

GREY ANDERSON

WEAPON OF POWER,  
MATRIX OF MANAGEMENT

*NATO's Hegemonic Formula*

**M**ILITARY ALLIANCES, by definition, are an agreement on the use of force against a rival. But this is not their only, or even primary role.<sup>1</sup> Ensuring internal order, encouraging commerce and disseminating ideology are additional alliance activities, far from exhaustive. As well as offering a framework for collective defence, and thus for coercive diplomacy, they may also serve as pacts of restraint, through which a strong power manages its weaker allies, potential adversaries seek conciliation or contracting parties pledge mutual forbearance.<sup>2</sup> Since its inception in 1949, NATO has assumed all of these functions; each, however, has not been equal in significance, and their relative weight has shifted with time.

From the beginning, the architects of the North Atlantic Treaty were under few illusions as to the military utility of their compact. In the unlikely event of a Soviet offensive on Western Europe, a handful of under-armed American divisions could not be counted on to turn the tide. With the militarization of the alliance at the turn of the 1950s (acquiring its 'organization' and integrated command as Chinese troops crossed the Yalu), the forces at the disposal of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) grew more formidable—by the middle of the decade, equipped with 280mm M65 atomic cannon—but schemes to mount a defence at the Fulda Gap or on the North German plains were always far-fetched and recognized as such. Of greater concern, in the immediate postwar years, was the enemy at home. European leaders looked to NATO as a bulwark against internal subversion as much as against the Red Army.<sup>3</sup> Such considerations illuminate a further dimension of the

alliance. For propagandists then as now, its mandate extended to ‘values’ as well as security. Did the 1949 Treaty not engage signatories not only to ‘maintain the security of the North Atlantic area’ above the Tropic of Cancer but also ‘to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law’?

## I. FREE WORLD

At first blush, a congeries that counted the Estado Novo and colonial French Algeria in the ranks of its founding members might not be thought an advertisement for democratic virtue. Nor was its warranty of civilian control impeccable. Within a decade of joining the alliance, both Turkey (admitted in 1952 alongside Greece, the first case of expansion) and France would see elected governments toppled in coups d’état; in 1967, Greek putschists took the outline for their plot from a NATO contingency plan for domestic counter-insurgency operations.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is drawn from the introduction, ‘Pactum de Contrahendo’, to Grey Anderson, ed., *Natopolitanism: The Atlantic Alliance since the Cold War*, published this summer by Verso.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Schroeder, ‘Alliances, 1815–1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management’, in Klaus Knorr, ed., *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems*, Lawrence 1976. Historians and political scientists, Schroeder argues, have both tended to overemphasize the weight of ‘hard power’ in the purposes of alliances—capability aggregation, collective defence, threat balancing, coercive diplomacy and so forth—at the expense of inter-allied management and control, considerably more frequent and consequential tasks. The Holy Alliance of 1815 exemplifies the *pactum de contrahendo* in this sense.

<sup>3</sup> Sensitive to the impropriety of overt meddling in members’ internal affairs, the British Foreign Office, early exponent of an Atlantic security system, initially balked at American pressure for a Treaty clause that mandated consultation in response to ‘an internal coup d’état or political change favourable to an aggressor’, ‘on the grounds that it would tend to reconstitute a “holy alliance”’. But the Americans carried the day, as they would in debates over whether to restrict the alliance to states bordering the Atlantic Ocean, expanded in the final text to the more capacious ‘area’. Cies Wiebes and Bert Zeeman, ‘The Pentagon Negotiations March 1948: The Launching of the North Atlantic Treaty’, *International Affairs*, vol. 59, no. 3, Summer 1983, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup> On seizing power, the colonels first swore their loyalty to the King, then to NATO. The junta surpassed expectations in Washington, permitting the 6th Fleet to berth warships at the Port of Piraeus. See the account of the CIA station chief in Athens, John Maury, ‘The Greek Coup’, *Washington Post*, 1 May 1977.

accession of Albania (2009) and Montenegro (2017) has further tested understandings of the rule of law. Insofar as NATO has claim to be an ‘alliance of democracies’, this is best understood in restrictive terms. By design, not flaw, it has effectively limited the exercise of sovereignty on the part of its constituent publics, insulating existential decisions over war and peace from the hurly-burly of electoral politics.<sup>5</sup> Here, the alliance bears comparison with the institutions of the European Union, which originated in the same conjuncture and matured within the nuclear protectorate directed from Washington.

Untroubled by any immediate prospect of havoc on the Central Front, content to oversee conservative restoration west of the Elbe, US authorities showed no sign of excessive concern for the preamble of the Washington Treaty. Murmurings in Canada, Norway and the Netherlands over the inclusion of Salazar’s Portugal subsided in the face of geostrategic imperatives to reinforce a southern flank. Bilateral arrangements between Washington and Madrid, concluded in a 1953 treaty, sufficed to pre-empt the objections augured by possible accession of Francoist Spain.<sup>6</sup> At the start, Germany inevitably posed a more intractable conundrum. France, in particular, was loth to agree to the rearmament of its historic rival. The failure of ensuing tractations, which hinged on an alternative scheme for a European Defence Community, resulted in a straightforward quid pro quo, US subvention of French colonial counter-insurgency buying acquiescence to a resurrected Wehrmacht in the NATO fold.

With the entry of the Bundesrepublik, formalized in 1955, NATO settled the question, in the words of a Central Intelligence Agency analysis, ‘of who is going to control German potential and thus hold the balance of power in Europe’.<sup>7</sup> Not for the last time, the alliance effectively resolved a problem of its own making. Having opted for remilitarization, the

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<sup>5</sup> This is the main thesis of the most recent archival history of the alliance, a work of impeccably orthodox credentials: Timothy Andrews Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order*, Ithaca 2019.

<sup>6</sup> The Pact of Madrid gave the US access to Spanish naval and air bases in exchange for economic aid. Spain would join the alliance in 1982, under the premiership of PSOE leader Felipe González.

<sup>7</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ‘Review of the World Situation’, CIA No. 5–59, 17 May 1949; cited in Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War*, Stanford 1992, p. 284.

Americans found themselves obliged to garrison hundreds of thousands of troops in West Germany, as much to reassure its neighbours as deter the Soviets. For an outspoken minority in the US foreign policy establishment in the immediate postwar period, this represented a fateful error, binding the country to a neo-imperial policy of dominion, as opposed to leadership in a more pluralistic system.<sup>8</sup> By the late 1940s, however, such views were out of season. They ignored both the scale of US superiority and the breadth of its interests: the incorporation of the Pacific rim, Mediterranean basin and Europe into a global capitalist order.<sup>9</sup> NATO, in this vast scheme, acted first and foremost to prevent any rival bloc from emerging in the Eurasian heartland, its geopolitical centre the confluence of the Rhine and the Ruhr. Even critics of the Treaty typically accepted the underlying logic. In the Senate debate over ratification, its most trenchant opponent, Robert Taft of Ohio, proposed instead that the Monroe Doctrine simply be extended to Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Other institutions developed in turn to steward postwar reconstruction on the continent, prodromes of the European Community. By relieving constituent states of the responsibility to assure their own defence, NATO encouraged this process whilst at the same time furnishing a check against unwanted bids for autonomy. It was both a means towards European integration and a hedge against it. The structure of the alliance, coordinated by the North Atlantic Council and soon endowed with its own parliamentary body, disclosed the balance of influence within it: the title of civilian secretary general has by custom been bestowed on

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<sup>8</sup> Two senior diplomats at the State Department, Charles Bohlen and George Kennan, shared this opinion. For an overview, see David P. Calleo, 'Early American Views of NATO: Then and Now', in Lawrence Freedman, ed., *The Troubled Alliance: Atlantic Relations in the 1980s*, London 1983.

<sup>9</sup> On the wartime evolution of US strategic planning, see Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*, Baltimore 1995, p. 33; and Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943–1945*, New York 1968, pp. 15–29 *et passim*.

