NATO AND THE WARSAW PACT

INTRABLOC CONFLICTS

Edited by Mary Ann Heiss and S. Victor Papacosma
NEW STUDIES IN U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS

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The essays in this volume are based on papers originally presented at Kent State University in an April 2004 conference, “NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Intra-bloc Conflicts.” In what seemed like a natural melding of their missions, the Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Union Studies hosted and cosponsored this gathering with the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (subsequently renamed the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security).

The Cold War era has claimed no shortage of publications focusing on issues of interbloc conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, with the declassification of materials by NATO and member states of both blocs since the early 1990s, scholars have presented new information, insights, and interpretations. Contrastively, intrabloc conflicts, which plagued both alliances, have received generally extraneous attention. The fourteen essays in this volume, written by scholars from the United States and Europe, seek to fill this relative gap in the historiography. The volume is divided into two roughly equal sections, one on each alliance, with each introduced by an overview essay about the alliance’s workings and general history.

“NATO United, NATO Divided: The Transatlantic Relationship” by Lawrence S. Kaplan provides the thematic backdrop for the coverage of intrabloc conflicts within NATO in the following essays. Differences among member states became evident from NATO’s origins, but the reliance on consensus and common consent in the alliance’s decision-making process somehow prevailed and is evident to the present. Kaplan refers to “the NATO method” for subsuming differences among allies and follows with several case studies embodying conflict and consensus.

Even before the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty (NAT) in April 1949, an unequal partnership between a dominant United States and its European allies surfaced and persisted to influence affairs in subsequent decades. It is this underlying theme that Kaplan emphasizes as he analyzes: NATO before the outbreak of war in Korea, the “special relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom up to the 1956 Suez crisis, the challenges posed by France’s Charles de Gaulle, and the Reagan administration’s strident policies. In doing so, he lists a succession of intrabloc conflicts, concluding that no year during the Cold War passed without some indication of tensions in the relations between the United States and its European partners.
One might have speculated that with the demise of the Warsaw Pact, the “glue” supplied by the Soviet threat, now undone, would have led, along with mutual transatlantic resentments, to the dismantling of the Atlantic alliance. In his final case study dealing with Iraq, Kaplan maintains that even with the glaring divide in the policy positions of the Bush administration and most of its NATO allies, “the termination of the transatlantic alliance is not inevitable.” He adds that despite a succession of intrabloc conflicts and despite the North Atlantic Treaty’s provision for an alliance member to withdraw, no state has drawn on this option. Concluding, he argues that the great challenge for this long-lived alliance is to prove its ongoing relevance.

Although colonial issues hardly served as an impetus in the drafting of the NAT, they did surface after its signing largely because a number of its members were major colonial powers. Mary Ann Heiss in “Colonialism and the Atlantic Alliance: Anglo-American Perspectives at the United Nations, 1945–1963” analyzes the diverging stances of Britain and the United States on matters of non-self-governing territories in the United Nations, which, in turn, influenced NATO affairs. The UN General Assembly’s composition and the Soviet Union’s espousal of anticolonial positions in the UN assured that decolonization became another feature of Cold War confrontation. Washington found itself shifting from a customarily anticolonial position to a less critical one as it viewed the colonies of Western European allies as valuable bulwarks in the global struggle against communism. Concurrently, U.S. policymakers confronted the dilemma of containing the alienation of the growing list of nations supportive of anticolonialism. This two-pronged effort generated many complications and troubled ties between Washington and London at the United Nations.

The Eisenhower administration initially professed to shift from its predecessor’s middle-of-the-road position but ultimately maintained, with some exceptions such as during the Suez crisis in 1956, the basic approach of not allowing anticolonialism to facilitate the advance of Communism in the developing world. The Kennedy administration followed and, with some variants, continued in this general direction. Throughout this earlier Cold War period, debates, votes, and resolutions at the UN posed problems for the United States and its colonial power allies. If these latter states weakened because of colonial problems, then their contributions in the Atlantic alliance would also falter. Intrabloc difficulties on colonial issues thus became another dimension of the Cold War, and Heiss contends that the general subject offers fertile ground for further research.

Article 2 of the NAT provides for advancing political cooperation among the signatories, an agenda not considered seriously in the alliance’s first years when military priorities dominated. Winfried Heinemann reveals how political collaboration would become a critical component of NATO in “‘Learning by Doing’: Disintegrating Factors and the Development of Political Cooperation in Early NATO.” He provides examples from the years 1953–56 to elaborate his position.

Behind-the-scenes efforts by the United States and Britain to impose a solution
during the Trieste crisis of 1953 could well have set into motion a NATO military response if Yugoslavia attacked Italian forces—a situation no one desired. The need for consultation among all of the allies had become evident. Heinemann illustrates that such an approach could produce positive results in light of anticipated complications for the United States and NATO in 1956 with a Communist participation in Iceland’s government and an associated call for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. He relates how concerted diplomatic action by NATO allies averted serious complications and brought on compromise.

In May 1956 the NATO Council assigned a three-man committee, subsequently dubbed the “Three Wise Men,” to propose ways to extend political cooperation within the alliance. Confronting a number of difficulties from the start, the committee also had to contend with the budding crisis surrounding Franco-British policy toward the Suez crisis during the summer of 1956, which then exploded in late October. With Britain and France victimized by events, the call for intra-alliance political consultation and cooperation became paramount—and facilitated the acceptance, with minor alterations, of the report in December 1956.

The entry of Greece and Turkey into the ranks of NATO in 1952 constructed a “Balkan Front” for NATO, offering projected protection for its communication lines in the eastern Mediterranean and security to the two states. In “Failed Rampart: NATO’s Balkan Front,” John O. Iatrides relates how the original expectations for this region failed to materialize and instead introduced a succession of problems for the alliance and for its two newest members.

From the start, Greece’s security objectives diverged from NATO’s strategic priorities. A proposed NATO naval base on a Greek island positioned near the entry of the Dardanelles confronted the opposition of the Turks. Attempts to construct more substantive military cooperation with Yugoslavia, recently detached from the Soviet bloc, faltered by 1955. That same year, Turkey and Greece, two rivals who had shelved their centuries-old animosity for about two decades, reignited it with the advent of the Cyprus crisis—an ongoing dispute in variant forms up to the present. Turkey additionally registered complaints on how its strategic concerns were disregarded during the Cuban missile crisis. The Turkish invasion of Cyprus in July 1974 and resultant occupation of a large section of the island almost led to war between the two hostile allies. The ongoing feud over Cyprus would be complemented by Turkish challenges to Greek sovereignty rights in the Aegean, also intensifying to the brink of war on a couple of occasions—but NATO as an institution failed to intervene positively. The narrow national interests of both states overrode broader NATO concerns, but in the final analysis, Iatrides points out that “the Balkan front was from the outset weak and expendable,” representing one of the alliance’s lowest priorities.

Gaullist France supplied many problems for NATO, and analysts have paid considerable attention to them. Anna Locher and Christian Nuenlist, however, focus on a generally neglected dimension of the conflict in “Containing the French
Malaise? The Role of NATO’s Secretary-General, 1958–1968.” Three NATO secretaries general, Paul-Henri Spaak, Dirk Stikker, and Manlio Brosio, served during these years, and the authors examine their policies toward France and other NATO states, evaluating their approaches and levels of success.

Spaak stood for the maintenance of increased consultation within NATO’s ranks between the major powers and smaller states. However, Charles de Gaulle early in his tenure advocated a triumvirate composed of the United States, United Kingdom, and France for formulating political and military strategy. Such a stand sought to leverage the influence of Washington and London in the alliance but created diplomatic fissures among the various parties. Seeking to accommodate the headstrong de Gaulle, with whom he had a testy relationship, and several NATO factions proved a futile exercise for Spaak and contributed to his decision to step down in January 1961.

