rationale for such assistance no longer exists, and given the difficulty American policymakers would have in justifying such an increase when important U.S. domestic programs must be funded to create jobs and re-vitalize the American economy.

The Gulf War And The "Out Of Area Issue"

Although the issues of allied burdensharing and U.S. military assistance are very important to American policymakers, perhaps the most significant threat to the future credibility of the NATO Alliance in the post-Cold War era is the lack of a viable approach to significant "out of area" military operations that may arise in the months and years ahead. The fundamental concerns of American policymakers regarding the "out of area" issue are best illustrated by the circumstances of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the subsequent Gulf War.

The crisis created by Iraq's action demonstrated that members of NATO did not share the same view as to how best to deal with the issues posed by the Iraqi aggression. To many in the United States, the mixed and seemingly uncoordinated response of the NATO allies to support U.S. efforts in Saudi Arabia raised serious questions about the commitment of our European allies to take whatever steps were necessary, including the use of armed force, to overturn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. This response by many NATO allies was especially troubling to Americans given the fact that very significant

⁴ U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. 102nd Congress, 2nd session. Report to accompany H.R. 5368, Foreign Operations Appropriations Act for FY1993, [House Report 102-585], June 18, 1992, pp.5-6, 10, 105 and U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. 102nd Congress, 2nd session. Conference Report to accompany H.R. 5368, Foreign Operations Appropriations Act for FY1993, [House Report 102-1011], October 4, 1992, pp. 12, 39.

economic interests of NATO allies were at risk in the Gulf as the result of Iraq's action. In many sectors of American public opinion, and, in the U.S. Congress itself, there was a conviction that several of our European allies believed that it was perfectly acceptable for the United States to bear the primary responsibility for deterring and defeating Iraq militarily--thereby ensuring the interests of these allies--while they continued to pursue their primary agenda of promoting greater European economic integration and development.

It must be emphasized that American critics of NATO Europe's response to the Gulf crisis noted, with appreciation, the fact that these allies: provided support in diplomatic fora, such as the United Nations, and voted for sanctions against Iraq; provided important base access rights for deployment of American soldiers and military supplies to the area of conflict; and made at least symbolic deployments of military forces in solidarity with the U.S. position that Iraq should be sanctioned for its actions against Kuwait.

But what remained troubling to many Americans is that, with few exceptions, our NATO allies were not willing to commit more than token military forces to the Gulf War effort. It was also keenly noted in the United States that Germany, the wealthiest European NATO member, provided financial support to defray major expenses of the Persian Gulf military operation--only with great reluctance.

These events, taken as a whole, allowed the most skeptical and cynical American critics of NATO and Europe to conclude that most of the European allies were not willing to commit themselves to make major sacrifices to achieve the goal of defeating Iraq's aggression. Instead, these critics argued, America's NATO allies preferred to minimize their risks as individual states while the Americans were required to bear the greatest burden, politically, militarily and economically to serve the security interests of Alliance members. These events, viewed in this context, explain to no small degree why previously strong support for NATO has declined among some in the United States and criticism of the Alliance has increased.

NATO's Future

In the post-Cold War context, the Persian Gulf War experience has important implications for NATO and its future. NATO is clearly at a major threshold in its history as one of the most successful collective security instruments of modern times. Decisions made in the next couple of years by its members will determine whether NATO will continue as a viable instrument for maintaining security and stability in international affairs, or whether it will merely become one of many international organizations used for consultations-- but not for collective political and military action.

With the direct military threat of the former Soviet Union, and the Warsaw Pact, a thing of the past, it is difficult to find a significant element of public opinion in the United

States that believes that Russia, pre-occupied with its massive domestic political and economic problems and its desire to achieve an effective non-totalitarian state system and increased economic ties to the West, has an interest in engaging in military aggression against Europe. Certainly political instability is a continuing possibility within republics of the former Soviet Union, and in the Balkans region--a fact that carries important implications for NATO states, and should be matter of focus and concern. But no military threat to European and United States security exists such as did at the height of the Cold War and the apex of the power of the former Soviet Union. In this context, key future threats to fundamental United States and European security interests seem most likely to emerge from "out-of-area" places--such as the Middle East and Persian Gulf--that have provided the basis for undermining Alliance solidarity in the past.