<sup>10</sup> 'Last Thoughts', *Time*, 25 July 1949. Kennan and others supported a similar alternative, seen to stop short of a guarantee of military intervention in the event of an attack on an allied state. In essence this is the compromise solution embodied in the *casus foederis* of the 1949 treaty, Article 5, which stipulates that an attack on one member—'in Europe or North America'—is to be considered an attack on all, and that each will assist 'as it deems necessary', without more binding commitment to an armed riposte.

a European; Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) is under American command.<sup>11</sup> 'NATO', a State Department analysis in the mid-1960s concluded, 'remains essential to the US as a well-established and easily available instrument for exercising American political influence in Europe'.<sup>12</sup> Subsequent decades bore out this assessment. Not that the Atlantic Community, as it came to be called, was free of discord. A refractory de Gaulle, going so far as to withdraw France from alliance integrated command in 1966, was a nuisance. Bulking larger were the exigencies of a resurgent West Germany, flush from its *Wirtschaftswunderjahre* and tempted by economic opportunity in the east and the siren call of reunification. American officials, who referred frankly to the need to 'contain' Bonn, had in NATO an indispensable instrument.<sup>13</sup>

A distinctive feature of American imperium, by contrast with British precedent, was the close interweaving of economic, military and ideological spheres, packaged as 'security' and retailed as a public good. NATO exemplified this development, by linking defence expenditure to member states' respective national incomes, invigilated in alliance conclaves.<sup>14</sup> From dollar hegemony to international trade, Washington did not hesitate to exploit its military presence for leverage. Threats to withdraw forward-deployed troops secured German cooperation on monetary policy, whilst periodic escalation against the USSR helped thwart bilateral arrangements with the Soviets in defiance of American diktat. Sanctions and embargoes on the Eastern bloc, first mooted as a component of NATO strategy during the 'Second Berlin Crisis' of 1961—to the dismay of the allies—would prove a trickier issue with Europeans, aware of who stood to suffer the brunt of their impact. At the same time,

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Truman and Eisenhower administrations ran the alliance much as Clay and MacArthur had run occupied Germany and Japan', as an admiring historian has written, in connection with the unique 'democratic culture' incarnated by NATO. Future presidents would follow suit. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, Oxford 1997, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hughes, 'Research Memorandum', US Department of State, Director of Intelligence and Research, 13 August 1965; available at the National Security Archive website.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfram Hanrieder, *Germany, America, Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy*, New Haven 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Maier, 'The Making of "Pax Americana": Formative Moments of United States Ascendancy', in R. Ahmann, Adolf Birke and Michael Howard, eds, *The Quest for Stability: Problems of West European Security, 1918–1957*, Oxford 1993.

Europe—and NATO—were largely set aside when it came to the ‘hot’ theatres of the Cold War: from Oceania to the Caribbean, Vietnam to the Middle East, the US preferred freedom of manoeuvre.

## 2. COLD WAR END GAMES

Inter-allied friction, bridled in the golden age of US hegemony, intensified through the 1970s, amidst a global downturn and a new mood of truculence in Washington. Under Nixon, the White House was increasingly explicit in linking military and economic issues, and the desire—in the words of Kissinger, his National Security Advisor—to ‘counter Europe by using NATO’.<sup>15</sup> The 1973 Yom Kippur War, during which the White House engaged in unilateral nuclear escalation without even the semblance of consulting allies (they were ‘notified’ after the fact), infuriated European leaders, who in turn refused American requests to airlift NATO military supplies ‘out of area’, to Israel. ‘As it stands’, Kissinger deplored, ‘the Europeans get free defence and give nothing for it’. ‘They are just like an adolescent; they want to be taken care of and at the same time, kick the hell out of their parents.’<sup>16</sup>

Menaced with abandonment, the quarrelsome dependents fell in line easily enough. But this period also saw Natopolitan think tanks, cenacles and advisory boards spring up like mushrooms, part and parcel of the revived Atlanticist offensive of the late 1970s, when the alarming progress of West German Ostpolitik prompted a coalition of neoconservative and neoliberal hawks to launch a crusade against ‘neutralism’, harbinger of continental ‘Finlandization’. Initially led by the US Information Agency (USIA), later joined by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), US psychological warfare—euphemistically described as public diplomacy—obtained relays in institutions like the Atlantic Council and the Ford Foundation, which cultivated European elites.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sayle, *Enduring Alliance*, p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, ‘The Crisis of NATO Political Consultation, 1973–74: From DEFCON III to the Atlantic Declaration’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, Summer 2017, p. 121.

<sup>17</sup> Melvin Small, ‘The Atlantic Council: The Early Years’, NATO Report, 1 June 1998; available on the NATO website.

Kissinger's successors varied in tone, but rarely in substance. No longer would the US pose as the disinterested benefactor of capital worldwide. The revocation of Bretton Woods and institution of the fiat dollar were followed by brutal arm-twisting over German and Japanese exchange rates to yield the 1985 Plaza Accord. Reheating tensions between the superpowers confirmed the trend. Under Reagan, NATO deployment of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe, purportedly to soothe anxieties over whether the US would unleash nuclear Armageddon in response to an offensive by the Warsaw Pact, had the opposite effect, giving rise to a massive popular protest movement and awakening neutralist stirrings in the FRG. By the late 1980s, contradictions within the Western camp and reform in Moscow, where Mikhail Gorbachev spoke of a 'common European home', seemed to herald an end both to the Cold War and the bipolar alliance system it had birthed.

NATO could claim, at the turn of the decade, to have prevailed in the East–West conflict 'without firing a shot'.<sup>18</sup> Defensive emplacements in Europe were never tested, and musings over their dissuasive impact remained perforce speculative. US military adventures elsewhere, bloody enough, were pursued outside the alliance framework. Of more moment was the American nuclear arsenal. The Euromissiles, explicitly conceived of as a form of economic warfare, contributed to the exhaustion of the USSR. Meanwhile, British reliance on the US for its submarine-launched Trident systems and French angling for position gave Washington a ready tool to avert rapprochement between London and Paris, concrete basis for Kissinger's threat to 'bust the Europeans'. Extended deterrence, so conceived, aimed *tous azimuts*. Acceptance of the Bomb, synecdoche for NATO itself, played a further role, as precondition for the exercise of political power in the North Atlantic area.<sup>19</sup> This indicates a more significant criterion. If the war-making capacity of the alliance was untried and its ideological hold contested, its uses as an instrument of management and control—institutionalizing US mastery over the western littoral of Eurasia, fulcrum of world power—were considerable. Junior partners

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<sup>18</sup> In the words, oft-repeated, of Secretary General Manfred Wörner: 'Speech by the Secretary General at the Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa, Rome', 10 May 1993; available on the NATO website.

<sup>19</sup> Mike Davis, 'Nuclear Imperialism and Extended Deterrence', in Edward Thompson et al., *Exterminism and Cold War*, London 1982.

found that enlistment came at a cost: ‘diluted’ sovereignty, delegated foreign policy, risk of atomic war.<sup>20</sup> For the governing classes of Europe, this seemed a price worth paying.

### 3. ‘OUT OF AREA OR OUT OF BUSINESS’

Political scientists have puzzled over the persistence of NATO after the dissolution of its putative adversary. But in the councils of power, plans not only to preserve but to expand the alliance in the event of a Soviet collapse dated back decades.<sup>21</sup> The fall of the Berlin Wall had no effect on the rationale for keeping US forces in Europe, two advisors to George H. W. Bush recalled in the early 90s, as these ‘had become vital to projections of American power elsewhere in other areas such as the Middle East’, not to forget serving ‘as the ante to ensure a central place for the United States as a player in European politics’.<sup>22</sup> That settled, Washington’s chief interest in the change sweeping the continent was to ensure that Germans not be permitted to accept neutrality or forfeiture of American nuclear weapons on their territory in exchange for reunification.<sup>23</sup> The success of this undertaking, accomplished via a combination of bribery and deception, thrilled US negotiators.<sup>24</sup> A satisfied Bush did not bother to attend

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Integration’, West Germany’s ambassador to NATO wrote in 1965 to then Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder, ‘is without a doubt an effective hegemonic instrument of the most powerful in the alliance’: Hanrieder, *Germany, America, Europe*, pp. 48–9.

<sup>21</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, then attached to the State Department’s Policy Planning Council, drafted a memorandum in 1966 that called for a cautious approach to détente and ruled out any mutual agreement to disband the two military blocs. Even US victory in the Cold War would not spell an end to NATO’s *raison d’être*; the US presence in Europe was to remain a vital prerequisite ‘for building world order on the basis of closer collaboration among the more developed nations, perhaps including eventually some of the Communist states’. Cited in Sayle, *Enduring Alliance*, p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Zelikow and Condoleeza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*, Cambridge MA 1995, p. 169.