Spaak’s successor, Dirk Stikker, fared no better in his dealings with de Gaulle, who initially blocked his appointment and who revived his call for tripartism. Attempts to arrive at a consensus response for the 1961 Berlin crisis found France generally at odds with the remaining fourteen members of NATO, a pattern that would continue in other issues. Stikker had hardly any contact with the French government, and when he announced that he would be departing from his position in the summer of 1964, de Gaulle did not permit a courtesy farewell visit.

Although initially received more favorably by de Gaulle, Manlio Brosio, the new secretary general, also ran into the stiff positioning of the French leader. The prospect of a French disengagement from the Atlantic alliance loomed possible and did occur in part in 1966 with the withdrawal of France’s remaining troops from NATO’s integrated command and the call for the closing of NATO headquarters in Paris. Institutionally, NATO weathered these storms and saw France approve the landmark Harmel Report the following year. The authors conclude that the three secretaries general collectively helped NATO withstand a number of internal challenges, overseeing in the process the alliance’s reconfiguration.

Toward the end of the 1950s European members of NATO expressed concerns over the viability of the United States’ nuclear guarantee. Ine Megens discusses a major effort to address these anxieties in “The Multilateral Force as an Instrument for a European Nuclear Force?” Robert Bowie, the head of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, introduced a scheme in 1960 to establish a seaborne multilateral force (MLF) as part of a broader initiative to spawn a “partnership of equals” between the United States and Europe. The Kennedy administration continued internal discussions on the MLF proposal, determining to consult with European allies in early 1963.

From the start, however, issues of political control for a multilateral fleet with nuclear weapons complicated deliberations within the Kennedy/Johnson administrations and among European allies. Concurrently, public discussion of a European
nuclear force began. Megens details the intra-European divisions, which included talk of advancing the cause of European political unity and U.S. positions in this debate. With no acceptable platform for the many parties to accept, momentum on the MLF and its variant forms fizzled during 1964.

Oliver Bange in “Ostpolitik as a Source of Intrabloc Tensions” approaches his subject by examining the impact of the initiative not only on NATO allies but also within the Soviet bloc. The Neue Ostpolitik of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr, as it evolved from the mid-1960s, had the prime objective of German unification, which would be achieved by undermining Communism within the Soviet bloc (from the exposure of its citizens to Western ways) and by constructing an all-European security system.

Bange offers nine separate but interrelated arguments to present his findings. For example, he links Ostpolitik to earlier strategies forwarded by Washington on ideological competition. Concerns over German unification had spurred de Gaulle to call for an all-European security system, but Georges Pompidou, his successor, saw France's influence potentially undercut by German advances in Europe. Warsaw Pact states differed in their estimations of Ostpolitik, but the author reveals that Władysław Gomułka, head of Poland's Communist Party, perhaps alone among his peers saw through the cover of Brandt's policies and the inherent dangers to the existing system. According to the author, Moscow anticipated potential benefits for its agenda of realizing détente objectives while downplaying possible risks. In turn, considerable friction surfaced between the United States and West Germany during the Nixon-Brandt years, with the former suspicious of the chancellor's bold policies and even considering plots to overthrow his government. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) sanctioned the Helsinki Accords in 1975, which, for the author, represented a natural culmination of the Neue Ostpolitik.

The manifold forces contributing to the close of the Cold War included the roles of prominent personalities. Charles Cogan has selected France's president for investigation in “The Florentine in Winter: François Mitterrand and the Ending of the Cold War, 1989–1991.” He develops the case that Mitterand attempted to restrain the momentum for German unification but had in due course to concede its inevitability. His public demeanor belied his behind-the-scene moves, which sought to contain a unified Germany. The French also envisaged a reformed NATO that would constrain the veto power of the United States in the alliance as Europeans constructed a new security architecture. Here, too, Mitterand asserted French positions for a less dependent Europe but would accept some accommodation in accepting the carefully worded New Strategic Concept in 1991. Cogan demonstrates that France did not venture to separate itself from the decision-making process, an approach continued by his successors.

In “The Warsaw Pact: An Alliance in Search of a Purpose,” Vojtech Mastny presents an overview of the now-defunct grouping of states lined up against NATO.
He stresses that a prime difference between NATO and the Warsaw Pact rested in their respective purposes: the former served to protect its members against the Soviet peril while the latter invoked uncertainty about its actual, rather than stated, purpose. According to Mastny, the “story of the Warsaw Pact is that of a search for its purpose, which kept changing over time.” Distinguishing between political and military functions was among the divisive dimensions of the Soviet-dominated alliance. Thus, the Soviet Union acted to prop up regimes of member states, which relied on Soviet protection from internal threats rather than external attack. New research findings indicate that dissonance in the alliance was far more prevalent than outsiders originally realized. Perhaps this discord did not match the number of disputes within NATO, which institutionally could better withstand divergent positions, but opposition voices challenged to a greater degree the solidity of the Warsaw Pact. Mastny spans the Warsaw Pact’s thirty-six-year existence with references to conflicts among its members, a number of which are detailed in the following chapters. Throughout his analysis Mastny draws comparisons with NATO’s record to highlight the Warsaw Pact’s limited accomplishments.

A prominent example of conflict within the Warsaw Pact is developed by Sheldon Anderson in “Polish–East German Relations, 1945–1958.” He portrays the East Germans and Poles as quarreling siblings within the Soviet bloc, each pursuing distinctly incompatible national interests. As early as 1945 the mandated transfer to Poland of German territories up to the Oder-Neisse border precluded the spawning of civil relations between the two Communist parties. Because of the German refusal to acknowledge the historic claims of Poland to German lands, the Poles nurtured apprehensions of German designs to revise the new border.

Acrimonious sentiments failed to fade, and still other lines of division ensued. Thus, the two parties fell into ideological feuds, with the East Germans tending to adhere to more orthodox Marxist-Leninist positions against the reformist inclinations of the Poles. In particular, the very fresh memories of Germany’s brutal occupation fed Polish aversion to German rearmament and then to the presence of East German forces in military exercises in Poland. East German officers came to question the loyalty and competency of their Polish counterparts in the Warsaw Pact. The two states also failed to coordinate positions on policy and proposals regarding possible German unification. Anderson concludes broadly that Eastern European Communist parties could not substitute Marxist internationalism for national loyalties.

In “The Warsaw Pact and the German Question, 1955–1970: Conflict and Consensus,” Douglas Selvage extends analysis of issues discussed in Anderson’s article. He approaches his subject by referring to the debate surrounding the Warsaw Pact’s fundamental nature—that of a “transmission belt” for Soviet directives, an actual alliance, or something amid the two. The Warsaw Pact witnessed extensive
deliberations on the issue of its policy toward the German problem, which, in turn, involved questions over the alliance’s functioning in the political sphere. The Soviet Union, Poland, and, expectedly, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) would be the core states concerned with the problematic German issue.

The GDR pursued policy to enhance its international position and considered the transmission belt function the most efficacious route for achieving this objective. Under Władysław Gomułka’s leadership, Poland supported a more consultative function for the Warsaw Pact to bolster the security interests of all the allies. Gomułka recognized that Poland could not receive Western recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line without allied help and that the Soviet Union had other priorities. Unwilling to acknowledge special consideration for the GDR, Gomułka advocated action toward the German question that would secure the interests of both states. Selvage points out that Moscow normally favored the transmission belt approach but found itself frequently assuming the role of arbiter until Leonid Brezhnev acted to reassert Soviet leadership in the late 1960s after the invasion of Czechoslovakia—a period that saw an acceleration of contacts with West Germany.

The Balkan front served up seemingly irresolvable disputes for NATO, and its eastern counterpart confronted related troubles, as Jordan Baev explains in “The Warsaw Pact and Southern Tier Conflicts, 1959–1969.” In the late 1950s the Soviet Union appeared to have a firm grouping of allies in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania. Yet in just a few years, this region evolved into a weak sector of the Warsaw Pact, a situation largely attributable to the wayward policies of two of the states.

