

“How to Save Freedom”
“NATO: Relevant or Relic?”

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How to save freedom? An important topic – one might argue that it is the “evergreen” topic, always relevant and always at or near the top of the list of matters of concern to humankind. But to link that topic with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO – is not at all obvious. What, indeed, can the future of a military organization have to do with “saving freedom?”

“Everything” is not an implausible answer. Indeed, to see “freedom” and “NATO” as two separate and distinct topics or phenomena is to deny to history its proper place. Let us remember that the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949 not just as part of a broad policy of containing both Soviet power and the spread of Communism in Europe but as one means, believed then to be an essential means, of defending freedom, in all of its components. Indeed, before the treaty speaks of military issues it speaks of the political and human values to which the new compact of then 12 nations was devoted:

The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them. [Article 2]

Indeed, there is no mention of the Soviet Union or any other military threat in the North Atlantic Treaty; but there is mention of underlying purposes of Western society. Further, military containment as practiced by NATO throughout the balance of the Cold War was only part of a broader strategy that focused heavily on political and economic efforts, not least support for democracy, free societies, and vibrant, liberal economies – as fostered by the Marshall Plan, what is now the European Union, EFTA, EEA, CSCE/OSCE, the Council of Europe, and other institutions, including the full range of the United Nations bodies. I believe it can also be safely said that the collapse of European communism and of the Soviet external and internal empires was brought about less through Western military action than by the hollowing out of the Soviet Union and communism because of their bankruptcy, their failure both to produce worldly goods in adequate supply and to meet human aspirations, not least political and human rights aspirations: in a word, freedom. NATO, coupled with American power, may have been the principle “shield” in this process, but the “swords” were to be found both in institutions and efforts like the EU and the Helsinki Final Act and in the very nature of free and democratic Western societies.

That is history, and well established. But what of today? Does NATO still have anything to do with the promoting, much less “saving,” freedom? I believe the answer is a clear “Yes,” provided, however, that we understand both the question and the answer correctly.

First, a word about the immediate post-Cold War period. It was most marked by a simple declaration of the-then US president, George H. W. Bush, who encapsulated the hopes and aspirations of hundreds of millions of people on this Continent in a single phrase: the desirability of “building a Europe whole and free and at peace.” It was the idea of building a new system of security that could potentially benefit all and penalize none. To that end, NATO adapted itself in several interlocking ways:

- the United States did not retreat from Europe with a “well done and *bonne chance*,” but rather rededicated itself to be a permanent European power;
- institutions were preserved to provide a guarantee – if a guarantee were needed – that the problem of German power that had led to such tragedy between 1870 and 1945 would never be repeated;
- a Partnership for Peace (PFP) was created to help with the democratization of the militaries – and hence societies -- of Central European and other non-NATO countries that had emerged out of the wreckage of the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact, and Yugoslavia;
- PFP was embedded in a Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC);
- several countries were admitted to full NATO membership, accepting not just its protections but also its fundamental values and commitments;
- Ukraine was accorded a special place in Europe’s future;
- NATO began reaching out in partnership to the European Union; and
- even Russia was accorded a place in the future of European security and development, provided that it, too, would adhere to the basic human and democratic values embraced by the Atlantic nations and would contribute to the security of all.

And all this was done as the European Union and individual countries – including this one, Switzerland, since 1996 a member of the Partnership for Peace and of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council – did their part to ensure that “never again” would the tragedies of the European civil war of 1914-1979, that period of assault on freedom – recur. This has been a second success for NATO and its ilk.

But what of today and tomorrow? Is a third NATO “success” possible? Does the Alliance remain relevant to basic human political and security needs? Or is it a relic, whose work is now done and which can be remembered as a successful effort of the past whose usefulness in the worlds of today and tomorrow has come to an end?

I vote for *relevant*: but only if we understand the nature of current challenge and respond to it effectively – never, in history, a foregone conclusion. And, I would argue at the outset, all of us in the transatlantic world are all in it together, whether or not our nations belong to NATO, or to

the European Union, as well, or stand apart. NATO, I believe, has an indispensable role to play in the “saving of freedom” in the future; but so do other institutions, governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. In the process, there is a critical prior task: nothing less than a redefinition of “security” in the modern age.

At the moment, NATO is going through a process to determine its proper future, not just in regard to current military engagements, as in Afghanistan – its first sustained wartime deployment -- but in relation to other threats, challenges, and opportunities that confront its members and partners. At the next NATO summit, in Lisbon in late November, allied leaders will adopt a new Strategic Concept, to replace or at least refine the one it last adopted in 1999. Discussion of what the new Strategic Concept should contain has become a major “cottage industry” in NATO countries, among governments and within academia and the so-called think tank industry. NATO has also appointed a Group of Experts from 12 countries that will issue a major report at the beginning of May; and then the NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, will “take up the pen” to write a draft for consideration at Lisbon.