<sup>23</sup> Mary E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*, New Haven 2021, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 66; Joshua Itzkowitz Shiffrinson, ‘Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the US Offer to Limit NATO Expansion’, *International Security*, vol. 40, no. 4, Spring 2016. Shiffrinson is more categorical than Sarotte that American officials reneged on a formal promise to their Soviet counterparts that NATO, having brought in East Germany, would not expand eastwards, but both concur on the basic facts.



the ceremonial *Anschluss* of the German Democratic Republic. From the outset, it was clear that the DDR would not be the last Warsaw Pact state to accede to NATO, even if the scope and timing of further expansion remained uncertain. Set in motion by the Bush Administration, this was guided by the desire both to take advantage of Russian weakness and ensure that no independent European security arrangement emerge to jeopardize US hegemony.<sup>25</sup> Loftier particulars would be adduced in time, as leaders found it convenient to invoke common ‘values’, the entreaties of Central and East European countries, democracy and so forth. None figured in the cardinal choice.

Lightning war in the Persian Gulf, in 1991, appeared as vindication to a US security state still tarnished by the fiasco of Vietnam. Strategists at the Pentagon struggled to chart the coordinates of their newfound primacy. The most significant attempt, a draft of the Bush Administration’s 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, set out a bracing view of American interests, from the Bering Strait to the Horn of Africa. In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, priority naturally fell on access to oil; East Asia and Western Europe had to be watched for any incipient regional challenger; the states of the former Soviet bloc ought to be brought into the EU.<sup>26</sup> Leaked to the press in an election year, the document elicited condemnation from candidates for the Democratic nomination; Senator Joseph Biden exclaimed it amounted to ‘literally a Pax Americana’.<sup>27</sup> The Administration ultimately repudiated its own product for fear of offending sensibilities in Berlin and Tokyo. Rhetorical bluntness aside, however, the DPG reflected verities that had long guided American power. Publicly abjured, its outlook prevailed across successive presidential administrations, irrespective of partisan colouration.

As a January 1992 report by the CIA concluded, the US still held ‘strong cards to play’ on the ‘military front’. NATO guaranteed against resurgent Russian bellicosity and an overweening Germany alike, a priceless resource in obtaining ‘corresponding European agreement’ on ‘economic

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<sup>25</sup> This argument, substantiated by American archives, is presented in Joshua Itzkowitz Shiffrin, ‘Eastbound and Down: The United States, NATO Enlargement, and Suppressing the Soviet and Western European Alternatives, 1990–92’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 43, nos 6–7, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Excerpts From Pentagon’s Plan: “Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival”’, *New York Times*, 8 March 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Hal Brands, ‘Choosing Primacy: US Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era’, *Texas National Security Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, March 2018, p. 25.

security decisions of vital interest to Washington'.<sup>28</sup> Germany, confronted with disquiet over its post-unification heft, did not tarry in expressing gratitude; that June, Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel promised to support the US over French objections in the finale of the Uruguay Round GATT negotiations. Awash in the glow of victory, American leaders indulged in *franc-parler* unthinkable in Atlanticist circles on the old continent. 'NATO', Senator Richard Lugar affirmed in August 1993, would go 'out of area, or out of business'. Full participation in 'the international marketplace' required 'a degree of stability and security in the international environment that only American power and leadership can provide'.<sup>29</sup>

The arrival in power of William Jefferson Clinton, at the beginning of the year, did not disrupt essential continuity in foreign affairs. If the former Arkansas governor's administration announced a shift in emphasis from political-military puissance to 'economic statecraft', or 'geoeconomics', armed might still had its place. Barely a year after Clinton's inauguration, on 28 February 1994, American-piloted F-16s dispatched to enforce a no-fly zone over Bosnia–Herzegovina shot down four Bosnian Serb fighter-bombers, the first combat mission in NATO's forty-five years of existence. Operation Deny Flight, launched in April 1993, had already marked the first deployment of NATO forces out of area, opening the way to exploits farther afield. Unpopular at home, and running counter to Franco-British efforts to broker a negotiated settlement, the US air campaign over Bosnia gratified interventionists like Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense David Ochmanek, who stressed the need to take the initiative precisely so as to pre-empt a European solution. NATO, 'an essential source of US influence', fitted the bill. 'If we want a seat at the table when the Europeans make decisions about trade and financial policy', Ochmanek wrote in a memorandum, 'we can't pretend that messy security problems in Europe are not our concern as well'. General William Odom, recently retired director of the National Security Agency, seconded the argument. 'Only a strong NATO with the

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<sup>28</sup> Liviu Horovitz and Elias Götz, 'The Overlooked Importance of Economics: Why the Bush Administration Wanted NATO Enlargement', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 43, nos 6–7, December 2020, p. 856.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Lugar, 'NATO: Out of Area or Out of Business. A Call for US Leadership to Revise and Redefine the Alliance', Remarks Delivered to the Open Forum of the US State Department, 2 August 1993, cited in Benjamin Schwarz, "'Cold War" Continuities: US Economic and Security Strategy towards Europe', in Anderson, ed., *Natopolitanism*.

US centrally involved can prevent Western Europe from drifting into national parochialism and eventual regression from its present level of economic and political cooperation', he averred. 'Failure to act effectively in Yugoslavia will accelerate this drift'.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. ENLARGING THE CIRCLE

For half a century the Atlantic Alliance had supplanted, to a considerable degree, national defence in Western Europe. In the 1990s, American policy makers became preoccupied by the converse possibility, 're-nationalization'. The connotations of this bugbear, ubiquitous in the period, are ambiguous, encompassing everything from barriers to trade to inter-state military rivalry and war. It is the interconnection of such ills, and the holism of their remedy, that distinguished Clinton-era globalist ideology. 'America's core concepts—democracy and market economics—are more broadly accepted than ever', rejoiced National Security Advisor Anthony Lake in September 1993. Emancipation of Eastern European states from the Communist yoke handed the administration a 'moment of immense democratic and entrepreneurial opportunity'. The time had come to advance 'from containment to enlargement'.<sup>31</sup> 'During the Cold War', Clinton intoned a week later, 'we sought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions'. 'Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions.'<sup>32</sup> Where the 'new democracies' were concerned, NATO and shock therapy were part of the same package.

In hindsight, it is notable that accession of the Visegrád trio, formalized at the 1997 Summit in Madrid, should have encountered as much US domestic resistance as it did. Congress was pliant enough, but a number of establishment grandees expressed their dissatisfaction, among them the secretary of defence, out of misgivings about alienating Russia.

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<sup>30</sup> Schwarz, "'Cold War' Continuities'.

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Lake, 'From Containment to Enlargement', Address at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 21 September 1993, *US Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 4, no. 39, 27 September 1993, pp. 658–64.

<sup>32</sup> 'Address by President Bill Clinton to the UN General Assembly', 27 September 1993, cited in Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Naná de Graaff, *American Grand Strategy and Corporate Elite Networks: The Open Door since the End of the Cold War*, London 2016, p. 113.

Differences chiefly had to do with when and where the alliance expanded, not its purpose as such. The Kremlin's concerns were ultimately brushed aside, and Clinton dismissed fears of a Russian backlash as 'silly'.<sup>33</sup>

Multiple considerations governed the push eastward, independent of electoral intrigue and the quirks of personality. To begin with, NATO reminded the newly baptized European Union, soon accoutred with its own currency, of the logic of US primacy. It promised as ever to contain German hegemony in Central Europe, perennial *loup-garou* of continental geopolitics. Military power likewise tendered surety against a potentially resurgent Russia, impossible to tame by purely economic means. Finally, the *Drang nach Kiev* called into view the coveted prospect of a Polish-Ukrainian corridor to the Black Sea, opening the way to the riches of the Caspian and Central Asia.<sup>34</sup> This was the 'prize' envisioned by Zbigniew Brzezinski, chief theorist of NATO expansion and tutor to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.<sup>35</sup> Ukraine, as the 'geopolitical pivot' of Eurasia, featured centrally in Brzezinski's enchiridion for American rule; in time, he foresaw, it too would be brought into the North Atlantic fold, perhaps between 2005 and 2015.<sup>36</sup> But there was no point in pretending this eventuality might leave Russia indifferent; Ukrainian accession would inevitably force the issue of whether Moscow was willing to accept the blessings of Atlantic civilization, or else fated to enmity and isolation. 'To put it in a terminology that harkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires', Brzezinski wrote, 'the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together'.<sup>37</sup>

NATO celebrated the entry of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999, on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, as alliance warplanes bombed Yugoslavia. 'I supported very strongly the expansion of NATO', Clinton adjured,

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<sup>33</sup> Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, p. 282.