Albania by the early 1960s turned into a vocal critic of “Soviet revisionism,” as it sided with Maoist China in the widening ideological split with the Soviet Union. Tirana stopped participating in Warsaw Pact activities in 1961, although formal membership was not severed until 1968. On its part, Romania assumed an increasingly independent stance during the 1960s. Bucharest’s policy drift troubled relations not only with Moscow but also with individual allies. Following the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, Romania would terminate field cooperation with the alliance. Bulgaria’s Communist leadership in 1965 snuffed out an attempted military coup, reportedly inspired by pro-Maoist officers. Throughout the 1960s and in subsequent years, Sofia remained loyal to Moscow and the Warsaw Pact. Baev concludes that the Kremlin acted in a manner indicating it had more limited worries about NATO capabilities in the Balkans and greater concerns about the possible spread of Chinese influence and the formation of an “anti-Soviet” bloc among Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

military units in 1969 solidified tensions and ill will. In the Warsaw Pact forum, maverick Romania blocked joint resolutions against China and possible military action against Moscow’s Asian nemesis.

The rapprochement between the United States and China began in 1971–72 and introduced a new consideration for Soviet security policy, which now had two major foes with the potential of working together militarily. Much to Moscow’s dismay, Beijing moved to improve economic ties with Eastern European states. By 1980 the security picture for Moscow had become quite gloomy with the collapse of détente, the impending morass in Afghanistan, and the ongoing threat of China.

In the years after the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet Union had established regular procedures to inform its allies about international issues and policy. Moscow, however, dismayed Warsaw Pact states when it informed them of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan on 25 December 1979 only after the fact, and Csaba Békés proceeds to detail important policy directions that followed in “Why Was There No ‘Second Cold War’ in Europe? Hungary and the East-West Crisis Following the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.”

Budapest determined that the Soviet initiative in Afghanistan did not constitute an internal affair of the Warsaw Pact. But serious concerns set in when the United States responded with countermeasures against the Soviet Union, and Hungary and other allies feared that the positive returns from détente would stall or reverse. Consequently, the Hungarians reacted adversely to the Soviet request that they should “freeze” their high-level contacts with the West. Békés relates the sensitive diplomatic maneuvering that led Moscow to yield, allowing socialist states to maximize on the potential “contained in existing relations with Western European countries to counterbalance the United States’s foreign policy line.” Those ties with Western Europe had very critical returns and not just for Hungary’s economy. Békés argues that small-state diplomacy had helped contain further deterioration in East-West ties, as had occurred between the United States and Soviet Union over Afghanistan, and averted a “Second Cold War.”

In focusing on intrabloc conflicts, the studies in this volume collectively provide new insights into the Cold War and its dynamics from multiarchival research. Maintaining cohesion in light of the perceived enemy is a prime objective for alliances, and NATO and the Warsaw Pact confronted a succession of challenges in efforts to maintain relative unity and viability. Some conflicts were minor and others quite major, to the extent that they undermined the strategic capabilities of the two alliances. Interestingly, while some of the specific disputes assumed differing forms in the two blocs, others were rather similar in content and impact. The articles indicate that NATO generally seemed to accommodate diversity better than the Warsaw Pact and that the Soviet Union did not have the perceived all-powerful
capacity to impose total discipline on its lesser allies. The two blocs, if anything, were certainly not able to operate as monolithic blocs.

And while NATO outlasted its now defunct rival, it has the difficult challenge of redefining its purpose and mission in a post–Cold War era. Lawrence S. Kaplan warns that not to do so might lead to “the possibility of NATO becoming as irrelevant as the League of Nations had been in the 1930s.” In a related vein but from an alternate vantage point, Vojtech Mastny refers to the entry of former Warsaw Pact states into NATO’s ranks and the concurrent need for the enlarged alliance to search for a clearly defined purpose. He reflects: “Until its new purpose has been found and clearly defined, NATO will court the fate of its former rival.” History reveals that effectively accommodating intrabloc conflict is a related component for defining and maintaining purpose.
PART I

NATO
Published in 2001 by the NATO Office of Information and Press, the NATO Handbook tells its readers that the alliance’s decision-making process is “dependent on consensus and common consent.” If there should be differences between member governments, NATO will make efforts to reconcile them “in order that joint actions may be backed up by the full force of decisions to which all member governments subscribe. Once taken, such determinations represent the common determination of all the countries involved to implement them in full.” This confident language suggests a history of relationships in which the alliance managed to confront “decisions which may be politically difficult,” thereby adding “force and credibility” to the outcomes. When those differences seemed impossible to keep within the confines of the North Atlantic Council, such as the withdrawal of France from the integrated military structure, the alliance could move on knowing that it was flexible enough to surmount such challenges.

The list of deviations for individual positions within the alliance, including those of Spain and the Scandinavian members as well as France, however, is long enough to raise a question about the meaning of “consensus.” Were the allies as a body satisfied with France’s decision to withdraw from the military structure of the alliance in 1966 or Denmark’s and Norway’s refusal in 1949 to allow stationing of foreign forces or nuclear weapons on their territories in peacetime? It would seem logical to find conflict rather than consensus to be the norm among twelve, then fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen nations during the Cold War. If so, extensive consultations in the North Atlantic Council and other NATO bodies were vital for the successful functioning of the organization. They were conducted behind closed doors where trade-offs were necessary to reach decisions acceptable to all. How
the allies were able to subsume their differences under a common rubric, known as “the NATO method,” is the subject of this chapter. Case studies during NATO’s first fifty years illuminate both conflict and consensus.

NATO Before the Korean War

NATO’s first year, before the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, witnessed many of the problems that the alliance had to cope with in succeeding years. The allies had to deal with an unequal partnership in which the United States, the dominant figure, had the controlling vote behind the screen of consensus. This was hardly surprising. Western Europe was desperate for the kind of aid that only American power could provide—namely, the assurance that its economies would recover and its societies would remain free of the rising Communist menace. In the sweltering heat of a Washington summer, delegates from the five members of the western union met in July and August 1948 with U.S. and Canadian representatives for exploratory talks on European security. The Europeans sought military aid (ultimately, article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty) and a guarantee of America’s commitment (article 5). After months of negotiations they received both, but at a price.

It took more than the summer of 1948 in Washington before the United States was prepared to break its long tradition of nonentanglement. The five signatories of the Brussels Pact reluctantly accepted language that did not quite fulfill the terms of the “pledge,” as Canadian diplomat Escott Reid characterized the most important article of the treaty. This, of course, referred to article 5—everything else was subordinate to this vital assurance in European eyes. The appropriate language in their view was available in article IV of the Brussels Treaty, which stated clearly and simply that an attack against one member “will . . . afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power.” The State Department responded negatively to this wording in August 1948, asserting that “the United States could not constitutionally enter into any Treaty” that might place the nation “automatically at war as a result of an event occurring outside its borders or by vote of other countries without its concurrence.” That this contingency was unacceptable to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee became the nub of controversies that postponed signing of the treaty until April 1949.

A better choice of language had to be found to assure Congress that military action would not be an automatic response to an attack against an ally, yet this response was precisely what the allies required of the United States. The semantic agility of George Kennan, the father of containment but a skeptic about its military dimension, provided a suitable compromise. Instead of the allies taking “forthwith such military or other action . . . [as] may be necessary,” the word “military” was finessed by replacing it with “including the use of armed force” to follow “such action.
as it deems necessary." Individual members were free to fashion their responses according to their respective national interests.

The tortuous language of the article sharply contrasted with the spare terms of article IV of the Brussels Pact and certainly did not offer what the Europeans wanted. It was, however, the best they could get in 1949. What may have tipped the balance in favor of the American version of article 5 was a recognition that the president’s powers as commander in chief could evade or at least dilute the constitutional prerogatives of the Congress. Sufficient precedents existed to give the allies confidence in the credibility of the American pledge. Thus, Woodrow Wilson in 1917 brought the nation into World War I despite a strong isolationist pull against involvement, and in the nineteenth century President James K. Polk manipulated Congress into declaring war against Mexico by dispatching troops into a disputed area in the expectation that the Mexican army would fire the first shots, thereby assuring passage of a declaration of war. Doubts about the viability of article 5 had to be weighed against the positive psychological impact on Europeans of the American guarantee. The image of U.S. B-29s, armed with atomic weapons, in the air twenty-four hours a day, and prepared to strike the Soviets in the event of an act of aggression, may have been an illusion, but it was a comforting one to the European allies in 1949.