The United States would like to collaborate effectively with its NATO partners in contributing to a peaceful and prosperous new international order in the coming years, but it seems clear that we must soon define in an unambiguous way the new terms of reference for that collaboration in the post-Cold War era. Our old approaches clearly must be revised, now that the former Soviet Union is no longer the critical security threat that binds the Alliance together.

If NATO is to continue to play a major security role in the post-Cold War era--apart from its being merely a consultative body--the allies and the United States must address directly and successfully resolve these questions: Can NATO perform a significant military role outside the current "NATO area" in defense of collective security interests? Will NATO members take the steps necessary to make this possible? It is not clear at this time whether consensus on these crucial questions can be achieved or what form that consensus will take. There are those in NATO Europe who view the Western European Union as the proper vehicle for coordination of European militaries in "out-of-area" or "peacekeeping" operations. Other NATO members believe that European military forces for security or peacekeeping purposes should only be committed to "out-of-area" operations under the auspices of the United Nations. Others prefer to keep their own counsel and take unilateral actions only if their own individual interests seem at stake. As sovereign states, all members of NATO are clearly free to chose the path they deem best for themselves. The history of NATO demonstrates, however, the clear advantages of collective action over fragmented, or individual, action.

We are in a time of enormous transitions in Europe, in the republics of the former Soviet Union, in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, and in the United States--where domestic budget pressures constrain the U.S. from doing all it has done in the past in support of collective security efforts to foster stability and advance the cause of peace. Transitions can be untidy affairs, but if handled properly can advance the collective interests of those who seek to manage them in a constructive way.

To this end, the members of NATO must commit themselves not merely to debate but to resolve the question of the Alliance's security mission in the post-Cold War era consistent with the threats currently faced and likely to be faced in the future. This task

is made more difficult than in the past, when the threats to collective allied interests were more simple to define. But if the Alliance is to survive as a credible institution it must succeed in achieving this objective.

Continuity And Change

Having said this, both the United States Government and the governments of NATO countries continue to believe that the presence of some U.S. military forces at bases in NATO countries serves America's national security interests, those of its NATO allies, and the cause of international peace and stability. But the historical relationship between the United States and its European partners in NATO--whereby America has shouldered most of the financial and military burdens of the Alliance--must change. America's NATO partners must in the future assume a notably greater portion of these obligations within the Alliance.

Our new President-elect, Bill Clinton, has recognized the importance of NATO and other international arrangements dedicated to advancing the cause of security and stability in the post-Cold War era, even as he has noted the critical need for the United States to be the principal leader of a "global alliance for democracy." His view of the future role of the United States and of its NATO allies in Europe is consistent with the one that the U.S. Congress has supported in recent years. His vision is one of continuity but also one of change regarding roles and responsibilities.⁵

As he has expressed it, the United States should "look to our alliances to take a more active role in the defense of their own regions. In Europe, we must maintain our ties to NATO even as the Europeans play a stronger role both within NATO and in the evolution of future security arrangements for the continent."⁶ The Clinton Administration will reduce American forces in Europe "but maintain a credible presence" there, while having our friends "bear more of the burden."⁷ For, in his view, "America's challenge in this era is not to bear every burden, but to tip the balance."⁸

⁵ Remarks by Governor Bill Clinton before the Foreign Policy Association, New York City, New York, April 1, 1992 and Remarks by Governor Bill Clinton before the World Affairs Council, Los Angeles, California, August 13, 1992.

⁶ Remarks before Foreign Policy Association, New York City, New York, April 1, 1992.

⁷ Remarks before World Affairs Council, Los Angeles, California, August 13, 1992.

⁸ Remarks before Foreign Policy Association, New York City, New York, April 1, 1992.