<sup>34</sup> Outlined prophetically in Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Bid for Global Dominance*, London 1999, p. 303.

<sup>35</sup> Perry Anderson, *American Foreign Policy and Its Thinkers*, London 2017, pp. 197–209.

<sup>36</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostategic Imperatives*, New York 1997, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, p. 40.

and I supported the idea that the United States, Canada and our European allies had to take on the new security challenges of Europe of the 21st century, including all these ethnic upheavals on their border. Why? Because if this domestic policy is going to work, we have to be free to pursue it. And if we're going to have a strong economic relationship that includes our ability to sell around the world, Europe has got to be a key. And if we want people to share our burdens of leadership with all the problems that will inevitably crop up, Europe needs to be our partner. Now, that's what this Kosovo thing is all about.<sup>38</sup>

The campaign again reasserted US suzerainty, coincident in this instance with the advent of the common currency. German sociologist Ulrich Beck allowed himself to hope that 'Kosovo could be our military euro, creating a political and defence identity for the European Union in the same way as the euro is the expression of economic and financial integration'.<sup>39</sup> When Operation Deliberate Force ended, an opposite conclusion suggested itself: it was US leadership over NATO, not its 'credibility', and still less a separate European identity, that emerged reinforced from the affair.<sup>40</sup>

Practical problems within the alliance, brought to light in Serbia and farther afield by the American monopoly over targeting selection and the manifest operational incapacities of European allies, reliant on the US for in-flight refuelling, signals intelligence and command-and-control, were patched over soon enough. The US had always capitalized on material and technological superiority, embodied in its nuclear arsenal, to exact a military division of labour within the alliance. Allies, in this conception, were expected to maintain 'interoperability' with the American arsenal whilst contributing sepoys on request. American commanders lamented Europeans' shortcomings on the battlefield, yet they simultaneously worked to exacerbate them, pressuring allied armies either to execute light-infantry expeditionary assignments or mop up

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<sup>38</sup> William Clinton, 'Address to the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Biennial Convention', Washington DC, 23 March 1999; available at the US Department of State website.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Cohen, 'The Europeans: In Uniting over Kosovo, a New Sense of Identity', *New York Times*, 28 April 1999; cited in Christopher Layne, 'Death Knell for NATO?: The Bush Administration Confronts the European Security and Defence Policy', *Policy Analysis*, vol. 394, April 2001, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Gowan, 'The Twisted Road to Kosovo: The Political Origins of the NATO Attack on Yugoslavia', *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, no. 62, Spring 1999, p. 5.

as ‘peacekeepers’.<sup>41</sup> Chivvying Europe to contribute more to its own defence (‘burden-sharing’) did not exclude strict limits on the scope of action of any EU force, forbidden from ‘duplicating’ existing NATO capabilities, ‘discriminating’ against non-EU alliance members or any other hint of ‘decoupling’ from America. Albright spelled out the ‘three Ds’ in a 1998 address in Haren, where she described fledgling European military coordination as ‘a very useful way to think about burden-sharing’.<sup>42</sup> Schemes to erect a Rapid Response Force (RRF) with its own European chain of command and staff structure, announced by EU defence ministers in the lead-up to a December 2000 summit in Nice, invited a swift reply; at a NATO parley in Brussels, US Secretary of Defense William Cohen made clear that the initiative would mean the dissolution of the alliance. The US enjoyed right of refusal over any operation involving manpower or matériel billeted to NATO, amounting to a blanket veto power. Washington preferred a multilateral fig leaf for American interventions to hard-power assets free from ‘adult supervision’.<sup>43</sup> Integrated command structures provided an additional advantage from the US perspective, as the allied officers assigned to them—impressed by their stateside training sessions, desirous of preferment, admiring of cutting-edge quincaille, on the lookout for budgetary windfalls at home—could be counted on as a bastion of Atlanticist fealty.<sup>44</sup>

For all the rigmarole of transformation and adaptation, NATO in the 1990s bore unmistakable signs of continuity. As it had during the Cold War, the alliance sought to secure US hegemony in Europe via the subordination of a now unified Germany, the demoting of a weakened Russia, the forward basing of forces and military hardware up to the borders of the former USSR, and the fabrication of ideological cover for undertakings

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<sup>41</sup> Paul van Hoof, ‘Land Rush: American Grand Strategy, NATO Enlargement and European Fragmentation’, *International Politics*, vol. 57, no. 3, June 2020, pp. 539–41.

<sup>42</sup> Layne, ‘Death Knell for NATO?’, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Schwarz, ‘“Cold War” Continuities’.

<sup>44</sup> Charles de Gaulle, himself returned to power by *pronunciamento*, privately blamed the praetorian ructions that marred the French retreat from Algeria on officers’ participation in NATO integrated command. Generals assigned to SHAPE, he complained, ‘de-nationalize themselves, unwittingly’. ‘They [lose] any sense of the state, the nation, of respect for the national hierarchy. . .’: Alain Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, Paris 2002, pp. 333–4. On the part played by philo-American French military leaders in thwarting plans for a distinct European ‘pillar’ in NATO (headed by France), see Kori Schake, ‘NATO after the Cold War, 1991–95: Institutional Competition and the Collapse of the French Alternative’, *Contemporary European History*, vol. 7, no. 3, November 1998.

near and far. On every count, the decade registered success. Although not officially a NATO operation, Desert Storm—carried out with the consent of Moscow, barely a year before the Soviet collapse—set the stage. Televised destruction rained down on Baghdad under the banner of the ‘international community’, fitting heir to the Free World. Out-of-area attacks on Bosnian Serbs and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the second without UN writ, were supposed to burnish the reputation of ‘humanitarian warfare’ road-tested in the sands of Iraq.

Yet if engagement in the Balkans curbed velleities of independent power in Europe, NATO bore some responsibility for the ensuing carnage and the fortunes of its Kosovo Force (KFOR) were mixed. Even new allies vacillated. The Czechs, deemed insufficiently ‘informed’ to vote on entry to the alliance two years prior, recidivated, undoing the gains of an intensive public relations campaign coordinated by the NATO Press and Information Office in Brussels. In Ukraine, the first of the CIS countries to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP), so to Russian angst over expansion and antechamber to membership for Central and Eastern European states, parliament sharply condemned the air war against Belgrade and voted for a resolution to re-acquire nuclear weapons. Brzezinski was alert to the risk that Kiev might prefer to negotiate a concordat with Russia. ‘In such a case, when the West would have to choose between a democratic or an independent Ukraine’, he remarked with habitual candour, ‘strategic interests—non democratic considerations—must determine the Western stance’.<sup>45</sup>

## 5. MARCH TO THE EAST

At the start of the new millennium, NATO for the first time activated Article 5—its collective-defence clause, keystone of the 1949 Treaty—in response to the destruction of the World Trade Center. Initially snubbed by American commanders, indisposed by cavilling in the Balkans and reluctant to ‘wage war by committee’, allied assistance was eventually welcomed to administer the occupation of Iraq as well as Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> In

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<sup>45</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, ‘Keynote Address on Ukraine in Transition and Western Strategy: Challenges for German and American Foreign Policy’, American Institute for Contemporary German Studies at the Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC, 22–24 April 1998; cited in Peter Gowan, ‘The Twisted Road to Kosovo’, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet*, London 2004, p. 304.

Europe, the turn of the millennium saw a wider reorientation, continued enlargement militating in favour of Atlanticism. ‘If you look at the entire NATO Europe today’, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted on the eve of the 2003 invasion, ‘the centre of gravity is shifting east’.<sup>47</sup> Complaints from Paris and Berlin over the younger Bush’s bumptious style did not intrude on concurrent preparations for another round of NATO and EU expansion the following year. The month Rumsfeld made his remarks, all seven countries slated to join—Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Baltic states—issued a statement in support of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, as did the three Visegrád members. France and Germany fell in line swiftly enough, providing logistical support and diplomatic cover.<sup>48</sup> Divisions over the fracas in Mesopotamia were not to be overstated. ‘Europe remains essential to the maintenance of a forward presence for United States military forces’, explained Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Ian Brzezinski, son of the former national security adviser, in March 2003. In fact, he added, ‘US forces forward deployed in Europe were among the first to take up positions in the war against Iraq, ensuring not only America’s security, but Europe’s as well’.<sup>49</sup>

When Bush urged that Georgia and Ukraine be invited into the alliance at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, French and German leaders demurred from a ‘fast-track’ Membership Action Plan (MAP) but co-signed a compromise statement promising that the two former SSRs ‘will become members of NATO’. The gathering, intended to fête France’s return to full membership, was rescued from a descent into unseemly bickering.<sup>50</sup> The forward push against Russia gathered steam over Bush’s first term, with unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 followed by covert support for the Ukrainian ‘Orange Revolution’ in 2004 and accelerated NATO aggrandizement.<sup>51</sup> Ukraine,

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<sup>47</sup> Van Hooft, ‘Land Rush’, p. 544.