The new Strategic Concept will need to deal with a number of critical topics. These include:

- the Alliance’s role in Afghanistan, but also what its roles will be following the conflict in Afghanistan, regarding possible conflicts elsewhere – including issues of where, when, why, who, and how;
- continuing efforts to counter terrorism, including its causes;
- relations with Russia – the one big item on NATO’s 1990s agenda that has not been essentially completed;
- the proper balance between focusing on so-called “Article 5 missions” -- meaning the defense of allies against possible aggression – and engaging in military and other activities beyond the European continent;
- other immediate military challenges, like piracy and countering terrorism;
- the future role, if any, for allied nuclear policy;
- the future of NATO’s “open door” policy on enlargement;
- the extent to which NATO should take on civilian responsibilities as well as military – especially in places like Afghanistan – as part of what NATO calls the Comprehensive Approach;
- whether the Alliance itself needs to consider newer threats and challenges, like the security of energy supplies and defense against attacks on cyber networks – as we have seen in recent years in parts of Central Europe;

- what relation NATO should have with potential partners – like Australia and Japan – and with institutions, notably the United Nations, the European Union, and the African Union; and
- many other miscellaneous topics, like the Balkans, the Black Sea, and cooperation with Mediterranean and Persian Gulf countries.

This is a long list – and I am sure I have not exhausted it -- and most of the items on this list, while relating to “security,” also relate to the ambition to “save freedom,” given that, in each of the threats and challenges that are stated or implied by these agenda points, there are potential assaults on the capacity of nations and people to have and to enjoy freedom.

Each of these weighty matters will of course be considered and dealt with in the coming months before Lisbon in its own terms. That will be the focus of debate.

But I believe this could prove to be the wrong way to proceed. For one thing, there is no question that public support for NATO, across the Atlantic, is not what it once was. This is true even in my own country. Some of this is clearly natural in the aftermath of the collapse of Soviet power and European communism; but it may be excessive when measured against the need for nations of the Alliance to meet and master the issues that I have listed above and the need for there to be strong public support to do so, not least to provide the resources that will be needed. But little that I have listed will be of a compelling enough nature to stimulate the needed public support. And that is true, I believe, in significant part because much of the NATO agenda does not match up with what the “average person in the street” believes to relate to his and her own personal security needs. And this is why I have raised the question of a need to redefine what we mean by security in the new age.

It is also why I believe that trying to write a NATO Strategic Concept now is getting the order wrong. It is putting the cart before the horse. Let me address three matters that I believe should be raised and, if possible, resolved before NATO proceeds to put thoughts to paper.

What is “Security” All About?

During the Cold War, it was relatively easy to convince Americans (and West Europeans, of course) of the need for an extensive US commitment to Europe and its security because of the nature of the threat and challenge from the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and European communism. Not so in the aftermath of the Cold War, and progressively so. Thus, even where NATO still remains important for the security and other interests and values of allies on the two sides of the Atlantic – as noted in partial detail above – it is much more difficult to convince publics of the need for the Alliance. But this may be the wrong question or perspective. The right question is whether there continues to be a set of strong and compelling interests that should unite countries on the two sides of the Atlantic, including the US and Canada on one side and a wide range of countries on the other, some in NATO, some in the EU, and some in neither.

From the perspective of the average American, without his or her actually articulating it, these interests include the preservation of a democratic, republican form of government, a strong and

vibrant free-market economy, freedom from direct military threat (far less salient than before, of course – other than, especially from the US perspective, defense against terrorism in the post-9/11 era), and a Western and global economic and financial system that works. Indeed, it is in the last two named areas that the sense of security of the average American – in the broadest sense of the word “security” – has been most challenged in the last few years; and it is not at all coincidental that in these two areas the US relationship with its transatlantic partners is most crucial for success from the actual perspective of the average American – a relationship, of course, that is not just about government but very much about the private sector and the financial sector. These are also the two areas where many Europeans most value an effective US role in promoting their “security” – again defined in its broadest sense – and where, unfortunately, America’s reputation both for leadership and effectiveness has been most tarnished in the last few years, to rival the damage done to US standing abroad caused by the invasion of Iraq in 2003. At the same time, there are other areas of “security” where the relationship with Europe is important for the US (and where the European relationship with the US and Canada is important for Europeans): These include what has come to be known, at least in the US, as “homeland security,” as well as common interests and values like education, health, and the environment.

An essential point is that, in all of these areas, all of which are non-military, the United States, Canada, and European countries, especially those which belong to the European Union (or only to the European Economic Area) represent the most important repository in the world of democratic polities, stable governments, strong liberal economies, an educated populace, an outward looking perspective – especially on “human” matters – and capacities in key instrumental areas like health and education. Thus it should be no surprise that, in considering the future of transatlantic “security,” effective cooperation in all of these areas is critical. And none of these particular areas of security are directly related to NATO. But that is not the point: the point is that, as the Western nations consider all the aspects of their security, what NATO does and what other institutions (and bilateral relationships, plus private sector and NGO relationships) do are complementary and need to be seen as part of a single package.