In article 5 the Europeans achieved almost all they wanted, while Americans could claim that constitutional procedures would be followed. There would be no automatic involvement in a European war if one of the allies were attacked. The Brussels Pact members were less satisfied with the enlargement of the prospective alliance to include such countries as Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Portugal, and even Italy. Adding these peripheral nations meant sharing American military aid with as many nations as comprised the Western union itself. There was little choice. The United States needed Scandinavian and Portuguese bases in the North Atlantic to transport the aid abroad. Even more frustrating than having to settle for smaller pieces of an aid pie were the restrictions the United States placed on the activation of article 3, which would offer U.S. military assistance to alliance members under the rubric of “mutual aid.” So urgent was this article that the Brussels core members presented a laundry list of items only one day after the signing of the treaty on 4 April 1949. It appeared that article 3 was almost as important to them as article 5.

Their démarche discomfited the Truman administration, which was reluctant to mix military aid with the principles of article 5. Washington felt that European requests were premature and perhaps somewhat unseemly by placing excessive emphasis on the military character of the alliance. It was as if the Europeans were too impatient in their race to avail themselves of American resources.

The allies did receive congressional grants of military aid—$1 billion—before the end of the year, but not until the administration and the Senate had attached conditions that did not conform to the spirit of the alliance. NATO was intended
to function as a multilateral institution, and the prospective recipients wanted to apply the principles of integration to the distribution of U.S. funds. Congress would take no action until the Senate ratified the treaty, and even then it took news of the Soviet detonation of an atomic device before a military assistance act could be passed in October 1949.9 With its passage, the allies had to accept the bilateral nature of the grants: negotiations between the donor nation and the beneficiary determined the detailed arrangements of dollars to be dispensed rather than NATO as an organization. This bilateral approach, intended to ensure that the funds would be properly utilized, inevitably generated friction between the United States and its allies. Moreover, the American military advisory groups in European capitals proved too intrusive and frequently too numerous. For example, the mission in Oslo was larger than the entire Norwegian foreign office. In larger capitals the diplomatic status of the U.S. aid inspectors smacked of imperial arrogance. The sensitive French insisted that “advisory” be removed from the title of the mission, and the British insisted that military personnel wear civilian clothes.10

The military aid teams were embarrassments to European governments, as suggested by their efforts to disguise them. To add injury to insult, equipment was slow in arriving and often inadequate for a particular country’s needs. In brief, the American tradition of nonentanglement in European affairs may have been breached by the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, but old habits of unilateralism died hard, and new assumptions of superiority based on the prerogatives of power reflected an imbalance in the alliance that might have doomed it in its infancy. If it did not, Europe’s sense of dependence on American support outweighed the resentment that American policies generated.

What helped preserve NATO in that first year was a fitful recognition on the part of the senior partner that it should repair damage to the relationship that it had unwittingly inflicted during the war. One instance grew out of the alliance’s need to develop a strategic concept to cope with the adversary’s aggressive actions. The distribution of forces in the concept displeased all the allies, large and small alike. The role of strategic air strikes would be filled by the United States, tactical air by Britain, and ground troops by the remaining member states. Logic dictated that strategic air power be placed in American hands, since only the United States possessed aircraft armed with atomic weapons. Nevertheless, the allies were unhappy serving as cannon fodder in the event of a Soviet attack when American airmen in the sky above the battleground would be less subject to casualties than the ground forces below. Echoes of dissent over this division of military labor could be found a half century later in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

To calm some of the passions aroused by the unequal assignment of forces, the United States revised scenarios that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had drafted at the time of the treaty’s framing. The predominant strategy after World War II had accepted the impossibilities of defending the European mainland from a Soviet attack. Their
short-term defense plan postulated defense at the perimeters—the Pyrenees, the Suez, and the British Isles. From these bases NATO could mount an attack on Soviet Europe much as the allies of World War II had against Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{11} For Europeans, a defense plan of this sort evoked memories they preferred to forget. Liberation after another enemy occupation was unacceptable. Europeans, particularly the French, might opt for a pro-Communist neutralism rather than experience replication of World War II.\textsuperscript{12} Responding to these concerns, the United States, at the meeting of NATO’s Military Committee in March 1950, produced the medium-term defense plan, under which the blanket of NATO protection would be extended to the Rhine. This was not a wholly satisfactory solution, because it left the Netherlands, divided by the river, uncertain about its status, as well as Denmark and Norway closer to Soviet-dominated Europe.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, the continuing presence of allied occupation forces, particularly American, in divided Germany indicated responsiveness to European concerns. Trust in the senior partner’s commitment to European security minimized transatlantic conflict in NATO’s first year.

\textit{“The Special Relationship”}

Of all the allies it was the United Kingdom that believed itself to be the most intimate partner of the United States. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin had taken the initiative in pushing the United States out of its isolationism after the collapse of negotiations at the foreign ministers meeting with the Soviet Union in London in December 1947. In his January 1948 speech before Parliament advocating a union of European nations, he sought to provide evidence of a serious break with their tradition of internecine conflict, thereby demonstrating that Western Europe was ready for a political counterpart to the economic reconstruction sponsored by the Marshall Plan.\textsuperscript{14} Bevin’s conception of the Brussels Pact two months later was to have the new western union serve as a vehicle for the United States to join the new organization.

The Truman administration’s endorsement of the Brussels Pact did not include American membership, but the secret Pentagon conversations immediately after the signing of the treaty buoyed British hopes of engaging the United States in an Atlantic, if not a European, alliance,\textsuperscript{15} resulting in a confidential understanding that an Atlantic security organization would follow in the near future. In the meantime, Britain dominated the negotiations in London that created the Western Union Defense Organization (WUDO) in the summer of 1948. It is worth noting that the British field marshall Bernard Montgomery, not the French general Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, became chairman of WUDO’s Commanders-in-Chief Committee. France, excluded from the Pentagon conversations, appeared to play a secondary role in London as well as in Washington.
In this context it is understandable that British leaders would identify a special relationship with the United States, making it primus inter pares in Europe. Indeed, the sentiment prevailing in Britain in the 1950s, expressed by such influential pundits as Alastair Buchan, was that the British would serve civilization as Greeks to the American Romans. In other words, Britain may have lost an empire but not the wisdom, as in the case of Greek slaves, to guide the powerful and relatively naïve Americans, the Romans of the twentieth century, in the ways of diplomacy.

Bevin and his colleagues were mistaken. The Americans had no intention of serving as surrogates for the strong but immature Romans. Their leaders, tested in World War II, came to the conclusion that Old World diplomats, especially the British in the 1930s, had failed to deal with the fascist menace. Americans could do better and did not need the discredited diplomacy of Europe to manage the Communist challenge. The British, after all, were the “Greeks,” who successively departed India, Greece, and Palestine in the years immediately preceding the Atlantic pact. No American statesman expressed the devaluation of British statecraft more succinctly than former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who outraged Britain in a 1962 speech at West Point when he observed that the British had lost an empire without finding a new mission.

The “special” relationship obviously had its limits as became evident early in the history of the Atlantic alliance. The authority that the British felt they had exercised in 1948, when London hosted the Western union’s headquarters, dimmed by 1952. American pressure to appease the French ally resulted in the transfer of NATO’s headquarters to Paris. This was not a British proposal or in the British interest. Similarly, Britain was frustrated by its inability to secure a major command when NATO reorganized in 1951. With a long and distinguished naval tradition, its leaders assumed that the supreme command of the Atlantic would be assigned to a British admiral, a fitting counterpart to the American general as the supreme commander in Europe. To the dismay of the British government, the command went to a U.S. admiral with headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, not Southampton, England. When an American was appointed supreme allied commander for the Atlantic, General Dwight D. Eisenhower ruefully, if belatedly, acknowledged that Americans should have learned from the experience in World War II of “the super-sensitiveness of the British public to anything and everything Naval . . . particularly as it may have an effect on the success of NATO.”