<sup>48</sup> Perry Anderson, *The New Old World*, London 2009, pp. 71–2.

<sup>49</sup> US Congress, *NATO Enlargement: Hearings Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 108th Cong., 1st session, 27 March–8 April 2003, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> German tergiversation infuriated East European leaders, who analogized the refusal of a formal Membership Action Plan to the Munich Agreement and recalled Berlin’s high-handed behaviour in the EU. ‘With Allies Like These’, *Economist*, 3 April 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Veteran US operatives played a role in the campaign to unseat Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma: Ian Traynor, ‘US Campaign behind the Turmoil in Kiev’, *Guardian*, 26 November 2004.



explained Richard Holbrooke, fixture of Democratic administrations and ubiquitous ‘special envoy’, belonged to ‘our core zone of security’.<sup>52</sup> ‘Why only Ukraine?’ asked a columnist for the *Washington Post*. ‘The West wants to finish the job begun with the fall of the Berlin Wall and continue its march to the east’.<sup>53</sup>

In the State Department, warnings had resounded for some time against gratuitous provocation of the Kremlin, which so admirably facilitated operations in Afghanistan and acknowledged NATO’s swallowing of the Baltic states with unexpected sangfroid. Russia’s economy had stabilized under Putin and the country was no longer the wreck it had seemed in the 1990s. Months before the 2008 Bucharest gathering, Ambassador to Moscow William Burns issued a series of forceful cables on the subject. He reiterated his concerns in an email that February to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice:

Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin’s sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests. At this stage, a MAP offer would be seen not as a technical step along a long road toward membership, but as throwing down the strategic gauntlet. Today’s Russia will respond. Russian-Ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze . . . It will create fertile soil for Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.<sup>54</sup>

Such qualms failed to move the White House, which praised Kiev’s assistance to the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia, KFOR—it formed a joint UkrPolBat with Poland—and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, not to mention the American-led coalition in Iraq. ‘Ukraine is the only non-NATO country supporting every NATO mission’, Bush pronounced with satisfaction on an April 2008 visit.<sup>55</sup> In 1995,

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Holbrooke, ‘From “Tent City” to NATO’, *Washington Post*, 14 December 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Krauthammer, ‘Why Only in Ukraine?’, *Washington Post*, 3 December 2004; cited in Stephen Cohen, *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: From Stalinism to the New Cold War*, New York 2011, pp. 182–3.

<sup>54</sup> William Burns, *The Back Channel: American Diplomacy in a Disordered World*, London 2019, p. 233.

<sup>55</sup> Steven Lee Myers, ‘Bush backs Ukraine’s bid to join NATO’, *New York Times*, 1 April 2008.

the North Atlantic Council had approved Ukraine's PfP agreement, and it embarked on manoeuvres and joint exercises—no fewer than 469 by the end of the decade—with unmatched vigour.<sup>56</sup> Beginning in 1997, these included recurrent 'Sea Breeze' naval drills in the Black Sea, to the consternation of Moscow and periodic protests from the inhabitants of Crimea. In 2000, a particularly provocative training exercise (one of 200 in that year alone) held on the eastern part of the peninsula, Cossack Steppe-2000, took as its premiss the subdual of a Russian-supported 'ethnic rebellion' in the region. Military and political ties with NATO augmented from 1997, which saw the signature of a Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, establishing a consultative crisis-response mechanism and expanding the remit of cooperation in civil-military relations, defence planning and armaments acquisition.<sup>57</sup> That same spring, a NATO Information and Documentation Centre set up shop in Kiev. Exchanges soon began between the Ukrainian National Defence Academy, the NATO Defence College in Rome and the SHAPE operational academy in Obergammergau. All without undue regard for Ukrainian public opinion, which was largely opposed to NATO membership at the time of the Bucharest summit, or for the vagaries of political leadership in Kiev, which oscillated between West and East.<sup>58</sup>

Portentously, in August 2008, soon after Bush floated the idea that Georgia, too, was on track for NATO membership, President Mikheil Saakashvili started shelling the Russian-controlled breakaway region of South Ossetia, prompting a fierce counterattack. US-Georgian joint military training that July, under the auspices of the NATO Immediate Response 2008 exercise, raised questions as to whether Saakashvili might have received American encouragement, as did a visit to Tbilisi by a senior advisor to Vice President Cheney in the lead-up to the assault.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tor Bukkvoll, 'Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 28, no. 3, September 1997, pp. 363–4. Joseph Laurence Black, *Vladimir Putin and the New World Order: Looking East, Looking West?*, Oxford 2004, p. 250.

<sup>57</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee, *NATO's Eastern Agenda in a New Strategic Era*, Santa Monica 2003, p. 103.

<sup>58</sup> Volodymyr Ishchenko, 'NATO through Ukrainian Eyes', in Anderson, ed., *Natopolitanism*.

<sup>59</sup> 'Rumours are currently circulating in the US that Cheney may have sparked the crisis in Georgia as a favour to the Republican presidential candidate [McCain]', reported *Der Spiegel*. 'There is a wealth of evidence to support such a theory.' Ralf Beste, Uwe Klußmann and Gabor Steingart, 'Russia and the West: The Cold Peace', *Der Spiegel*, 1 September 2008.

Whatever the case, bipartisan Russophobia dominated much of the 2008 US election cycle, Republican candidate John McCain proposing that NATO combat forces be deployed directly to Georgia, Democratic eminences Brzezinski and Strobe Talbott calling for Russia to be barred from the World Trade Organization and expelled from the G8. Robert Kagan, adviser to McCain, detected in the Russo-Georgian clash nothing less than the ‘return of History’.<sup>60</sup> ‘The details of who did what’, Kagan commented, ‘are not very important’. Illusions of a pacified, posthistorical Europe were ceding to more ancient precepts. Rearmament was the order of the day.

## 6. INTO AFRICA

Democratic victory in the 2008 contest left the outlook from Washington unchanged in its fundamentals. Obama, having campaigned as a critic of the Iraq imbroglio, sharply intensified the NATO operation in Afghanistan. More emollient in style towards European leaders than his predecessor, he adopted a no less jaundiced view of their vanity and impotence. Early in Obama’s presidency, a report for the German Marshall Fund criticized the still-twitching reflexes of ‘renationalization’ in Europe, patent not only in debates over NATO’s push into the former USSR—revealing the persistence of ‘national, rather than collective, defence goals’—but on the ground in Afghanistan, where the Bundeswehr’s legalistic rules of engagement (relaxed not long thereafter) invited mockery.<sup>61</sup>

Under these circumstances, the 2011 NATO blitz on Tripoli was seen to redeem the fortunes of coalition warfare under the flag of humanitarianism. ‘Ten years earlier’, wrote SACEUR James Stavridis and the US ambassador to the alliance, ‘in NATO’s war in Kosovo, the United States was responsible for dropping ninety per cent of all precision-guided munitions’. In Libya, the proportions were reversed.<sup>62</sup> Little Denmark

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Kagan, ‘Putin Makes His Move’, *Washington Post*, 11 August 2008.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Wood, ‘(Re) Nationalization in Europe’, Policy Brief, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 20 August 2009; on German RoE, see the pungent digest by Max Boot, ‘German Rules of Engagement?’, *Commentary*, 29 July 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Ivo Daalder and James Stavridis, ‘NATO’s Success in Libya’, *New York Times*, 30 October 2011.

and Norway alone took out as many targets as did Britain. Sweden also participated, together with Qatar. In a fuller audit, six months after Operation Unified Protector wrapped up on 31 October 2011, the same authors acclaimed a ‘model intervention’. Not only had NATO succeeded ‘by any measure’, it did so for a song, at a cost of only \$1.1 billion for American taxpayers, suffering through the Great Recession—nothing compared to the sums expended in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan—and not a single soldier lost in combat.<sup>63</sup> Obama later observed that the operation itself ‘was part of the anti-free-rider campaign’, an endeavour to compel other NATO states to do their fair share; on that basis, Americans could congratulate themselves.<sup>64</sup> Inter-allied decision-making had also been less contentious than in 1999. Now, US commanders were seen to favour destruction of ‘soft targets’ and civilian infrastructure, whilst French and other European air forces privileged the more challenging task of ‘plinking’ armoured vehicles and artillery.<sup>65</sup> British and American special forces, abetted by electronic warfare aircraft, collaborated in pinpointing the location of the Libyan head of state, Muammar Gaddafi, who was captured by rebel militiamen and murdered on the spot.