In short, as NATO considers its own future, it needs first to look at the overall context of Western country and institution relationships, all of which have a security dimension, in the broadest sense of the term. This is also part of the effort to rebuild popular support for NATO to pursue those tasks in the “traditional security” field listed above: to gain broad realization that ties and common efforts across the Atlantic, across the board, are essential to the well-being of all the regional countries.

A Division of Perspective

Second, it is becoming increasingly clear that the United States government is viewing security problems that also relate to relations with its European allies from a perspective that is not entirely shared by any of the allies *in toto*, and by most of them less than that. For the US, virtually all of the critical security issues relating to Europe have been resolved or at least have reached a point in their “resolution” that the United States does not have to spend the kind of effort that characterized the Cold War period. For the United States, interests regarding Europe were set in the early part of the 20th century and could be summarized as the need to oppose any hostile regional hegemon. This meant Imperial Germany (1917-18), Nazi Germany (1942-45), and the Soviet Union (c. 1947-1989). In each case, US interests embraced what one could call

realpolitik; but they also embraced values critical to the birth and development of the American nation, especially freedom, human rights, and democracy. Thus, today, the United States is perfectly comfortable with the thought of a “regional hegemon” in Europe – the European Union, promoted from its infancy by the United States – which is a “friendly,” not “hostile” aspirant to influence on the Continent, within a democratic framework.

It should not be surprising that the United States is less concerned, today, about European security, per se, even though it still subscribes to preserving and extending those efforts of the 1990s to reinforce the doctrine of “never again.” This includes roles for both NATO and the European Union. This US engagement also includes awareness that the United States remains indispensable in the effort to be sure that the Russian Federation does not become a problem for European security in the future. There is in fact common recognition throughout Europe that only the United States can play that role, and this is a major reason that most European countries want the US still to be engaged on the Continent.

But for the US, a primary focus now and very likely for at least some period in the future will be the region that stretches from the Middle East through Southwest Asia. This includes four main areas of actual or incipient conflict: the Arab-Israeli conflict (largely but not entirely dormant), Iraq, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and Iran. Few European allies (or Canada) see their primary security concerns in this way, although there are exceptions. And, in fact, all 28 of the NATO allies have security personnel in Afghanistan. But few of these countries are there because they genuinely believe that they would otherwise face a direct threat in their homelands from Al Qaeda, other terrorist groups, or the Taliban. Most are there because NATO is there, and NATO must not be seen to fail as an alliance, and because the United States is there, initially in response to 9/11. And the United States is seen as important by all the NATO and EU countries (and some others) as important not just to European security concerns (especially the future of Russia) but also to the meeting of a raft of other responsibilities on a global basis, including economic and financial areas of activity as well as military and more traditional security areas.

The point here is that, as NATO looks to creating a new strategic concept, it must create a basis on which both the US and the (in general) European and Canadian perspectives can be reconciled. To use a big phrase, there needs to be a new “grand bargain” across the Atlantic. Its elements are a continued, permanent role for the United States as a European power, matched by the willingness of many if not all European allies (and EU states and potentially others) to support what the US sees to be its interests – and also believes to be European interests – farther East. This will not be easy; but to sustain an overall sense across the Atlantic that “we are all in this together,” along with the institutions that help to achieve shared objectives (primarily NATO and the EU), this perspective needs to be addressed and dealt with effectively, including in the politics of all allied countries. That will not be easy; but it is a requirement that must precede the development of the new NATO Strategic Concept and, without which, the future of NATO could be bleak even where there are clear areas in which cooperation is required and indeed broadly acknowledged by all.

The Comprehensive Approach.

Third, in assessing the nature of security issues facing the United States and other “North Atlantic” nations (now stretching beyond the old Continent), it has become clear that a number of

elements of power and influence must be brought together and made to work in tandem. This is obvious at the macro level, where a strong global economy and financial system must go together with whatever is done, by NATO or other institutions, to secure countries and peoples against military and related threats and challenges. But it is also true at a more micro level. This has been true for many years in several places, and it was dramatized by the efforts in both Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s to help provide lasting security following NATO military engagement to bring conflict to a halt in those two places. Efforts to preserve the peace that emerged have been undertaken not just by NATO, including with a non-military dimension, but also by the United Nations, the European Union, private sector enterprises, and a wide variety of non-governmental organizations. Indeed, it has been the intersection of that these efforts that has enabled Bosnia and Kosovo to achieve at least some political and economic advance in the last decade and a half, and certainly not to see a reemergence of active combat.