There was more frustration in store for the British when they were denied a Mediterranean command, under Admiral Lord Mountbatten in Malta, that might have had a standing only slightly inferior to Eisenhower’s in Paris. Instead of enjoying an autonomous role in the Mediterranean, Mountbatten was required to report to Eisenhower through the southern command headquarters in Naples, headed by an American admiral. The most that the British could salvage from a distribution of commands was the assignment of the Channel command, an obvious sop to
British pride that also represented an accurate judgment of the disparity between the American and British military establishments.¹⁹

The “special” relationship suffered further setbacks in NATO’s first decade, but none was more humiliating than the American reaction to Britain’s effort to retake the Suez Canal by force in 1956. As defined in article 6 of the treaty, Egypt and the canal did not fall within NATO’s area of responsibility. It became, however, one of the many “out-of-area” problems that influenced U.S. relations with its allies and occasionally even threatened the survival of NATO itself. The nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt’s dictator, General Gamal Abdel Nasser, severely challenged the alliance. Asserting Egyptian nationalism in a bid for leadership of the Arab world, Nasser sought to control an operation that had been built and controlled for almost a century by Britain and France. For the British, the canal represented a vital link to what remained of their empire in Asia.

The Eisenhower administration had appeared to share the concerns of the allies, but when it came down to possible military action against Egypt, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles expressed the American position evasively. He wanted to work within the framework of the UN Charter to undo Nasser’s seizure. Distrustful of Dulles’s steadfastness, Britain and France joined with Israel in October 1956, without informing their American ally, to wrest the canal from Egyptian hands. Israel, under constant threat of Egyptian aggression, successfully crossed the Sinai Desert, defeating the Egyptian army as it moved swiftly toward the canal. The Anglo-French air and sea invasion, however, stalled before it could retake the waterway, allowing Egypt to appeal to the United Nations for support against aggression from two major NATO partners.

The result was the near destruction of the alliance as the United States sided with the Soviets in opposing the Suez operation. A painful moment for all the allies, the abortive invasion coincided with the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt. Instead of marshaling world condemnation against the Soviets’ brutal actions in Hungary, NATO found itself on the defensive as the Communist world directed attention in the United Nations to Anglo-French behavior toward a Third World victim. Given its strong position against the illegal use of force, the United States felt compelled to join the Soviet adversary in the United Nations’ judgment against its NATO allies. America’s condemnation proved all the more galling because it spoiled an opportunity to put the Soviet Union in the dock before the court of world opinion over its treatment of Hungary.

Both Britain and France succumbed to this combined pressure and retreated from the canal. Prime Minister Anthony Eden resigned under fire from liberals critical of gunboat diplomacy and from conservatives critical of the failure of that form of diplomacy, but Eden’s successor, Harold Macmillan, repaired much of the damage done to the Anglo-American relationship, attributable in large part to his camaraderie with President Eisenhower during World War II. A case may be made
that the relationship, having survived the Suez crisis, appeared stronger at the end of the 1950s than it had been at the beginning of the decade. The ongoing challenge of the Soviet Union, emboldened by its success with Sputnik, the first earth satellite, drew the two allies closer when they resisted Chairman Nikita Khrushchev’s efforts to drive the Western allies out of Berlin in 1958. Yet the “special” relationship was never quite the same. The imbalance of power between the two nations never permitted the British to direct American NATO policy in the way the Greeks were said to have controlled imperial Rome’s.

The Gaullist Challenge

That General Charles de Gaulle, president of France under the new Fifth Republic in 1958, became the leading European challenger to American primacy in NATO over the next decade is not open to doubt. De Gaulle’s towering presence dominated Europe’s relations with the United States, even as many of the European allies resented France’s pretensions. His rise to power from the ashes of the Fourth Republic coincided with the perception, generated by the successful launching of Sputnik in October 1957, of American vulnerability to Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile attack. De Gaulle took advantage of the shock that this demonstration of Soviet power rendered to Europeans and Americans alike. Not even the quick dispatch of nuclear stockpiles to Europe or the assurance that American missile technology was actually more advanced than its Soviet counterpart proved sufficient to erase the trauma caused by the Soviet accomplishment.

Until 1957 the United States had been considered invulnerable to any Soviet aggression. Unlike Europe, its territory extended beyond the adversary’s range, and its promise under article 5 to respond to an enemy attack was credible. The Soviet Union could not reach America, while U.S. nuclear power based in Europe restrained Moscow’s allies. It was under this nuclear umbrella that the NATO allies had found a sense of security and achieved economic prosperity. Now the question was whether the American commitment would remain intact when the United States itself could be subjected to Soviet missiles. Repeatedly during his presidency de Gaulle answered this question negatively. It seemed illogical, he proclaimed, for any country to place the security of others, whether or not in an alliance, over its own. More specifically, he reminded the allies about America’s interest in Asia being older and more constant than its involvement with Europe. He offered as his case in point the Vietnam War, in which the United States was increasingly entangled in the 1960s. Among its other instructive uses he cited this conflict to question the wisdom as well as the geographical direction of American policy. Given doubts about the credibility of the U.S. commitment to Europe’s defense,
De Gaulle envisioned France assuming the leadership of Europe, which the United States had held in NATO’s first decade.\(^{20}\)

De Gaulle’s actions in the 1960s proceeded on the assumption that the Soviet threat of aggression had lessened. He considered the Soviet Union a nuclear power on a par with the United States with intentions no less hostile to the West than in the past, but at the same time he recognized that it was no longer the expansionist state it had been a decade before. Its retreat from belligerence over Berlin in 1959 and again in 1961, along with its literal retreat from Cuba in the missile crisis of 1962, encouraged de Gaulle not only to equate the two superpowers in their relation to Europe but also to claim that Europe under France’s direction could play a significant role as mediator between the two superpowers. Although it was unlikely that he genuinely believed that the United States, given its history in NATO, posed the same kind of military threat, his image of the two adversaries suggested more similarities than differences.\(^{21}\)

Gradually but inexorably, de Gaulle moved toward his goal in carefully calibrated steps. The first confronted the Anglo-Saxon powers with a plan for a triumvirate in which France would join the United States and the United Kingdom to direct NATO affairs. Presumably this would correct a situation in which the “NATO method” of consensus had given too much weight to the smaller allies. Not unexpectedly, the United States and Britain rejected the proposal on the grounds that it would distort the nature of the alliance, even if it improved its efficiency. Their reaction served to confirm de Gaulle’s judgment that NATO was a ward of Anglo-America and that France could never achieve equality under this arrangement. He subsequently justified rejecting British membership in the European Economic Community on the premise that Britain would be America’s Trojan horse in the European order he had in mind.\(^{22}\)

Having failed to win over the United States to his version of a reorganized NATO, de Gaulle moved to accelerate the development of nuclear independence through a French force de frappe. Although France’s nuclear program originated in the frustrations of the Fourth Republic, it was an important gauntlet thrown down before the senior partner. The United States reacted strongly, asserting that no other NATO member should find it necessary to have nuclear weapons; the American nuclear arsenal was more than sufficient to serve all the others. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara irritated the French with his claim that smaller nuclear arsenals in the alliance would not only be needlessly expensive but also lack credibility as a deterrent.\(^{23}\)

France made it clear that it would not accept American objections. Its military strategists rejected the notion that France’s nuclear weapons would be quickly wiped out in the event of a nuclear war. On the contrary, they suggested that the prospect of destroying even a limited number of Soviet cities would serve as a force
of disuasion. National nuclear arms, no matter how small, would strengthen deterrence by instilling a sense of insecurity in the minds of a potential aggressor. At issue in French eyes was a transparent effort to block France from achieving an element of equality with the United States in NATO and undermine France’s leadership in Europe.

America’s failure to impress on the French the folly of their nuclear ambitions was only to be expected. Too much had been invested in their nuclear program. American opposition served up simply another piece of evidence in their case against the hegemony of the transatlantic partner. France’s independence from the United States required keeping its nuclear weapons outside of NATO’s integrated command.