To be sure, clouds darkened this otherwise rosy tableau. A majority of NATO members had declined to take part in the overthrow of Gaddafi. Germany, notably, abstained from voting on the relevant UN Security Council resolution and refused to commit its armed forces, although it contributed weapons and volunteered to step up sorties over the Hindu Kush by way of compensation. Beyond NATO, the Libyan war proved a tipping point. China and Russia, after acceding to US demands not to veto the UN endorsement that underwrote the Libyan expedition, were agitated by the transformation of a supposedly humanitarian enterprise into an experiment in regime change. The next year, the two powers blocked attempts to win equivalent licence to overthrow the Syrian government. Turkey, ambivalent over the ouster of Gaddafi, appealed in vain for NATO intervention against its Ba’athist neighbour; denial (the US preferred

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<sup>63</sup> Ivo Daalder and James Stavridis, ‘NATO’s Victory in Libya: The Right Way to Run an Intervention’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 2, March–April 2012.

<sup>64</sup> If the country they left behind was a ‘shit show’, in Obama’s words, this was hardly their fault. Jeffrey Goldberg, ‘The Obama Doctrine’, *Atlantic*, April 2016.

<sup>65</sup> An admiring French commentator detected in the Libyan campaign the lineaments of a ‘European way of war’. François Heisbourg, ‘The War in Libya: The Political Rationale for France’, in Dag Henriksen and Ann Karin Larssen, eds, *Political Rationale and International Consequences of the War in Libya*, Oxford 2016, p. 37.

proxy or covert means) spurred Ankara to seek momentary rapprochement with Moscow, a *va-et-vient* fated to destabilize the theatre.

Wars in the Greater Middle East had blooded NATO soldiers untested in the Balkans campaigns and associated ‘peacekeeping’ tasks. Nevertheless, as the Global War on Terror entered its second decade, the alliance registered military and ideological stalemate from Zuwara to Helmand, while Washington increasingly re-focused on the Pacific. Protracted, unpopular warfare in the Middle East, coupled with revelations in 2013 of NSA espionage against US allies and a secret assassination campaign in Afghanistan, saw support for NATO cool in Germany and elsewhere. But solace could be found in the triple-pronged advance into the Balkans (Albania and Croatia), the Black Sea (Romania, Bulgaria) and the ex-Soviet Baltic states. Eastern expansion, EU equerries pulling up the rear, represented a hegemonic stroke. Service under unified command, whatever the utility of the units committed, helped disseminate shared ways of thinking in allied militaries, just as they lent newly minted post-Soviet member states the occasion to distinguish themselves from the Old World ‘axis of petulance’.<sup>66</sup>

For Western capitals and like-minded local elites, candidacy itself, formalized in the MAP process after the first round of expansion, turned up a multitude of mechanisms for intervening in the affairs of would-be allies, from promoting ‘good governance’, collaboration with NGOs and economic reforms to drafting legislation. If there was a ‘paradox’ in such undemocratic promotion of ‘democratic norms’, it was forgivable.<sup>67</sup> Expansion also brought concrete territorial gains, broadening the already globe-girdling array of American bases and logistical hubs. But its dynamic—and the promise of future pacts—hastened the long-foretold confrontation with Russia, now recovered from its post-Soviet trough. Crisis in Ukraine at the end of the year arrived as a divine surprise. Just as the Maidan protests against Ukrainian President Yanukovich seemed

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Krauthammer, ‘The Axis of Petulance’, *Washington Post*, 1 March 2002; cited in Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, p. 321.

<sup>67</sup> Pedagogy was the order of the day. ‘We realized these people were too imbued with socialist and nationalist ideas’, a member of the US delegation to NATO commented of Romania’s first bid to enter the alliance; the prudent course was to ‘wait for that generation of politicians to “die”—at least politically speaking. In the meantime, we would concentrate on educating “baby generals” and “baby politicians”’. Quoted in Alexandra Gheciu, *NATO in the ‘New Europe’: The Politics of International Socialization after the Cold War*, Stanford 2005, p. 162.

to be winding down, with an agreement on early elections, they received an unexpected boost: sniper fire, its origins still disputed, legitimated the storming of government buildings, putting Yanukovych to flight. As the State Department's Victoria Nuland and her colleagues nominated the new Ukrainian government's leaders, Putin's men in green materialized outside regional government buildings in Crimea and counter-Maidans gathered force in the Donbas, with Russian backing.<sup>68</sup>

## 7. EXTENDING RUSSIA, AIMING AT CHINA

NATO's formal abandonment of any pretence to comity with Moscow, announced at the September 2014 Wales summit, marked the twentieth anniversary of the PFP. At its meeting in Newport, the alliance settled on a 'Readiness Action Plan' for semi-permanent stationing of combat brigades in Poland and the Baltic states, in disregard of the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act, and the pre-positioning of matériel. Military planners alit on the Suwałki gap, the 65-kilometre-wide corridor spanning Belarus and Kaliningrad, as a prospective battleground. Nominally neutral Finland and Sweden entered into a collective Memorandum of Understanding with NATO, allowing alliance forces to operate out of their territory, and the alliance vowed to redouble 'military-technical assistance' to Ukraine.

The Wales summit also coincided with a series of meetings between Russian, Ukrainian, French and German representatives in Belarus, to negotiate an end to ongoing fighting in southeast Ukraine. Yet well prior to the signature of the Minsk Accords, a powerful coterie of American hawks moved to thwart compromise with Moscow. With the outbreak of hostilities in the Donbas in spring 2014, Allied Supreme Commander Philip Breedlove took point position in sounding the alert of an imminent, full-fledged offensive from the east. Advised by Wesley Clark, another former NATO supremo, and a network of neoconservative

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<sup>68</sup> In the run-up to the Maidan uprising, Assistant Secretary of State Nuland and Carl Gershman, head of the National Endowment for Democracy (outrider for the CIA), coordinated a public relations campaign aimed at deposing Yanukovych as a trial run for toppling his counterpart in Moscow. David Hendrickson, 'At the End of Its Tether: US Grand Strategy of Advancing Diplomacy', *Defense Priorities*, 30 June 2022.

operatives in the orbit of Nuland, Breedlove conspired to undermine diplomacy and sway the White House into equipping the Ukrainian armed forces for a protracted struggle.<sup>69</sup>

For the war party, escalation was self-evident. Decisive action would not only cow Russia and check German ambitions in the region, but signal resolve to Beijing. ‘China is watching closely’, Clark wrote to Breedlove in April 2014:

China will have four aircraft carriers and airspace dominance in the Western Pacific within five years, if current trends continue. And if we let Ukraine slide away, it definitely raises the risks of conflict in the Pacific. For, China will ask, would the US then assert itself for Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, the South China Sea? . . . If Russia takes Ukraine, Belarus will join the Eurasian Union, and, presto, the Soviet Union (in another name) will be back . . . Neither the Baltics nor the Balkans will easily resist the political disruptions empowered by a resurgent Russia. And what good is a NATO ‘security guarantee’ against internal subversion? . . . And then the US will face a much stronger Russia, a crumbling NATO, and [a] major challenge in the Western Pacific. Far easier to [hold] the line now, in Ukraine than elsewhere, later.<sup>70</sup>

Breedlove and his associates stewed over Obama’s apparent reluctance to supply more advanced matériel to Ukraine.<sup>71</sup> In the new year, as a tenuous ceasefire took hold, the General repeatedly warned of a forthcoming Russian conquest of Donbas, to the astonishment of European spy agencies. The head of French military intelligence complained that

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<sup>69</sup> The divergence between American and European strategies may be qualified. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her French counterpart, François Hollande, who presided over the ‘Normandy format’ negotiations, have both since claimed that they pushed for a negotiated settlement at Minsk as a means of buying time for NATO to rearm Ukraine. Angela Merkel, ‘Hatten Sie gedacht, ich komme mit Pfedereschwanz?’, interview with Tina Hildebrandt and Giovanni di Lorenzo, *Die Zeit*, 7 December 2022; François Hollande, ‘There Will Only Be a Way out of the Conflict When Russia Falls to the Ground’, interview with Theo Prouvost, *Kiev Independent*, 28 December 2022.