The idea of relating military to non-military (civilian) instruments of power and influence has also been tested in both Iraq and – especially for the entire NATO Alliance – in Afghanistan. Indeed, in the latter theatre of “combat,” it has become a truism that success (however defined) will not just be something that comes about because of military efforts, however essential they are to provide at least a modicum of security for Afghans, but also because of effective efforts by Afghans and others in the areas of better governance, reconstruction, and development – across the board. It is also obvious that, while NATO has the lead in providing military security and in fighting both Al Qaeda and the Taliban, within the International Security Assistance Force, is not the best institution for prosecuting the non-military part of security-providing or (to use a much overworked and misunderstood term) “nation building,” which is a compound of political, economic, social, and related efforts – all, of course, part of an overarching concept of helping Afghans gain what can be summarized as “freedom.”

This is a clear argument for engaging institutions (and others) beyond NATO, where the UN and the EU are the most obvious. But the potential for the EU to be engaged effectively in Afghanistan, far beyond what it is already doing, is important for another reason beyond helping to do work in Afghanistan and doing it within the framework of overall allied strategy there: it is also a means for EU countries to demonstrate to the United States that Europeans are prepared to “pull their weight” in the effort in Afghanistan. Indeed, this issue, summarized in alliance terms as “burdensharing,” has long bedeviled NATO, but rarely as much as today, where the United States has deep questions about the willingness of many of the European allies to support the decisions that all the allies took in 2003 to be engaged as an alliance in Afghanistan. In fact, in Washington, there is something of a falling-off of respect for many of the allies and hence of looking to NATO as a serious element in the overall US security perspective. It is important, however, not to exaggerate this point; but rather to be alert to the potential problem – note the matter of a new “grand bargain,” above. It is also important to be alert to the likelihood that for European allies (and other Europeans) to engage in non-military activities in Afghanistan will not just help to reinforce their own security (though many do not see direct security challenges to themselves from potential negative developments in Afghanistan), but it will also help to shore up the US political commitment to Europe, including to European security, and to help facilitate the ability of the United States to support common objectives elsewhere by helping to reduce the extent of the US effort in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, the relationship between NATO and the European union is still quite limited and, on the ground in Afghanistan, is not even “official.” While there is some unofficial cooperation, whenever it rises to the point of being visible, it is vetoed in the North Atlantic council (NATO) by Turkey, because of its concerns over issues of Cyprus and its own thwarted ambitions to join the EU. Further, the EU countries have so far not been willing step up to the mark in terms of the size of a non-military commitment to, and engagement in, Afghanistan. Even in one area where the EU has technical responsibility, police training, it has fallen short.

This situation thus poses another requirement before the development of the NATO Strategic Concept: efforts to bring the two institutions closer together, to pull down barriers between them, and to build capacity for working closely together. This should include a role for NATO’s Allied Command Transformation not just to support NATO but also to support the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) – as difficult as this would be to achieve politically, given the continuing problems of institutional prerogatives as between NATO and the EU. Further, as NATO looks to its Lisbon summit in November, there should be a parallel summit, as between the United States and Canada and all the leaders of the EU countries, to discuss what the EU can be doing in regard to the full range of “security” issues and to foster a close working relationship with NATO. In fact, because of the overlap between NATO and EU membership (21 EU members are also in NATO), only a handful of extra leaders would need to be in Lisbon. This idea is not new (the author of this paper has tried, unsuccessfully, to get it adopted since the 1999 Washington NATO summit), but it would require leadership. It would also be useful for the EU to create its own “strategic concept,” embracing the full range of “security” issues as laid out here, going far beyond the 2003 European Security Strategy, *A Secure Europe in a Better World*.

Notably, the US president has declined to attend the traditional annual summit meeting this spring with the EU leadership, under the Spanish presidency. Some Europeans see this as a snub, as the President’s taking Europe less seriously than before. In fact, it reflects the incapacity of these summits to address serious issues, across the board. The proposal here would need to fill that gap: a genuine, top-level strategic relationship among the Atlantic powers, with specific efforts to be undertaken then parceled out as appropriate to institutions, notably NATO and the EU. Vision and leadership, however, must come first.

The Agenda

Here, therefore, are three areas of interest and activity that need to be considered by the Western nations before NATO sets pen to paper for its Strategic Concept: to see the full range of transatlantic relationships that need to be dealt with; to gain a clear understanding of the new “grand bargain” needed across the Atlantic and to move in that direction; and to adopt a true “Comprehensive Approach” that will bring military and non-military instruments of power and influence together, along with the appropriate institutions.

This may seem like a tall order; but it is essential if the NATO summit in Lisbon is to mean very much – if also the Alliance in the future will continue to be “relevant” and will not risk becoming a “relic” -- and if the new Strategic Concept is not just to be hollow words on paper. This is all part of “how to save freedom!”