It was only a matter of an appropriate time before de Gaulle detached France from the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE). He had begun the process by signaling to the Soviet Union that France would follow its own course when he removed the French fleet from the Mediterranean command in 1959. The slogan Méditerranée aux Méditerranéens was his assertion of preeminence in the area as well as an expression of his assumption that the warships of both superpowers would be excluded from the sea. Four years later he removed the French Atlantic fleet from the Supreme Allied Command, Atlantic (SACLANT). In refusing to allow France to participate in Fallex ’66, NATO’s annual military exercise, de Gaulle seems to have completed preparations for full withdrawal from the alliance’s military structure.

By the end of 1965, conditions had ripened for such a move. The Cold War had sufficiently thawed for overtures to be made to the Soviets; the German neighbor had formally accepted France’s leadership in NATO as a result of a special treaty of cooperation in 1963; and the Algerian war had been liquidated. In March 1966 de Gaulle sent a letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson demanding that all NATO installations on French territory be removed within a year’s time and announcing that all French personnel would leave their SHAPE posts. The deadline of a year appeared insultingly short for the United States to pick up its men and matériel and get out of France. At the same time, the French made it clear that they would not denounce the North Atlantic Treaty but would separate participation in the alliance from membership in its military organization.

There was shock and anger in Washington, although the former reaction was less understandable than the latter. The French president had supplied enough signals of his intentions over the years to cushion the surprise when the final action did occur. In fact, American reaction was mixed. The most vehement protests came from such Francophiles as Undersecretary of State George Ball, who felt personally betrayed by France’s behavior. He wanted to challenge the legality of de Gaulle’s cancellation of agreements that provided for two years’ notice before termination. If Johnson had not restrained Ball, he would have had the United States retaliate
by challenging the legality of its eviction from bases in France and denying the
French access to NATO intelligence sharing. The most serious NATO riposte was
to remove its political, as well as military, headquarters from France to new homes
in Belgium.

Undoubtedly, France did damage NATO’s defense capabilities in the short run. The
sheer physical effort to shift supply lines into Germany from an Atlantic route
via France to North Sea ports in Germany was not only costly but also disruptive,
yet it did not generate the kind of hostility that might have led to France’s isolation,
if not ejection, from the alliance. There was actually no mechanism to throw out a
member. In fact, de Gaulle’s posture always had admirers, particularly among Euro-
peans sharing his resentment of American domination. Diplomats, such as NATO’s
secretary general, Manlio Brosio, had deep ties to France and were not anxious to
move offices from Paris to Brussels. Ironically, Secretary of Defense McNamara wel-
comed de Gaulle’s action as an occasion to reduce American obligations and place
greater responsibility on Europeans for defense of their territories. He also saw an
opportunity in France’s departure to streamline the NATO defense system, to make
it more efficient and less costly. President Johnson himself accepted de Gaulle’s deci-
sion with equanimity, at least publicly, on the grounds that the French president was
not going to change his mind, whatever arguments his allies might deliver.

The alliance survived the French challenge, partly because de Gaulle, his grand
gestures notwithstanding, maintained French forces in Germany, albeit not under
NATO’s provenance. He also kept French air space open to NATO aircraft. More-
over, France continued to be represented in every NATO military headquarters,
though its representatives were identified as “missions” rather than “delegations.”

In retrospect, de Gaulle’s challenge failed to discredit America’s leadership
of NATO. Implementation of his aspirations to replace the United States as the
paramount influence in Europe depended on Germany as a junior partner. Up
to a point, the close links between the French president and German chancellor
Konrad Adenauer, solemnized in the Franco-German treaty in 1963, gave substance
to French hopes. But, while there was German dissatisfaction with America’s man-
agement of the Berlin crisis in 1961 and with Secretary McNamara’s preference for
a high threshold of nuclear response to a Soviet attack, Germany was not prepared
to substitute a less credible French leadership in place of the American. Nor were
the smaller allies comforted by the prospect of a Gaullist Europe.

In some respects, NATO felt liberated by the departure of France from its military
structure. Rarely in step with its allies, France absented itself from the new SHAPE
headquarters in Mons and from meetings of the International Military Staff in
Brussels (which had replaced the defunct three-nation Standing Group in 1966),
freeing the alliance from deferring to its obstructive behavior at the meetings of
the Defense Planning Committee. De Gaulle’s self-propelled removal from SHAPE
inadvertently opened the way for a more harmonious collaboration between the United States and the smaller nations of the alliance in the Nuclear Planning Group, established in the year France expelled NATO military bases from its soil.

Reagan and the “Evil Empire”

The Gaullist decade, not incidentally, witnessed a decline in U.S. authority in NATO, as exemplified by a new sense of Soviet power in the 1970s and a concomitant sense of relative weakness in America’s response. Neither the Nixon-Kissinger approach to détente nor the Carter administration’s efforts to defuse the Cold War satisfied the European partners, though they still depended upon America’s nuclear deterrent, no matter how attenuated, and were concerned by the senior ally’s apparent inability to cope with the Soviet Union’s armory of medium-range nuclear missiles (SS-20) targeted against major Western European cities. Although the Carter administration did respond with a substantive increase in defense spending and the promise to deploy U.S. medium-range missiles in Europe, the allies continued to be worried about America’s indecisiveness. NATO’s dual-track initiative of 1979, which combined continued efforts toward détente with the promise of delivering to Europe sufficient medium-range cruise and Pershing missiles to cope with the Soviet threat, proved inadequate to dispel Europe’s doubts. Excessive weakness, not excessive strength, was the major European grievance as the Reagan administration came to office in 1981.

President Reagan’s simplistic vision of a world divided between good and evil and his determination to oppose unreservedly the Soviet evil empire should have been a tonic for the allies’ morale. Intending to revive an unambiguous American primacy in the alliance, which had waned under his predecessor, Reagan delivered a strong message with the verve and polish apropos of a former Hollywood actor.  In light of the malaise associated with the Carter presidency, there was a hope in Europe that any change would be for the better, but to use an Aesopian image, Europeans soon wondered whether they had exchanged King Log for King Stork as leader of the alliance.

Conflict with European goals inevitably followed from the American perception under Reagan that détente was truly dead and that the Soviets could only be dealt with from a situation of strength. It was not that Europeans failed to appreciate Reagan’s message: in view of the scare inspired by the Soviet missile threat, the clear promise of firm American guarantees was heartening. European appreciation, however, had distinct limits. Reagan’s blood-curdling language lambasting the Soviets was difficult to overlook, particularly when administration officials saw no problem in surviving a nuclear war. No matter how disturbing the Soviet intermediate-range missiles were to their sense of security, and no matter how
much they deplored Soviet behavior in Afghanistan in 1979 or in Poland in 1981, Europeans had to share a continent with the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. Détente could not be permanently scrapped.

The potential economic benefits of trade relations were a major element in the survival of détente for Europeans. They had never shared the American conviction, going back to the Mutual Defense Assistance Control Act of 1951, that trade relations with the Soviets would eventually defeat the Communist bloc. When the Polish military imposed martial law in 1981, the U.S. administration applied sanctions against Poland and the Soviet Union alike. Although there was considerable sympathy for Poland’s resistance, just as there was revulsion against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the more prevalent sentiment in Western Europe was that the United States had overreacted in both instances, at the expense of its allies. Their misgivings intensified when the Reagan administration, to put teeth into sanctions, suspended gas and oil technology sales to the Soviet Union and prohibited the export of technology manufactured by subsidiaries of American companies in Europe. These measures affected a planned pipeline designed to carry natural gas to the West. This apparently thoughtless automatic response to Soviet behavior did not sit well with the allies. Regulating European companies because of their American connections smacked of extraterritoriality, or at least of an infringement on the sovereignty of affected nations. The Europeans refused to abide by the American regulations, regarding economic connections of this sort as an occasion to revive détente as well as profit from the trade. After five months of wrangling with the United States, the Europeans prevailed.