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Kees van der Pijl, *Flight MH17, Ukraine and the New Cold War: Prism of Disaster*, Manchester 2018, p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> ‘I think POTUS sees us as a threat that must be minimized’, Breedlove wrote to Harlan Ullman, senior adviser at the Atlantic Council, ‘ie do not get me into a war????’ [sic]. Breedlove to Ullman, 30 September 2014; cited in Lee Fang and Zaid Jilani, ‘Hacked Emails Reveal NATO General Plotting against Obama on Russia Policy’, *Intercept*, 1 July 2016.

American sources monopolized NATO threat assessment, aggravating a tendency towards inflationary doomsaying.<sup>72</sup> Berlin was sufficiently irked to lodge a complaint with the North Atlantic Council; German diplomats reported that every visit to Kiev by senior US commanders and politicians left their Ukrainian counterparts more gung-ho to retake the separatist oblasts by force.<sup>73</sup>

Obama declined to provide anti-tank weapons directly to Ukraine, despite bipartisan clamour in Congress and prevailing consensus in his own administration, reportedly for fear of compromising German and French support for sanctions against Russia.<sup>74</sup> Technically orchestrated by the EU, these have been renewed by unanimous vote every six months since 2014, a display of 'bloc discipline', as Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov put it, 'stricter than the discipline that existed within the Warsaw Treaty Organization'.<sup>75</sup> Obama acceded, however, to hard-liners' demands to boost American presence at the Yavoriv training facility on the Ukrainian border with Poland, site of joint NATO exercises since the 1990s. His successor in the White House, withal heretical claims on the stump that the alliance was 'obsolete' and Ukraine might not be a national priority, deferred to the same coalition of interests; undermined even before he took office by Democratic connivance with Ukrainian nationalists, Trump's agreement to pony up FGM-148 Javelins did not prevent impeachment for insufficient promptness in delivering them. Outrage greeted his disobliging comments about allied tithes and trade policies on the eve of a 2018 NATO summit in Brussels, complaints voiced by American leaders for generations. Rhetoric, more than substance, grated in the President's cavalier treatment of America's foreign entanglements. 'Demeaning those commitments as if they were

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<sup>72</sup> Assemblée Nationale, *Compte rendu: Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées*, XIVe législature, session ordinaire de 2014–15, no. 49, 25 March 2015, pp. 7–8; see Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire*, Atlanta 2017, p. 206.

<sup>73</sup> 'Breedlove's Bellicosity: Berlin Alarmed by Aggressive NATO Stance on Ukraine', *Der Spiegel*, 6 March 2015.

<sup>74</sup> 'I have never seen a more aggressive and emotional debate than I have on this question', commented Matthew Rojansky, director of the Kennan Institute, who added that it was 'reminiscent of that when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan'. Jennifer Steinhauer and David M. Herszenhorn, 'Defying Obama, Many in Congress Press to Arm Ukraine', *New York Times*, 11 June 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Richard Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order*, Cambridge 2017, p. 183.



transactional protection rackets', bemoaned the *New Yorker*, 'is corrosive and self-defeating'.<sup>76</sup>

Defending the Natopolitan outlook was a vastly expanded galaxy of think tanks, whose numbers have grown in tandem with NATO's ever more capacious concept of 'security', now encompassing everything from fossil-fuel consumption and pandemic preparedness to digital media. They nourish the Atlanticist mass media with a steady supply of insider information and op-eds. Containment, it could now be admitted, never really fired the imagination; at best, it was the counsel of prudence, a purely negative message. Democratic norms, economic *aggiornamento* and global governance yielded more energizing material. This was the idiom that animated sponsors of NATO expansion from the 1990s. Since the turn of the 2010s, attention has trained on the arena of so-called hybrid threats, where 'disinformation' occupies pride of place.<sup>77</sup> This watchword, meant to describe Russian and Chinese attempts to influence the politics of Western states, is better understood as a mechanism to sidestep traditional diplomacy and inflate threats, justifying increased defence spending and 'public-private partnerships' across sectors like surveillance, artificial intelligence and cyberwarfare. Viewed accordingly, the US, partly via organisms like the German Marshall Fund and the Atlantik-Brücke in Berlin, the International Institute for Security Studies and Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London, and the Center for European Policy Analysis in DC, exerts by some measure the most powerful external influence in European politics. These are complemented by some two dozen NATO 'Centres of Excellence', alliance-accredited think tanks that operate in tune with US strategic objectives. As Washington has effected a 'pivot' to Asia without letting Russia out of the crosshairs, its ideological apparatuses combat allied complacency with talk of a new Cold War.

Historical analogies, for what they are worth, may be looked for less in the mid-century freeze between the two blocs than in the late-70s crisis of détente, catalysing what has been called the 'Second Cold War'.<sup>78</sup> The Carter–Reagan offensive took place in a context of relatively diminished

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<sup>76</sup> Steve Coll, 'Global Trump', *New Yorker*, 11 April 2016.

<sup>77</sup> See Joshua Rahtz and Anne Zetsche, 'Rhetoric and Reality of Disinformation in the European Union', *Study for the Left in the European Parliament*, Brussels 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War*, London 1986.

American economic and military supremacy, deepening contradictions in the Western camp, and a shift in gravity away from the European theatre. After a flurry of protest, these years also witnessed a remarkable reversal of much of the European left, with anti-Soviet feeling trumping antipathy to American imperialism. The parallels are curious, if unintended, after two decades in which the US unilaterally unwound Cold War-era arms-control agreements, from the scuppering of the ABM to the 2019 abrogation of the ban on intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), the accord that brought the so-called Euromissile Crisis to a close.<sup>79</sup> In this respect, the brigading of allied nations into the Sino-American face-off bespeaks broader strategic intentions. In 2019, White House pressure on NATO allies to adopt a more aggressive posture towards Beijing provoked an indignant response from Macron. ‘Is our enemy today Russia? Or China?’ he asked rhetorically at a press conference. ‘Is it the goal of NATO to designate them as enemies? I don’t think so.’<sup>80</sup> But subsequent events returned a different verdict. At its June 2022 summit in Madrid, NATO for the first time officially fixed China (labelled a ‘systemic challenge’) in the gunsights, amidst US efforts to ‘leverage’ action on Ukraine into ‘more concrete support for its policies in the Indo-Pacific region’.<sup>81</sup>

In the past few years, American strategists have consciously evoked the rising tensions of the 70s, when the rationale for pushing Europeans to increase their NATO outlays was to free the US to expand operations farther afield. A digest published by RAND in 2019 cited Andrew Marshall’s 1972 report for the think tank, *Long-Term Competition with the Soviets*, as inspiration for ‘cost imposing’ strategies vis-à-vis Moscow. ‘One historical reference point for such measures’, the report noted,

can be found in the policies of the Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan administrations through the 1980s. These included a massive US defence build-up, the launch of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, also known as

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<sup>79</sup> Over the past year German leaders, faced with mounting tensions over Ukraine, instinctively grasped for references to SPD Chancellor Helmut Schmidt’s initiative in the NATO-*Doppelbeschluss*, the 1979 resolution to deploy nuclear-armed ICBMs to Western Europe if the USSR refused to remove its equivalent theatre forces, the SS-20s.

<sup>80</sup> Helene Fouquet, ‘Macron Says NATO Should Shift Its Focus Away from Russia’, *Bloomberg*, 28 November 2019. Macron reiterated the question two years later, after Anglo-Saxon perfidy tricked France out of a lucrative submarine contract.

<sup>81</sup> Henry Foy and Demetri Sevastopulo, ‘US Steps Up Pressure on European Allies to Harden China Stance’, *Financial Times*, 29 November 2022.

Star Wars), the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear-armed missiles to Europe, assistance to the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan, the intensification of anti-Soviet rhetoric (the so-called evil empire), and support to dissidents in the Soviet Union and its satellite states.<sup>82</sup>

Stepped up support for the Ukrainian military—‘already bleeding Russia in the Donbas region’—was another means of ‘extending Russia’, raising the likelihood that the Kremlin

might counter-escalate, committing more troops and pushing them deeper into Ukraine. Russia might even preempt US action, escalating before any additional US aid arrives. Such escalation might extend Russia; Eastern Ukraine is already a drain. Taking more of Ukraine might only increase the burden, albeit at the expense of the Ukrainian people.<sup>83</sup>

Such an approach was not without risk. Were Ukraine overwhelmed, or forced to accept a Carthaginian peace, ‘US prestige and credibility’ could suffer. Flooding the theatre with weaponry likewise called to mind undeniable hazards. ‘On the other hand’, the authors observed, ‘Ukraine is certainly a more capable and reliable partner than others to whom the United States has provided lethal equipment—for instance, the anti-Russian Afghan mujahidin in the 1980s’. Updated in a militant synthesis by the Atlantic Council, similar reflections guided the agenda of the Biden Administration from early 2021.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, beginning in January 2021, two US destroyers deployed for seventeen days to the Black Sea, where they participated in a multi-domain surface, air and subsurface warfare drill with the Ukrainian navy, Turkish frigates, F-16s and a P-8 reconnaissance plane. In an appearance at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal announced plans to construct new bases in the Black Sea and the Azov Sea, and SACEUR Tod Wolters trumpeted NATO’s ‘enhanced forward presence’ in the region, ‘with superb support from Georgia and Ukraine’.<sup>85</sup> That June, the British destroyer HMS Defender entered Russian territorial waters off Cape Fiolent, leading to a volley of warning shots from a Russian patrol boat. On the heels of Defender-Europe 21, one of the

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<sup>82</sup> James Dobbins et al., *Extending Russia: Competing from Advantageous Ground*, Santa Monica 2019, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Dobbins et al., *Extending Russia*, p. 100.

<sup>84</sup> David Hendrickson, ‘The Causes of War’, *American Conservative*, 4 March 2022.

<sup>85</sup> John Vandiver, ‘Ukraine Plans Black Sea Bases as US Steps Up Presence in Region’, *Stripes*, 10 February 2021.

largest NATO exercises since the end of the Cold War, the Royal Navy joined in the annual Sea Breeze exercise and a land drill in Mykolaiv Oblast named Cossack Mace. The UK took the lead in the modernization of Ukraine's Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4) capabilities and the development of a 'mosquito fleet', equipped with British anti-ship missiles; a report by RUSI noted that London is perceived by the Kremlin as 'willing to go to the edge', with 'fewer reservations about confronting Russia' than other alliance members.<sup>86</sup> By late 2021, the US and UK claimed to have trained tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers, substantively bringing the country's military in line with NATO standards.<sup>87</sup>

Over the course of the year, the alliance ratcheted up its 'air-policing' activities over the Baltic, with a reported 370 sorties.<sup>88</sup> Belligerent notes in Washington and Kiev, compounded by signs that Ukraine was acquiring a combat drone capability on the Azerbaijani model, accompanied Russia's military build-up on the border throughout 2021.<sup>89</sup> At an October briefing in the Oval Office, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley outlined a fourfold blueprint of 'US interests and strategic objectives':

1. Don't have a kinetic conflict between the US military and NATO with Russia.
2. Contain war inside the geographical boundaries of Ukraine.
3. Strengthen and maintain NATO unity.
4. Empower Ukraine and give them the means to fight.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Maryna Vorotnyuk, 'Security Cooperation between Ukraine and the UK', RUSI, 10 November 2021; available on the RUSI website.

<sup>87</sup> Andriy Zagorodnyuk, Alina Frolova, Hans Petter Midtunn and Oleksii Pavliuchyuk, 'Is Ukraine's Reformed Military Ready to Repel a New Russian Invasion?', Atlantic Council Ukraine Alert, 23 December 2021; available on the Atlantic Council website.

<sup>88</sup> 'Around 80 per cent of the missions', per the alliance press release, 'were in response to flights by Russian military aircraft'. 'NATO Jets Scrambled Hundreds of Times in 2021 to Guard Allied Airspace', 28 December 2021; available on the NATO website.

<sup>89</sup> David Hendrickson, 'Why Washington Has Lost Its Mind over Ukraine', *National Interest*, 11 February 2022.

<sup>90</sup> Shane Harris, Karen DeYoung, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Ashley Parker and Liz Sly, 'Road to War: US Struggled to Convince Allies, and Zelensky, of Risk of Invasion', *Washington Post*, 16 August 2022.

Before the month was out, a Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 under Ukrainian command carried out the first drone strike against rebel forces in Donbas.

This sustained escalation around Ukraine was the context for the accelerated pull-out from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021. Brzezinski Sr, welcoming Obama's 2009 'surge', had cautioned that a NATO defeat in the country would entrain catastrophic consequences for American credibility and trans-Atlantic harmony.<sup>91</sup> When Kabul fell to the Taliban on 15 August 2021, the US withdrawing without so much as consultation with its allies, voices resounded to declare the end of Pax Americana. At a cost of \$2.3 trillion, the 20-year war had taken more than 7,000 lives on the invaders' side and an untold number of Afghans. In December 2021, NATO foreign ministers convened in camera at the ATTA Centre in Riga to discuss the conclusions of an 'Afghanistan Lessons Learned Process', disseminated to the public in a page-long factsheet. This document struck a basically upbeat note, although it regretted the failure of the (non-NATO) 'international community' to rebuild a functioning state.<sup>92</sup> In the meantime, the Biden regime retargeted sanctions on Kabul and seized \$9 billion in central bank reserves, leaving the country ruined and millions prey to starvation and death.<sup>93</sup>

Months later, as Russian troops and armour poured across the Ukrainian border, all could be forgotten. 'NATO has been revitalized, and the United States has reclaimed a mantle of leadership that some feared had vanished in Iraq and Afghanistan', the *New York Times* announced two weeks after the offensive began.<sup>94</sup> The Ukraine war opens a new chapter in NATO's story, yet to be written. What balance sheet can be drawn of the trajectory of the alliance so far? From the Balkans to the Dnieper, its claims as guarantor of peace in Europe disclose on examination their opposite—a career of brinkmanship, *Machtpolitik* and provocation. In terms of capability aggregation and military throw-weight, the record of Franco-British showboating in North Africa and the failure after twenty

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<sup>91</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'An Agenda for NATO: Toward a Global Security Web', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 5, September–October 2009.

<sup>92</sup> 'Factsheet: Afghanistan Lessons Learned Process', NATO, November 2021; available on the NATO website.

<sup>93</sup> Ezra Klein, 'If Joe Biden Doesn't Change Course, This Will be His Worst Failure', *New York Times*, 20 February 2022.

<sup>94</sup> Mark Landler, Katrin Bennhold and Matina Stevis-Gridneff, 'How the West Marshaled a Stunning Show of Unity against Russia', *New York Times*, 5 March 2022.

years to subdue the Taliban speaks for itself. Ankara's performance as gatekeeper to Finnish and Swedish accession, all while pursuing its ongoing campaign against the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, illuminates the circumference of the Atlantic 'community of values'.<sup>95</sup>

In other respects, however, NATO chiefs may be entitled to boast that theirs is 'the most successful alliance in history'.<sup>96</sup> Midwife to liberal rebirth in Eastern Europe, sheriff of globalization, warden of international outlawry: the variety of its missions, if not always compatible with its principles, attests to the prepotency of its helmsman. NATO's ranks more than doubled in the first three decades after the end of the Cold War, new members inducted into a compact unbounded in all but name by the geographical ambit of the North Atlantic Treaty. The EU's relationship of dependency to it is codified in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, which stipulates that no European security policy jeopardize commitments to the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>97</sup> As a mechanism for disciplining allies, mediating their disputes and managing imperial problems, its record in enforcing American hegemony over Europe cannot be gainsaid. Far from the sole such implement, readily dispensed with when inconvenient, it nevertheless bids fair to be the most influential. Integration is not merely a matter of standardizing munitions, refining doctrine and coordinating command protocols. Equally, if not more importantly, NATO seeks to ensure 'mental interoperability'.<sup>98</sup> Atlanticism, de Gaulle once observed, 'is in us, amongst our ruling layers and those of our neighbouring countries.' 'It is in our heads.'<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Cihan Tuğal, 'Turkey Shows What NATO Really Is', *New York Times*, 26 May 2022.

<sup>96</sup> The epithet, seemingly debuted in the first flush of post-Cold War victory, is omnipresent in alliance communiqués.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Sakwa, 'The New Atlanticism', *Valdai Papers*, no. 17, May 2015, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> Gheciu, *NATO in the 'New Europe'*, p. 181.

<sup>99</sup> Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, p. 606.