Such mutual grievances never boiled over into transatlantic separation in these years. Other factors proved more important in keeping the alliance together. The ascent to power of Helmut Kohl in 1982 offered a source of comfort to American policymakers. The new chancellor firmly supported the deployment of American cruise missiles in Germany, a decision made in 1979 but requiring four years for enactment. The delay provided opponents with the opportunity to organize protests. Britain’s Margaret Thatcher and Germany’s Kohl stood firmly behind the decision and put the lives of their governments at risk in 1983 elections in their respective countries.

Britain and Germany experienced a wave of protest that, if successful in blocking deployment, would leave Europeans, not Americans, more vulnerable to Soviet attack. The European Left directed its anger against the United States and its European allies rather than against the source of the threat. The formerly centrist Laborites in Britain and Social Democrats in Germany had been radicalized by the 1980s, moving not merely toward opposition to the Atlantic alliance but also toward identifying the United States as the enemy of Europe. In both countries mass protests, which included pacifist and religious groups as well as Communist and pro-Communist elements, preceded elections. Moscow orchestrated many, but not all, of the demonstrations against deployment of the missiles. Communist
arguments turned on the provocative nature of the missiles, with their ability to strike at the Soviet motherland. Peace demonstrators dwelled on the possibilities of a nuclear holocaust resulting from the emplacement of these missiles. Few opponents were willing to look at the Soviet role in raising the level of fear in Europe.

The protestors failed in their objectives. Soviet intimidation, which had accompanied the protests, united rather than divided the alliance over this issue. The Low Countries and Italy followed suit. The success of the conservative governments at the polls in Britain and Germany affirmed NATO solidarity both over the extent of the Soviet menace embodied in the SS-20s and over the need for cruise and Pershing missiles to counter them.

But if the deployment of missiles represented a centripetal force in transatlantic relations, the lack of progress in arms control—the other half of the dual-track decision in 1979—was a centrifugal force that had preceded and followed the NATO decisions on missile deployment. The gratitude of the allies for the steadfast opposition of the Reagan administration to Soviet pressures coexisted with dismay, bordering on cynicism, at America’s disinterest in working toward arms reduction, nuclear or conventional, with the Soviet adversary. Not until the arrival of Gorbachev to power in Reagan’s second administration did a prospect for advancing arms control surface.

The Iraq Quandary, 2002–2004

The end of the Cold War only a few years later exacerbated rather than terminated fissures in the alliance. Without the Soviet menace to serve as glue, mutual transatlantic resentments could have spelled the end of NATO—and might yet in the near future. On the American side there was contempt for the minimal military capability of the European allies and a consequent temptation to go it alone outside NATO. For Europeans, the United States was the hyperpower, to use the French term, throwing its weight around in a manner dangerous to Europe’s new sense of self, as reflected in the expanding European Union. Nowhere was the gulf more evident than in the U.S. war against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq in 2003.

Throughout 2003 the Bush administration, led by its Pentagon planners, had linked the Iraqi dictator with the terrorist network of al Qaeda, which was responsible for the death of nearly three thousand Americans on 11 September 2001. Although proof of a clear link had not been made, Iraq fitted the image of a rogue state, part of the “axis of evil” that the president condemned in his 2002 state of the union address. The Bush administration intended to strike down terrorists before they could strike, as the Islamic fanatics had done on 9/11, and as Saddam Hussein may have been preparing to do with biological and chemical, as well as nuclear, weapons.

The shifting emphasis from al Qaeda to Iraq in the war on terrorism opened a
Schism in the alliance that worsened when the United States prepared for war with a “coalition of the willing” or, if necessary, alone. Perhaps the unilateral stance was even preferable to some officials on the assumption that a Europe unwilling to raise its defense budgets would only be a drag on the American effort. The superpower could take on Saddam on its own. Weaker than it had been at the time of the Gulf War of 1991, Iraq should be an easier and more manageable target than the elusive al Qaeda.

Skeptical Europeans, along with some skeptical Americans, deprecated Bush’s rush to war on a variety of grounds. Was the United States acting to gain control of Iraq’s oil, or to complete what Bush père failed to do in 1991, or to display a presidential leadership that would assure Republican victory in the 2002 congressional elections, or to divert America’s—and the world’s—attention from the failure to rout the al Qaeda network? Or was the attack on Iraq simply a display of a superpower’s ability to go its own way and expect its allies to follow?

European allies, aided by elements of the Bush administration, particularly Secretary of State Colin Powell, tempered the president’s drive for immediate and unilateral action by working through the United Nations, even as he and administration hawks continued to say that they would not be bound by UN decisions. That Saddam Hussein was a persistent threat to stability in the Middle East was no more in question than his violation of UN resolutions since the end of the Gulf War. The allies recognized this challenge in their ultimatum to Iraq in November 2002 (Security Council Resolution 1441) to accept intrusive inspections of weapons of mass destruction or face the consequences of war. Secretary Powell crafted this arrangement in a way that brought France, Russia, and China into agreement at the Security Council.

The apparent victory of diplomacy over military action, however, merely papered over divisions between the United States and Britain, on the one side, and France and Germany, on the other. The old NATO adversary, Russia, quietly opposed the American war but remained in the background as NATO allies separated over the wisdom of a forceful overthrow of Saddam Hussein. France and Germany had placed their faith in the inspection teams dispatched by the Security Council to investigate whether Iraq still possessed proscribed biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. The Anglo-American allies, however, were convinced of the mission’s futility, no matter how much more intrusive it would be compared with the failed inspections in the 1990s.

The suspicion of many in the West and in most of the Muslim world was that the United States had predetermined the failed outcome of inspections and only wanted to use the United Nations as a cover for its invasion. President Bush’s insistence that the United States was justified in waging war unilaterally offered sufficient proof for critics to doubt America’s good faith in accepting inspections while engaging in a military buildup on Iraq’s borders.
Anger over American behavior manifested itself on the European “street” and could be found in the editorials of most newspapers. Germany vied with France to display its independence of the United States. Popular opposition to an American-led war supplied grist for Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder’s election campaign in 2002, when he promised that under no circumstances would Germany provide troops or aid in the war, even if Turkey were attacked. In a sense, this was a reprise of a posture held in 1991. But in 2002 antiwar and anti-American sentiments ran deeper. Schroeder’s truculent position renounced Germany’s habitual deference to the senior partner. World War II was long past, as was the feeling of gratitude for the sustenance America had provided to the fledgling democracy. Franz Munterferning, the general secretary of the Social Democratic Party, talked about a “German way” that resonated with voters unhappy with the American hegemon. But it also could awaken memories of a “German way” in the Third Reich.

Problems with a newly assertive Germany, however, were relegated to the backburner in 2002. Europe’s attention at this time centered on the American threat of a preemptive war against Iraq and its demands for allied compliance. A common anti-American posture solidified the Franco-German connection and clearly manifested itself in the inability of the North Atlantic Council to reach a consensus over an American request for support in the event of war.

American responses to European dissent were equally uncompromising when the administration accused the French and Germans of the kind of weakness that led to Munich in 1938. Secretary of State Powell suggested at one point that his French counterpart suffered from an attack of the “vapors.” Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld went even further in suggesting that these two countries and their followers in the West represented “Old Europe.” The NATO that had expanded eastward in 1999 and again in 2002 now included states comprising the “New Europe” with allies more understanding and more appreciative of American leadership.

The war that seemed to have been won so easily in the spring of 2003 did not lead to a peaceful Iraq that would serve as a model for democracy in the Middle East and a warning to terrorists everywhere. Instead, the mounting occupation costs as well as the increasing opposition of remnants of the Saddam regime, augmented by Islamic militants, took American lives each day and impeded the country’s reconstruction. By the fall of 2003 Europeans felt vindicated in their opposition to the Anglo-American war. There was a sense of schadenfreude on the part of the French and Germans, as the Bush administration was forced to turn to the United Nations and NATO for economic and military assistance. Unilateralism was discredited when the United States sought help from the very organizations that it had spurned the year before. In light of the mutual resentments inflamed by the Iraq issue, the alliance appeared once again in danger of collapse.

The transatlantic division over Iraq actually was only the most dramatic occasion for an open break between Washington and Europe that had been in the making
since the end of the Cold War. The European Union under Franco-German domination had looked for opportunities to challenge U.S. hegemony. France’s threatened veto in March 2003 at the UN Security Council of any resolution authorizing the use of force for the removal of Saddam Hussein symbolized the depth of European alienation from America. President Bush’s bellicose language seemingly reflected values alien to the newly unified Europe. The war against Iraq that followed the deadlock in the Security Council further estranged France and Germany as well as the publics of those NATO partners accepting American leadership in the war.

After the sharp exchanges over Iraq in 2003, it was hardly surprising to find speculation once again about NATO being at the point of dissolution. Or, if it should survive, it might be a rump alliance of Central and Eastern European countries, along with Italy and the Iberian members, as partners of the Anglo-Americans. France and Germany might still lead the EU, but even here the admission of more Eastern European countries into that organization could dilute the Franco-German condominium. The end product may then be a return to the fractured Europe seen before World War II and a NATO as powerless as the League of Nations, with the United States permanently following a path of unilateralism.

Still, there are centripetal factors that work against the breakup of the alliance. Some of them stem from ongoing transatlantic cooperation that has nonetheless coexisted with the tensions of the last decade. No matter how badly the European allies mismanaged the Bosnian crisis and subsequently hampered the conduct of the Kosovo campaign, their role after both these conflicts was vital to the peacekeeping process. Their numbers far exceeded those of the United States, whose contributions steadily decreased by the end of the 1990s. Europeans picked up a burden that was appropriately theirs. Similarly, while the United States managed the war against the Taliban in 2001, the postwar rebuilding of Afghanistan has been shared by the allies. Even as Germany figuratively thumbed its nose at America over Iraq, it sought to rebuild bridges by assuming cochairmanship in February 2003 with the Netherlands of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul. In April 2003 the North Atlantic Council formally approved a NATO role in Afghanistan. For the first time in its history, NATO assumed command of a mission outside the area covered by the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty.40 Was it not possible, as NATO supporters suggested in 2003, to place Iraq under a NATO command? It would then have the authority of a Security Council mandate, as the allies have long wanted, which through SHAPE would be under the operational control of an American general reporting to the North Atlantic Council.41

In addition, Europeans have been supportive in the war against al Qaeda and not simply as a service to the superpower. Their own security was at stake as Europe also appeared to be a target of the terrorist network and the site of terrorist conspiracies. Here was an example of a war where transatlantic allies could fulfill the mission of article 5. It is worth noting that high among the criticisms of U.S.
policy toward Iraq was the European complaint about the diversion of energy and resources from coping with the primary enemy, the al Qaeda network. Granted that Islamic fundamentalists have found safer havens in Western Europe than they have in the United States, credit should be given to those allies whose investigators have been increasingly active in rooting out terrorist networks as vigorously and, arguably, more effectively than their American counterparts. The termination of the transatlantic alliance is not inevitable.

In Retrospect

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization formed in 1949 to correct the inability of the United Nations to provide the security that the West had expected after the havoc of World War II. The Atlantic alliance drew its strength from a perceived need to contain the Communist threat to Western democracies and facilitate the political and economic integration of a divided Europe. By the end of the twentieth century, the implosion of the Soviet Union, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and the advances of the European Union were tributes to the success of the common transatlantic effort.

Nevertheless, no year in the Cold War had passed without revelations of strains between the United States and its European allies. Some were minor, others serious. In most of the conflicts Europe stood relatively united against what the allies felt were acts of discrimination or neglect, of insensitivity or intimidation, committed by the senior partner. Occasionally, frictions within Europe manifested themselves, as, for example, between France and many of its allies in 1966, and between Greece and Turkey—though the United States was a principal player in both of these controversies. There were instances, too, where European governments lined up with the United States against their own citizens, as in their support of cruise missiles in the 1980s or of the war against Iraq in 2003. For the most part, however, Europeans could and did display common grievances against the United States and were ever ready to highlight them. Numerous congressional resolutions urging troop withdrawal from Europe suggested an American counterpart to Europe’s grievances.

But the transatlantic bonds were never severed. Greece did remove itself from NATO’s military structure but not permanently. France did not return to the military fold but made sure that its military was closely connected to SHAPE’s command centers. For political reasons France has remained outside the integrated military structure, but its hostility to American leadership has never been as virulent as it was under de Gaulle. Although Britain has always chafed at its assignment as a junior partner in the Anglo-American relationship, its dissatisfaction, displayed in the command assignments of 1951 and the Suez adventure of 1956, never rose to the breaking point.
The United States growled periodically over its sense of unfair distribution of the military and financial burdens of the alliance, but its bark was always sharper than its bite. None of the many Senate resolutions contemplating withdrawal of American troops from Europe was ever implemented. A retreat into isolationism would have dangerous ramifications for the superpower, and a chaotic Europe would be as damaging to America’s well-being as it had been between the two world wars. For its part, the European Union, absent a symbiotic relationship with NATO, could be as open to fratricidal disputes as the Brussels Pact powers were in 1948, when they had trouble deciding which member would exercise leadership.

In light of these constraints, it is not surprising that NATO and the EU have shown the possibilities of fruitful cooperation, as in the EU’s assumption of NATO’s peacekeeping mission in Macedonia in March 2003 and in its larger plans to take over the NATO mission in Bosnia in 2004. The United States cannot manage world affairs alone. The partnership with the allies has been vital, if not always respected, for services provided in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and, more recently, Iraq. Granting the ongoing frustrations on both sides of the Atlantic, there is a mutual dependence that has kept NATO together in the past and should continue in the future as “out of area” missions promise to dominate NATO concerns. What is needed is mutual respect for the role each ally plays and a civilized rhetoric when tempers flare.

Arguably, the most compelling sign of transatlantic solidarity has been the allies’ silence over terminating membership in the alliance. Under article 13 of the North Atlantic Treaty, any member can “cease to be a Party one year after its notice of denunciation.” No member has chosen to take advantage of this exit from the alliance. The danger in the future, however, may lie not in the likelihood of an abrupt dissolution but rather in the possibility of NATO becoming as irrelevant as the League of Nations had been in the 1930s, if America and Europe fail to share the responsibilities of crisis management beyond the boundaries of the alliance.
An expanded version of the themes in this essay is in NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004).

2. U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948 (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1974), 3:148ff (hereafter FRUS, with year and volume number). Achilles noted that "We met every day from the beginning of July to the beginning of September. That was before the days of air conditioning and we all worked with our coats off," in Fingerprints on History: The NATO Memoirs of Theodore C. Achilles, ed. Lawrence S. Kaplan and Sidney R. Snyder (Kent, Ohio: Lyman L. Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Community Studies, 1992), 19.
4. State Department paper prepared for Working Group, Exploratory Talks, 10 Aug. 1948, Records of Interdepartmental and Intradepartmental Committees (State Department), Record Group 353, file 840 20/8–1048, Lot 53, D68, NATO, box 3, National Archives II, College Park, Md.
7. See Ambassador Bonnet’s comments at Fourth Meeting of the Washington Exploratory Talks, 8 July 1948, FRUS, 1948 3:165.
10. Ibid., 61–62.
12. See Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber’s editorial in Le Monde, 5 Apr. 1950, raising the possibility of neutralism in the face of NATO’s failure to bring a sense of security to Europe.


29. T. K. Jones, deputy undersecretary of defense for strategic nuclear forces, envisioned survival for anyone who would “dig a hole, cover it with a couple of doors, and then throw three feet of dirt on top.” Quoted in Walter LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–1984, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 304.


33. President’s speech at West Point, Washington Post, 2 June 2002.


36. *The Guardian*, 5 Aug. 2002. Munterfering told a press conference that the party leadership would have Germany go its own way: “Independently of what the UN decides, there must be a German way, that we must decide for ourselves what must be done.”


